

Luisa Passerini, European University Institute

Utopian versus Utopian

If you search “Google Translate” for the couple of Italian adjectives ‘*utopico* contro *utopistico*’ (the first understood in a positive sense and the second in a negative one), you find out that such a distinction does not exist in English, and that the phrase given as the English equivalent is *utopian versus utopian*. However, “The Roget's Thesaurus” has *utopianistic*, to indicate “a person inclined to be imaginative or idealistic but impractical”. This divergence signals the very problematic state of the art concerning this area of thought.

In the course of time, from the nineteenth century on, various debates took place on the different meanings of these terms and the comparable French ones – not by chance, Italy and France are two countries in which 1968 had a relevant political role and a theoretical impact. Particularly in the decades 1960s–1980s, this counter-position took up a political sense which was widespread around youth-, student-, and women-movements. In this period, the new link established by these movements between utopia and daily life led to a constellation including democracy. The novelty was the critique of representative democracy and the insistence on direct democracy as an essential element of redefining “*utopico*” and ‘*utopistico*’ while restoring the primacy of the former against the second.

Myrthe Bartels, Institute of Advanced Studies, CEU

What would an ancient democratic utopia have looked like?

This paper explores the implications of ancient Greek ideas about the importance of *scholê* for democracy. The ancient notion of *scholê* does not correspond to a modern concept; it should be understood in contrast to working for a wage. The inclusion of wage-labourers (the *dêmos*) as citizens in the political community was a characteristic feature of ancient democracy. Part of the reason why ancient intellectual authors (Plato, Xenophon, Aristotle) criticised democracy was because day-jobs and wage-earning did not allow for *scholê*: time devoted to one’s friends or one’s city (which is not the same as our notion of “free time” or “leisure”). Hence, in their more utopian writings, Plato and Aristotle put *scholê* at the heart of citizenship and restrict wage-earning to outsiders, i.e. those who do not have a stake in the city’s politics. Why was *scholê* construed as superior to wage-earning when it came to taking part in politics? What was it about wage-earning that made it incompatible with citizenship, and what did citizenship involve? This paper explores the utopian implications of the ancient idea that non-paid activities in the service of the community are of fundamental importance for participating in politics.

Ferenc Huoranszki, CEU

Dreams of a Final Normative Theory: Why do they not search for Utopia?

It might seem to be a natural task for any normative social theory to adumbrate the basic structure of a political community in which human beings can flourish. To the extent that this structure represents an ideal, it also seems natural to interpret normative social theory as a rationally grounded Utopia. Nevertheless, it is a striking feature of contemporary practical philosophy that ‘being utopistic’ seems to be a charge against, rather than a favorable or at least neutral description of, most normative projects. How has the genre of utopia turned from an innocent dream about an ideal community into a depiction of a dreadful vision of humanity’s (or sometimes every possible rational being’s) future? I shall critically investigate a few initially plausible answers to this question and then defend the relative merit of one.

Zoltán Balázs, Corvinus University

The Time of Democracy

Utopian thinking is embedded in what may be considered everyday and natural thinking insofar as both operate with the same concept of time, that is, with a distinction made between present and future. The world and society of utopia is regarded as different from the present or real time. In addition, utopian thinking tends to attribute some completedness or 'endedness' to the imagined future. In that sense, it aims at timelessness. My thesis is that in fact our present time, the political time of democracy, is already being conceived of as such. Political time is not identical with historical or personal time, which is passing, even though political time influences the perception of historical and personal time. Still, political time (of democracy) is not passing but it is, as a sort of timelessness, hence as a completed utopia or dystopia. What kind of time is this? Timelessness? Being-without-time? Being-above/beyond-time? Being-outside-time? Eternity? These concepts evidently conjure up and invoke theological thinking and conceptions, mostly related to the New Testament. I wish to explore the political time of democracy by means of political theology and the various types of time it works with.

Zsolt Czigányik, CEU DI

Democracy and leadership in 19th century Hungarian utopias

The current paper reflects on the intellectual history of democracy within utopianism, focusing on the 19th century. There seems to be an agreement in contemporary western utopianism about the necessity of a democratic pattern in an ideal society. As Furet and Costopoulos argue, "since the eighteenth century, democracy has presented itself to the modern individual as a promise of liberty, or more precisely, of autonomy. This is in contrast to earlier times when men were viewed as subjects, and consequently were deprived of the right of self-determination, which is the basis of the legitimacy of modern societies." At the same time, 19th century Hungarian utopian texts often highlight the problematic aspects of democratic societies, particularly when contrasted with regimes centred around benevolent, enlightened rulers. Utopianism also reflect on the problems and dangers arising out of the immaturity of the masses. With the examples of the works of György Bessenyei (1746-1811) and Imre Madách (1823-1864) the paper will point out how the ideal society was viewed, often with an enlightened ruler in the centre, whose reign is a constitutional monarchy where the laws and the demands of public good are respected by the ruler. The figure of Queen Arténis in Bessenyei's *The Voyage of Tariménes* (1804) is influenced by Queen and Empress Maria Theresa (1740-80), and the immaturity of the masses is also touched upon – a notion that will become central in the Athens scene of Madách's *The Tragedy of Man* (1861). Such moderate hopes of a more democratic, less absolutistic power structure reflect the historical reality of Hungary within the Habsburg Empire.

Iva Dimovska, CEU DI

Barbarians and Geniuses, or the Democratic Potentials of a Balkan Utopia

One of the earliest artistic and political movements based on the concept of utopia in Yugoslavia was *Zenitism* (Zenithism), formed with the launching of the international magazine *Zenit* (Zenith, 1921-1926), by its progenitor, Serbian writer Ljubomir Micić. The main personification of Micić's utopian ideas is the revolutionary-anarchistic figure of Barbaro-Genij (Barbaro-Genius), imagined as a modern, forceful, and an "authentic Balkan" man who in the new machine age would "Balkanize" Europe, bringing about new art and culture, and a total re-evaluation of traditional values and political ideals.

In the first manifesto of 1921, Micić prophesized that “the rotten fruits of European pseudo-culture and civilized progress” would be destroyed by a collective, cosmopolitan, global artistic movement whose goal would be to “de-civilize” and “re-democratize” Europe. This balkanization of Europe is brought upon via the presence of the dangerous, but desired imagined Other, the barbaric genius, that carries but chaos and renewal. Therefore, a very specific mixture of utopian and national(ist), but also anti-European sentiments, marks the aesthetic and political ideology of *Zenitism*.

In this proposed paper, I trace the manner in which Barbaro-Genius, the main figure of Zenitism (critically and uncritically) adopts, embodies and parodies Western orientalism. By doing that, I will attempt to see how Barbaro-Genius, as an ironic and playful representation of the Balkans, but also as a part of an avant-garde utopian movement, has the potential to investigate how concepts such as “Western” vs. “Central/Eastern”, the “Balkans”, or even “Europe” and “democracy” are all equally contestable, embodied in and conveying historically differentiating contexts and meanings.

Ana Maria Spariosu, European University Institute

“The only real democracy is direct democracy”: an exploration of the concept of democracy in two Italian contemporary utopian communities

This paper will focus on one expression of utopianism – communitarianism – and more specifically on two contemporary utopian communities in Italy, and what their practices and subjectivities can highlight in relation to democratic ideals. Both case studies perceive representative democracy as not democratic enough, opting instead to put into practice their own variations of direct democracy. To address the perceived faults of representative democracy, which focuses on majority rule, both Italian case studies suggest that all voices, states of awareness, and frameworks, and the messages that they carry, are needed to ensure a complete democratic process. As a result, both communities have developed practices to ensure more inclusivity in community decision making, such as the practice of consensus decision making and the creation of various forums and community structures that foster in-depth dialogue and the expression of member’s opinions. An emphasis on dialogue lies at the centre of these practices and is influenced by both communities’ psychosocial approach, which posits that seemingly unimportant events and feelings can often bring unexpected solutions to both group and inner conflict, consequently, also playing a key role in the creation of more direct and ‘deeper’ forms of democracy. Therefore, this paper will seek to understand the two kinds of direct democracy that each contemporary utopian community aims to foster through an examination of their related practices and subjectivities, including the differences and similarities between them, and in connection to the Italian historical context under which they developed.

Eglantina Rempert, Eötvös Loránd University

Patrick Pearse, Democracy and the Irish Proclamation of Independence

My paper analyses Patrick Pearse’s political writings and the Proclamation of the Irish Republic (1916) with regard to his ideas on democracy. Pearse was one of its signatories and a leader of the Easter Rising of April 1916; his ideals were decisive in framing the demands of the Irish nation during the revolutionary times. He discussed his vision of Ireland’s democratic future in a series of essays, ‘The Sovereign People’, ‘The Separatist Idea’ and ‘The Spiritual Nation.’ Pearse’s political writings will be evaluated in relation to those of Irish socialist leader and co-signatory of the Proclamation, James Connolly. Their vision might have been different but they shared the same desire to change Ireland’s future. Michael Collins’s writings will also be referenced; he was member of the Irish delegation that

signed the Anglo-Irish Treaty in December 1921, the closing act of the Irish War of Independence (1919-1921). One of the achievements of the Treaty was that the British government had agreed to reinstate the Irish Parliament in Dublin. This, however, came at a price that many Irishmen and women who had fought for the establishment of an independent Irish state were not willing to accept: the partition of Ireland and the mandatory oath of allegiance of members of the new Irish parliament to the British Crown. My paper considers the Proclamation as a utopian text, and reads it as an important example of an Irish literary and political tradition that dated back to time of the French Revolution of 1789 and the United Irishmen Rebellion of 1798, the latter leading to the passing of the Act(s) of Union in Dublin and in Westminster in 1800.

András Bozóki, CEU

Ideas between Innovation and Imitation

Social reformers, philosophers and political thinkers often find themselves being caught between ideology and utopia, between myth and reality in elaborating their ideas about future, society. They are struggling to choose, or perhaps to find a third way, between the desirable and the possible. This was, and still is, also true in the countries of the European semi-periphery: in East Central Europe. In this region, where Western models of democratic social organization have not been rooted deeply, but Eastern models of authoritarianism has been somewhat surpassed, 'third way' or 'hybrid' ideas and solutions shaped history in the 20th century. Social reformers tried to find an optimal solution between innovation and imitation, a dilemma which is heavily debated these days among social scientists (Krastev & Holmes 2019 vs Kubik 2020) who aim to reinterpret the meaning of global transformations of 1989. Scanning through the past century, my paper aims to investigate hybrid ideas between innovation and imitation, by rejecting the view that Central European transformations were preceded by the conceptions of imitation. Quite the contrary, innovative thought in Central Europe was always characterized by „fantasies of salvation” (V. Tismaneanu) which is interpreted here in a positive way to highlight the originality of Central European thinkers such as Jenő Henrik Schmitt, Oszkár Jászi, László Németh, Václav Benda, Václav Havel, György Konrád, Gáspár Miklós Tamás and others. Their conception of democracy was novel, innovative, anarchistic, and sometimes illusionary, however they were ready to continuously rethink their concepts to offer salve to human misery.

Ondřej Slačálek, Charles University

The end or a new beginning of anti-utopian democracy?

The paper will focus on the confrontation of contemporary debates on democracy with the genres of dystopia, anti-utopia and the utopian imagination.

Democracy has always had a utopian dimension: it has always been based on the idea of human reason, the possibility of education, enlightenment and often progress. Unlike communism or some conservative ideas, which are utopias in content, democracy was primarily a formal utopia. However, the correct procedures were also supposed to contribute to the correct (and thus often utopian) outcomes.

Especially since the Cold War, we can observe a different conception of democracy, based on the association with the genre of anti-utopia. Liberal democracy has become an alternative to utopia, which in its real form has taken on dystopian features. The key role of Orwell's anti-utopia 1984 is symptomatic; the greatest virtue of liberal democracy was that it was not totalitarianism.

Even after 1989, the lessons of totalitarianism (the political version of the anti-utopian genre) played a key role. It helped return liberal democracy to its key motif: the negation of absolutist power. Since the

2000s, this kind of legitimation is not enough. Anti-utopian liberal democracy (can be summarized as follows: we need to control power and lower our expectations of politics, lest we fall into utopian expectations leading to utopian nightmares) faces the threat of dystopias: environmental crises, the collapse of the security system, new nationalisms (whether internal in the form of nationalist populists from Trump to Orban, or external like Putin or Xi), the destruction of rational public communication by social networks. In the face of dystopia, our greatest fear is no longer the excess of power, but the lack of it. The anti-utopian face of liberal democracy is thus in crisis.

It is in this context that some proponents of liberal democracy are trying to reconstruct its utopian face - this paper will show this by analyzing post-truth discourse in the texts of Timothy Snyder and the Journalism Manifesto. But the paper will show the problematic moments of this approach: instead of defending shared institutions, liberal democracy becomes one side of the argument, with a tendency to depoliticise the other side as "enemies of liberal democracy".

Zoltán Gábor Szűcs, Eötvös Loránd University

A utopia of fear? Three forms of utopian thinking in contemporary realist political theory

Contemporary realist political theory (like 'realism' in a broader sense) is often characterized as anti-utopian, whatever it means for different authors (e. g. Galston 2010; McKean 2016; Raekstad 2018); and this feature of realism is sometimes held against it as a sign of its unwarranted status quo bias or conservatism (Finlayson 2017). Indeed, it seems plausible to think that a strand in political theory that grew out of a suspicion against the politics of hope (like in the case of Judith Shklar's liberalism of fear as well as in her criticism of utopian thinking) or an appreciation for a tragic vision of politics (like Bernard Williams's attraction to Sophoclean tragedy, Hobbesian 'first political question', Nietzsche as well as moral philosophy as 'bad news') or a passionate and spirited criticism of Enlightened progressivism (like John Gray's post-liberalism) must be uncompromisingly anti-utopian. Recently, however, some realist political theorists – who often describe themselves as radical realists (most notably, Raymond Geuss, Enzo Rossi, and Paul Raekstad etc.) started to argue that realism and utopia are not necessarily incompatible with each other. On the one hand, not every form of realism is obsessed with the political status quo and the fragility of political order (Rossi [2019] calls them 'ordorealists') but some are concerned with how it is possible to come up with alternatives to the existing political order that likes to mask itself as the only feasible political order (Rossi [2019] calls them 'radical realists'), leaving some theoretical room for utopian thinking. On the other hand, not every form of utopian thinking seems to be fundamentally irreconcilable with the general political outlook of realism. Even if detailed blueprints for an alternative political order must be rejected on realist grounds, claims Rossi, other forms of utopia might still be very appealing to radical realists in their search for alternatives to the political status quo. In my paper, I will critically revisit Rossi's claim and argue that even though Shklar's, Williams's, and Gray's (as well as other liberal realists') thinking may not indeed seem very open-minded toward utopias, there are at least two forms of utopian thinking that are not just compatible with (liberal) realism but also not entirely uncommon in it. First, there is a dystopian strand of realism that deserves to be taken seriously and, second, there is a 'utopia of fear' (as opposed to a 'utopia of hope') which is partly a theoretical space yet to be filled in by future realist thought but also partly an already existing (albeit sporadic) element of realist political theory (as well as the broader realist tradition). The former is a gloomy (and much more familiar) vision about how politics tends to turn into catastrophe while the latter is a cautiously optimistic vision (that usually remains hidden in plain sight) about how politics can become a meaningful human activity and a safeguard against tyranny and oppression, against all odds.

The paper will seek to provide a typology of these three main forms of realist utopian thinking, focusing on the largely neglected two forms (dystopian realism and especially the 'utopia of fear').

Daryna Koryagina, CEU

Towards the Brave New Communist World: utopian notions in socio-cultural life in Soviet Union in 1920s

For a scholar of utopianism, the early Soviet period presents a curious case, beginning with the idealistic nature of October revolution itself. Utopian ideas permeated early Soviet society in many spheres, starting from actual literally utopias and various artistic endeavors, like a powerful futurist movement, to architecture and even, arguably, science with the ideas of the New Soviet man. Moreover, the rhetoric of the "brighter tomorrow" was widely used by the emerging Soviet state. Since utopias traditionally deal with "ideal" societies, often without explaining how a given society would achieve that stage, early Soviet propaganda was peculiar as it attempted to provide an actual roadmap of how the regime was aiming to reach its stated goal in creating a truly communist society. That illustrates the impact of these essentially utopian notions from a socio-political perspective. And yet, the Bolsheviks, following the Marxist tradition, would protest the very notion of utopia as anti-scientific. The tensions between Lenin and Lunacharsky alongside with the ban on literary utopian works, whose authors would later be forced out of their respective Soviet Republics, are amongst the many indicators of this divide between attempting to build what is essentially a utopia, while rebuking the utopian nature of Bolshevik's communist project. All of this posits the questions – how can we discuss utopianism present in early Soviet cultural and social life.

Natalya Bekhta, Tampere Institute for Advanced Studies

On Democratic Futures and the Literary Imagination of Central Eastern Europe

In this talk I examine the usefulness of Utopia as a future-making category in the context of post-1990s Central and Eastern Europe. What happens to Utopia – as literary form and human impulse – in this region, shaped by decades of post-Soviet re-organisation of societies and local wars? The disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 may have briefly created a moment in the social imaginary when a collective longing for an alternative, affluent and democratic, future seemed to have been fulfilled. But new social, economic and ecological catastrophes soon exposed the longing for the end of utopias as itself "the biggest utopia of them all" (Prokhasko 2020: 175). The end of Cold War may have briefly created a sense that the Western model of liberal democracy is the endpoint of political development or a realistic version of otherwise impossible utopian demands. But the "rebirth of History" (Badiou 2012) that followed has opened up anew the persistent utopian struggle for a different, better social future. Is this future being conceived of in democratic terms? And what exactly does democracy mean from the Eastern-European vantage point? In order to engage with these questions, I shall draw on the example of post-1990s Ukrainian fiction, since, in times of social crises, literature renews its role as a site of articulation and discussion of what it means, to be a certain kind of society with a view towards a free future.

Emrah Atasoy, University of Warwick

Utopia, Dystopia, and Democratic Discourse in Contemporary Turkish Literature

Utopian and/or dystopian narratives in contemporary Turkish literature and culture as social and political structures presented as alternatives to historical reality illustrate potential utopian and/or dystopian

dreams or nightmares. Through these literary illustrations, authors of such works engage with various issues such as the role of utopia in political thought, solidarity, common good, and the relationship between utopia, dystopia, and democratic discourse. Zülfü Livaneli's critical dystopia *Son Ada (The Last Island, 2008)* presents the gradual transformation and destruction of a utopian island into a nightmarish place under the guise of democratic discourse and rhetoric. His work demonstrates how democracy, democratic discourse, and civilisation become influential in the radical transformation of this arcadia. This presentation, thus, aims to discuss how democratic discourse may be a powerful tool, engendering a drastic transformation in the face of a utopian society in initial solidarity, as manifested in Livaneli's speculative text *Son Ada*.

Gregory Claeys, Royal Holloway

Utopianism and Democracy

To both its votaries and detractors, utopianism has often implied rule by philosophers of experts, with the voice of the majority democratically expressed being of little concern. After the late 18th century revolutions, this changed to an impressive degree. Yet the challenges of environmental collapse, and the disregard of millions for the looming threat of humanity's annihilation, may yet return us to a more elitist understanding of the near-future ideal society. This lecture reviews the development of the anxious relationship between utopianism and democracy, touching on the fundamentally anti-political aspects of the utopian tradition, and the charge that the eternal search for near-unanimity of opinion is fundamentally anti-democratic. It examines the (mis)interpretation of utopia as "perfection", and the optimal role played by consent in utopian relationships. Finally, it asks whether we can achieve an environmental consensus in time to avert the catastrophic destruction of the planet, and what we can do in the absence of such a consensus.