ISSN 2280-7853

PHENOMENOLOGY AND MIND

Rosenberg & Sellier

Topics
Phenomenology and Social Ontology; Ethics and Political Theory; Cognitive Neurosciences, Philosophy of Mind and Language, Logic; Aesthetics, Metaphysics and History of Ideas; Gender Philosophies; European Culture and Politics.

Frequency
2 issues per year

Registrazione del Tribunale di Pavia, n° 6 del 9/07/2012
Direttore responsabile: Roberta De Monticelli
ISSN 2280-7853 (print) - ISSN 2239-4028 (on line)

n. 19 - 2020

PHENOMENOLOGY AND MIND

HUMAN REPRODUCTION AND PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY: NEW THEORIES, NARRATIVES, ETHICS

Edited by Simona Corso, Florian Mussgnug, Virginia Sanchini

Rosenberg & Sellier

Phenomenology and Mind practices double blind refereeing and publishes in English.

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via Carlo Alberto 55
10123 Torino
www.rosenbergesellier.it

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REPRODUCTIVE UTOPIAS AND DYSTOPIAS: MORE, CAMPANELLA, BACON AND HUXLEY

abstract

Our reproductive imaginaries have changed considerably in the XX century. This cultural change can be described as a transition from Utopia to Dystopia. Plato imagined that in his perfect State women and children were in common, and that adequately matched couples would yield a perfect breed. On the contrary, Thomas More's Utopia *(1516) is based on a modern liberal view of the family, where divorce is allowed and relationships are free. Tommaso Campanella's* The City of the Sun *(1602) understands relationships exactly in terms of a eugenic policy. Francis Bacon's* New Atlantis *(1626) also conceives of generation as a public good. Aldous Huxley's Brave* New World *(1934) creates a vision of reproduction as a total nightmare. The whole process of reproduction has been taken into control by an* ideology. *We must distinguish* liberal utopias *from* totalitarian *ones, which evolve into dystopias.*

keywords

utopia, dystopia, reproductive health, liberalism, totalitarianism

Phenomenology and Mind, n. 19 - 2020, pp. 22-33
DOI: https://doi.org/10.17454/10.17454/pam-1902
Web: http://www.rosenbergesellier.it/elenco-libri?aaidriv=14

ISSN 2280-7853 (print) - ISSN 2239-4028 (on line)

1. From Utopias to Dystopias

Our reproductive imaginaries have changed considerably in the Twentieth Century. When compared with the imaginaries of the past centuries, and limiting ourselves to modern ones, a sinister turn has been impressed on our perception of reproductive practices, mainly due to their connection with science and technology. On the whole, this cultural and social change might be described by many (though not all) as a transition from utopia to dystopia. We should ask ourselves why this transition took place: what is it that makes us afraid of the possibilities raised by reproductive technologies? What brought us, in late modernity, from utopia to dystopia, in the perception of reproductive practices?

A thorough analysis of this complex social and cultural change is clearly beyond the limits of this paper. A portion of this question can be partially answered by inquiring into some examples of utopian literature, a long tradition notoriously initiated by Thomas More's *Utopia* in 1516 (More, 1995) and developed through the centuries in a variety of genres: philosophical essays, literary novels, short stories, the visual arts, and, in the Twentieth century, film, radio and television (see Mumford, 1992; Manuel, Manuel, 1979; Jameson 2005; Mordacci, 2020).

A notable feature of this literature is that, around the turn from the Nineteenth to the Twentieth Century, it has undergone a radical change from a positive characterization of the ideal society to a negative representation of totalitarian States disguised as perfect societies. This turn can be defined as a switch from utopias to dystopias (Bagchi, 2012; Claeys, 2017; Atchison, Shames, 2019). The result of this change has been to cast a shadow upon the idea of utopia, which today is often assumed to imply, as a natural evolution of the concept, a dystopian outcome in reality. Thus, there has been a growing suspicion against utopias in the Twentieth Century.

The evolution from utopia to dystopia is connected to three features: a strict control of social relationships, the realization of a "perfect" (perfectly managed, perfectly organized) society, and a pervasive use of sophisticated technology. These features are assumed to be present in the very idea of utopia and their implementation is understood as actually creating a dystopian society.

Reproductive practices are always an issue in utopias. They have to do with control, with the idea of perfection and with the use of technology. Therefore, they provide a good starting point for inquiries into the alleged intrinsic relation between utopia and dystopia.

Elsewhere I have argued at length (Mordacci, 2020) that More's utopia is strikingly different from most later utopias because of its humanistic image of a good State, which bears no totalitarian traits. Here, I will argue that none of the features of control, perfection and

reliance on technology belongs to the original model of utopia designed by More, while they can be found in the utopias of Campanella and Bacon. My analysis of the representation of reproductive practices serves to support this general argument. On this basis, a distinction can be made between liberal utopias, which do not accept any of the aforementioned features, and totalitarian ones, which rely more or less heavily on them and therefore become dystopias. If my argument works, then we have reason to question the alleged intrinsic connection between utopias and dystopias.

The argument can be made here only by example. I will start by showing that, contrary to Plato's model in the *Republic* (which is not a utopia), Thomas More's *Utopia* does not impose the traits of control, perfection and technology on the reproductive practices of utopian citizens (§2). Then, I will show that these traits are clearly present in Tommaso Campanella's *The City of the Sun,* and, in a less marked form, in Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (§§ 3 and 4). These authors present their society as ideal, but clearly emphasize totalitarian features, if we define totalitarianism in terms of very strict State control over the citizens' private and public life, also through terror (Arendt, 1958). These totalitarian features can be traced back to Plato's model of the ideal city (Brown, 2017).

Furthermore, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World,* which explicitly presents itself as a dystopia, shows how the pursuit of a "perfect" society through technology as a means of social control leads to a totalitarian outcome. Its features are very far from Thomas More's model, while they are somewhat present in Campanella's and Bacon's models. Therefore, Huxley's dystopia cannot be said to be the natural evolution of More's *Utopia* (§5).

I will conclude by arguing that the case of reproductive practices shows that we need to distinguish between liberal (or humanistic) and totalitarian (or technological) utopias. The former do not lead to dystopias, the latter do (§6).

2. More's *Utopia* and reproductive practices

Many utopias include imaginary regulations of reproductive practices. Plato famously imagined that in his perfect State women and children would be in common and that adequately matched couples would yield a perfect breed (*Republic*, 457 c – 460 c). Yet, Plato's *Republic* is more an archetypical image of the perfect State than a real utopia.

Utopias are *narratives* of a harmonious and just republic, not thought experiments that seek to project the proper state of the soul on the "big screen" of a city, as Plato describes his plan in the *Republic* (*Republic,* 368 d*)*. Thomas More's *Utopia* does not set any *a priori* rules for the life of the citizens of a perfect town. It rather *reports*, through the narrative of Raphael Hythlodaeus, the customs of the inhabitants of a harmonious and prosperous community, and then derives from that description the principles on which the community's life is based.

The institutions of More's *Utopia*, first published in 1516, are very different from the ones of Plato's *Republic,* especially as far as reproductive practices are concerned. *Utopia* is based on a rather traditional view of the family, with some modern innovations: for example, priests can get married. Women get married after the age of eighteen, men after the age of twenty-two. "Clandestine marital intercourse, if discovered and proved, brings severe punishment on both man and woman" (More, 1995, p. 189) and on their parents as well. More offers an indulgent reason for such rigorous moral rules: "The reason they punish this offence so severely is that they suppose few people would join in married love – with confinement to a single partner and all the pretty annoyances that married life involves – unless they were strictly restrained from promiscuous intercourse" (*ibidem*). So, the reason for the punishment is not so much a moralistic condemnation of the offence, but the prevention of a cause of the fragility of families, which are the cornerstone of the Utopian society.

Apart from this, More does not seem to imply that marriages are combined, nor that they are totally free. It is likely that his understanding is that there is no reason for families to make

"good" combined marriages for economic or political reasons, since all citizens are equal and do not need to have any economic or political influence. In this perspective, the free sentiments of young men and women are *de facto* paramount in the choice of the partner. Of course, More speaks only of heterosexual couples; homosexuality is not even mentioned. Family life in Utopia is dominated by men: women follow their husbands in their households, serve them during meals and manage the home. Children serve their parents and also help during meals. Families are large: "Each household (there are six thousand of them in each city, exclusive of the surrounding countryside) should have no fewer that ten nor more than sixteen adults. They cannot, of course, regulate the number of minor children in a family" (p. 135). This means that there is no demographic policy concerning the number and sex of children allowed for each family: this is a rather liberal rule for an ideal state, where usually (as in Plato, in Campanella and in other authors) the overall number of citizens is artificially kept stable by law.
There is a provision regulating the demographic balance between the towns, and in general across the island:

> If a city has too many people, the extra persons serve to make up the shortage of population in other cities. And if the population throughout the entire island exceeds the quota, they enrol citizens out of every city and plant a colony under their own laws on the mainland near them. (p. 135)

Utopians are allowed to occupy foreign land as long as the local inhabitants do not occupy or cultivate it: "They think it is perfectly justifiable to make war on people who leave their land idle and waste yet forbid the and possession of it to others who, by the law of nature, ought to be supported by it" (p. 137).
There is no eugenic policy concerning "good marriages" or "good breed", as happens, for instance, in both Plato and Campanella (see §3). It seems that More's utopians can choose their partners according to taste and that there is no control over the quality of the offspring. Yet, there is a rather strange custom concerning the couples who want to get married. Hythlodaeus says:

> In choosing marriage partners they solemnly and seriously follow a custom which seemed to us foolish and absurd in the extreme. Whether she be widow or virgin, the woman is shown naked to the suitor by a responsible and respectable matron; and similarly, some honourable man presents the suitor naked to the woman. (p. 189)

More quickly explains the reason for such a bizarre ritual, and explains how it replaces the custom of combined marriage (common at More's time) with a more "natural" and "realistic" practice. People who have to spend their whole life together and faithfully tied to each other should have the opportunity to know each other at least "visually". In fact, More adds:

> We laughed at this custom, and called it absurd; but they were just as amazed at the folly of all other peoples. When men go to buy a colt, when they are risking only a little money, they are so cautious that, though the animal is almost bare, they won't close the deal until saddle and blanket are have been taken off, lest there be a hidden sore underneath. Yet in the choice of a mate, which may cause either delight or disgust for the rest of their lives, men are so careless that they leave all the rest of the woman's body covered up with clothes and estimate her attractiveness from a mere handsbreadth of her person, the face, which is all they can see. [...] Not all people are so

> wise as to concern themselves solely with character; and even the wise appreciate the gifts of the body as a supplement to the virtues of the mind. (189-191)

It seems clear that More simply thinks of the good relationship between the partners, rather than thinking of a biologically good match. Private property is abolished in Utopia, but persons are not considered a property, therefore marriages are protected as personal relationships, not as "goods" to be shared.
Divorces are allowed in Utopia – a matter on which More had to reflect seriously, later in his life. His liberal view on divorce, in *Utopia*, suggests that the subsequent dispute with King Henry VIII concerned the authority of the Pope and not divorce *per se*. Incompatibility of character can be the cause of a consensual separation, when approved by the senate after a careful investigation, although divorce is deliberately made difficult.
Adultery and "intolerably offensive behaviour" are severely condemned: the violator of the marriage is punished "with the strictest form of slavery" (p. 191) and a relapse into the same crime is punished by death (p. 193). In Utopia, slavery is generally considered a sufficient form of punishment; death penalty is only applied in the case of harsh rebellion or recidivism.
More's view on the family is thus a traditional one, albeit with some consideration for the feelings of the partners and with the awareness that a marriage can become intolerable for one or both of them. There exists no eugenics and no communality of women and children. Spontaneous stable relationships are considered a good thing for the city, but there is no absolute rule on this.
More's *Utopia* is quite realistic and traditional. It does not advocate a total control of social relationships and in particular of marriages and reproduction. Utopians are not expected to yield a "perfect" breed, and their marriages are based on individual choice rather than demographic policies. Moreover, no technology is implied in reproductive practices as a tool for social control, not even the calculus of the best time for matching, or the definition of "best matches". No eugenics can be allowed in Utopia and the provisions on marriage are conspicuously liberal in comparison with the customs of his time, leaving more room for individual free choice.

2. *The City of the Sun* and totalitarian control on reproduction

Tommaso Campanella's *The City of the Sun* (2009; *La città del Sole,* originally written in 1602) is much less liberal on reproduction. Sexual relationships are ruled by Mor, one of the Princes governing the town, together with "The Sun or Metaphysical", a supreme spiritual and temporal king with absolute power. Mor, which means Love (Amor), takes care of reproductive practices: "He sees that men and women are so joined together, that they bring forth the best offspring" (p. 15, original text: "*con unir li maschi e le femine in modo che faccin buona razza*"). Campanella repeats More's argument based on the analogy between choosing horses and human partners ("Indeed, they laugh at us who exhibit a studious care for our breed of horses and dogs, but neglect the breeding of human beings", *ibidem*), but gives it a radical twist. In fact, Campanella understands the analogy exactly in terms of a eugenic policy: More ensures that everything is appropriate – food, dresses and intercourse – so that "good" children are delivered. So, rudimental techniques are adopted in order to assure the perfect result in terms of "good breed".
Campanella says that the inhabitants of the City of the Sun arrived in their place from the Indies "flying from the sword of the Magi, a race of plunderers and tyrants who laid waste their country" (*ibidem*). Therefore "they determined to lead a philosophic life in fellowship with one another" (*ibidem*), introducing in their custom the commonality of women (which was not practiced in their homeland) and of any good. The argument against private property is presented by Campanella precisely as an extension of his critique of marriage:

> They say that all private property is acquired and improved for the reason that each one of us by himself has his own home and wife and children. From this, selflove springs. For when we raise a son to riches and dignities, and leave an heir to much wealth, we become either ready to grasp at the property of the State, if in any case fear should be removed from the power which belongs to riches and rank; or avaricious, crafty, and hypocritical, if anyone is of slender purse, little strength, and mean ancestry. But when we have taken away selflove, there remains only love for the State. (p. 16)

More would have strongly disapproved of this connection of marriage with private property. But Campanella was a monk, and his idea of commonality includes everything: women and children are "goods" rather than persons. Therefore, they are subject to a very strict control by the State.

Men procreate after the age of twenty-one, women from the age of nineteen. Sodomy is blamed and punished, but rather mildly, at the beginning. Punishment increases in the case of recidivism, and may even include the death penalty.

Young men and women exercise themselves naked, like the ancient Greeks. Meanwhile, their masters observe and decide who has to be matched with whom: "The big and beautiful women with big and virtuous men; and the fat women with slim men, and slim women with fat men, to create an equilibrium" (Italian edition, p. 46)[1]. The time and the ritual of mating is strictly regulated: it takes place every three nights. An astrologist and a physician determine the exact moment of the mating. Priests and wise men copulate less frequently, but they deserve "the most lively, healthy and beautiful women" (Italian edition, p. 47). Campanella declares openly that without natural dispositions there is no moral virtue. For this reason, the magistrates make the greatest possible effort to create a good breed.

Mothers breast-feed their children for up to two years, and then give them to the magistrates. All children are raised together: at the age of seven, they are instructed in the natural sciences, then in the other sciences and finally in "mechanics". The Metaphysic (not the parents) gives every child a name. The decisions of the magistrates are mandatory. If a couple falls in love, they can play and talk to each other, but they are not allowed to generate (p. 32).

The model for Campanella is Plato's *Republic*, and this text is specifically quoted in *City of the Sun*. Campanella is the first, in the utopian tradition, to connect the abolition of property with the abolition of marriage and with eugenics. Sentimental love is totally separated from generation, which is conceived as a "public good". The communality of women is not imagined as a freedom to form relationships without marriage. Rather, it is assumed that sex is for procreation only and that procreation is for the State. Persons are deprived of their sexual faculties rather than emancipated and granted sexual freedom. The utopian character of Campanella's *City of the Sun* focuses on the abolition of property and on the liberation from hard work and religious dogmas. Yet, social interaction is dominated by a complete control of relationships, which serves to promote biological perfection through genetic politics and through the use of rudimental "technologies" such as a definition of the number and ways of reproductive acts. The State regulates the reproductive life of all citizens in meticulous detail. Violation of these norms is severely punished, and this creates an atmosphere of terror. Campanella's utopia is thus a decidedly illiberal one. When it comes to reproduction, it bears strong similarities with the Platonic model. Using control, perfection as a goal, and technology as a tool, it can be defined as a totalitarian utopia, leading to a clearly dystopian society.

1 Some parts of the original text have not been translated in the English translation used. In these cases, I make reference to the Italian edition and translate the passages myself.

4. Reproduction in Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*

Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1999, originally published in 1627) also presents generation as a public good, although in a less eugenic and totalitarian way than Campanella. A great feast, the Feast of the Family, "is granted to any man that shall live to see thirty persons descended of his body altogether, and all above three years old" (p. 169). The feast is done at the cost of the State. The Father of the Family, called Tirsan, resolves tensions in the family, settles disagreements and helps those in need. He also chooses "one man from amongst his sons, to live in house with him: who is called ever after the Son of the Vine" (*ibidem*). The Tirsan's wife attends the ceremony in a separate place, without being seen. According to the custom of Bensalem, the capital of the New Atlantis, "the king is debtor to no man, but for propagation of his subjects" (p. 170). Only the sons can serve the Tirsan. The daughters wait close to the walls. Women are a marginal part of society. The narrator explains:

> And because propagation of families proceedeth from the nuptial copulation, I desired to know of him what laws and customs they had concerning marriage; and whether they kept marriage well; and whether they were tied to one wife? For that where population is so much affected, and such as with them it seemed to be, there is commonly permission of plurality of wives. To this he said, 'You have reason for to commend that excellent institution of the Feast of the Family. And indeed we have experience, that those families that are partakers of the blessing of that feast do flourish and prosper ever after in an extraordinary manner. But hear me now, and I will tell you what I know. You shall understand that there is not under the heavens so chaste a nation as this of Bensalem; nor so free from all pollution or foulness. It is the virgin of the world. I remember I have read in one of your European books, of an holy hermit amongst you that desired to see the Spirit of Fornication; and there appeared to him a little foul ugly Ethiop. But if he had desired to see the Spirit of Chastity of Bensalem, it would have appeared to him in the likeness of a fair beautiful Cherubin. For there is nothing amongst mortal men more fair and admirable, than the chaste minds of this people. Know therefore, that with them there are no stews, no dissolute houses, no courtesans, nor any thing of that kind. Nay they wonder (with detestation) at you in Europe, which permit such things. (p. 173)

Marriage, though, is not conceived as a personal relationship. Rather, it "is ordained a remedy for unlawful concupiscence; and natural concupiscence seemeth as a spur to marriage" (*ibidem*). Therefore, marriage is treated as a remedy for "a libertine and impure single life" which makes men marry too late, "when the prime and strength of their years is past" (*ibidem*). In Bensalem there is no "masculine love; and yet there are not so faithful and inviolate friendships in the world again as are there" (p. 174). Procreation is a serious business for the State, subject to strict regulation.

Polygamy is not tolerated. Marriage cannot take place before at least one month of mutual acquaintance. Couples can marry without permission from the parents, but in that case they loses any heredity. Bacon quotes More's provision of letting the couple see each other naked, but disapproves of it, because it would be difficult to refuse a person after such an intimate knowledge. Instead, in Bensalem "they have near every town a couple of pools (which they call *Adam and Eve's pool*) where it is permitted to one of the friends of the man, and another of the friends of the woman, to see them severally bathe naked" (p. 175). By this trick, in fact, social control of the couples is re-established, where More's provision foregrounded the couple's privacy and individual freedom .

Bacon's utopia is closer to More's than to Campanella's, which is closer to Plato's. Yet, it also treats reproduction as a public good, to be protected and controlled by the laws of the State.

Chastity is valued as a virtue, since it avoids the dispersion of the primal energy in men and thereby helps to increment the population. This shows that the goal of delivering a perfect descendance is paramount. In Bacon's *New Atlantis* there is no demographic policy which settles the average number of people living in the State. Stereotypical anti-feminism is sharply visible in the description of the role of women during the Feast of the Family. New Atlantis is a town for male scholars, who devote their life to science and whose families act as a support for their academic activity. Science and technology are the main goals of the State, as they are in Bacon's conception of knowledge and society. Bacon's utopia is a republic of knowledge. His text does not describe the forms of government, but, when it comes to reproductive practice, it advocates an illiberal stance. The combination of social control and technological drive makes Bacon's utopia far less liberal than More's model. Terror is not used to exert control, so New Atlantis is not a totalitarian utopia. Nevertheless, Bacon's emphasis on control, perfection and technology make it likely that his imagined State would evolve into a totalitarian society.

5. *Brave New World* as reproductive dystopia

Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (2000; originally published in 1932) takes some of these ideas to the extreme and creates a vision of generation which is a total nightmare. Huxley's novel belongs to a rich tradition of literary and political reflection aiming at showing the undesired outcomes of social engineering, especially through the use of technology. Examples of this tradition are the ambiguous *A Modern Utopia* by H.G. Wells (1905), Evgenij Zamjatin's *We* (1921), *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell (1948 – a rather more "political" than "technological" dystopia, but where "thought control" by Big Brother has a preminent role) and *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury (1953). Huxley's novel takes a prominent place in this tradition, both for its literary quality and for its clear-sighted depiction of a society dominated by social control, the search for perfection and a pervasive use of technology. Political control revolves around artificial procreation and sleep-learning in order to obtain individuals who are perfectly adapted to their role in a highly hierarchical society. Reproductive technologies are essential. From the very first lines of the first page, we are introduced into a cold, indifferent, mechanic world where reproduction is an industrial and totally impersonal activity:

> A SQUAT grey building of only thirty-four stories. Over the main entrance the words, CENTRAL LONDON HATCHERY AND CONDITIONING CENTRE, and, in a shield, the World State's motto, COMMUNITY, IDENTITY, STABILITY.
> The enormous room on the ground floor faced towards the north. Cold for all the summer beyond the panes, for all the tropical heat of the room itself, a harsh thin light glared through the windows, hungrily seeking some draped lay figure, some pallid shape of academic goose-flesh, but finding only the glass and nickel and bleakly shining porcelain of a laboratory. Wintriness responded to wintriness. The overalls of the workers were white, their hands gloved with a pale corpse-coloured rubber. The light was frozen, dead, a ghost. Only from the yellow barrels of the microscopes did it borrow a certain rich and living substance, lying along the polished tubes like butter, streak after luscious streak in long recession down the work tables.
> "And this," said the Director opening the door, "is the Fertilizing Room." (pp. 15-16)

We feel cold. But we are also confused about the purpose of this setting, until its meaning is made clear by the words "The Fertilizing Room". This expression says it all. Human reproduction is clearly not an event, or even an act. It is an industrial process, in an aseptic environment, guided by the logic of efficiency. Huxley's motto is bitterly hyperbolic: "Community, identity, stability" could be translated into: "State, uniformity, social immobility".

We still feel uneasy. We need an explanation, which comes when the Director of the Fertilization Centre begins his speed. His age cannot be guessed, since in this dystopic London of A.F. 632 people look about thirty until, at the age of sixty, a sudden decline happens and leads to a rapid death. Here are the words of the Director:

> "These," he waved his hand, "are the incubators." [...] "The week's supply of ova. Kept," he explained, "at blood heat; whereas the male gametes," and here he opened another door, "they have to be kept at thirty-five instead of thirty-seven. Full blood heat sterilizes." (pp. 17-18)

Suddenly, we begin to understand the contrast between traditional utopia and Huxley's narrative. The Director gives

> a brief description of the modern fertilizing process; spoke first, of course, of its surgical introduction–"the operation undergone voluntarily for the good of Society, not to mention the fact that it carries a bonus amounting to six months' salary"; continued with some account of the technique for preserving the excised ovary alive and actively developing; passed on to a consideration of optimum temperature, salinity, viscosity; referred to the liquor in which the detached and ripened eggs were kept; and, leading his charges to the work tables, actually showed them how this liquor was drawn off from the test-tubes; how it was let out drop by drop onto the specially warmed slides of the microscopes; how the eggs which it contained were inspected for abnormalities, counted and transferred to a porous receptacle; how (and he now took them to watch the operation) this receptacle was immersed in a warm bouillon containing free-swimming spermatozoa–at a minimum concentration of one hundred thousand per cubic centimetre, he insisted; and how, after ten minutes, the container was lifted out of the liquor and its contents re-examined; how, if any of the eggs remained unfertilized, it was again immersed, and, if necessary, yet again; how the fertilized ova went back to the incubators; where the Alphas and Betas remained until definitely bottled; while the Gammas, Deltas and Epsilons were brought out again, after only thirty-six hours, to undergo Bokanovsky's Process. (pp. 18-19)

The "Bokanovsky's Process" is essentially cloning, which is explained as follows:

> One egg, one embryo, one adult-normality. But a bokanovskified egg will bud, will proliferate, will divide. From eight to ninety-six buds, and every bud will grow into a perfectly formed embryo, and every embryo into a full-sized adult. Making ninety-six human beings grow where only one grew before. Progress. (p. 20)

When a foolish student dares to ask about the advantages of this arrangement, the Director reacts with astonishment:

> "My good boy!" The Director wheeled sharply round on him. "Can't you see? Can't you see?" He raised a hand; his expression was solemn. "Bokanovsky's Process is one of the major instruments of social stability!"
> *Major instruments of social stability*.
> Standard men and women; in uniform batches. The whole of a small factory staffed with the products of a single bokanovskified egg.
> "Ninety-six identical twins working ninety-six identical machines!" The voice was

> almost tremulous with enthusiasm. "You really know where you are. For the first time in history." He quoted the planetary motto. "Community, Identity, Stability." Grand words. "If we could bokanovskify indefinitely the whole problem would be solved."

Solved by standard Gammas, unvarying Deltas, uniform Epsilons. Millions of identical twins. The principle of mass production at last applied to biology. (pp. 21-22)

Now it is clear why Huxley's novel makes us uncomfortable. The whole process of reproduction is controlled by an *ideology*. This is the main difference between utopias and dystopias. The latter are the imaginative expression of an ideology: a scientific, systematic, theoretical construction translated into a political reality. Utopias are exercises of imagination which seek to explore what a good society would look like, but they are not a derived from fully developed theory. As Karl Mannheim (1953) has pointed out, ideology is opposed to utopia exactly because it pretends to be a scientific, empirical and theoretical conception of society, which leads to a necessary, controlled, and certified result. On the contrary, utopias are not theories: they are narratives, often imbued with irony and jokes (More notoriously was a fan of jokes). So, they are not to be taken too seriously. On the contrary, ideologies pretend to be the most serious of plans, and any irony is taken as dangerous dissent (see also Bagchi, 2012 for more on this point).

Ideology severs the relation between nature and the State. Nature is a nuisance. Not only fertility but also sterility are regulated to enable the the creation of rigid, genetic classes of individuals, who will later be conditioned by a mechanical, pedagogical system called "hypnopedia". Social stability is obtained through a system of ultra-rigid division into classes or castes. Nature is replaced by human invention.

> "For of course," said Mr. Foster, "in the vast majority of cases, fertility is merely a nuisance. One fertile ovary in twelve hundred–that would really be quite sufficient for our purposes. But we want to have a good choice. And of course one must always have an enormous margin of safety. So we allow as many as thirty per cent of the female embryos to develop normally. The others get a dose of male sex-hormone every twenty-four metres for the rest of the course. Result: they're decanted as freemartins–structurally quite normal (except," he had to admit, "that they do have the slightest tendency to grow beards), but sterile. Guaranteed sterile. Which brings us at last," continued Mr. Foster, "out of the realm of mere slavish imitation of nature into the much more interesting world of human invention." (pp. 31-32)

Social stability and well-being are guaranteed because some individuals are bred and raised in a permanent and accepted form of slavery, designed to increment consumption in every human activity, so that the market flourishes. This totalitarian society is the paradise of capitalists, since individuals are conditioned to love products and goods in every moment of their lives, also during free time. Huxley understands that extreme control, extreme social engineering and extreme consumerism are integral parts of a single social and political vision.

6. Dystopias as bad (i.e. totalitarian) utopias

Utopias and dystopias are different. They narrate the idea of a perfectly functioning State in different registers: a dream in the first case, a nightmare in the second. Moreover, they point to divergent ideas and have incompatible aims. Utopias want to sketch the general shape of a just and harmonious society, where good relationships and good living are the rule (Bloch, 2000). In utopias, the author attempts an imagination what such a society would look like but also indicates that this is not clear. Irony is a sign of this lack of clarity. Solutions can be bizarre, and are formulated as hypotheses, to be tested rather than realized dogmatically. In

dystopias, on the contrary, the goal is to indicate what we certainly do not wish to happen: obsession with order and productivity, with regulation and hierarchy, the perversion of freedom into a totalitarian State. Dystopian authors point to the specific effects of certain ideas of a well-ordered State and denounce the risks of making too detailed plans for engineering a perfect society, especially where they are based on a pervasive and extreme use of technologies. In this sense, utopias and dystopias have a common goal: to alert us to forms of governance that we would wish to refuse. Utopias do this by designing an alternative State, dystopias by bringing to the fore the hidden totalitarian dimension of allegedly "perfect" societies.

Generation and human reproduction are imagined in worrying terms in both utopias and dystopias. Yet, More's *Utopia* (and similarly Bacon's *New Atlantis*) appear less obsessed with the control of reproduction for the good of the State. Families are, after all, a quite natural social structure, even if they are not the only or the best one. The idea of open, enlarged or new kind of families does not seem to be incompatible with these utopias, although it is far from the sensibility of their authors. Nevetheless, there appears to be no insurmountable contrast between rainbow families, which might rely on reproductive technologies, and a just and harmonious society. In utopias, freedom is a part of the project of a good society.

On the contrary, Plato's *Republic,* Campanella's *City of Sun* and Huxley's *Brave New World* appear to be founded on a rigorous control of reproduction through very strict policies. The well-ordered State, in this perspective, is one dominated by the separation of roles and by the total control of the behaviour of citizens. Technology is used to realize a "perfect" society. In this framework, when reproductive technologies make their appearance in the imagination of authors, i.e. when they start to seem feasible, the State power immediately takes control of all processes, and creates a society divided into genetically designed classes (or rather genetic types) of individuals who are structured and conditioned to function as a part of a mechanism. In this perspective, there is a natural slippery slope from illiberal utopias to dystopia. Technology immediately becomes a weapon of power and oppression or rather of social engineering.

The most significant difference, in other words, exists between *liberal (or humanistic) utopias* and *totalitarian* ones. This difference lies in the idea of the State: in the first case, it is a community of free individuals joining for mutual help and good living; in the second, it is a metaphysically based order, politically realized through ideas of necessity and control and often with the aid of reproductive technologies as a means of social engineering. The second kind runs very quickly into dystopia. The first seems to be far less exposed to such a risk.

It needs to be acknowledged that liberal States face the risk of reproductive dystopias created by the free market. This is a serious risk, and it calls for an intervention by the liberal State, in protection of the dignity and equality of all citizens. Ultra-libertarian States can become *de facto* totalitarian societies, based on the economic power of the "happy few". This is another reason why we need *good liberal utopias*: their vision of a harmonious and free society, and their desire to regulate the use of reproductive technologies must be a part of the picture.

We still need utopias. And it seems that the breaking point between utopia and dystopia, as far as reproductive technologies are concerned, *does not lie at all in technology per se*. It lies in a totalitarian, mechanic, metaphysical conception of the political realm: reproductive technologies in totalitarian utopias and in dystopias are tools of social control and of a suspicious idea of human "perfection" (Boym, 2001). But they are not necessarily dystopian *per se*. They become dystopian when associated with the goals of control and perfection. Dystopias are the possible result of our social dynamics. But as long as we stick to the idea of the State as a community of free individuals (as it is in the liberal conception) there is no

danger in imagining how a good society would function. Reproductive technologies can be a part of such a society, as imagined in good utopias, as long as they are a help to citizens rather than a weapon in the hands of a totalitarian State.

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