

An Investigation on How Personal Perspective Impacts on the Interpretation of Individuals from Utopia and Dystopia

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ABSTRACT

For thousands of years, one of the big dreams of human beings was a perfect world free from conflict, hunger and unhappiness. For centuries, utopias were favorite subject for writers. A dystopia is a community or society that is unpleasant or terrifying. It is not a good place and has an opposite meaning to utopia. The idea of utopia has entered into various disciplines, genres and passed through historical periods. This study investigates on these various disciplines and also examines on how personal perspective impacts on the interpretation of individuals from Utopia and Dystopia. The subjective ideal of perfection forms the concept of utopia in the men's mind. Concerning human nature, the concept of Dystopia as the idea of absolute agony, depend on our understanding. Many scholars have suggested concepts to achieve perfection. There are many ways that politicians can use to create an image of the country as a good place such as manipulating the press, language and politics. If people hope to believe in Utopia, it is necessary to accept the negative points with blind conviction. With respect to it, the same holds true for the illusion of dystopia. Therefore, the concept of dystopia is mainly negative, than completely awful. It can be concluded that both Dystopia and Utopia are fictional and subjective concepts that cannot reach their full potential.

KEYWORDS: Utopia, Dystopia, Personal Perspective, Marxism

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I. INTRODUCTION

For thousands of years, a perfect world that is free from conflict, hunger and unhappiness has been the big dream of human beings. In 1516, the term of utopia was introduced by Thomas More in *Utopia*. The word 'utopia' was coined from the Greek ou-to pos meaning 'no place' or 'nowhere'. But it has a double meaning; the prefix u (no) and/or eu (well), literally means 'no place', the

place does not exist, and/or 'place of wellbeing'(Nakamori 33).

In utopia, as an imagined society, there are highly attractive qualities for the citizens. It is a place, state, or condition in which politics, laws, traditions, and conditions are at the perfect level(ibid).

According to utopian ideals, economics, government and justice are equal, while the method and structure of proposed implementation

may be different based on ideology(Oxford Dictionaries 87).

A dystopia (from the Greek δυσ- "bad" and τόπος "place", or simply anti-utopia) is a community or society that is unpleasant or terrifying(ibid). It is not a good place and has an opposite meaning to utopia. This term is used to describe a utopian society in which there are a lot of problems. This futuristic and imagined world restrains the society oppressively through corporate, bureaucratic, moral, technological, or totalitarian control. It is a tool for dystopias to criticize the current trend, societal norm, or political system (Donawerth 43).

The main characteristics of a dystopian society are as follows. In order to control the citizens, propaganda is used; there are many obstacle on the way of information, independent thought, and freedom; the citizens of the society worship a figurehead or concept ; Citizens' behavior and activities are under close observation; Citizens fear to be in the outside world; Citizens are badly treated that they are dehumanized; The natural world is rejected and distrusted; Citizens have no individual expectations and should have uniform expectations; There is no place for individuality and disagreement; The society is ahallucination of utopia(Rodriguez 90)

Authors share their concerns about society and humanity through dystopia. They inform society members to focus on their society and to be aware of how things are worsen without anyone knows what has occurred(Donawerth56).

II. THE HISTORY OF UTOPIAN IDEAS

Although the word utopia was coined by Sir Thomas More, it is not a modern concept. For centuries, utopias were favorite subject for writers. The biblical Garden of Eden in Genesis and Plato's Republic, which was about a perfect state ruled by philosopher-kings are examples of utopia(Xiang1403) In the 18th century, utopian ideas increased suddenly and manifested in social and political actions. The social reformists began to believe that they had their own right and reason. Thinkers like de Condorcet, Rousseau and Washington give citizens a set of reasons they needed to battle for a superior and more pleasant world. Utopia is often a safe place to imagine and implement the solutions to the real world problems outside the mainstream, with low disturbance to it. On the other hand, the revolution takes place. First in America, then in France, the ancient régime was under pressure to provide opportunity for the new situations. Kings of Great Britain and of France

lost their power(Monteiro 23) In the 19th century, two model communities were established by Robert Owen and Titus Salt. These two persons, who were industrialists and reformers, provided houses for the workers at their textile mills. These communities are often considered as socialist utopias. These independent experimental communities were built around textile factories. A better quality of life was provided for Workers. The aim of Owen and Salt was to set up communities in which human rights, equality and democracy are the main objective(Shostak28). At this time, American Independence and the French Revolution were occurring.

III. UTOPIAN THEORY

The idea of utopia has entered into various disciplines, genres and passed through historical periods. The area of knowledge and procedure has changed the meaning of the utopia [8]. In the first decades of the twentieth century, Marxist thinkers believed that utopianism is "a driving force of political shift from capitalism to socialism/communism (Jameson 51)" without any political strategy.

Utopianism and Stalinism were considered equal during the Cold War. In the same way, some urban planning projects such as Le Corbusier's urban planning projects and Oscar Niemeyer's modernist architecture had been criticized destructively. The critics believed that these plans are utopian idealism and are not realistic socially (Noble 15). Initially, a geographical location was considered as utopia, but this view was changed into "more abstract concept as a means of seeing, thinking, and acting"(Jalving31).

Further, this idea of utopia was redefined by Ernst Bloch. He presented the utopia as a more comprehensive principle. According to Bloch, utopia is not a mere literary genre. "Utopia is the impulse that flows through any future-oriented expression in our lives, both in society and in culture in general: from daydreams to fairytales, travel accounts, dance, film, theater, architecture, painting, and poetry" Bloch argues (ibid). Contrary to the Marxist's belief, he asserts that utopia is not a mere desire to change society extremely, without existing social conditions are considered (Bloch 30). Instead, according to Bloch, 'utopia' as an actual desire firmly depended on the objective realization of the contradictions in a reality rather than to realize in an abstract and radical condition. In another word, "utopian impulse" that expresses

“anticipatory consciousness,” is inherent in human nature.

The utopian impulse takes from human's capacity to identify problems in the immediate environment (Levitas 12). However, Ruth Levitas (1949) rejects “anticipatory consciousness” as an inherent part of human nature. He suggested that the “utopian impulse” is a historical and cultural construct as it underlies “anticipatory consciousness” (19). The social context shaped the subjectivity of artist. The artist makes an effort to understand the specificity of economic, social and political conditions and indicates their place of orientation.

From this point of view, utopian impulse for a better future is derived from a social and cultural base, not from the innate nature of human. On another level, as the artists have critical insights into existing social problem, these critical views are the source of utopian impulse. Therefore, art plays a critical role in the formation of society and construction of future.

IV. THE IMPACT OF PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE INTERPRETATION OF INDIVIDUALS FROM UTOPIA AND DYSTOPIA

As mentioned before, the subjective ideal of perfection forms the concept of utopia in the men's mind. Concerning human nature, the concept of Dystopia as the idea of absolute agony, depend on our understanding. However, if an individual is unaware of suffering, utopia is achievable. One can say that dystopia is merely a utopia from another point of view. However, if the Utopian society has problems on any level, then the society cannot be regarded as Utopia, because this kind of community is unable to meet the needs of all society members. It is contrary to the definition of utopia. Accordingly, utopia cannot be attained in any circumstance, unless the society members ignore some problems and imperfections (Shklar 27)

Historically speaking, many concepts have been suggested by scholars to achieve perfection. They criticize that section of society who is able to change the conditions. Marx in the *Communist Manifesto* displays a world in which the proletarians ‘have a world to win’. Although, this concept was accepted widely, it was unmanageable. According to Marx, the working class should emancipate themselves from the oppression of capitalism and attempt to achieve a goal to maintain a unified nation (Marx 57). In theory, Marxism provides a set of ideal laws to setup autopia. Based on Marxism, private

ownership is abrogated and this control is given up to the state. The state monopolizes transport, communication, agriculture, factories and education. As a result, all workers are paid equally. Communism appears as Utopia in its most achievable form. For the working class with lower socioeconomic status, the idea of comprehensive equality is attractive. However, the major defect of Communism is that the fundamental human traits such as narcissism, greed and competition are neglected (Marx 104).

Throughout history, it has not been discovered a civilization that demonstrates absolute equality. Basically, hierarchal conditions are a necessity for man by which one individual holds status above another. The main example, which is used to show the hierarchy and oppression, is the embodied European ‘White Man’. In Western culture, the ‘White Man’ has condemned all those below him through the Church, industries, Monarchy, and Government (Ware 39).

Based on traditional British standards, the upper-class white male (The Bourgeoisie) is above the middle and lower class white male. Then, for their pleasure, they are placed above women of the same class. The women of this class are at higher place than children, ethnic minority, and the disabled. In the communist society, in which all individuals are equal and, have equal earning, narcissism as a human trait cannot be ignored. The narcissistic traits of human cause an individual displeasure with the state of equilibrium. It would inevitably cause the rebellion. For example, politicians show selfish qualities in order to control the public (Barber 105)

In a Communist state that considers public as a material in order to maintain the state, it is more probable that politicians corrupt. In Orwell's *Animal Farm*, two characters of Squealer and Napoleon show their overactive Ids. In this novel, a world is shown in which the previous hierarchal system is removed from power and a new system is started. It is only a return to the previous condition with new oppressors. It mentions the real mechanics of Communist Russia. Only in a very short time in the novel, it is shown ‘all animals are equal. As one of the most prominent narcissist of the novel, Napoleon destroys the current system and allows himself to abuse equality in order to create inequality where he leads off the regime. It demonstrates how ‘absolute power corrupts absolutely’. The famous slogan of ‘Animal Farm’ (All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others) shows that narcissism is the

main obstacle to Communism manifest itself accurately (Relotić 65).

In the *Handmaid's Tale*, as a dystopian novel by Margaret Atwood, Gilead creates very terrible situations and defines them with an oblique allusion into forming positive associations. Two terms of 'Participation' and 'Prayvaganza' that are used to define an execution and mass prayer have the same effect; 'Participation' is created from the connection of 'participate' and 'execution'. This conjunction unifies those who take part in 'Participation'. The presence at the event means to incriminate. 'Participation' and 'Alternative Facts' have the same effect. Both execution and lies have negative connotations. The rebrand by Gilead's regime eventually uncovers the terms of their original definitions in order to estrange residents of the nation from the original meaning, isolating the nation from negative acts (Redder 61).

Arthur Schopenhauer stated that: 'Many undoubtedly owe their good fortune to the circumstance that they possess a pleasing smile.' Certainly, some politicians use this attribute. They are able to misrepresent any definitions, ignore truth, and give entertainment importance. Accordingly, politicians can manage and direct the opinion of people to make them believe that the state is perfect or hateful. This statement shows that the concept of utopia is shaped by personal opinions and feelings (Maharaj 59). Schopenhauer quote ends with frustration: 'Yet these hearts would do better to beware and to learn from Hamlet's tables that one may smile, and smile, and be a villain'.

There are many ways that politicians can use to create an image of the country as a good place such as manipulating the press, language and politics. It is impossible to cause intelligent people believe this illusion. In the condition of modern life, one can hope for a 'good place'. This illusion is the closest to Utopia. As 'Hope is the confusion of the desire for a thing with its probability', in order to achieve utopia, 'ignorance is bliss'. If people hope to believe in Utopia, it is necessary to accept the negative points with blind conviction (134). With respect to it, the same holds true for the illusion of dystopia. If there is a single person who succeeds in what the majority of people define as dystopia, then the nation does not comply with its definition. Therefore, the concept of dystopia is mainly negative, than completely awful. It can be concluded that both Dystopia and Utopia are fictional and subjective concepts that cannot reach their full potential. In real circumstance, Thomas

Moore's interpretation of Utopia as 'No Place' is more supported than the fictional circumstance. Neither can be achieved due to their attribute of 'perfection'.

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