

## **The Good of the World and the Happiness of the Nations A Study of Modern Utopian and Dystopian Literature**

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### **Abstract**

Concern about the future and hope for peace and happiness have always been basic elements of human life and thought. Interest in the collective fate of humanity has been expressed in many forms, including that of novels which consist of both social criticism and a visionary outlook. Nineteenth-century utopian writers believed in human progress and the perfectibility of human nature and saw history as a continuous ascent towards an ideal social order. Twentieth-century authors, disillusioned by war and social, economic, and moral disasters, see humans as savage and incapable of erecting a progressive social system. Their dystopias are visions of tyranny and decay. The writings of the Bahá'í Faith, contemporary with these works, offer a new understanding of humanity's destiny. They teach that human beings are spiritual and noble, that humanity as a whole is reaching maturity, and that social change can and will be brought about through the inner transformation of individuals and the application of spiritual, moral, and practical solutions to the problems of the world. Thus, the unity of humanity and the establishment of a new world order are God's purpose for this age. "World peace is not only possible but inevitable."

### **Résumé**

La préoccupation face à l'avenir et l'espoir de voir la paix et le bonheur ont toujours été les éléments de base de la vie et de la pensée humaines. L'intérêt porté au sort collectif de l'humanité a été exprimé de plusieurs façons, y compris par des romans sous forme de critique sociale aussi bien que de perspective visionnaire. Les écrivains utopiques du 19<sup>e</sup> siècle croyaient au progrès humain et à la perfectibilité de la nature humaine et voyaient l'histoire comme une ascension continue vers un ordre social idéal. Les écrivains du 20<sup>e</sup> siècle, désillusionnés par la guerre et les désastres sociaux, économiques et moraux, voient les êtres humains comme des sauvages, incapables d'ériger un système social progressif. Leurs dystopies sont des visions de tyrannie et de décadence. Les écrits de la foi bahá'íe, qui sont contemporains de ces derniers, offrent une nouvelle compréhension de la destinée humaine. Ils enseignent que les êtres humains sont spirituels et nobles, que l'humanité en général est en voie d'atteindre la maturité, et que la transformation sociale peut et va être réalisée grâce à la transformation intérieure des individus et la mise en application de solutions spirituelles, morales et pratiques aux problèmes du monde. Ainsi, l'unité de l'humanité et l'établissement d'un ordre mondial sont le but fixé par Dieu pour cet âge. «La paix mondiale est non seulement possible mais inévitable.»

### **Resumen**

La preocupación por el futuro y el deseo de paz y felicidad siempre han sido elementos básicos de la vida y pensamiento humano. El interés en el destino colectivo de la humanidad ha sido expresado de muchas maneras, incluyendo las novelas que consisten tanto de crítica social como perspectiva visionaria. Los escritores del siglo XIX creían en el progreso humano y el perfeccionamiento del ser humano y veían la historia como un continuo ascenso hacia un orden social ideal. Los autores del siglo XX, desilusionados por las guerras y los desastres sociales, económicos y morales, ven a los seres humanos como salvajes e incapaces de erigir un sistema social progresivo. Sus distopías son visiones de tiranía y pudrición. Las escrituras de la Fe Bahá'í, contemporáneas con estas últimas obras, ofrecen una nueva comprensión del destino humano. Enseñan que los seres humanos son nobles y espirituales, que la humanidad entera está entrando el período de madurez y, que el cambio social puede ser y será producido a través de la transformación interior de individuos y la aplicación de soluciones espirituales, morales y prácticas, a los problemas del mundo. Por lo tanto, la unidad de la humanidad y el establecimiento de una nueva orden mundial son los propósitos de Dios en esta etapa. "La paz no es solamente posible sino inevitable."

### **Introduction**

Concern about the fate of the earth and the future of humanity is one of the most prevalent sentiments in the modern world. People have always wondered about the future. Some have viewed history as a record of humanity's continuous progress, others as that of constant decline, and still others as that of an endless cyclical process. The varying degrees of optimism or pessimism have been influenced by people's material and spiritual condition, as well as by their upbringing, knowledge, and historical background. Despite all the variation, however, interest in the future has been a common feature of most cultures.

In recent years, speculation about the future has taken on a special form. The threat of nuclear war, poverty,

racial and religious tension, environmental destruction, and a host of other problems have brought about an increasing awareness of the need for change in both individuals and society if there is to be a future at all. The result has been a sense of despair or apathy in some but also a renewed interest among many others in constructive efforts for achieving peace and order.

In fact, the quest for peace has been with humanity from earliest recorded history and has been an essential element of our expectations about the future. Religious leaders of both the East and the West, ancient philosophers and modern thinkers, and ordinary people throughout history have expressed their desire for peace. In Matthew 5:9 we read that "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." Nearly twenty centuries later, the writings of the Bahá'í Faith state:

The Great Peace towards which people of good will throughout the centuries have inclined their hearts, of which seers and poets for countless generations have expressed their vision, and for which from age to age the sacred scriptures of mankind have constantly held the promise, is now at long last within the reach of the nations.... World peace is not only possible but inevitable. It is the next stage in the evolution of this planet.... (Universal House of Justice, *To the Peoples* 1)

The above statement inspired me to study in detail the works of some of these "seers and poets" regarding the prospect of universal peace. I felt the need, however, to examine not only those works which look forward to peace and prosperity but also those that warn against war, tyranny, and disaster. In a sense, these outlooks are different ways of expressing the same desire for happiness. They are characteristic of different eras in human history, but both can yield the same result to the careful reader by revealing humanity's deep inner longing for justice, harmony, and peace.

I chose novels as the primary sources for my study because the two viewpoints I have mentioned are best exemplified by a genre within the novel form—that of the utopian and the dystopian novel. This paper is divided into four major parts. The first is a discussion of the utopian/dystopian novel in general, the second a detailed comparative analysis of the novels, the third an attempt at evaluating their success, and the fourth a presentation of a radically different viewpoint, that of the Bahá'í Faith.

### **The Utopian Tradition**

The word utopia has its origins in the Greek *ou*, meaning "not" and *topos*, meaning "place." Thus, utopia means "nowhere." The term was first used as the title of Sir Thomas More's famous account of the imaginary island that enjoyed perfection in laws, politics, and economy. More's choice of title was particularly ingenious because it combined the idea of utopia (no place) with that of eutopia (good place). Utopia then has come to mean a visionary system of social and political perfection. In the twentieth century, a new word, dystopia (bad place), has been coined to deal with the development of visions of the decline of society.

Utopian literature of some form or other has existed in the West from the time of the ancient Greeks. Plato's *Republic* is of course the most famous and influential of early utopias, but More, Campanella, and Bacon continued the tradition into the Renaissance. In between, religious millennialism flourished along parallel lines under the influence of Christian philosophers such as Saint Augustine, who created visions of an ideal time, just as the classical tradition envisioned an ideal place. By the nineteenth century, as the idea of progress reached its height, utopian and millenarian thought and literature also gained special importance. Then in the twentieth century, ideals of progress and perfection were shattered by the savagery of two world wars and the rise of totalitarian governments, and dystopian novels became the new literary classics. Thus, these centuries are ideal periods for the study of utopian literature because they have seen both the culmination of hundreds of years of visionary hope and the disillusionment that followed.

I have chosen Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* (1872), William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890), and Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888) as the best known and most influential of nineteenth-century utopias. H. G. Wells's *A Modern Utopia* (1905) is a very good transitional work reflecting both centuries' ideas of the world. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) are modern classics of the dystopian genre that vividly paint unforgettable images of nightmarish futures. Finally, Huxley's *Island* (1962) is among the very few twentieth-century utopian novels and is crucial for comparison.

For the section on the Bahá'í view of the future of humanity, I have used many of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi. I have also relied heavily on *To the Peoples of the World*, the statement on peace by the Universal House of Justice, and on Geoffrey Nash's *The Phoenix and the Ashes*. Also Robert Elliott's *The Shape of Utopia*, Peter Ruppert's *Reader in a Strange Land* and Robert Nisbet's *History of the Idea of Progress* have been useful in guiding my research.

Why is there a utopian tradition in literature? The answer to this question can help define a framework within which to read literary utopias. I think the interest in utopias arises out of two distinct impulses. The first is visionary insight. People need purpose in life. We need to see not only where we are going as individuals but also what the meaning of our lives is in the greater scheme of the universe. We need a vision of the future. To a great extent, that is what utopian novels provide. The truly eutopian ones paint pictures of an idyllic Golden Age of

happiness, prosperity, and justice; the dystopian ones conjure images of future misery, decay, and tyranny.

Both are visions of the future, but they differ, at least partly, because of the different settings in which their authors have created them. Nisbet writes, "... there is usually a correlation between the actual, perceived experience of progress and the belief in mankind's progress" (*History* 19). Societies such as those of the nineteenth century that see themselves as being at the zenith of development and power are bound to produce utopian works; those like twentieth-century societies that have experienced a loss of faith and idealism are likely to produce dystopian works.

This brings us to the second element of the interest in utopias. Just as a visionary outlook towards the future is necessary, so is an awareness of the realities of the present. The writer of a true utopian novel extrapolates to a future world the implications of ideas and realities in the writer's own world. In the process, the utopian novel can become a criticism of existing society, a warning or cautionary tale, a plea for change, and a manual for reform.

Thus, these two impulses—social criticism and visionary insight—together bring about the creation of a utopia or dystopia. There is, of course, a tension between these two impulses, and individual novels may lean more in one direction or the other.

### **Modern Utopias and Dystopias**

Many books have been written about dystopias and utopias, classifying, evaluating, and proposing ways of reading them. In his valuable book on the subject, Ruppert summarizes the variation in utopias alone:

Some utopias are fictive and playful explorations of social prohibitions; others are grave and serious proposals intended for immediate implementation. Some are located in another time, others in another place.... Some advocate revolutionary change while others are satisfied with gradual reform.... Beyond a general desire for human happiness, justice and social harmony, utopian literature provides us with a variety of visions that reflect the diverse and contradictory dreams of those who construct them. (*Reader* 8-9)

We can also apply this analysis to dystopias and come to an understanding of the vastness of the field with which we are dealing.

Ruppert also reviews some of the most common ways of reading literary utopias. He divides the readers into two groups: "...first, those readers...who tend to read all utopias as proposals for social reform...and second, those...who tend to read utopias first and foremost as fictions, as products of the imagination which may or may not be intended for realization" (*Reader* 10). Each approach involves obvious problems, which Ruppert acknowledges and discusses. Utopias as plans for social reform are generally too hazy and impractical to be put into action. Most utopian writers concern themselves with the ideal end result and neglect to explain the means by which to achieve the end. Utopias as works of fiction are also often unsatisfactory since "...instead of an ambivalent and provocative no-place...utopia is [often] a boring place that sets out systematically to eliminate all doubt, conflict, drama and complexity" (*Reader* 10), the very qualities that make reading fiction exciting and rewarding.

We can read utopias and dystopias in a third way, however. We can read them as the writers' attempts at an alternative to the existing social situation. They are neither blueprints for building a new society nor fiction in the usual sense. They are instead conscious attempts to bring the two together. If we insist on seeing utopian works as one or the other of two unrelated genres, we shall find them frustrating and dull. They become interesting and worthy of study, however, if we view them as means of presenting social criticism and a visionary outlook in a way that is at once more comprehensible than a fable, more realistic than a myth, more dramatic than an essay, and thus more forceful and memorable than all of them—in other words, in the form of a novel.

Once we accept utopian and dystopian works as novels in this particular way, we can proceed to analyze them more or less at face value without overly concerning ourselves with evaluating their literary or political merit. We can think of them as reflections of the trends of thought and worldviews that the authors and their contemporaries experienced. This is the first step in reading such works.

The second step involves a process that goes beyond the simple acceptance of the contents of the novel. Ruppert sees any utopia as a juxtaposition of two separate but mutually informing communities that represent opposing views of society, that is, the author's own society, which the author criticizes, and the utopian alternative, which the author idealizes: Reading utopias, then, is a dialectical process in which the reader, placed in an untenable position between "an unacceptable social reality and an impossible utopian dream" (Ruppert, *Reader* 52), is activated into going beyond what is represented in the text and even modifying his or her own social beliefs. Dystopias can also be read in a similar way. As Ruppert says:

...rather than an antithesis of utopia, the anti-utopia is typically an inversion of utopia that plays on the same essential dialectical structure: we know what utopia is by knowing what it is not. A closer reading of most antiutopias... reveals that the text works to envision indirectly what utopia would be. (*Reader* 103)

Such an approach is very rewarding when comparing a number of utopian and dystopian novels because it provides a common frame of reference for some very diverse outlooks and styles. Also, it fits in very well with the point of view that informs my own response to these works, namely the idea that utopian and dystopian novels are two different ways of expressing the same desire for a better future. I shall discuss the novels in the two ways

described by examining four recurring themes: the idea of progress, the role of history, the conflict between freedom and happiness, and the question of human nature.

## Progress

An important concept that helps us understand this genre is the idea of progress. Nisbet discusses the history of the concept of progress tracing it from ancient times to the present. In the period 1750-1900, the idea of progress reached its zenith and became the dominant idea in the West. History was seen as a "... slow, gradual, but continuous and necessary ascent to some given end" (Nisbet, *History* 171), and historical progress as a unilinear and irreversible process.

The idea of progress followed two paths that have proved in the long run to be contradictory. One was the idea of progress as freedom. To thinkers like Turgot and Condorcet,

the reality of progress was attested to by the manifest gains in human knowledge and in man's command of the natural world...when all possible limits were removed from the individual's freedom to think, work and create. The test of progress was thus the degree of freedom a people or nation possessed. (Nisbet, *History* 179)

The other path led to the achievement of progress linked with power, though always in the name of some kind of liberation. To Hegel, Comte, and Marx, among others, progress was possible through power, "... [a] power less concerned with the limitation or constraint of human action than with the bending and shaping of human consciousness" (Nisbet, *History* 237). The ideas of progress as power and as freedom emerge in various guises in the novels.

Morris's *News from Nowhere* and Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, both written in the 1880s and similar in structure, are examples of these two versions of the idea of progress. Both envision a happy and peaceful future where people are healthy, strong, and beautiful; where there is total community of all goods; and where all are equal and have the same rights by virtue of their common humanity.

Both Morris and Bellamy condemn nineteenth-century society thoroughly, but their belief in the possibility of a golden future is genuine and strong. Morris savagely attacks "the great vice of the nineteenth century, the use of hypocrisy and cant to evade the responsibility of vicarious ferocity" (*News from Nowhere* 265). He sees the change that must come before the new utopia is born in terms of a socialist revolution complete with strikes, demonstrations, and war. Eventually, people will choose "a system of life founded on equality and communism" (*News from Nowhere* 295) and realize their perfect society in some unspecified way. Morris reassures himself and the reader by saying that "there is yet a time of rest in store for the world, when mastery has changed into fellowship" (*News from Nowhere* 301).

Bellamy also criticizes society. His target is excessive individualism and lack of cooperation. He attributes these problems to the belief that greed and self-seeking are what holds humanity together and that nothing can improve matters. He posits a peaceful and bloodless change that occurred when people "laid aside the social traditions and practices of barbarians and assumed a social order worthy of rational and human beings" (*Looking Backward* 281). He does not say why or how this change came about, but his vision of the subsequent establishment of the new order is clearer. For example, he attributes the greater national wealth to the abolition of the military and the elimination of waste due to crime, sloth, and disease. He ends with an inspiring postscript in which he writes, "The dawn of the new era is already near at hand, and...the full day will swiftly follow...the Golden Age lies before us" (*Looking Backward* 312-14).

However, there are significant differences between the visions of Morris and Bellamy. Morris' view corresponds to what Nisbet calls progress as freedom. In his utopia, there is no money or private property, industry is local and small-scale, no organized educational system exists, and there is a diffuse grassroots democracy with no central government. Thus, there is a total freedom that creates a sense of relaxation and serenity. This is understandable given Morris' disgust with the subjugation of one class by another, as characteristic of his own time.

Equally understandable is Bellamy's vision of a highly ordered and systematized world. He objected most to the competitiveness and selfishness of his century and wanted to replace it by a cooperative and unified world. In his utopia, the nation guarantees the nurture, education, and comfortable maintenance of every citizen. The whole country is organized into an "industrial army," there is a great degree of communal living, and music as well as religious and political sermons are broadcast over the "telephone." Later anti-utopian writers have taken many elements of Bellamy's work to create images of repressive, power-crazed, authoritarian governments. In this sense, Bellamy's work may be seen as an example of the progress-as-power approach, although he is not concerned with power for its own sake but rather power for the common good.

Both Morris and Bellamy believe in the progress of humanity. They base their hope largely on their belief that humans have the capacity for good if their environment is good. As Bellamy puts it, "The conditions of human life have changed and with them the motives for human action" (*Looking Backward* 130). Thus they believe that a change in society will change even human nature and will lead to a future not only of internal order but also of peace among nations. Morris writes, "...the whole system of rival and contending nations...has disappeared along with the inequality betwixt man and man" (*News from Nowhere* 256).

Many of these same ideas appear in H. G. Wells' *A Modern Utopia*. Wells' book is interesting as a transitional work between the ideas of the two centuries. He maintains the optimism of Bellamy and Morris but is also aware of modern forces and trends. Old utopias were restricted to a single state or an isolated island. Wells, however, says that 'no less than a planet will serve the purpose of a modern Utopia' (*A Modern Utopia* 21). He also sees machines as necessary to progress because they reduce unpleasant work. He is the first of the utopians to discuss population control. Most important among these new ideas is his assertion that 'Utopia must be not static but kinetic' (*A Modern Utopia* 16).

Wells attempts to unite the ideas of freedom and power. He advocates liberty but wants to achieve maximum general freedom by getting rid of 'all those spendthrift liberties that waste liberty' (*A Modern Utopia* 42). There are prohibitions that are necessary in order to ensure the freedom of all-but no compulsions. People can have money and property, travel where they want, do as they please, and express themselves individually, but they cannot own land or natural resources; they are registered with the central government and are ruled by philosopher-kings with all the real power. Wells's book is highly instructive in its conscious, deliberate exploration of utopian ideals. He does not see his book as a blueprint for future action. To him, 'There will be many Utopias. Each generation will have its new version of Utopia' (*A Modern Utopia* 354). But he is, like his predecessors, assured of humanity's ultimate goodness and capacity for progress. Wells wrote, 'Synthesis is in the trend of the world' (*A Modern Utopia* 335).

Belief in progress and the perfectibility of human beings was the dominant idea of the nineteenth century, but the belief was not held universally and altogether uncritically. There were thinkers who saw human nature as essentially imperfect and incapable of radical change. Butler is one of these thinkers, and Erewhon, despite its orthodox utopian exterior, is a testimony to his lack of belief in an ideal society. The inhabitants of Erewhon are beautiful and healthy, generally simple and kind, and neither greedy nor competitive. Society is stable and well ordered. Nevertheless, there is no overall sense of contentment. Unhappiness and serious problems exist. The only difference between Erewhon and our world lies in the causes of these problems. There is a reversal of disease and crime, for example. Criminals are treated in hospitals, while the ill must hide their disease or be shunned and imprisoned.

Obviously, such absurd Erewhonian beliefs are not Butler's ideals. Rather, they are sarcastic criticisms of the injustice and absurdity of nineteenth-century mores. Erewhon contains very few positive realities other than the physical perfection of its people. Everything else is negative in that it is a condemnation of the aspects of real society that Butler dislikes. There are no solutions proposed. Presumably, Butler's real ideals are the opposites of the attitudes prevalent in Erewhon and England. This is particularly true, for example, of his depiction of the Colleges of Unreason, which correspond to the English educational system, preparing students for hypotheticals, 'a set of utterly strange and impossible contingencies' (*Erewhon* 185).

Butler sees people as either unreasonable, foolish and gullible like the Erewhonians, or greedy and exploitative like the visitor who plans to colonize them. There is no such thing as an ideal society. There are only different societies that are equally contemptible and imperfect, although some may seem more peaceful or happier than others. Erewhon is not a utopia at all, but an early and disguised dystopia. Its significance thus becomes even greater because it represents a dissenting voice in the midst of the prevailing optimism of Butler's time and an anticipation of the twentieth-century dystopian tradition.

Later, 'not faith but abandonment of faith in the idea of progress' (Nisbet, *History* 317) becomes a major characteristic of the twentieth century. According to Nisbet, the idea has not survived because it has lost its crucial premises. Among these premises are the acceptance of the worth of technological and economic growth, faith in reason and science, and belief in the value of the past. Next, I shall discuss some of the dystopias of this century with respect to this last idea, the belief in the value of history.

### **The Importance of History**

The relationship of utopias to history is at best ambiguous. On the one hand, utopias can be seen as the authors' views about the outcome of history. The achievement of an ideal society is the inevitable culmination of history for those who see it in terms of continuous progress. On the other hand, for readers who do not share the utopian writers' faith in progress, 'Utopia is...discontinuous with history; it can exist only in discourse and is realizable 'nowhere' except in the imagination' (Ruppert, *Reader* 4).

History plays a negligible part in the structure of utopian novels. Utopias revolve around a visitor from the real world who stumbles across a society removed in either time or space and who learns about its customs mainly through conversation with the inhabitants. In More's *Utopia* and in Butler's *Erewhon*, both isolated islands removed in space from the narrator's society, history is entirely irrelevant. In the utopias of Bellamy, Morris, and Wells, there are some perfunctory mentions of how the new society evolved, but these are sketchy and unsatisfactory. The people are on the whole uninterested in their past.

The importance of history as the vehicle of progress was perhaps so obviously taken for granted by the utopian writers that they felt it unnecessary to state this explicitly in their work. However, this failure to take historical development into full account is one of the reasons people have not taken utopian works seriously. The dystopian writers reacted against the dismissal of history both by contemporary society and by their utopian forbears. In the three dystopias portrayed in Huxley's *Brave New World*, Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and Bradbury's

*Fahrenheit 451*, the disregard for history is carried to its ultimate conclusion. Here history is deliberately ignored, suppressed, distorted, and finally destroyed.

In *Brave New World*, we are told that "History is bunk." For this reason, the young people are not taught history in school, nor do they know anything about religion, literature, or philosophy. There has been "a campaign against the Past" (Huxley, *Brave New World* 38) to the extent that it has become virtually nonexistent. All that matters is the present and the pleasure associated with the immediate experience of living. As a result, neither life nor death has any meaning beyond its immediate reality.

In *Fahrenheit 451* too, there is no knowledge or consciousness of the past. Here the loss of the past is more insidious. It ties in with the central premise of the story: the decline and fall of books. A spokesperson of the new system describes the process by which people stopped reading. At first books were condensed. Then

school [was] shortened, discipline relaxed, philosophy, histories, languages dropped, English and spelling gradually, gradually neglected, finally almost completely ignored. Life is immediate, the job counts, pleasure lies all about after work. Why learn anything save pressing buttons? (Bradbury, *Fahrenheit* 59)

Reading was replaced by sports and television. What books remained became bland and empty and stopped selling altogether. The book-burning firemen were the inevitable next step, but "the firemen are rarely necessary, the public itself stopped reading of its own accord" (Bradbury, *Fahrenheit* 44).

Bradbury's dystopia is perhaps one of the most disturbing because it is so close to us. We can recognize the beginnings of many of these trends in our own experience. In Bradbury's world, the burning of books, and thereby of history, is a means of destroying all that is different and therefore disturbing. "[Fire's] real beauty is that it destroys responsibility and consequences" (*Fahrenheit* 125) and removes all challenges. Even more dangerously, it leads to the manipulation of history. Ultimately, the destruction of history is the destruction of continuity and meaning, and of life itself. Bradbury implies that the burning of books and "the two atomic wars since 1990" (*Fahrenheit* 80) are part of the same destructive process that arises from making people the same and therefore disposable. People must preserve and create instead of forgetting and destroying if they are to avoid such a dystopia.

Orwell presents a similar point of view even more forcefully in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In this bleakest and most hopeless of dystopias, the distortion of the past assumes an even more horrible aspect as it is used by the ruling party as the means of wielding power.

The Party seeks power entirely for its own sake. We are not interested in the good of others; we are interested solely in power....Power is not a means, it is an end.... power is power over human beings. Over the body—but above all, over the mind. If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face—for ever. (227-30)

The explanation is disturbingly reminiscent of Nisbet's definition of progress as power. It is the negative image of the vision held by the nineteenth-century believers in the idea.

In order to maintain its power, the State has created two ideas that are essential to the control of people's thoughts. One is Newspeak, whose aim is to narrow the range of thought to orthodox sentiments by cutting down connotations and minimizing lexical and morphological variety. In the end, people will be unable even to experience thoughts contrary to what the State wants because there are no words to express them. The second and even more potent concept is that of doublethink, the mainstay of the Party's power. It is referred to also as reality control and mutability of the past. The Party is constantly rewriting history. Truth is what is in the record at any given moment. As soon as the record changes, so does the truth. The Party tampers with reality and then tampers with the knowledge that it has done so, and so on, until there is no objective reality. "Whatever the Party holds to be truth, is the truth" (Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 214), so there is no basis for comparison, discontent, or rebellion, and the Party becomes infallible and invincible.

This rigid control of consciousness necessitates a total lack of privacy, hence the slogan, "Big Brother is watching." It also leads to complete uniformity. The result is that individuals are made insignificant and ineffectual. It is difficult to believe a system as repressive and brutal as that of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* could exist for long, even when we remember the dictatorships of Hitler and Stalin, who loom large in the background of the novel. We may well observe trends in our own world that could lead to a society like the one Orwell imagines. But in the end, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* would be impossible unless we alter history and distort our consciousness to the extent that the Party does.

In summary then, the modern dystopian writers see the loss of connection with history as a destructive force that reduces people to insignificance and seriously undermines their capacity for envisioning a better future. The loss of the past implies a discontinuity with and loss of the future, and destroys hope, which is the motivation for change.

### **Freedom versus Happiness**

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* the Party uses its power to make people suffer. It is not interested in the good of others; it is interested solely in power. Such an extreme is very unusual even in a dystopia. In most cases, the rulers of society, real or fictional, maintain that they exercise authority in order to bring happiness to the people. The

question often resolves itself into a choice between freedom and happiness. Ruppert writes, "The incompatibility of happiness and freedom, as has often been noted, is the central issue in most anti-utopias" (*Reader* 106).

Huxley's *Brave New World* is a prime example of this opposition. It depicts a world where the whole purpose of life is pleasure. It is a world where pain and doubt and instability have been systematically abolished. As the World Controller puts it:

The world's stable now. People are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can't get...they're so conditioned that they practically can't help behaving as they ought to behave. (177)

They are as happy and content as any of the inhabitants of Morris's or Bellamy's utopias. However, their happiness is artificially induced. Genetic engineering, conditioning, and the drug soma have made them incapable of any other emotion. The price for this has been the loss of literature, religion, and true science, as well as the loss of love, truth, and God. The price of happiness is the loss of individuality and choice—in other words, the loss of freedom.

The antithesis of the *Brave New World* is the Indian reservation. Although it is freer and therefore more human, this life is too utterly squalid and wretched—too unhappy—to be an acceptable solution either. Later, Huxley wrote of a third alternative in his utopian *Island*. In Huxley's terms, the island of Pala has the few good things that *Brave New World* possesses but has none of its evils. There is, for example, unrestricted sexuality in Pala, but it is accompanied by real love and fidelity. There is the psychedelic moksha-medicine, but, unlike soma, it is used to enhance reality not to take a holiday from it. Huxley bases the perfection of Pala on the idea of affirming and embracing opposites. He tries to bring Eastern religion and mysticism together with Western science and technology. He sees Pala as a world where freedom and happiness have come together.

Still, Huxley cannot entirely get away from the notion of conditioned happiness. Palanese children are conditioned, not educated, to love others. Highly suggestible people are identified and specially hypnotized and trained so they will not be hypnotizable by later enemies of liberty. It is "pure Pavlov...but Pavlov purely for a good purpose" (Huxley, *Island* 195). One could make a good argument that, philosophically, happiness and real freedom are no more compatible in Pala than in *Brave New World* as long as conditioning and drugs, no matter how benignly used, are essential to good behavior and contentment. A more serious problem with *Island* as the perfect utopia is that its vision of the reconciliation of freedom and happiness is something Huxley obviously longs for but which he does not really consider possible.

Ultimately, *Island* is closer even to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* than to *News from Nowhere*. It resembles the latter in its exterior but shares with the former something more fundamental, namely a pessimistic worldview. Morris could imagine a world where happiness was not incompatible with freedom because he believed human beings to be essentially good. Neither Orwell nor Huxley has any such faith in human nature. Huxley, even when he creates a utopia, does not believe it will endure and has it destroyed by the forces of consumerism and militarism in the end.

The question of the opposition between happiness and freedom is perhaps one of the most important philosophical issues raised by utopian and dystopian literature. The authors discussed may be divided into two groups. The first unequivocally holds happiness to be the only goal and considers the issue of freedom more or less irrelevant. Bellamy and to some extent Wells, who both display this tendency, attempt to balance the two conditions but clearly see happiness as the more crucial requirement. They are, as may be expected, writers of utopias. The second group includes the major dystopian writers Huxley, Orwell, and Bradbury, who not only consider the so-called happiness derived from satisfying all needs to be incompatible with freedom but also deny that it is real happiness altogether.

Bradbury puts his finger on the problem. One of the characters says, "People want to be happy...well aren't they? Don't we keep them moving, don't we give them fun? That's all they live for.... For pleasure" (*Fahrenheit* 63). Later, another character answers this assertion: "If there were no war, if there was peace in the world, I'd say fine, have fun! But all isn't well with the world" (113). Real well-being and happiness are not the same thing as mere pleasure.

Careful reading leads us to redefine happiness. We should also redefine freedom. The kind of freedom necessary for a happy world is not licence to do as one pleases. After all, the inhabitants of *Brave New World* do have that kind of liberty. Real freedom is the freedom to make one's own moral choices. The Savage in *Brave New World* says:

But I don't want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin....I'm claiming the right to be unhappy. (192)

Freedom, then, is not unhappiness but the right to choose between happiness and unhappiness, goodness and sin, comfort and danger. Liberty is necessary because free, independent choice leads to moral and spiritual growth, which is ultimately the only source of happiness.

## Human Nature

For most modern readers, dystopias are more convincing than utopias. Hence the common use of the word utopian to mean impractical. Traditional utopias like More's and twentieth-century utopias are isolated spots that

preserve their ideal quality because they are removed from the rest of the world. On the one hand, Morris's and Bellamy's ideals, although worldwide in scope, are unreal because they are removed in time. Dystopias, on the other hand, are depicted not as theoretical possibilities but as given facts. They are universal in their scope and are presented not as dreams but as extensions of our present world.

Faith in utopia is directly related to faith in human nature. The writers of utopias believe that humans can be good and virtuous in the correct environment. Morris differentiates between "the human nature of paupers, of slaves, of slave-holders [and] the human nature of wealthy freemen" (*News from Nowhere* 258), the implication being that once the material conditions are right, people will also improve morally. Wells and even Huxley also subscribe to this viewpoint. They too see the need for the right kind of society in order for people to be free as well as prosperous.

Because they posit a change in society as a prerequisite for change in human nature, even utopian writers themselves have little confidence that the ideal can be achieved. Dystopian writers, who accept human nature as essentially weak or evil, naturally predict the deterioration of society from its present evils to even greater ones. Thus, Butler cynically views people as either manipulative or gullible; Bradbury envisions mass exploitation and the rejection of moral responsibility and intellectual awareness; and Orwell imagines a world, frightening in its realism, where everything is done for the sake of gaining power. Much of modern literature and thought holds evil and savagery to be at the core of human nature. Such a view is certainly part of the dystopian conception of the world. Utopian approaches, although ostensibly asserting the opposite position, are nevertheless touched and shaken by it too. Moreover, modern readers accept this proposition to a great extent and therefore tend to accept dystopias as more plausible than utopias.

### **A Vision of the Future**

We have looked at the novels as manifestations of individual writers' thoughts and ideals, but we can also view them as a unit. We can see this group of novels as a constituent of a greater whole, namely, the modern vision of the future. Thus, none of the novels is complete in itself, but each complements the others, and together they give one a sense of what is wrong with the modern world, what is needed to improve it, and what may be expected of the future. The following is a synthesis of the ideas discussed above.

Both utopian and dystopian novels criticize contemporary society. Nineteenth-century writers objected to the hypocrisy, selfishness, greed, individualism, and self-deception that marked society. Twentieth-century writers have added to this list even more dangerous tendencies, such as the addiction to power, the drive towards centralization and authoritarianism, the loss of liberty, and the savagery supposedly inherent in human beings.

The writers all agree that the world needs to change. They also agree that an improvement in society requires material and physical well-being as well as moral and intellectual freedom and autonomy. The nature of the change and, more important, whether or not such a change is possible, are questions that divide the utopian and dystopian writers.

The utopian thinkers of the last century, encouraged by the scientific and economic developments of their time, believed in human progress and in the perfectibility of human beings. According to these thinkers, once society is restructured on the basis of reason, justice, and the principle of general wellbeing and happiness, people will be transformed, and there will be no need to worry about tyranny, crime, or war. World peace and universal prosperity will ensue once society has been reformed.

The dystopian thinkers of this century—disillusioned by the failure of reason to prevent two world wars, the rise of totalitarian states, a potentially suicidal arms race, and economic disaster—hold a diametrically opposite view. They see little reason to believe in the perfectibility and progress of humanity. Instead, they believe that the most modern society can hope for is to prevent things from worsening. Even the twentieth-century utopias fail to recover the hope of their predecessors because they do not operate within a positive, optimistic worldview.

Nineteenth-century writers take the importance of history and the doctrine of irreversible progress as a given and, therefore, do not feel the need to assert its importance in their prognoses for the future. In the twentieth century, thinkers realize the need for a connection with the past and reiterate its importance in their works, but they no longer believe in history as a process of development and improvement. Both views of history are therefore incomplete in that they fail to integrate historical reality with a sense of historical purpose.

Finally, utopian writers, responding to the competition and selfishness of the world, favor happiness through organization, cooperation, and community. They are preoccupied with happiness often to the exclusion of concern for the freedom of choice. Dystopian writers, reacting to the dangers of uniformity and excessive centralization, take the other extreme. They prefer freedom even if it means unhappiness and suffering. The tension between the two viewpoints may be expressed in terms of the tension between the need for unity and the need for diversity.

In general, utopias promise a new world of happiness, peace, goodness, and progress. Dystopias point to the failure of these promises and predict a future far worse than the present. In the final section of this paper, I would like to look at the viewpoint of the Bahá'í Faith, a radically different approach that proposes ways of fulfilling the former prediction and avoiding the latter.

### **The Vision of the Bahá'í Faith**

The writings of the Bahá'í Faith are unusual companions for the novels under discussion since they are obviously not novels, are not "utopian" in the sense of impractical (although highly optimistic), and are not solely



concerned with the future but rather with the whole range of human life and activity. However, a comparison of the two bodies of literature can be very rewarding. Since the Bahá'í Faith was founded in 1844, its sacred writings are contemporary with the other works examined in this article. Like these secular works, the Bahá'í writings are concerned with the challenges of a new age and with aspirations for a better world. Bahá'u'lláh said, "We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations" (*Proclamation* v). Most important, the Bahá'í Faith offers ways of achieving such good by answering questions that the writers we have dealt with left unanswered.

The Bahá'í vision of the future is unequivocally hopeful. The writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi all express faith in a glorious future for humanity. The promise of world peace is expressed succinctly in the statement by the Universal House of Justice. It says, "World peace is not only possible but inevitable. It is the next stage in the evolution of this planet...." (*To the Peoples* 1). It is hard to believe that these words are prognostications for the same world the dystopias described. Of course, the Universal House of Justice, having established its basic premise, goes on to say that, "Whether peace is to be reached only after unimaginable horrors precipitated by humanity's stubborn clinging to old patterns of behaviour, or is to be embraced now by an act of consultative will, is the choice before all who inhabit the earth" (*To the Peoples* 1). However, this does not alter the fact that according to the Bahá'í teachings, a future of unity, justice, peace, and order will be established.

The Bahá'í Faith teaches that change in society is rooted in personal change. For much of history, human beings have been viewed either as sinful and evil or as merely highly evolved animals or biochemical machines. Based on such views, human beings have been seen as intrinsically violent and aggressive, and hence incapable of betterment. This has led to a paralyzing contradiction in human affairs:

On the one hand, people of all nations proclaim not only their readiness but their longing for peace and harmony.... On the other, uncritical assent is given to the proposition that human beings are incorrigibly selfish and aggressive and thus incapable of erecting a social system at once progressive and peaceful.... (Universal House of Justice, *To the Peoples* 3)

The Bahá'í teachings say that human beings, in addition to their material existence, are also spiritual and noble. We have the capacity to be educated physically, morally, and spiritually. We are capable of changing from violent and selfish creatures into spiritually enlightened, peaceful, and loving beings. In fact, humanity as a whole must undergo such a transformation for society to be transformed and "the happiness of the nations" realized.

Given humanity's almost unremittingly brutal past, however, is there any hope that such a change can take place? And if so, how is it to come about? The Bahá'í philosophy of history answers both questions. It teaches, on the one hand, that God is the creator of the universe according to whose plan history unfolds and develops. On the other hand, human beings are regarded as the apogee of creation, "the center where the glory of all the perfections of God shines forth.... If man did not exist, the universe would be without result, for the object of existence is the appearance of the perfections of God" ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions* 196). Therefore, history provides the meaning for creation itself. It is the record of humanity's slow development towards maturity and the expression of its latent perfection. Thus, prejudice, exploitation, and war, far from being intrinsic to human nature, are really expressions of humanity's immaturity and distortions of its true spirit.

The human race, as a distinct, organic unit, has passed through evolutionary stages analogous to the stages of infancy and childhood in the lives of its individual members, and is now in the culminating period of its turbulent adolescence approaching its long-awaited coming of age. (Universal House of Justice, *To the Peoples* 4)

War and tyranny can and will be abolished as humanity outgrows them in its stage of maturity.

From the Bahá'í viewpoint, this maturation depends on both God's plan and humanity's efforts. God has set the process of evolution in motion by endowing each human being with a rational soul capable of attaining perfections and by establishing laws according to which individuals can develop their latent capacities. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "All sciences, knowledge, arts, wonders, institutions, discoveries and enterprises come from the exercised intelligence of the rational soul" (*Some Answered Questions* 217). When humanity fails to fulfill its part in this process, it brings suffering to the world and retards the achievement of life's purpose. But God also intervenes in the process of evolution itself. He guides the ultimate course of history and helps us to develop by revealing his will through his Manifestations. The religions taught by these Messengers reveal God's teachings and laws progressively according to the needs and understanding of people at different times. As Nash puts it, "The Bahá'í concept of progressive revelation establishes the major pattern of history to consist of the advent of these Manifestations of God, and the advance in civilization their appearance invokes" (*Phoenix* 88).

Undeniably, people have committed great atrocities in the name of religion, but these have been perversions of the true spirit of religion and must be attributed to people's own selfishness and lack of understanding. Bahá'u'lláh said that "religion is the greatest of all means for the establishment of order in the world and for the peaceful contentment of all that dwell therein" (qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, *World Order* 186). No attempt to set human affairs right can ignore religion.

Based on its view of history, the Bahá'í Faith predicts a glorious future for humanity, saying that from the

outset history has been moving towards the goal of the unification of humanity. Shoghi Effendi writes,

This will indeed be the fitting climax of that process of integration which, starting with the family, the smallest unit in the scale of human organization, must, after having called successively into being the tribe, the city-state and the nation, continue to operate until it culminates in the unification of the whole world, the final object and the crowning glory of human evolution on this planet. (*Promised Day* 122)

The Bahá'í Faith, then, has a strong belief in the idea of human progress.

The horrors of the modern world, however, have to be more fully explained. The phenomena that led to the replacement of nineteenth-century optimism by twentieth-century despair are part of the inevitable process of the growth of human society. Within this larger scheme, the Bahá'í writings see events such as the two world wars to be significant in another way too. Shoghi Effendi writes, "The destructive forces that characterize the [present order] should be identified with a civilization that has refused to answer to the expectation of a new age, and is consequently falling into chaos and decline" (*World Order* 170). This is part of a process of death and rebirth. These destructive forces signalize the death-pangs of the old order. But there is another process that "proclaims the birth-pangs of an Order, divine and redemptive,... within Whose administrative structure an embryonic civilization, incomparable and world-embracing, is imperceptibly maturing" (Shoghi Effendi, *Promised Day* 16). The events of the past hundred years, which have rocked the foundations of the earth, have a two-fold significance. Through them, humanity is "being simultaneously called upon to give account of its past actions, and is being purged and prepared for its future mission" (Shoghi Effendi, *Promised Day* 3),

The expectations of the Bahá'í Faith about the future consist of two stages. First is the achievement of the Lesser Peace, a politically achieved peace that 'Abdu'l-Bahá said would be initiated by the end of this century. Bahá'u'lláh called upon world leaders to hold "a vast, an all-embracing assemblage" (*Gleanings* 249) and to conclude a binding treaty that would put an end to war. The next stage would be the establishment of the Most Great Peace within the context of a new world order that is fundamentally spiritual in character.

The discussion so far has stressed the visionary aspect of the Bahá'í writings. The establishment of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh is the goal towards which history has been moving according to God's plan. However, its implementation also depends on the application of the teachings and laws by the community. The Bahá'í writings contain critical analyses of the problems of the present world and principles necessary for solving them. The Universal House of Justice writes about the steps towards establishing unity and a new order. Racism, the inordinate disparity between rich and poor, unbridled nationalism, and religious strife are direct causes of enmity and conflict between nations, classes, and individuals, and are major barriers to the achievement of peace that must be removed. Equally important is the fulfillment of certain prerequisites including the equality of women and men, universal education, and the adoption of an international auxiliary language. All of these goals can be achieved through a combined application of spiritual, moral, and practical solutions.

In practice, this involves the inner transformation of individuals as they bring their lives into conformity with the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. In the words of Shoghi Effendi:

One thing and only one thing will unfailingly and alone secure the undoubted triumph of this sacred Cause, namely, the extent to which our own inner life and private character mirror forth in their manifold aspects the splendor of those eternal principles proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh. (*Bahá'í Administration* 66)

It also involves the development of the administrative order of the Faith, "not only as the nucleus but the very pattern of the New World Order destined to embrace in the fullness of time the whole of mankind" (Shoghi Effendi, *World Order* 144). By its very design, the Administrative Order operates at a grassroots level, channeling and coordinating the energies of all members of the community. At the same time, it functions in increasingly wider circles so that the efforts of individuals are harmonized with those of institutions at the local, national, and international level. Thus can the transformation taking place within individuals influence and change society as a whole.

The most important prerequisite, however, is the achievement of the unity of humanity. According to Bahá'í teachings, "The earth is but one country and mankind its citizens" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 250). The idea of the oneness of humanity is not simply an intellectual proposition but a reality that all must eventually recognize. It is the spirit of the age, something that nineteenth-century writers felt and strived for but could not fully grasp. Twentieth-century writers rejected their predecessors' vision of unity because both sets of writers had misunderstood the true meaning of unity. Unity does not mean sameness. The Bahá'í Faith

far from aiming at the subversion of the existing foundations of society...seeks to broaden its basis, to remold its institutions in a manner consonant with the needs of an ever-changing world.... It does not ignore, nor does it attempt to suppress, the diversity...that differentiate[s] the peoples and nations of the world. It calls for a wider loyalty, for a larger aspiration than any that has animated the human race.... It repudiates excessive centralization on one hand, and disclaims all attempts at uniformity on the other. Its watchword is unity in diversity.... (Shoghi Effendi, *World Order* 41-42).

The Bahá'í teachings, then, see no need for conflict between the happiness that comes from unity and cooperation, and the freedom that is the outcome of individuality, diversity, and independent moral choice. In fact, one of the basic principles of the Faith is the independent investigation of truth. Each person is considered capable of recognizing and accepting the truth. It is everyone's duty to seek the truth in all things, to consider all that is encountered without passion and prejudice, to decide on what to accept, and then to act upon one's beliefs. In this way, each person can preserve individual freedom of choice within the wider context of loyalty and love for all fellow humans. So central is the concept of unity that Bahá'u'lláh writes, "The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established" (*Gleanings* 286).

At a deeper level, happiness and freedom are not only compatible but also complementary. Bahá'u'lláh writes:

True liberty consisteth in man's submission unto My commandments.... Happy is the man that hath apprehended the Purpose of God in whatever He hath revealed from the Heaven of His Will.... The liberty that profiteth you is to be found nowhere except in complete servitude unto God.... (*Gleanings* 336)

Elsewhere, writing about his ordinances, Bahá'u'lláh says, "Whoso keepeth the commandments of God shall attain everlasting felicity" (*Gleanings* 289). Likewise, 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes, "Religion is the light of the world, and the progress, achievement, and happiness of man result from obedience to the laws set down in the holy Books" (*Secret* 71). Thus, in the Bahá'í worldview, both freedom and happiness derive from obedience to divine laws. Both freedom and happiness are described in words so similar that one may even consider them to be different manifestations of the same state of being.

### **Conclusion**

The novelists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries responded to isolated aspects of the world around them. Although in a sense this is all that can be expected of any individual, such a response can lead to a fragmentary understanding not only of the present but also of the past and the future. Thus, within a few decades, we observe a major shift from highly optimistic visions of progress to equally hopeless images of regress. The utopian writers of the last century would have been horrified by the predictions of Huxley and Orwell, while modern dystopian authors find the works of Morris and Bellamy naive and unconvincing. The readers find neither approach fully satisfying. One satisfies the emotional yearning for hope but is seemingly incompatible with the reality of the world. The other appears to be a rational interpretation of the actual world but is too devastating in its emotional impact. Appreciation for the whole genre is diminished because of this failure to satisfy both the emotional and intellectual needs of the readers.

My own response to the books has been greatly enhanced by my study of the Bahá'í writings. I find that the Bahá'í writings can reconcile the critical function of the dystopias with the visionary insight of the utopias to create a united entity that validates each part while giving a further dimension to the whole. This added dimension is that of a realistic hope for the future based on a comprehensive understanding of the past and the present. I will end with a passage from Shoghi Effendi, who summarizes this unifying vision most eloquently:

God's purpose is none other than to usher in ... the Great, the Golden Age of a long-divided, a long-afflicted humanity. Its present state, indeed even its immediate future, is dark, distressingly dark. Its distant future, however, is radiant, gloriously radiant.... (*Promised Day* 120)

Adversity, prolonged, world-wide, afflictive, allied to chaos and universal destruction, must needs... precipitate a radical change in the very conception of society, and coalesce ultimately the disjointed, the bleeding limbs of mankind into one body, single, organically united, and indivisible. (*Promised Day* 127)

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