

## **A Modern Utopia: The Future World State of Authority**

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H. G. Well's *A Modern Utopia* is the only utopia which has made some contribution to the Utopian thought & technique, although it is indebted to the utopias of the past. Lewis Mumford calls it "the quintessential utopia, as it is written with a free & critical gesture & with a sufficient similarity towards the more important books that come before it."

It has the strict regard for the present realities & is altogether a fine & lucid product of the imagination. *A Modern Utopia* may be distinguished from all other preceding ideal Commonwealths in many respects. First, it breaks with the Utopian tradition by refusing to describe a perfect society. H. G. Wells says that in this novel there will indeed be no perfection & there must also be friction, conflict & waste, but the waste will be enormously less than in this world. Wells's *A Modern Utopia* begins with the following words: "The Utopia of a modern dreamer must need differ in one fundamental aspect from the No-here & Utopias men planned before Darwin quickened the thought of the world. Those were all perfect & static states, a balance of happiness won for ever against the forces of unrest & disorder that inhere in things. One behold a healthy & simple generation enjoying the fruits of the earth in an atmosphere of virtue & happiness..... But the Modern Utopia must not be static but kinetic."

This aspect about Well's Utopia suggests that the imaginary state will be possible & more desirable than the world in which we live. But it will be indeed "Most distinctly impracticable by every scale that reaches only between today & tomorrow."

It may, no doubt, be an optimistic enterprise within human limitations. It has been built upon the hypothesis of the complete emancipation of a community of men from tradition, habits, legal bonds & servitude. Herein lays great regard towards human freedom.

The second aspect in which Wells's Utopia differs from national Utopias or federations of Utopias is its global size. In the modern age time has broken all frontiers & barriers created by races, religions, political divisions, languages & cultures as such a whole planet may serve the purpose of a modern Utopia. It calls for a state powerful enough to rule the world under modern conditions. It must be a world state. Hence in his *A Modern Utopia* there is a world community with a single civilization, to be discussed in all parts of it. It is a planet identical to ours. It is located somewhere beyond Sirius. Every river, lake, ocean, mountain, land, mass, animal or plant, which we see on the earth, has its equivalent in *A Modern Utopia*. Every earthly inhabitant has his counterpart in the population of this Utopian planet. The only difference between the earth & the modern utopia is that with the passage of time the utopia social organization have rapidly improved themselves & reached to a level considerably superior to ours. Yet this Utopia is not perfect, it is in a transition to perfect society. Its history is parallel

to ours, except that it had a critical turn for the better at a not too remote period. While mechanical invention & science & all that sort of thing is exactly on the same level as ours, the scale & order of things is entirely different.

Another aspect is which this Wells's Utopia is unique is the knowledge of its author of the past Utopias. In this imagining of the Utopian state, he has criticized many features of the preceding works, whereas he has incorporated many of them into his Utopian scheme of obedience to law.

In fact Wells's A Modern Utopia is authoritarian in nature. His view is that a man is not more free where there is least law & more restricted where there is most law. Besides, a general prohibition in a state may increase the sum of liberty & a general permission may diminish it. According to him, Socialism & Communism are not necessary a slavery & anarchy is not freedom. Hence, laws are the best guardians of freedom. In this spirit he introduces a vast amount of legalization into his Utopia. He attempts to clip away all those spendthrift liberties that waste liberty & thus strives to attain the maximum freedom for all. He suggests two contrasting methods of limiting liberty: prohibitions which means "thou shalt not" & command which means "thou shalt". He asserts that murders may be avoided by the loss of common liberty to kill. It is a fallacy in the supposition that people will butcher one another if all punishments for murder are abolished. From whatever Wells believes, it may be concluded that the only corrective of the cause of crime lies in punitive legislation.

This conception of Utopian freedom seems to be a narrow one. In the past Utopias, the ideal community had common beliefs, common customs, common ceremonies, common manners & common guidelines. The men of the same community dressed in the same fashion, each according to his defined grade, behaved in the same fashion, loved, worshipped, died in the same way. But Wells deprecates this common pattern, which suppresses individualities. He had no new pattern for his Utopia. He simply goes on elaborating a similar pattern by describing a ruling class which has all the characteristics of the past Utopia. The freedom of creative work is only possible for those who have private means or happen to choose the work which is useful to the state. As a matter of fact, Wells's concepts of freedom is the outcome of a compromise between Socialism & Laissez Faire Capitalism.

The people of A Modern Utopia are divided into four classes. The kinetic, the poetic, the base & the dull. The Kinetic are the active & organizing elements in the community. The active of them are managers, enterprises & administrators while the passive ones are minor officials, shop letters, farmers & the like. The poetic are the creative elements. They may be called the intellectuals. The base & the dull serve as low workers. They are the slugs of the community. The active in these classes are the criminals & habitual drunkards who are transported to various islands in the Atlantic, where they have their own community. There they practice fraud & violence to their heart's content. The same classification was outlined by Wells in his Utopia & terms given to the classes were Philarchs, people, priests, scholars, comte

names them as chiefs, people intellectulas & emotional Plato called them as guardians, warriors & workers in the republic. In the Bhagvad Gita, the society is divided into Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas & Shudras & their duties are determined by the modes of works assigned to them.

The complexity of organization in A Modern Utopia demands a more powerful & more efficient method of government than what the electoral can give. As in Plato's Republic, there is a class of guardian to perform this job; the Samurai are entrusted with the task of governing the state. They owe their place & position neither to elections nor to inheritance, but they are voluntary nobility. All the real power of Utopin state resides in the hands of the Samurai. All judges, barristers, owners of labor units, medical men, legislators, head-masters & college Principals must be Samurai. All the executive committees which play an important role in managing the affairs of the community are chosen by lot exclusively from the Samurai These people are volunteers. Any intelligent adult in a reasonably healthy & efficient codition may, after attaining the age of twenty five, become one of the Samurais. These Samurais have to play the role of universal controllers. They have a high intellectual standard of achievement.. They lead a simple life. They are under strict moral discipline & follow a minute regimentation of dress & minor details of conduct. They cannot marry out of their class. Once a year they are sent into the forests, the mountains or the waste place to shift for themselves. They go bookless & weaponless, without pen or paper or money & they come back again with a new hardness & fineness & fortification of spirit: "It is such an organization as might have been evolved at the time of the Reformation. just like the order of Jesuits to affect a dictionary of Christendom." The Samurai must be willing & able to follow the rule: "The rule aims to exclude the dull & base altogether, to discipline the impulses & emotions, to develop a moral habit & sustain a man in periods of stress & fatigue & temptation, to produce the maximum co-operation of all men of good intent, & in fact, to keep all the Samurai in a state of moral & bodily health & efficiency."

The rule consists of three parts: there is the list of things that qualify the list of things that must not be done & the list of things that must be done. Qualification is designed to weed at the duller dull & many of the base. It includes the passing of college examinations as a proof of steadiness of purpose. Among the things forbidden are tobacco, wine, alcoholic drinks narcotic drugs, meat etc. they are forbidden to engage in commerce which tends to brings about unsocial human qualities. Acting, singing & reciting are also forbidden as they tend to weaken the soul. Samurai cannot be servants. They may not bet nor play games or watch them being played. There is a rule of chastity but not of celibacy. Marriage between equals is considered Samurai's duty to the race. If a Samurai loves a woman who does not belong to the order, he must either leave the Samurai order to marry her or induce her to accept the woman's rule. These small things do no great harm bit they remove self- indulgence. The rule by which the Samurai are obliged to do certain things prescribes a simple life, though it may be Spartan. Besides, reading the Book of the Samurai for at least ten minutes every day serves "to break

down isolations of sympathy, all sorts of physical & intellectual sluggishness & the development of unsocial preoccupations."

Every year they fortify their body & spirit through living in nature for a week. Wells's *A Modern Utopia* suggests the elimination of inferior people, such as idiots, lunatics, perverse & incompetent persons, drunkards, drug-addicts, persons tainted with transmissible diseases, thieves, cheats, criminals etc. yet there will be no resort sends its exiles to islands for apart from the ocean highways & make sure that they may have no children. Women there are segregated from men by placing them in island nunneries.

The economic system, as may be perceived in *A Modern Utopia*, has been borrowed to a great extent from Austrian economist, Theodor Hertzka. His plan for a better society has been laid in his *Utopia, Freeland: A social Anticipation* (1891). It was received with great enthusiasm by the people in general. It is in fact an ideal compromise between individualism & Socialism. In the preface of his *Utopia*, he explains the synthesis he has attempted. He says : "If it is possible for the community to provide the capital for production without doing injury to either the principle of individual freedom or that of justice. if interest can be dispensed without introducing communistic control in its stead, these no longer stand any positive obstacle in the way of the free social order."

He proposes that land, capital & means of production should belong to the state & that every inhabitant should have an equal right to the common land & to the means of production provided by the state. Invalids & old people will be at the charge of the state. Wages will be offered according to the value of the work done, for example, a technician will be paid more than a laborer. Dividend will be distributed to the members after deducting a portion for repayment of capital & taxes. If an association of men wishes to devote itself to industry or agriculture, it may obtain land & capital from the state on demand. Still there will be scope for personal objects, houses & gardens as private property.

Wells presents the same features in his *Utopia*. The world state of the modern *Utopia* will be sole land-owner, with local governments' municipalities holding it feudally under the state as landlords. Since the trend in the modern thought is entirely against private property, land, natural objects & other products in this *Utopia* will be the inalienable property of the state. The state & its subordinates hold all the sources of energy available for work. The land is equally leased to individuals or companies for a period of not more than fifty years. These or their tenants produce food & exploit coal & electrical power together with the powers of wind, wave & water. They pour out these benefits by assignments, lease or acquiescence upon individual citizens. They maintain order, keep roads in order, run cheap & rapid locomotion, distribute labor, control & administer all natural productions, secure healthy births & thus care for a vigorous new generation. They maintain public health, coin money sustain standards of measurements, subsidize research & reward such commercially unprofitable undertaking as benefits the community as a whole. They also collect & distribute information.

Machinery plays an important role in the Modern Utopia. There is no harping back to the past in industry or in architecture or in the mode of living. All that machinery has to offer has accepted & humanized. The means of communication & travel are in the hands of one common administrative body. Railways are great socialized enterprises. Farms are worked by cooperative associations of tenant farmers. The absence of menial service is conspicuous & may be observed from the hospitality of an inn. which the travelers get in their first contact. Even the interior decoration of rooms has verged towards the modern style. There is a perfect cleanliness marked by an absence of squalor & confusion. All these features are significant to show how this world community is better than one of our planets. "Like Plato, H.G Wells is concerned to provide for education, discipline & maintenance of people who will be sufficiently disinterested & intelligent to keep this vast organization a group concern-no-ordinary politician or captain of industry will do."

Despite the state's ownership's & control of utopian land, Wells has some regards for private property.. He asserts that private property should be maintained because "A man without some negotiable property is a man without freedom & the extent of his property is very largely the measure of his freedom." Without any property, without food & shelter, a man has no choice but to set about getting these things. He is in servitude to his needs until he has secured property to satisfy them. With this he may obtain elaborate apparatus, try curious novelties, build houses & make gardens, establish business & make experiments at large. The object of modern utopian statesmanship is to secure a man. The freedom given by all his legitimate property, by all the values his toil or skill or foresight & courage have brought into being. Whatever he has justified made, he has a right to keep, but he will also have a right to sell & exchange. The state may limit the rights of man's property when it reaches such proportions that his freedom oppresses the freedom of others; Wells does not define in his Utopia when exploitation begins to become oppressions.

Money is considered essential in A Modern Utopia. It reserves the general attitude of the past Utopias in respect of need of money. These Utopias regarded money as the source of all evils. Wells makes an apology for it. He writes "Money, did you but use it right, is a good thing in life, a necessary thing in civilized human life, as complicated indeed for its purposes, but as natural a growth as the bones in a man's wrist & I do not see how one can imagine anything at all worthy of being called a civilization without it. It is the waste of the body social, it distributes & receives & renders growth & assimilation & movement & recovery possible. It is reconciliation of human independence with liberty."

For Utopists were bitterly against gold. Sir Thomas More puts it to undignified use, & there was no money in the Republic of Plato. Gold was a vessel of dishonor & an instrument of human baseness for the succeeding writers.

Gold is not worse than the labor credit or free demand of commodities, which betrays what inherent dross, is in man. Yet Gold is used as a standard of value because its value is

changeable. It is the productive energy that is reckoned in physical units & tends to become uniform in terms of labor power.

In A Modern Utopia work is necessity but a privileged few can afford to live without work, if they wish so: "Under the restricted Utopian scheme of inheritance, if a man inherited sufficient money to release him from the need of toil, he would be free to go where he pleases & do what he liked."

It is justified because a certain number of men at ease are good for the world. Work as a moral obligation in the duty of slaves. Yet there is no need of worry, as some are overworked & very few are under worked. A Utopian worker has a great choice of occupations. He can prefer adventure into business single handed, he may have all the freedom of enterprise; he may design a tram road or strive to perfection. Hence there is no unemployment in this Utopia. The state absorbs all surplus labor by setting on foot some permanent special works of its own. It pays the minimum wages & allows the workers to progress as the ebb & flow of labor dictates. It also absorbs the excess of labor by reducing the working day. The excessive use of machinery may tend to create surplus labor, but the careful control of the population growth prevents any major unemployment. It is, however in the interest of state to have at its disposal a pool of surplus labor which it can employ at a minimum wage in times of need. It manifests that work is regulated in a Utopia with a universal security & with the exercise of the minimum compulsions to toil.

Another unique feature of A Modern Utopia is its card indexing system. It is because this Utopia is responsible for its citizens. It has devised a scheme by which every person in the state may be promptly recognized & traced out, if missing. Through this scheme, the state is able to keep a check on all the inhabitants, who are obliged to get them registered & notify their change of address, even though a temporary one. It is an elaborate system, which concentrates to make the record of 1,500,000,000 persons. This registration notes a citizen's name, index-number, finger prints, his movements hither & thither, marriage, parentage, criminal convictions & the like. It also records the netry of the new-born & the elimination of the dead. This colossal control index is housed, as a tribute to the distinctive lucidity of the French mind, in a vast series of building at or near Paris. All the incidents of a man's life are thus recorded: "At last when then citizen died, would come the last entry of all, his age & the cause of his death & the date & place of cremation & his card would be taken out & passed on to the universal pedigree to a place of greater quiet. to the ever growing galleries of the records of the dead."

H. G. Wells does not admit that this scheme of card indexing is a caprice of his fancy, but asserts that such a record is inevitable if the modern Utopia is to be achieved.

Well's A Modern Utopia is great achievement of Utopian imagination, which works wonders at least in two respects. In a sense every Utopia is scientific, but Wells's work is highly scientific in its planning. He has analyzed the modern conditions in the first place & then

proceeded to reconstruct a new society with all the knowledge available to him. As he is a student of science & has written scientific romances, he applies science in his Utopian experiments. He knows that the modern society is complex. He, therefore, attempts to work on a great deal of social planning with the aid of applied science. A Modern Utopia is an efficient mechanical organization, which is also pronounced as a technical nightmare. Science in the Utopian fantasies of Aldous Huxley & George Orwell has gone a step further, so much so that the scientist in them has become a maniac.

A Modern Utopia has so extensive & exhaustive discussion about an ideal commonwealth, but there is very little fiction. It is conceived that a modern man, seated at a desk, is brooding over the possibilities of man's future. Gradually his image comes to life, he defines his views & his voice rises into a narrative. He throws from time to time his illustrations of a new world upon the screen. Wells's *A Modern Utopia* is a significant work as regards Utopian aesthetics. It has made a breakthrough in the Utopian technique. He combines in it his simple-minded romanticism & imagination through which he plans his Utopian fiction as an escape from the earthly oppression, with his full grasp of the realities of human society. He attempts to get the ugliness, untidiness, thriftlessness out from our daily environment. He shows in his work a civilized world, clean & orderly. As a member of the Fabian Society, he forecasts in *A Modern Utopia*, a society which is founded on the rock of sanity & philosophy, yet grounded in basic realities. It clearly demonstrates that H.G. Wells as a Utopian writer of the modern age deserves appreciation for what he has contributed to this genre.

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