Utopia, Myth, and Narrative

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I: Introduction

> [I]n the 1920s and 1930s…Fascist theorists…adapting the language of Georges Sorel, grandiloquently proclaimed the superiority of their own creative myths as 'dynamic realities,' spontaneous utterances of authentic desires, over the utopias, which they dismissed as hollow rationalist constructs.[1]
> - Frank and Fritzie Manuel

> We have created a myth, this myth is a belief, a noble enthusiasm; it does not need to be reality, it is a striving and a hope, belief and courage. Our myth is the nation, the great nation which we want to make into a concrete reality for ourselves.[2]
> - Benito Mussolini, October 1922; from speech given before the 'March on Rome'

One of the most historically recent and damaging blows to the reputation of utopianism came from its association with the totalitarian regimes of Hitler's Third Reich and Mussolini's Fascist party in World War II and the prewar era. Being an apologist for utopianism, it seemed to some, was tantamount to being an apologist for Nazism and all of its concomitant horrors. The fantasy principle of utopia was viewed as irretrievably bound up with the irrationalism of modern dictatorship. While these conclusions are somewhat understandable given the broad strokes that definitions of utopia are typically painted with, I will show in this paper that the link between the mythos of fascism and the constructs of utopianism results from an unfortunate conflation at the theoretical level. The irrationalism of any mass ethos and the rationalism of the thoughtful utopian planner are, indeed, completely at odds with each other. I arrive at this conclusion via an analysis of the concepts of myth and narrative, and the relationships these have with the concept of utopia.

II: The Concept of Utopia

The best place to start is with the nebulous concept of utopia itself. A good deal of equivocation goes on in discussions of utopia due to its definition as ‘ideal’ in two senses: in the sense that it is (1) perfect and (thus) desirable; and (2) exists only as an idea. Often sense (1) of ideal is limited to cases wherein the object of desire is possible to attain, although this is not always the case.[3] However, if ‘ideal’ in the first sense is constrained to the realm of the possible, then ‘ideal’ in the second sense is threatened if the highly desirable state is ever realized, as it would then no longer be just an idea, but a concrete reality as well. So there will be some tension between these two senses of ‘utopia’, unless we explicitly state that we are interested in only calling *impossible* highly desirable states ‘ideal’, which would be unsatisfactory for our purposes. Fine then: our provisional concept of utopia remains a conjunction of the two senses of the word ‘ideal’—a highly desirable state of affairs that only exists as an idea (at least for the moment); a social arrangement that is conceptually ‘conceivable’ yet not contingently ‘achievable’, to employ a distinction of Peter Alexander’s.[4] Problematic ambiguity should only arise for us in the case that utopia is thought to be realized—which is to say, if and when literally *everyone* can look around themselves at the current sociopolitical arrangements and honestly say to each other and themselves, “things could not get any better” (a state which could only, I suggest, result from a widespread failure of the imaginative faculty).[5] The chances of that seem very slim indeed—although of course it is not logically impossible for such an occurrence to take place, utopia will probably not arrive in the time it takes to read this paper, nor before the advent of the next full moon, nor even in the lifetime of anyone reading this in the first decade of the 21st century.

What is it that makes utopia so unlikely to obtain in the present and near future? First, depending on one’s theoretical preferences, either (i) utopia must be conceptualized as a possible state in the distant future in order for it to be meaningfully distinguishable from other, less ambitious programs of reform currently underway or pending; or (ii) utopia is defined as an extremely radical departure from the existing sociopolitical order, and thus (barring supernatural interference) the processes required to alter that socio-political order to fit demanding utopian

specifications will be predictably lengthy, placing it at a remote space-time coordinate (or, occasionally, completely outside the space-time continuum). Secondly, utopia is a genre of fiction, and it bears pointing out here that it's not likely that a book would get shifted from the fiction section of the library to the non-fiction section, because, taking a second look at it, we discover that everything in it came true. Indeed, what could be *less* likely to occur than this? It is this second point that I want to explore today, as the first constitutes oft-trodden (and so muddier) conceptual ground.

The first thing that springs to our notice is the seeming importance of author intention—if an author *intends* to produce a piece of fiction, then it seems as if it cannot be considered non-fiction, even if her vision is eventually realized in all of its minute details. We might think of a work as being fixed in type at the point that it is written: a prophetic novel about a nuclear war occurring on December 17th, 2074, involving fictional characters who turn out to have real counterparts with identical names, occupations, and temperaments, and who initiate the same fateful series of events—such that the nuclear war arrives precisely on schedule—would, intuitively, remain classified as fiction (this would hold true even if the utopian author herself helped engineer this eventuality). The borderline case would be a book that began as fiction, but changed into non-fiction halfway through, or vice-versa. In either case, however, there should be some sort of discernable turning points whereby the learned or astute could distinguish which sections are the veritable and which the fictitious.

Utopias do not constitute problematic borderline cases of the type discussed above. Perhaps this is because, as Alexander notes, that "[utopian] authors have been concerned with conceivability rather than achievability and with the clarification of familiar moral and political concepts. *Few of them have discussed methods of getting from our present society to the ideal one*."[6] Further, "[t]he conviction that we have described an ideal society does not confer upon us the responsibility of working to achieve that society as a whole, although it may confer the responsibility of at least not obstructing progress towards some features of it if they are practical possibilities."[7] In other words, the *realization* of the ideal is not necessarily within the strictly utopian purview—the utopian may well be neither prophet nor activist. Thus utopia would probably remain a fiction, stranded in the distant future (or, more classically, the distant past), if the politics of utopia were left to utopians.

Let us consider the converse of the utopigrapher's predicament, for the sake of clarity. To wit: If an author intends to produce a piece of non-fiction, then correspondingly it seems as though it cannot be considered fiction, even if it corresponds to nothing real. The futurology of Marx fits into this category of non-fiction. Futurology, of course, is the study of the future, the assembling of reasoned predictions about how things might be, given the way that things are. It is not intended as fiction, and indeed it can be taken as a science, qua Marx. Yet the future is notoriously opaque: for example, Marx's predictions about the fall of capitalism have thus far failed to be realized, and so Marx now more resembles a 'prophet' (Popper's epithet) or a mythmaker than a social scientist.[8] Nevertheless, we will not find *The Communist Manifesto* amongst the books of fairy-tales in the children's section of the library (and not for want of a happy, or at least dramatically satisfying, ending).

But where *do* utopias (and failed social sciences) belong? Where is their proper place in relation to other works of literature? Alexander suggests that "among fictions, utopian writing is perhaps most closely related to fairy-tales than to other forms."[9] David Plath has, in a similar vein, observed that:

> Men everywhere seem addicted to visions of ideal otherness, although often enough it can only be achieved by death-and-transfiguration, or is the gift of infra-human mammals or supra-human spaceniks. So if one is willing to widen the definition to include other types of transcendent social vision, one can begin to see many varieties of utopian image-work in mankind's many traditions.[10]

These points are well intentioned, but lead to unnecessary obfuscation. I think that Plath, for example, is drawing our attention to the undeniable prevalence of *myths* in the history of humankind, and then attempting to link these mythologies thematically to the various articulations of utopia that have cropped up alongside and after them. But this conceptual brushwork is too hurried and imprecise; important distinctions are obscured by Plath's proposed widening of the definition of 'utopia'. Similarly, it is a tempting but ultimately misguided move to link the unknown with the known, the new with the old—and the utopia with the myth or the fairy-tale, as Alexander does. I believe the definition of utopia should not be widened or loosened in Alexander's proposed fashion; that the myth and the fairy-tale constitute altogether distinct strands of literature. I stand with theorists such as J. C. Davis in upholding the importance of

distinguishing utopia from other fictional narratives and forms of ideal society. Davis, notably, identifies five unique types of ideal society typically encountered in political fiction: (1) Cockaygne, the land of unbounded desire and inexhaustible sources of satiation; (2) Arcadia, the land of moderate want and pastoral rest; (3) the Perfect Moral Commonwealth, a social arrangement with a common ethical system that is perfectly adhered to by each of its members; (4) the Millennium, a future time in which a supernatural transformation with positive effects on the human race and its institutions is hoped for or expected; and (5) Utopia.[11] What makes Utopia distinctive on his account is that:

> Utopia, by contrast, accepts the distributional problems posed by the deficiency of resources and the moral disabilities of men. Unlike the others, therefore, it accepts the bases of the problem from which politics arises. Out of the minds and wills of human beings must come organizational forms and practices which will guarantee the just distribution of finite resources and contain the anti-social proclivities of men and women.[12]

What Davis says here gels with the opinions of many other utopian theorists, and conforms as well to the contents of most utopian novels: human organizations and institutions are inevitably dealt with in utopias as an explicit or clearly implicit subject matter; the problem of the political is never far from the reader's mind, and often one can detect blemishes on the visage of any 'perfect' state. The form and content of the fairy-tale, on the other hand, more closely approximates an Arcadia, a Cockaygne, or a Millenium than a Utopia.

Nonetheless, where Plath and Alexander make important contributions in their discussions of utopia is in their recognition of its ultimately *narrative* character. The other tales of ideal societies are less logical and linear by comparison: the transformations they describe on humankind and the world are largely rationally unexplainable. The cash value of a Utopia, conversely, lies in the details of its rational explanation: usually through the exposition of an embedded utopian character, we as readers are shown the inner workings of a perfect society in motion. An attempt is thus made to convince the reader that the utopian system would operate in a fashion superior to our own, if only we cared enough to establish it in reality. Compare the function of narrative in a utopia to the function of narrative in a fairy-tale, for example, to see their divergent aspects. In a fairy-tale, the content of the story itself does not conform to the laws of nature or rational expectation—we would not, for

example, normally expect to stumble across a house constructed of gingerbread and inhabited by a witch on any of our walks through the forest—while in a utopia, the laws of nature are generally respected, along with the less believable elements of the story are mitigated by the setting's spatiotemporal remoteness, and by our own underlying beliefs that the gap between a utopia and the society of today can be bridged by immanent technological and social developments. Therefore, the reader of the fairy-tale is not exhorted to any consequent course of action—they cannot expect their actions to produce a fairy-tale result, no matter how desirable it may seem; while the reader of a utopia may feel some consequent obligation or pressure to help bring about the better world that they believe might be possible someday.

III: The Role of Narrative in Political Fiction

The justification of *hypothetical* political institutions is part of the narrative of a utopian novel, but it also provides a narrative structure for an actual society itself, a positive end that is worth striving for. We can see the operations of utopia, therefore, as a story within a story within a story. I have written elsewhere on this point:

> Not only does the narrative form make the utopian ideal accessible to the public in a manner not possible via discussion of pure theory alone; but it also suggests a 'meta-narrative', if you will, between the society that *is* and the society that *could be*. The reader, accordingly, is entreated to fill in the gaps between these disparate realities with their own thoughts, efforts, and real or figurative journeys.[13]

Simply put, a story without an ending is unintelligible to us, especially when it is a story we are living through. The imagined end of the story provides the narrative framework we require to make our actions in the present intelligible to ourselves and others on a longer view. There must be a story that explains how who we *are* can eventually become what we ultimately *want to be*. This is not to say that we should obsess on death, that inevitable end to every mortal story; rather, I call our attention to the fact that we ought to keep in mind a clear picture of our ideal selves when considering the desirability of the range of actions available to us in the present. To fail to do so is to abnegate our future, at least as far as our power of self-determination is concerned. As Judith Shklar phrases it: "…in relinquishing utopia men lose the will

to shape history and so the ability to understand it."[14] Utopia is here seen as the theoretical key by which we are able to unlock a better common future for all.

Without a means of visualizing an ultimate end to the ongoing collaborative venture that is the species-life of the human, we also lack the means to evaluate the value of our coordinated, as well as non-coordinated, actions in the present. Collective narrative writ large, a utopia is *the end of a given society's story*, a state wherein the most predictable improvements upon current conditions—and many of the less obvious ones as well—have already been instituted, and thus further positive developments, though not impossible, would be difficult to clearly conceive of, and so articulate (utopia cannot be 'one-upped' easily). By providing a 'happy ending', a utopia has a motivational effect upon its readers; it gives its potential citizens a goal to work toward, a dream to chase. Krishan Kumar concurs that "Utopia's value lies not in its relation to present practice but in its relation to a possible future. Its 'practical' use is to overstep the immediate reality to depict a condition whose clear desirability draws us on, like a magnet."[15] Without at least some narrative plausibility—a story (regardless of how shabby) about how to get to there from here—utopia would not have the power that it does to motivate political actions. This is, in part, because utopia is a suggestion regarding how things could be changed, how things could be different than they are under the existing political regime(s). Utopias thus lack authority outside the realm of the normative—they cannot punish, they can only advise, and offer rewards to draw us forward.[16]

We can think, then, of utopia as both ethical recommendation and potential political reward in one. Presumably, stronger political rewards will tend to produce stronger political motivations and thus bolder political actions. In what can be taken as a further step in this line of thinking, Seiji Nuita asserts that "Utopia can be used as a barometer to measure the life-energy of a nation; if a race or a people lives vigorously in world history, it will produce utopias befitting its vigor."[17] In this rather ambiguous comment on the content of utopias, too, there is a wide margin for erroneously connecting the utopian tradition to history's most notorious empires and xenophobic social movements. We can infer that there is a cyclical process described by this thought, wherein 'vigorous' peoples produce 'vigorous' utopias and then these utopias, in turn, further shape their peoples. While a corresponding relationship

between the production of utopias and the sociopolitical realities confronted by their authoring peoples is a very credible idea, it is just as likely that a truly 'vigorous' nation in Nuita's sense would not need to be consoled or advised by a utopia; it could easily propel itself though world history on the strength of its national mythology. Vigor should not be mistaken for either a cause, or a symptom of, effective utopian theorizing. In fact, Nuita's account in itself strikes one as mythological—the idea that a vigorous nation must produce vigorous utopias is not an empirical statement, nor an *a priori* truth (for instance, about narrative structure), but rather an article of faith. It is a step too far, a descent into *hubris*, to associate the rationality of the utopian with the actions typified by the politically frenetic; this is another basis upon which utopia is unnecessarily conflated with myth.

IV: The Concept of Myth

At this juncture, when we begin to consider more carefully the distinction between utopia and myth, our theoretical worries begin in earnest: for what is a myth but a fiction, something that exists only as an idea? And we have to concede that myths share this sense of 'ideal' with utopias; but they differ in that other sense, in that they are not 'perfect and desirable'. Indeed, myths are often employed to justify corrupt or otherwise odious regimes; they are 'ideological' in Karl Mannheim's sense of the word. As the myth does not appeal to reason, we cannot bring ourselves to rationally prefer it to other states of affairs. Myth is preferred, where it is preferred, due to the appeal of its other features. Centered, as myth is, on phenomena, experience, and intuition, it caters to certain psychological, emotional, or spiritual needs and wants. Due, however, to their implausible narratives, myths lack rational persuasiveness—thus we must suspend our rationality to find myths plausible. This distinction is an important tool for disambiguating the utopian from the mythological.

Myths are stories that provide non-rational theoretical frameworks through which one can non-reflexively interpret the world. They chiefly serve the role of we might call 'explanatory fictions'. If a child in ancient Greece asked, "Why is there lightning in the sky tonight?" she might very well have been told by her parents that "Zeus is angry, so there is a storm" and this might have been the end of the

discussion, if the child was trusting. To use an example closer to home: my friend's parents narrowly avoided a serious house fire, due to flooding caused by bursting water pipes in their basement. Her mother's explanation of why nothing more serious occurred was simply that, in her words, "God must be looking out for us." What is important to note here is that "God has it in for us" is an explanatory fiction that serves just as well to account for the phenomenon of the (nonetheless fire-preventing) flood in the basement as "God is looking out for me", and "Zeus is happy" is an equally informative explanation for a storm as "Zeus is angry". Although each statement is the inverse of another equally non-provable and non-disprovable statement, either could be accepted from a mythological standpoint without further evidence or discourse.[18] The content of the myth, in other words, is secondary to its instrumental function in silencing further inquiry into a given matter, or in producing a desired pattern of acceptance in its audience.

Plato's 'myth of the metals' in the *Republic* is a good exemplar of the instrumental function of the myth. The republic's hypothetical citizens are to be told that they are literally sprung from the earth and, as a result, they must protect both the earth itself (because it is their mother) and their fellow citizens (because they, being born of the earth as well, are all brothers and sisters).[19] After swallowing these rather far-fetched premises, they are to be informed that "…God as he was fashioning you, put gold in those of you who are capable of ruling; hence they are deserving of most reverence. He put silver in the auxiliaries, and iron and copper in the farmers and the other craftsmen"[20] and furthermore "change and meddling among those classes is death to the city".[21] All of this, of course, is not phrased as a rational argument, but is delivered as an indivisible set of unassailable assertions. It is presumably expected to be accepted as such, and a perfectly harmonious social order is the advertised probable result.[22] It is blind faith, not reason, that serves to cement the social structure in Plato's schema.

In more historically recent times, in the realm of non-fiction, Hitler employed myth in a like manner, utilizing both ancient superstitions and contemporaneous trends in German ideology to produce the 'myth of blood and soil' with which he was able to rally the German people to his cause. Under Hitler, write Peter Calvocoressi and Guy Wint, "Germanism materialized as *Reich* and *Volk*, a pair of politically

disruptive and often mystical concepts. A *Reich* is a claim to dominion; a *Volk* is a people linked not by habitat but by race. *Reich* and *Volk* combined imply racial domination."[23] Germanism, thus stated, is mythological because the concept of *Reich* expresses an illogical (arguably pathological, in this instance) will to power with no basis in rationality. To the skeptical minority in the early days of the 'Third Reich', belief in Hitler's myth was coerced by the direct or indirect application of violence, with little or no attempt made at rational persuasion. The contrast with utopia here should be apparent in terms of function: again, the purpose of the myth to not merely to inspire, but to coerce if necessary. Due to its implausibility, the myth must be suggested and maintained from a position of political authority; whereas the utopia, because it posits a political counter-world, is always in the position of the subversive, and so it must appeal to reason—bereft of the aid of non-rational coercive power, it must phrase its seditious message in as plausible a manner as possible.

Myths, in the oral tradition, demanded repetition in exactly the same form to all listeners. Intentional deviation from the repeated myth was considered a form of intellectual dishonesty, if one knew how the myth was meant to be retold; and questioning the myth itself was simply to admit that one did not understand the function of the myth in establishing or preserving sociopolitical apparatuses. Thus the myth is, traditionally, an inherently *authoritarian narrative*; it does typically not admit of revision or criticism, and it serves an instrumental function in producing behavioral compliance. The political myth offers a singular ending to a society's story: there are no alternate possible endings vying for our rational apprehension and ranking. Rather, the myth presents a monolithic singularity that must be confronted, the idealized past and the idealized present and the idealized future unified in a relationship of mutual justification. The motivation the myth provides for its adherents is, principally, not reward-oriented but punitive—it aims not for innovation but for the prevention of the same—exactly the opposite of a utopia.

According to Carl Schmitt, the myth is:

> …not a rationalism that transforms itself through a radical exaggeration and fantasizes utopias, but finally a new evaluation of rational thought, a new belief in instinct and intuition that lays to rest every belief in discussion and would also reject the possibility that mankind could be made ready for discussion through an educational dictatorship.[24]

What are we to make of this 'new belief in instinct and intuition', and this rejection of a real or imagined 'educational dictatorship'; this crisis arising from, and wholly opposed to, the dominance of rationalism? On a surface level, it looks as though there is value being read into reactive or unconscious actions. Surrender to intuition is praised, the animal instincts embraced. This seems ethically analogous to the exercise of automatic virtue on the state level, with exhibitions of *phronesis* by virtuous leaders and exhibitions of *mimesis* by their less virtuous followers.[25] The analogy ends there, however, as the myth allows no room for real moral education to take place, as meaningful and probing discussion on the content of the myth is taboo. The myth offers up no syllogisms for our rational scrutiny, nor does it operate according to any laws of nature. For instance, according to the mythologies of different areas, islands can be created by gods dipping a spear into the ocean, or gods giving birth, or by gods throwing stones at animals; although each of these myths was considered authoritative in its proper time and place, neither reason nor the laws of nature can be called upon to help us assess any universal value they might have.[26] Moreover, as Schmitt notes, the doctrine of political mythology denies the very possibility of a truly educable general public; from such a standpoint, the herd is to be led with strength and cunning, but never should attempts be made to reason with it, so such evaluations of myth are out of the question from the onset.

In this manner the political myth resembles the political mysticism criticized by Adorno; characterized as it is by

> extreme empiricism, teaching absolute obedience of the mind to given data, 'facts,' [which] has no principle such as the idea of reason by which to distinguish the possible from the impossible, and thus the development of enlightenment overreaches itself and produces a mentality often no longer able to resist mythological temptations.[27]

Rationality, deprived of its critical function in the context of political mysticism, is relegated to a bureaucratic role in the ceremonial authentication of irrational practices.[28] When the possible is rationally indiscernible from the impossible, utopia and myth appear to be equally reasonable political alternatives, and indeed blur into each other, as one amongst many other unfortunate conflations resulting from the adoption of such a framework. We can imagine that within such a system, belief does not aspire to reflect objective truths, but simply gravitates toward what it is instrumentally useful to believe. Russell called this disposition "epistemological

pragmatism…the idea that truth is the same as usefulness" and associated it directly with authoritarian ideology.[29] If whatever promotes or quickens pleasure, or prevents or delays pain, becomes rational, then no arguments can be formulated against the powerful. Compliance will maximize utility as long as the coercive power of the state is effectively pervasive. Under such conditions, Adorno notes, "'[t]o be rational' means not questioning irrational conditions, but to make the best of them from the viewpoint of one's private interest."[30] The government of the continent-state of Oceana in George Orwell's *1984* comes to mind, both for the mythology of constant warfare with the other two continental blocs that must be accepted by its general public to keep the state functioning, and for the main character Winston's privately coerced concession to its representative that two and two equal five.[31] The authoritarian myth penetrates completely in this story, from the various omni-visible apparatuses of state, to the innermost neural pathways of the individual human mind.

The myth, consolingly, offers the hope of *some* knowledge to its believers, although this sort of knowledge cannot be arrived at via independent reasoning or introspection. Even if whatever is known "ceases to be true when the Party ceases to assert it", at least "[w]hatever the Party says *is* true, as long as the party says it."[32] That being said, the central function of the myth is not to produce justified true beliefs, but rather to inform belief and behavior; to *motivate*, usually negatively.

V: Conclusion

It would seem that the myth provides all the motivational inducement of a utopian vision without any of utopia's indictment of the real. Schmitt writes:

> Only in myth can the criterion be found for deciding whether one nation or a social group has a historical mission and has reached its historical moment. Out of the depths of a genuine life instinct, not out of reason or pragmatism, springs the great enthusiasm, the great moral decision and the great myth. In direct intuition the enthusiastic mass creates a mythical image that pushes its energy forward and gives it the strength for martyrdom as well as the courage to use force. Only in this way can a people or class become the engine of world history. Wherever this is lacking, no social and political power can remain standing…"[33]

It is this embrace of enthusiasm, and the accompanying lack of critical function that ultimately distinguishes myth from utopia. Utopia, despite its ideality, ultimately arises from the need to rationally address concrete political and philosophical

problems. Conversely, Schmitt concedes that for mythmakers and myth-believers alike, “[e]very rationalist interpretation falsifies the immediacy of life. The myth is no utopia.”[34] To iterate an earlier point: utopia cannot take root in a myth-based sociopolitical order because the vivifying and empowering myth does not admit of critique; demonstrations of power suffice to silence all arguments to the contrary. We are now conceptually closer to Alexander’s claim that

> most utopians have had as a central aim, though not their only aim, the solving of certain philosophical problems… thinking about utopias, whether favourable or critical, inescapably involves one in the analysis of certain moral and political concepts and that this often leads to the recommending of certain normative judgments.[35]

Thus where analysis is impossible, a utopian vision is inconceivable. The political myth eschews philosophy, while utopia embraces and embodies it. Utopia and myth are divergent streams of political narrative that should, therefore, not be casually conflated—as they, unfortunately, have sometimes been.

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[1] Frank E. Manuel and Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), p. 10.

[2] Quoted in Carl Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, Ellen Kennedy trans. (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1992), p. 76. Despite the conceptual tension between myth and utopia, Seiji Nuita points out that, ironically, “…Mussolini himself published a journal called *Utopia*. It was first issued in 1913 and apparently continued for a year, up to No. 18, although there are many combined numbers. Some of the issues are available in the Harvard University Library.” [Noted in “Traditional Utopias in Japan and the West: A Study in Contrasts”, in *Aware of Utopia*, David Plath ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1971), p. 28 n. 11.]

[3] Tony Milligan has pointed out to me that we might imagine ourselves desiring *impossible* states of affairs as well, i.e.: ‘I want to be a child again’, but that there are *no actions* that correspond to the realization of such desires. This is a slightly misleading conclusion; as there may be actions that attach to unrealizable desires—it’s just that they are actions that the desiring agent *irrationally* attaches to the desired ends. In the example above, going to a theme park, or dressing in children’s clothing, or wearing a diaper might serve as absurd, irrational expressions of the desire for an impossible state, to be a child again. Although of course these actions cannot literally reverse the flow of time, they may nevertheless have some subjective effect on the mental state of the desiring agent, who might come to actually feel or believe that they are a child again, at least for a moment. But here we do seem to have actions that could be connected to an impossible wish, contrary to Milligan’s claim; it is just that we may deem such actions, and sometimes the strange wishes that spawn them, as pathological. This is not to condemn daydreams, or flights of fancy; it is simply to say that if we act on these illusions because we quite inappropriately take them *seriously*—if we come to actually *attempt* to make these obtain in reality—then we can expect others to understand our actions as irrational.

[4] Peter Alexander, “Grimm’s Utopia: Motives and Justifications”, in *Utopias*, Peter Alexander and Roger Gill, eds. (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co. Ltd., 1984), p. 33.

[5] If anyone in a so-called ‘utopia’ *is* dissatisfied, things would be better for them and for everyone else if they were not dissatisfied, and so a better ‘utopia’ could easily be envisaged, supplanting the former state, and so forth and so on until everyone is fully satisfied. Under those (unlikely) circumstances, utopia would be realized.

[6] Alexander, p. 35 (my emphasis).

[7] Ibid., p. 40.

[8] "…Marx was, I believe, a false prophet. He was a prophet of the course of history, and his prophecies did not come true; but this is not my main accusation. It is much more important that he misled scores of intelligent people into believing that historical prophesy is the scientific way of approaching social problems." –Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950), p. 275.
[9] Alexander, p. 37.
[10] David Plath, "Foreword", in Plath, *Aware of Utopia*, p. xii.
[11] J. C. Davis, "The History of Utopia: the Chronology of Nowhere", in Alexander and Gill, *Utopias*, pp. 8-9.
[12] Ibid., p. 10.
[13] Christopher Yorke, "The Normative Role of Utopianism in Political Philosophy", in *New Thinking* Vol. II Issue 1 (Boston: The New Thinking Institute, Winter / Spring 2004), p. 5.
[14] Judith Shklar, *Political Thought and Political Thinkers*, Stanley Hoffmann, ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 162.
[15] Krishnan Kumar, *Utopianism* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1991), p. 3.
[16] Masaki Ichinose has fruitfully suggested to me that the functions of the dystopia and the anti-utopia be briefly noted in this context. It does, indeed, appear as if the function of these forms of political fiction is to threaten negative end-states for society whose clear undesirability motivates us to avoid them at all costs. There is, in the critical function of utopia, a similar indictment of the present; the political institutions of here and now are what must be overcome or, if you will, avoided *ex post facto*. A more comprehensive discussion of the distinctions between the utopia, the dystopia, and the anti-utopia can be found in Chad Walsh, *From Utopia to Nightmare* (London: Geoffrey Bles. Ltd., 1962).
[17] Nuita, p. 32.
[18] Popper, in his *Conjectures and Refutations*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Limited, 1965), discusses the role of myth in the development of modern science.
[19] Plato, *Republic*, Robin Waterfield trans. (New York: Oxford University Press), § 414.
[20] Ibid., § 415.
[21] Ibid., § 434.
[22] This is taken to be the case, even though Plato allows that some guardians may realize that the founding myth is a mere fiction.
[23] Peter Calvocoressi and Guy Wint, *Total War: Causes and Courses of the Second World War* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 18. This doctrine is elaborated by Hitler into the "myth of blood and soil", wherein the Germanic peoples are depicted as a farming race destined to spread out and cultivate more and more of Europe, converting it into *Lebensraum*.
[24] Schmitt, p. 66.
[25] I have previously remarked on the analogue between the concept of 'virtue' as idealized excellence in individuals, and the concept of 'utopia' as idealized excellence in states (see Yorke, p. 3).
[26] In the first instances, I am referring to the well-known Shinto creation myth of the Japanese archipelago. In the last, I am referring to the more obscure Native American creation myth of the islands of my hometown in Canada, the non-ironically named Five Islands. According to the myth, the Mi'kmaq god Glooscap was angered with a beaver, and in a fit of rage threw huge clods of earth at it, which became the five islands that are visible from the shoreline of the village.
[27] T. W. Adorno, *The Stars Down To Earth and Other Essays on the Irrational in Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 116-7.
[28] As Popper puts it, "rationalism is critical, whilst irrationalism must tend towards dogmatism (where there is no argument, nothing is left but full acceptance or flat denial)…criticism always demands a certain degree of imagination, whilst dogmatism suppresses it." (*The Open Society and Its Enemies*, pp. 424-5)
[29] Originally published in Russell, *Let the People Think* (1941), paraphrased here by Popper, in *Conjectures and Refutations*, pp. 4-5.
[30] Adorno, p. 43.
[31] George Orwell, *1984* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1977).
[32] Walsh, p. 109.

[33] Schmitt, p. 68.
[34] Ibid., p. 71.
[35] Alexander, p. 32.