UTOPIAN SUSTAINABILITY FOR CLIMATE CATASTROPHIC DEPRESSION

The book is divided into four parts with numerous subchapters and sub-titles, organized thematically and historically. Subchapter 2 of Part I “The Mythical Background: Remembering Original Equality”, Part II and Part III, as well as subchapter 9 of Part IV “Twentieth Century Consumerism and The Utopian Response” offer a long history of the ideas of Equality, Sociability, Luxury and Consumerism in literary or practical utopias from Antiquity and the Middle Ages to their flourished development in the past three centuries. The historical approach to these concepts is meant to be the basis for persuading the reader to embrace a practical utopia that reconciliates aspects of Marxism, Socialism, Buddhism\(^1\) and Environmental Policies. For instance,

The new paradigm owes to capitalism an emphasis on maximising technical efficiency, and an element of technological utopianism. In its dedication to equality and antipathy to exploitation it is indebted to socialism. But in the centrality it gives to sustainability it (…) is uniquely utopian.\(^2\)

As its subtitle suggests, the study is written within the paradigm of Marxism. “Life after consumerism” is presented as life after capitalism, even though the program does not intend to make *tabula rasa* of the old systems, but urges for radical changes that should come out of every individual, as if the ecological purpose had a spiritual component.
However, the research is valuable as such beyond the theoretical motivation of the entire book. From a historical point of view, the ideas discussed are addressed in the change and evolution of European Culture: the Gold Age, Sparta, Christian Paradi...
would serve to conceive utopia no longer as an imaginary island, but as a specific public space; second, Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner’s concept of liminality refers to the fact that utopia should no longer be approached as a perfect society, but as one that has to be continually improved; third, Ernst Bloch’s concrete utopia mediates between the common points of utopia and society within the world envisioned by Karl Marx, yet this concept would bring the necessity not only to dream, or to imagine utopias, but to build them; and finally, the concrete utopia should be what propels communities to hope and what gives them the power to change public and political life. Here, it is not clear if the author’s own program should be one way among the others of changing the actual society, or the only one available as the program addresses the entire world, not groups or communities.

The author assumes Bloch’s reconciliation of Marxism and utopianism, referring to the elimination of the following utopian connotations: ideals and the finale utopica, the relinquishment of final, abstract general scopes being often reiterated. Actually, the goal of the work is to present the inheritance of utopian genre as a viable tool for social engineering, without overtly stating this. The reason for that would be the intent to influence specific behaviours and attitudes on a large scale in order to produce desired ecological and social characteristics by knowledge control, resources control, economy control. For this reason, Gregory Claeys’s book would stand near contemporary studies that analyse or propose utopia as a methodology for social engineering such as Michael Harvey’s *Utopia in the Anthropocene: A Change Plan for a Sustainable and Equitable World* (Routledge, 2019) or Teppo Eskelinen’s edited anthology *Revival of Political Imagination: Utopia as Methodology* (Bloomsbury, 2022). Moreover, for Claeys, utopias of twenty-first century must include three qualities, as follows: equality, sociability and sustainability.¹³

To begin with, the first two ideas are specific to historical utopias as they imagine different kinds of communities. This study narrows the meaning of community to the need for belonging. Equality is a controversial problem that is discussed as a material concern, even though “Utopia remained the ghostly nostalgic memory of the imagined original equality of a lost paradise or Golden Age”¹⁴. Notably, the examples discussed underline the sense of happiness, fullness, beauty, more exactly, feelings and states of being that are believed to accompany the so-called original equality. For Gregory Claeys, equality plays the role of facilitating sociability, which is enhanced as belongingness to both a community, and a place. Equally important, sociability is a compensatory factor for the humans engaged in constructing a practical utopia, because the sense of belongingness would bring happiness and fulfilment reducing the suffering out of voluntary material restraints.

Adjacent to the main demonstration, the author tries to identify specific sources of the contemporary western ethos, namely, Immanuel Kant’s famous concept of “unsocial sociability,” meaning “a propensity to enter into society, bound together with a mutual opposition which constantly threatens to break up the society”¹⁵. In that case, the specific modern tension of being in and out of society as the society has the
family as a basis is discredited by Gregory Claeys by implying that the balance should lean towards society. Here the institution of the family is criticised because of the presupposed gathering of goods and property for the members of the family alone, there he claims that all emotional needs of the individual should be fulfilled by the society alone. In a word, being in society should exceed the importance of being in the family. In reality, he tries to suggest entering into a new social contract whose commitments should include the new values, especially, equality, sociability and sustainability.

By the same token, Luxury and Consumerism are presented as the great evils criticised by utopias from different periods and as values that caused the soon-to-come climate catastrophe. Essentially, both luxury and consumerism are forms of excess and, to some extent, forms of waste. Irrational waste is an issue, but a certain amount of excess supply is preferred in spite of the lack of it in case that the unpredictability of life demand the use of more supply. By controlling one’s supply or consumption, the result is controlling one’s capacity. However, Claeys’s demonstration implies the self-control into consuming less goods. And yet again, the history of monasticism in every form that includes practices of self-constraints presents cases of failure, not to mention that only a small part of the believers (of the community or society) ever tried to dedicate themselves to such practices or way of life. In a word, luxury and consumerism should be replaced by sustainability-driven self-constraints. Thus, the new ethos would imply austerity, ascetism, simplicity, and “a quest for being rather than having more – that is, a qualitative rather than quantitative enrichment” which is, in essence, also, what almost every spiritual doctrine claims. As a result, the ecological utopian sustainability should be a form of salvation for the planet based on a voluntary ascetism that should be compensated by the joy of being with others.

In conclusion, the task assumed “is to sketch out a new paradigm which is neither capitalist nor Marxist but defined by utopian sustainability.” However, there is a bit of contradiction with parts of the book where specific Marxist and capitalist elements are kept in the new program in an eclectic way. Above all, the book is a sincere attempt to construct a form of optimism to oppose the climate catastrophe depression can be distinguished.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


**Notes**

1. Self-constraints and voluntary simplicity towards a spiritual fulfillment implied in utopian sustainability or schematic ecotopia.
4. One of the few remarks on the pros and cons of this debate is the issue of Green parties and industries' funding of the theoretical attempts, academia, grants, media and private groups to support their green policies which would carry no bias as long as the whole economy and consumerism as such is financially supported by the contemporary biggest economic actors.
5. It has to be mentioned that the book does not take into discussion the narratives of Anthropocene that already tried to name and explain the phenomenon of Global Environmental Crises and gathered them under the idea that for the first time in history man is capable of geologically influencing the fate of the Planet, or other alternative narratives to Global Warming. From the great range of eco-narratives, only a couple are taken into account.
7. Thus, the work would inscribe itself in a category that could be called a plea for imagination, even though it is politically engaged.
8. Utopia as an answer to climate catastrophe takes into account only the humans' perspective, the agency of the planet being ignored. Thus, the continuous scientific measurement of the points that are to be changed is not discussed, even though the premises to such changes would be the actual activity of the climate that is constantly changing out of our control. As the author proposed the term of voluntary simplicity, the same term gives way to the increased ignorance of the complexity of the world we live in, including the planet, the climate or the environment.
16. As a matter of fact, when Marxist Leninism tried to eliminate religion, despite the fact that religion was one of the traditional powers in state, people rendered the party and the doctrine as the old religion with catastrophic consequences. Thus, a society whose base would be eliminated would be a society that would end up being rendered as a family and the consequences of such a scenario do not include only positive effects.