

Political Utopia `really' matters

Smrutipriya Pattnaik¹, C. Upendra²

(*Doctoral Student, School of Humanities & Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Indore, India*)
(*Associate Professor, School of Humanities & Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Indore, India*)

Abstract: How do we bring justice in this world? Why can we not create a society of equals? How do we attain this condition politically? Does emancipation require politics? These questions, other than those elaborately addressed by Terry Eagleton in his book *Why Marx Was Right*, brings us back to the same fundamental question: after all, what is the problem with Utopian imagination? The essay centers around this argument: In response to anti-utopianism, we assert that nothing but utopia ascertains the dream for a better future. The essay attempts `utopian resurrection' retrieving it out of its `tragic fate'. While it recognizes the many recent claims to utopia, it specifically draws support from Kolakowski, White, Bloch and Jameson. Though these had inclination to Marxism, we can draw the spirit of hope, the right to daydream, and that one day the human condition will want for no more change.

Keywords: *Utopia, hope, Marxism, Socialism, capitalist-triumphalism, ideology*

I. INTRODUCTION

“Another world is possible” – any such claims is ‘arbitrarily’ posited as dystopian, violent and insane. Of-late utopia is looked at as a controversial term in and outside of political theory, especially, amid the triumphalist claims of liberal-capitalist democracy. It has become a commonplace belief that utopianism means totalitarianism, living under an oppressive political regime that neither values an individual nor their freedoms. Utopia is looked at with utter suspicion and disregard both prior to the fall of the communist empire and latter to it. In the process, both socialist ideas and fascist ideas were placed in the same realm because both followed the principle of ‘control them through their obedience’. This misunderstanding took its toll on Marxism in theory and practice. The coldness toward utopia persuades us to address important concerns of one and all in contemporary times: How do we bring justice in this world? Why we cannot create a society of equals? How do we attain this condition politically? Does emancipation require politics? These questions, other than those elaborately addressed by Terry Eagleton in his book *Why Marx Was Right*, [1] bring us back to the same fundamental question: after all, what is the problem in Utopia? The entire essay centers on the argument that nothing but utopia ascertains the dream for a better future. By doing so, the essay attempts ‘utopian resurrection’ retrieving it out of its ‘tragic fate’. It specifically draws support from Kolakowski, White, Bloch and Jameson, even though they were inclined towards Marxism. It also recognizes the many recent claims to utopia and reaffirms that we can draw the spirit of hope, the right to daydream, and that one day the human condition will want for no more change.

II. REDRAWING THE UTOPIAN SPIRIT

Liberal capitalists, declaring to the world that western capitalism has triumphed emphatically (claiming it as best of all the possible worlds) over all its rivals, immensely propagate the needlessness of utopias. The fall is metaphorically seen as the end of ideology, politics, history and violence. For them the world is deceived by the utopian futuristic imagination. The promise that the past and present will be redeemed into a new future is seen as absurd besides, the triumphalists’ claims renders ‘politics driven by ideology’ with utter suspicion. Both Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History* and the upsurge of globalization is the only alternative claim to bear witness to this triumphalism. Such widespread propaganda jeopardizes dreams of an ‘Earthly Paradise’ resulting from our great human effort. It also subverts our belief in utopia as the ultimate human predicament. The effect of this predicament resulted in the post-Soviet fear of utopias. Anti-utopianists draw their motivation from John Rawls’s theory which labels it as ‘realistic utopias’ – the central feature being the workable (achievable) well-ordered society. This is not the end of the story. The picture of ‘another world’ changes and broadens with time and history. The inner-urge for a just and equal world demands a lot of things – not just economic transformation but philosophically speaking, the conscience of individuals. In this regard both the praxis approach (generally emerging from Marx’s anti-utopian utopianism) and the realistic politics are problematic.

The question which is relevant today is: "Is utopia a by-gone idea on a global scale?" It is necessarily not. There have been societies that have never experienced utopian movements to transform their social condition. Why have these societies not embraced utopias? This makes the anti-utopian slogans weak cornered by a counter assertion – *why not follow the ideal*. The ideal cannot be despised for its *fantasmic* character. Rather, it is valuable because it drives our practical world too. It will mildly identify with the 'collapse' of a society. How can societies take flight from this decadent condition? There are several criticisms laid against the Utopian attempts in the twentieth century – all of them having a common line of argument – all those ideologies have an underlying violent metaphysic, *conformity at any cost*. Do these criticisms fall in line with the (Berlin wall and Soviet Union) *endism*?¹ Definitely, there is a scare while the capitalist west is marketing *apocalypse*. Many critics exhausted their minds by being loud about the non-existence of Socialism, Communism or Marxism. All these paradigms lost their ontological status. Realistic utopias focus on the pragmatic aspects of a well-ordered society leaving behind hard realities which are supposed to have had suffered elimination. The idea is that the world cannot be perfected, but can be bettered. The issue is the need for making the world unrealistically and unreasonably ideal. The contemporary urge for a reasonably just world combines the historical, social, economic and political perspectives that conjoin in understanding the human condition (not just in terms of base-superstructure relationship). The euphoria of the capitalist west that they have won the war again lures us back into the utopian imagination.

The new political imagination reconciles this tension between the ideal and the actual. Actual may be the given condition but not a desirable or the desired state as such. The actual always becomes idiosyncratic leading to the revival of the ideal. Realistic utopias also speak the truth – the imperfectability of the human condition. That one has to come to terms with the 'given' brute picture of the world implies something very difficult to accept. Imperfection cannot be perfected but it is also not clear as to what kind of unevenness of the world is let persist. The fear is that there is a big trade-off here, the most terrifying and dispassionate apathy that deludes our conscience for a fair world. If a fair and just world is an indicator of erratic thinking then it shows us the poverty of our conscience itself. To alleviate our conscience levels we need to build what Louis Mumford called "castles in the sky", similar to what Landauer referred to the inability of language to capture the utopian spirit. [2] That the world has to be reasonably just is not in the conscience of individuals further provides utopian imagination a strong footing. The perennial picture of the human condition is perfectibility and this 'tragic fate' throws us into the world of idealizations. It gets a psychoanalytic touch where the obsession for the lack only multiplies.

This proliferation of the urge for a better world is never exhausted. Historical forces cannot come to an abrupt end or run out of ideas. No-where becomes now-here, with no necessary reference to socialism. It is to be noted that the ontological basis of socialism is risked by keeping utopia open-ended, without any pre-emption. No pre-emption means no primacy or reservations for or against any political ideology, not even to radical democracy. We have to take such a risk to restore utopian thinking. What kind of hope does it manifest in the mind of its believers? To answer this we should raise another question: *Is it the doomsayers or its romantics who are generating the more compelling insights into the unsettled topography of contemporary world politics?* Utopias that provide a cracked mirror to the past and a distorted analysis of the present cannot hope to tell us much about the future possibilities. This kind of futuristic concern lays upon us certain ethic – in the name of people or community to come (as emphasized by Benjamin, Derrida and others) we need to be honest about our present convictions for the future. The transformation aimed at forces *a priori* fate on to the future generations. Are justice and equality ever concerns for us? If they are, then it shows our diffidence for a fairer world, which takes care of both individuality and the promise of a (coming) community. There are a lot of philosophical-political contestations regarding the ethics of transformation – especially, the messianic element of the transformation. With a renewed urge for utopia we can begin a proposition to grant the messianic role to utopia itself. However, we are not sure, considering the opposition between Benjamin and Zizek, about when it will come – after the day (Benjamin) or unconditional presence of the messianic moment (Zizek). [3]

The magnificent challenge is to initiate a change (or transformation through revolution) and sustain the change. It raises the Rousseauian understanding that the civil society is according to the will of the people. Looking at twentieth century's experience of revolutions, the reliability of spontaneity, rebelliousness and expression of an unfilled social imagery [4] is questioned. We have seen how vehemently suspicious are post-holocaust critics about any utopian principle imposed on to us as a metaphysical doctrine. Tracy Strong presents a very depressing remark about the twentieth century: "the past century claims to have been the morally worst-century in human history." [5] Looking at the way 'hope' and 'revolutions' affected human affairs brings bewilderment to one and all – how could the human condition turn so morally decadent in the name of hope? One way of looking at it is that all violence has eventually become fundamental and has arisen from thinking through the

¹ "And many sigh with relief at the suggestions that with the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and the triumph of political liberalism, with its realism and pragmatism, this dark chapter in the history of human inequity might have been finally closed."

banister (here, through the western cannon) [6]. Change is desired when a society lives through dark times – understanding the ‘times’ is very important. Hannah Arendt’s principle of *thinking without banisters*² is a possible way of looking at the revivalism of utopias. The idea of ‘shared imagery’ itself is a big problem, thanks to the penchant for ‘difference’ and ‘diversity’. It is even more severely impossible in the post-failure scenario. There is a disclaimer here. The negative propaganda against the (Soviet) communism by the west outweighs the violence fundamental to the revolutionary change itself. However, the bad image created (that communism as nightmarish) poses a forceful threat here: Is a non-imposing and non-totalitarian perspective of utopia possible? The triumphalist claim sees no such possibility collapsing all alterities.

William Morris’s *News from Nowhere* [7] is treated as a utopia without utopianism [5] with a preference to fellowship or brotherhood (“one for all and all for one”). It is not a simple idea to make a collective feel that the current state-of-affairs demands radical change. The plea for an alternate community is a colossal task for any given socio-political condition. The commitment to transformation is weakened by this wavering conviction of all the people. This may take us back to the cannon. The differential treatment of the cannon can be seen in his non-necessitating of socialism for transformation. The imagery of the world contains in it the point of departure from Marxism/Socialism by being sympathetic to these historical paradigms. Nonetheless, there is no promise of absence of violence or conflict of paradigms. It is unthinkable instead. The reason why we have to retain the hope is that the moment of the utopian condition is momentary – in other words, there is an urge to escape or take a flight away from the place we land. This hope is jeopardized by capitalist denouncing of the hope thesis through its suspicion and disregard for other paradigms. In the following section we will revisit some of the classical works that talk about the significance of utopia.

III. DRAWING THE UTOPIAN SPIRIT

3.1 Kolakowski: *The Death of Utopia Reconsidered*

Leszek Kolakowski made one of the profound discussions on the idea of ‘death of utopia’ [8]. He points out the pejorative sense of utopia, from our everyday speech to grand socio-political discourses. Referring to philosophy, he says that it is full of epistemological utopias - that have aimed at absolute certainty of knowledge. The best example that can be taken from the history of philosophy is Rene Descartes’s obsession [further seen in Edmund Husserl] for finding a solution for the ultimate foundations of knowledge. Looking for ultimate foundations is like looking for perfect harmony, not only in the epistemological sense but also in the transcendental sense. Husserl was greatly influenced by Descartes in his phenomenological project [phenomenological reduction] directed toward pure consciousness. For Paul S. Macdonald those were the radical beginnings of philosophy at different stages of history witnessing ‘cognitive affective orientation of the whole self’ [pure subjects of cognition] [9, 10]. It comes with an urge for a presupposition-free, unprejudiced approach to knowledge. It calls for identifying the ultimate ground of grounds [also seen in Kant] – realizing the absolute without the divine. The idea of certainty is an epistemological concern. In what way it is connected to political utopia? It would mean that if knowledge is certain in its attainability, so do the perfect state of the human condition. The idea here is that a radical skeptical approach would spell the ruin of European culture. These are the fears of modern philosophy. Did this influence the thinking of Karl Marx? Let us assume that the above has been dominantly present in Marx’s times and influenced him greatly [though he can be classified as an anti-German Idealist].

This project was not without adversaries. On the other hand, critics of this project like Maurice Merleau Ponty and Martin Heidegger were not interested in such meta-considerations. Utopia is generally understood as creation or attaining of a better world. Going by this definition, how do we label totalitarian tendencies as utopian? They suspected the absolute transparency of knowledge. From transcendental the focus shifted toward philosophy of the culture. Kolakowski rightly opines that philosophy cannot discover any universal truths – despite some advancement made in science. He argues that the 'cultural' role of philosophy is not *Truth per se*, but building the spirit of truth [8]. We will come to this point as to how it affected the politics of utopia and social imagery. It brought to philosophy the primacy of 'being-in-the-world' – where social, cultural and political forces shape human world. Departure from the transcendental or the absolute characterizes human beings as meaning-making creatures.

Kolakowski's revealing of philosophy's inability to trace truths, assigning to it the cultural role, exposes philosophy to several antinomies and contradictions. His understanding is that philosophical perfectionism is seen in utopian understanding of a perfect world. Further, intrusion of culture into philosophy has simultaneously affected people's belief and attitude toward utopia. There is more imperfectness to human existence completely ineradicable – like the Kantian reflection that “out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing was ever made” [11]. If humans possess deeply fundamental imperfections, they cannot carve out

² Arendt speculates the possibility of looking beyond the tradition for new insights into the understanding and evading of violence. Tracy Strong makes it the central question of his book *Politics Without Vision*.

a perfect social order with absolute equality and justice. Liberal social contractualists also give us a challenging picture, especially, Hobbes and Rousseau. Kolakowski argues that that life of the modern mind is predominantly anti-utopian. What is anti-utopian understanding of utopia? How is a perfect world characterized? We can have two arguments here: First, utopia [also referred as a perfect world] is understood as attempts made to bring a perfect harmony [even unwarranted] and seek absolute conformity through superimposed ideals of a great society [fascism and Nazism]. All these are externally imposed characteristics. On the other hand, a perfect world is also understood as eradication of all injustices, inequalities and hierarchies among human beings [Marxism]. At least the former two ideas did not embark on the principles of justice and equality.

There is another important consequence of handing the cultural role to philosophy. Philosophy began giving considerable attention to the realm of the political. Carl Schmitt's understanding of the political is worth mentioning here. Attacking the liberal ideal, he conceived political as something that manifests the relationship of a political society's members into friends and foes, and us and them. It keeps the society completely infested with adversaries. Both imperfectness and political seem to sabotage the goal of 'everlasting fraternity'. Every attempt to realize this goal subjects the human condition to extreme oppression and evil. This is a post facto assertion of anti-utopian claim. Kolakowski refers to Zyamiatin, Huxley and George Orwell. It is doubtless about their profound satires about a perfect world and its debasement of the human itself.

March of humanity toward 'everlasting fraternity' is highly likely to bring phenomenal violence to the world. Anti-utopian senses a deep sense of monism [sameness, perfect consensus] in utopian philosophy. In this sense, any forward leap in this direction is bound to suppress people who refuse to converge. Under this condition, all collisions are brought to a halt or nullified. In other words, people are treated as creative and free, but they are all directed toward achieving a particular goal. The variety of human life forms is lost in this process. Utopia is understood *via* Stalin's Soviet Union, Hitler's Nazism, Pol Pot's Kampuchea or Milosevic's great Serbia. Due to this reason utopias turned into dystopias, and then anti-utopian in nature. Kolakowski says that the greatest works of twentieth century political theory focus on anti-utopia crushing all utopian notions. This can be linked to the problem of perfectibility again. If the world is an imperfect garden, attempting to perfect it is a disaster. Human perfectibility, in the context of political utopias, is treated as making the society sound monistic. The above political regimes formulated their respective notions of a perfect world and laid down their respective plans to achieve them. All of them turned despotic in their pursuit for everlasting fraternity or universal brotherhood eventually. Kolakowski classifies them as *kakotopias* due to their adoption of violent means.³ He sees the possibility of universal brotherhood of wolves, but not human beings. This has a counterpoint too. That perfect equality is always the path toward despotism is one-dimensional thinking. It undermines the forceful change attempted contrary to the idea that change takes place in the due course of historical progress.

There is anti-utopian bias too. We can deduce two important arguments from Kolakowski: [1] An attempt to implement a conflictless order by institutional means can be indeed successful only in totalitarian regimes. [2] A utopian vision once translated into a political idiom becomes deceitful or self-contradictory; providing new names for old injustices. Kolakowski categorizes Rousseau's notion of 'one has to compel people to freedom' as possessing totalitarian tendencies. He senses fraternity by coercion in Rousseau's idea.⁴ Life necessarily involves tension and suffering, and nothing illogical in this reasoning. Kolakowski states that there is deception in utopia's promise of the glory of progress. The glorious future is seen as already existing hitherto as a logical inevitability, as a psychoanalytical condition; more real than the real. Is it right to categorize utopia as self-righteous? Are anti-utopians reasonable enough in claiming utopian ideals like 'everlasting fraternity' as detrimental to human civilization? Anti-utopian bias is that they suspect any path toward wiping out evil from society, and evil intrinsic to human nature. They consider it as the dogma of utopianism. They undermine the confrontation and deep-rooted tension between the hostile basis of human relationships and its opposite, love and friendship. Our relentless lust for domination and our urge to replace it with love, friendship or fraternity are under ever-mutual deception and suspicion.

Kolakowski says that a static form of utopia that matches some sort of a Platonic ideal is not always an ethically blessed society. He not only talks about the philosophical poverty of utopia, but also says that the impossibility of it is undesirable. He did maintain that after the Marxist revolutionary phase of the late 1960, the idea of utopia did take a beating, but is coming back. Kolakowski says that if utopia were to ever succeed, then it would result in a society that would be authoritarian and/or totalitarian. On the other hand, he says that if we keep on doubting utopia with our skepticism, then we will find it difficult to build anything that would even start

³ A kakotopia is defined as a state in which worst possible conditions exist in government, society, law.

⁴ Refer to his *On the Social Contract*. "The 'fundamental problem' explored by Rousseau's political theory is to devise social and political institutions such that 'each [citizen], uniting with all, nevertheless obeys only himself, and remains as free as before'. It is not immediately clear whether his theory achieves this goal. Indeed, at times Rousseau sounds distinctly totalitarian, demanding the 'total alienation' of all an individual's rights to the community, and asserting that uncooperative citizens 'shall be forced to be free' [2

approaching utopia, even if not achieving that state or realizing it. This is what he calls a hopeless stagnation. Further, he says that this state of stagnation will result in immobility and could lead to a situation of chaos. He is of the opinion that utopia cannot ever be achieved, and at the same time, we need to continue striving towards it. These two positions are constantly in a state of war with each other with none of the positions coming out victorious.

3.2 Hayden White: *Future of Utopia in History*

Lewis Mumford boldly claims that history is the sternest critic of utopias [12, 13]. This has created an alleged antipathy between history and utopia – translated as where there is history, there is no utopia; where there is utopia, there is no history. Utopia is a mere wishful thinking and daydreaming. Discussing this point, Hayden White brings the place and non-place debate here, referring to utopia as anything but historical. Further, he also mentions the main argument of Karl Manheim: “In the course of history, man has occupied himself more frequently with objects transcending his scope of existence than with those immanent in his existence [14]. These two positions seem to challenge the realistic nature of utopias. Their understanding goes like this: As long as utopias project themselves as ideologies, independent of their socio-historical structures, plying from outside of society, they remain unrealistic, lacking any concrete forms of social existence. In other words, utopia may sound as a *phantasm*. This comes to an interesting stage of a dilemma. The dilemma is between the belief that there is a long story of repression of the utopian moment in history on the one hand, and the allegation that utopia failed to pay its debt to history on the other.

White proceeds to understand ‘history as utopia’s other’ rather than taking ‘utopia as history’s other.’ [13] How does the former differ from the latter? In simple terms, the former tends to place utopia as a modernist enterprise following the principle of disenchantment. It seems to place it as a free-standing principle to derive universal appeal. The latter speaks of the past-less condition of utopia, absence of a temporal condition. White argues that in the latter’s case, it becomes a repressive desire; a desire for a future against the claims of the present [social system]. Further, he puts forward two versions of utopia; past-oriented and future-oriented. This sounds like a psychoanalytic condition. We mourn for a past that we never had [*historical*], and we mourn for a something we cannot live without [*poetic*]. How do these two affect our understanding of utopia? There is a problem intrinsic to modern utopias. To build a future out of the abominable historical past is problematic for the modernists. Can we imagine or construct a future completely devoid of the past? For instance, was Marx trying to do the same? If not utopia, there ought to be something else that seriously takes care of human evils. Suppose that historical mourning refers to actual facts of history [could have been] – there is no flight from history, to call it as confiscation of the historical by history itself. On the other hand, literary modernism took its flight from history⁵ [13] - providing space for the irrational and the uncanny. What needs to be seen is how utopian fantasies enrich the very notion of political utopia, to be realized in the actual world.

Phantasms cannot be erased from the realm of political utopias. White makes an interesting reference to Marcel Proust and aesthetic modernism. In this realm, one can imagine oneself [in terms everyday life] being liberated from the ills of a liberal present and future, being placed in a world that fulfills her fantasy. Futuristic dreams have taken their seat in the modernist historicism. For the latter, it was a phenomenal challenge to make use of historical debris they have inherited. Why did the modernist utopias become anti-historical? Why is historical existence a burden to modernist historians? What can be said of Marx? Can we say that he too followed the modernist scheme of ‘flight from history’? Was his historical materialism heading toward the Edenic bliss or earthly paradise? There are two rival points here. Some think that utopia involves the liberation of higher faculties and a contemplative life. On the other hand, it is accused of focusing on the material conditions of life. The anti-historical slayer perpetually downsizing utopia resulted in bringing forward another criticism. George Kateb criticizes that utopia is not only anti-historical but also fails to value temporality and glorifies immortality. This is like what Fredric Jameson states that every historical phase has its own utopia. Kateb’s concern can be translated like this: how is it possible that we can manifest utopian principles as a permanent possibility of the human condition. By being skeptical to this possibility, Kateb, like other critics, seems to be wary about human beings. Prior to judging Kateb’s worry, we have to make a presupposition. The presupposition is that it is inevitable to get lured into the idealistic imagination, when the actual condition seems completely adversarial in nature. If one is asked to conceptualize a ‘just world order’, one cannot be indifferent to the idealistic approach by mere focusing on the practical politics. What is the way to confront the present and the past? White seems to have no trust in these futuristic fantasies. He makes interesting reference to the American approach to war, global waste, environmental depletion, and nightmares of heat deaths etc. The kind of the present we are placed in forecloses the possibility of a better world to our children [13].

This can be linked to capitalist global triumphalist argument. The belief is that the end of the cold war also contributed to the futility of the utopian thinking. Sociopolitical transformations have two dimensions to it: one,

⁵ Hayden White mentions Ezra Pound, George Eliot, Woolf, Kafka, Richard Joyce etc., as representatives of this ahistorical literary modernism.

just superstructural changes and the other, fundamental change. The latter is beyond the scope of a liberal capitalist framework. For fundamental changes, bringing here the idea of Judith Shklar, we need a radical approach to sociopolitical transformation. We need to be attentive to one important aspect: utopia is the only thing through which change is desired for a better future. Most of the theoretical paradigms take a flight from the 'given'. It is a mark of utter disregard for the current accepted realities. Modern utopia seeks an escape from modernity, discontinuous with earlier religious and mythical chronotopes. They should not dream of the glory of the "once upon a time" in the past, rather focus on the philosophy of the 'not-yet'. From the political theory point of view, both are nostalgias, one for the past and other for the future [the tension between what might be and what ought to be]. The present is caught between these obsessions.

White comes to an understanding that what is realistic and unrealistic about utopia is not to be decided by history alone. He mentions an interesting example from Sigmund Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents*. Freud opines that if civilization itself is the cause of certain illness we are suffering from, it is delusory to think of society itself as a malady. James Joyce's protagonist Stephen Dedalus makes a similar argument in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, "history is the nightmare from which I am trying to awake." [15] It is contradictory that we seek solutions from history when it is nightmarish in nature. For White, utopias of the past are regressive and of the future are progressive in nature. Eventually, he shows bias toward utopian thinking, referring to American situation [assuming that it has overcome utopian fantasies], stating it as a dead idea, and is now history.

3.3 Fredric Jameson: *The Politics of Utopia*

Fredric Jameson throws sufficient light on the utopian representation of reality. In the last two sections, we have seen how utopia is characterized as something unrealistic and also abominable in nature. It is also accused of being ahistorical. In his path-breaking article, Jameson begins his argument stating that utopia offers the "spectacle of those rare phenomena whose concept is indistinguishable from its reality." [16] It sounds as if utopia has a reality of its own and yet has normal social functions. Jameson speculates the presence of two worlds, one absolutely characterized by misery and poverty, and the other driven by unparalleled wealth in many walks of life. The interesting aspect is, he sees utopia made-irrelevant in both the domains. Unlike in the case of Kolakowski and Hayden, utopia is placed closer to politics, besides textual, generic and historical contexts. Jameson talks about the possibility of utopia in the context of globalization. For him, any consideration for radical political program systematically outlines other alternative society, which we call utopia. Any practical politics has to consider utopia seriously.

Jameson approaches the understanding of evil in terms of political utopias. Utopia seems to promise the elimination of 'root of all evil', like greed and arrive at a more humane form of life. He refers to Plato, Thomas More, Joseph Proudhon, Ezra Pound and Henry George who have argued for the abolition of private property. So how does this become a political tool? Suppose greed is to be controlled by a certain form of repression of desires [psychoanalytically]. One cannot be sure how this guarantees elimination of desires. Desires are definitely the source of hierarchies. Marx and some of his predecessors saw property relations as one of the sources of social hierarchies and individual injustices. One-way of putting it is 'if desires are conditioned, you can control injustices'. This kind of an understanding is based on some [psychological] essentialist [biological] reductionism about human nature. But injustices are not tackled by reference to drives, passions, power or greed. Marx is right in making it socio-structural. What difference does it make in shifting the focus from drives to historical processes? How is the 'root of all evil' eliminated without elimination of drives? In Marx, we find the belief in the material conditions of life accessible to one and all through the structural transformation of the system. Jameson identifies the root of all evil in a society's inability to cater to the productive capacities of all its citizens. This is not the only evil. Evil is of a profound kind, especially, perpetuated by the political ideologies.

Jameson seems to follow some of the principles of Thomas More. The latter tells us utopians are easy going, good-tempered, ingenious and leisure loving. He also states that these individuals cling on to the pleasures of the mind. This sounds problematic. It needs a proper understanding of the political. Jameson states that utopia is either too political or not political enough. But once utopia is attained, political is erased along with history, indicative of a general will. Is Jameson's point reflective of Fukuyama's claim that there is no possibility of history in the post-ideological world? General will seems to be operative in the context of political utopias. What does Jameson mean by this? He states that there is something fundamental that cannot be challenged within the system. It is understandable that total elimination is meaningless to imagine. On the contrary, what gets transferred from the Old to the New is a question of intense debate. Jameson states, "A Social system in order to continue must continue its own immunities." [16]

Further, Jameson asks a very pressing question, "How should we formulate the position of utopia with respect to the political?" As an immediate response, he says that the utopia emerges at the suspension of the political. On the other hand, he says that politics is always with us in every sense. It means that it is in the mode of a ceaseless mental play, changing from time to time, so too the political institutions. Jameson gives us a situation: political institutions seem both unchangeable and infinitely modifiable which is a paradox. There are

possibilities of revolutionary changes and equally countervailing forces that contain any such changes. Jameson seems to qualify political utopias as imperfect and impractical, yet necessary. For him, most changes in human history occurred in the worst impotent situations. For changes to take place, political has to become external to the social life, preparing its ground for change in whatever fashion it may be. In times of the utopian progressions, reality seemed malleable but not the system. This is the most profound observation of Jameson. It speaks of internal repulsions a system generates against any attempt to bring radical transformation. These challenges hinder the creative free play of utopia, meaning, they may be restricted to one's imagination but not concrete changes.

This distinction of utopia being present in the mind, but not corresponding to the times we live in, keeps alive the endless play of fantasy. It would be an interesting exercise to look into the manner in which this endless free play again manifests into a political idea. But there is an ongoing process where utopia in the form of ideology is subjected to negation. Jameson, then asks, "Is this to say that we can form no substantive or positive picture of utopia, short of embracing all the multiple contradictory pictures that co-exist in our collective social unconscious?" [16] He states this as the fear of utopia or the anxiety of the utopian impulse that confronts us. However, one cannot escape from these utopian impulses. All those hierarchies and injustices Jameson lists can only be sorted through an understanding of emancipation. Jameson mentions Adorno's understanding here: "He who asks what is the goal of an emancipated society is given answers such as fulfillment of human possibilities or the richness of life..." [16] This condition is central to capitalist societies deeply caught in the self-preservation mode. Contrarily, there is no place for self-preservation arguments in the world of utopia

3.4 Ernst Bloch: *The Spirit of Hope*

How do we understand the world we live in? How do we address transition from one historical phase to the other? The past lineages lead us through the present to an unknown future. This is acceptable when the present is acceptable to us. When we have an unbearable burden of the past on us [unbearable because of the deeds of our predecessors], we are not sure about 'where to go from here.' This brings anxiety and fear to us. Is there a loss of hope in such situations? Ernst Bloch is uneasy about any form of hopelessness. In his great work *The Spirit of Utopia* [17], he talks of bringing hope to the human condition. The emotion internal to us never lets us tolerate a suppressed life. The question that bothers us in this anxiety is, "What can best help the world become a sane place to live?" Bloch's mind blowing work focuses on the significance and inevitability of daydreams [utopias as daydreams] – of a smooth everyday life, not just the prerogative of the rich. If not for political utopias, at the individual level, Bloch seems to claim that a life without dreams cannot be imagined. This dream brings us to the venturing beyond, thinking of a better world. We have been talking about change [radical or otherwise]. It will not be possible without this treading beyond – nothing but creative free play of imagination. Bloch carefully avoids abstractions here. He attaches these adventures to what goes on around us, and which is in continuous motion. It is like history is always operated through the dialectic.

Giving primacy to dreaming beyond is like always living in the futuristic imagination. For Bloch, we always live in the future. It means there is ceaseless wait for tomorrow, waiting for today to pass by. This futuristic approach, rightly stated by him, is driven by our fears and anxieties. From the old to the new, hope runs through all the time. Bloch values hope and the means through which it is kept alive. To live in the future is to dream of the world 'unbecome'. That individual is pervaded by daydreams due to her bad situation that can be extended to understand social and political lives. People living under unfortunate circumstances are bound to fantasise a better future. For Bloch, Marx was one of the first to venture beyond or becoming conscious of it. This act also brings to our conscience the NOT-YET-CONSCIOUS or NOT-YET-BECOME. Bloch looks for a profound treatment of the notion of the 'not-yet'.

Bloch admonishes philosophy for lacking a futuristic imagination. He states, "Philosophy will have conscience of tomorrow, commitment to the future, knowledge of hope, or it will not have knowledge." To have a conscience of tomorrow is to have a commitment to the future. This gives rise to the philosophy of the NEW, opening up to new ways, at times, dangerous, and calls for overcoming those conditions. The task is not easy. Bloch states that what is radically intended by us is not delivered anywhere, but not thwarted anywhere either. This preserves the possibility of utopian imagination. We can see that in all the past and current freedom movements, are inevitably guided by utopian aspirations. We are not sure whether Bloch has any reference to 'everlasting fraternity' often mentioned by Kolakowski.

Hope faces another challenge. Bloch very often talks about the "Unbecome", "Not-yet", or "Future". He brings forth the idea of Hegel. For the latter, 'what has been' [past-present] *overwhelms* 'what is approaching'. Things that have become past-present, totally obstructs the possibility of Future, Front, and Novum. This idea is anyway contra Marx. Due to this, the utopian principle is unable to achieve a breakthrough, totally distinct from 'what has been', despite its explosive dialectics. One such challenge comes from the mythical reference to the Golden Age and its transposition into the future with a messianic consciousness of the oppressed classes and people. For

Bloch, Marxist philosophy addresses this question more ardently. From this tradition, we learn to look forward than backward, trying to know the dawning of the not-yet conscious. For Bloch, hope is not just an emotion but also a cognitive feature. This still needs a proper understanding of the not-yet. It sounds as if the not-yet, the 'unbecome' is 'become' one day, like dreams realized. Then this argument has an evolutionary punch to it. The latter talks about the unraveling of specific characters of an organism which belong to a specific species at a specific point of time. By virtue of this extrapolation, utopia or the not-yet is realized.

The not-yet-conscious brings us close to not-yet-become. This transition shows some wishful images of the future, consisting of fairytales of the world yet-to-become. It is prominently seen even in the context of political utopia. There are political fairytales and fantasies of the world to be realized, like the Marxists belief in "Another world is possible." These fairy-tales have a peculiar character of the fantasy of a perfect world like that of the geographical scales of the *Eden of Eldorado*. The not-yet-conscious and not-yet-become are connected to these fantasies of perfection. Why do they have to be perfect? May be the continuous historical denial of a just place of an individual, her community etc., for a just world order makes it a daydream fantasy. This has to do with the profusion of human imagination, which becomes concrete only with the help of utopian function of that imagination. By referring to Shakespeare and Dante, Bloch seems to signify the dependence of non-social utopias on the social. Thus, Bloch signifies what lies in the front, than what has been with us.

IV. WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

Michael Walzer discusses the reclamation of political utopianism. He responds to Isaiah Berlin's claim that exciting utopian ideas will never allow the triumph of liberal democracy. The latter, being an ardent critic of Marxism and totalitarianism desires the decline of Utopian ideas in the west [18]. Critics like Berlin, Karl Popper, Hannah Arendt etc., conflated utopianism with totalitarianism in which torture and mass murder are used as justified means to achieve their ends. This conflation is severely criticized by Russell Jacoby. He argues that this is a confused mismatch of utopian ideas with racial/ethnic, national imperialist and sectarian agendas. In this sense, there is a severe problem with the received wisdom of scholars and political theorists. Kolakowski's article discussed in the first section makes an interesting conclusion. For Kolakowski, humanity has to come to terms with two kinds of mentality, both skeptical and utopian. Too much stress on utopian ideals puts humanity on the verge of catastrophe and unquestioned authority leads to perilous stagnation. This sounds like an inevitable paradox. While siding with either utopia or anti-utopia, we have to come to terms with what can be and what cannot be overcome by human will. Utopia was not just something one thought or dreamed about, it was where you had to live. It is also where one is supposed to die too. This would mean that we only switch from one created utopia to another – keeping in mind the above argument- needlessly socialist or communist. But as long as capitalism uses the triumphalist claims, socialism does not lose its ontological status.

REFERENCES

- [1] Eduardo Mandieta, Utopia, Dystopia, Utopistics, or the End of Utopia: On Wallerstein's Critique of Historical Materialism, *Review*, 25(3), 2002, 225-243.
- [2] Ruth Kinna, Politics, Ideology and Utopia: A Defense of Eutopian Worlds, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 16(3), Oct 2011, 279-294.
- [3] Leszek Kolakowski, The Death of Utopia Reconsidered, *Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, Delivered at the Australian National University, June 22, 1982.
- [4] Michael K. Shim, Descartes and Husserl: The Philosophical Project of Radical Beginnings (Book Review), *Journal of History of Philosophy*, 38.4, October 2000, 593-595.
- [5] Hayden White, The Future of Utopia in History, *HISTORIEN*, 7, 2007, 11-19.
- [6] Roby Evan Record Jehl, The "Nightmare of History" in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, *Humanities & Social Sciences*, 9, 2013, 1-9.
- [7] Frederic Jameson, The Politics of Utopia, *New Left Review*, 25, Jan-Feb 2004, 35-54.
- [8] **Books:**
- [9] Terry Eagleton, *Why Marx Was Right* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2012).
- [10] Russell Jacoby, *Picture Imperfect: Utopian Thought for an Anti-Utopian Age* (New York: Columbia
- [11] Arthur Bradley & Paul Fletcher, eds., *The Politics to Come: Power, Modernity and the Messianic* (New York: Continuum, 2010).
- [12] Tracy Strong, *Politics Without Vision: Thinking Without Banister in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: The
- [13] Richard J. Bernstein, *Violence: Thinking Without Banisters* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013).
- [14] Willaim Morris, *News from Nowhere*, Krishna Kumar ed.,(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
- [15] Paul S. MacDonald, *Descartes and Husserl: The Philosophical Project of Radical Beginnings* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).B

- [16] Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy (London: John Murray, 1990).
- [17] Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954).
- [18] Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).
- [19] **Book Chapters:**
- [20] Louis Mumford, Utopia, the City and the Machine, in Frank E. Manuel (Ed.), *Utopia and Utopian Thoughts* (Boston: Boston University Press, 1967).
- [21] **Blogs:**
- [22] Michael Walzer, "Reclaiming Political Utopianism," *The Utopian Blog*, December 14, 2009.