William Morris, *News from Nowhere* and the Function of Utopia

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I

News from Nowhere (1890) is a book bursting with ideas.[1] Not least, as a serious and informed contribution to the utopian tradition, it provides an accessible and engaging vantage-point from which to reflect on the character and purpose of descriptions of an ideal commonwealth. My aim here is to use Morris's text to pursue an inquiry into the functions of utopia; to ask: What are utopias for?

My ambition is to illuminate both *News from Nowhere* and the functions of utopia. However, those two targets are conceptually distinct, and readers might variously conclude that I succeed in neither direction, in both directions, in the one direction but not the other, or in the other but not the one.

II

Given the variety of ways in which the term 'utopia', and its various cognates, get used, a little clarificatory preamble might be useful. I begin with a route not taken. The function of utopia is often discussed in the critical literature of utopian studies, but much of that discussion takes place in a very particular context, namely that of worrying about how to define utopia. The discipline of utopian studies is preoccupied – some might think *overly* preoccupied – with questions of definition, and there is a familiar and controversial approach which defines utopia in terms of its function(s).

The best-known (at least, most-quoted) exemplar of that approach is the work of the Hungarian-born sociologist Karl Mannheim, who famously defines utopia in terms of its function. In *Ideologie und Utopie* (1929), utopia is said to consist in a set of 'orientations transcending reality' which are successful in passing over 'into conduct', breaking 'the bonds of the existing order', tending to 'shatter, either partially or wholly, the order of things prevailing at that time'.[2] The defining characteristic of utopia, on this account, is its capacity to produce social change. In this respect, utopia is

contrasted with ideology, which is said to stabilise rather than undermine the existing social order. Mannheim is not simply saying that one of the functions of utopia is to bring about change, he is claiming that this transformative characteristic is what makes a body of thought utopian. If a set of ideas fail to change the world, then it is not utopian, and if it does change the world, then it is (because utopia is defined by that function).

There is much that we might say about such a view, but my reason for mentioning Mannheim is simply to acknowledge the existence of a well-known approach that I will not be adopting here. My concern with function is not a definitional one. I will define utopia apart from its function, and only then ask what are the functions of utopia so defined.

Of course, functions are sometimes essential to the definition of an entity. For example, it seems plausible to think that the function of protecting a table or bar surface is an essential feature of a beer mat, whereas other functions that beer mats have, even important other functions (such as providing a portable surface for writing phone numbers on, or a means of stabilising wobbly bar tables), might not be. In what follows, I outline some important functions that utopias have, but, on this account, none of those functions are essential to being a utopia (because I am not minded to define utopia in terms of its function).

A reader committed to a functional definition of utopia might still accept much of my account. Not least, they could accept my list of functions, but go on to insist – as I do not – on one, or more, of those functions being essential to the definition of utopia. (Indeed, as will become apparent, Mannheim's world-changing purpose retains a place in my list).

III

This arrangement of matters seems clear enough, but it does generate a prior question – what do I mean by utopia? – which has to be addressed before we can get to our real subject. My definitional remarks will be brief and unfashionable: brief for reasons of focus and space, and unfashionable since I resist the expansive definitions which – partly under the influence of the German Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch, who found utopia almost everywhere he looked – are popular in the utopian studies literature.[3]

By utopia I will mean a detailed description of an ideal society which does not exist (at least, not yet). That is, I treat utopia as synonymous with what is sometimes called the 'positive utopia' or 'eutopia'; the latter term alluding to the connotation of 'good place' in the *Utopia* (1516) of Thomas More, the humanist scholar and Tudor statesman. Indeed, it should be apparent that my working definition captures both

of the meanings – 'good place' and 'no place' – playfully combined in More's original neologism.

By way of clarification – and hopefully still avoiding being *overly* preoccupied with definition – I might make four points about this usage. First, the detail here is important. Utopias, in this sense, are not merely articulations of yearning ('the expression of the desire for a better way of being' would not, on its own, be enough), but say something about particular values and the kind of social institutions and ethos that might best embody them.[4] Second, although utopias, so understood, are in some broad sense 'fictions' – in that they depict societies that do not exist – there is no suggestion here that utopias have to take a particular literary form. Utopias may, but do not have to, take the form of a sustained fictional narrative in which a visitor from the world of the author encounters a superior civilisation in some distant location (the distance here usually being either geographical or chronological). Third, the reference to an 'ideal' society is deliberately ambiguous. Utopias are not usually, despite the claims of some critics, depictions of perfection, but they do tend to have demanding conceptions of the good society (we might informally say that they 'take the ideal seriously'). That said, the definition adopted here is intended to be neutral about how utopias map onto distinctions between social arrangements which are the most desirable, the best feasible, or the best accessible, respectively (my use of these terms is elaborated below). Fourth, and finally, these preliminary remarks are mainly intended to clarify how I will be using the term utopia and its cognates, on this occasion. I am perfectly happy to allow that there are other ways – including other legitimate and illuminating ways – of using the relevant words.

IV

In what follows, I reflect on the functions of providing or promoting a detailed description of an ideal society that does not exist, descriptions of the kind that appear in the texts and tradition that More named but did not invent.[5]

According to my bare-bones list, and in no particular order, utopias typically have some of the following six functions: construction; criticism; clarification; context-revelation; consolation; and cheer. These labels are not all self-explanatory, and in what follows I will utilise examples from Morris's book to illustrate and illuminate each of these functions in turn.

V

The first of the functions of utopia is 'construction'. That is, utopias can contribute to building a new society, or, at least, to bringing about changes in the existing social and political order. (Not, *pace* Mannheim, that this transformational characteristic is

what makes a body of thought utopian, but rather that suitably defined – here without reference to function – utopias may help to change the world). I take it that they might discharge this constructive function in a variety of ways, but perhaps most often by providing targets, illuminating forms of transition, and generating relevant motivation. First, they can provide a goal or target, signposting the direction in which the world might be changed. Second, and perhaps less frequently, they say something about forms of transition, and how one might get nearer to, or even one day reach, that goal. And third, they can help motivate individuals to change the world, inspiring them to involve themselves in struggles to transform society.

The social arrangements of *News from Nowhere* are often, and not implausibly, treated as providing a goal of some kind. Morris is usually understood as describing elements of (something like) the kind of society that he would like us to move towards. Moreover, this seems a natural way of reading certain threads in the book. It was, of course, Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888) whose combination of 'serious essay' on socialism and 'slight envelope of romance' provoked Morris into writing his own utopian romance. In his *Commonweal* review, Morris criticised Bellamy's treatment of five aspects – work, technology, the state, cities and art – of the ideal society, and, in due course, he presented his own alternative account of these in *News from Nowhere*. First, Morris suggests that work would be transformed from a necessary evil into a creative and fulfilling activity, in which there is the expectation of pleasure from both engaging in self-realising activity (developing and deploying our own essential human powers) and considering the resulting product (and its usefulness to others). Second, technology would be transformed from being the master into being the servant of humankind, dealing with the small amount of necessary but repulsive labour that might still remain in a future society where the widespread adoption of handicraft – even at the cost of luxury and productivity – had followed dissatisfaction with 'a mechanical life' (pp. 153-54).[6] Third, the abstraction called a state would somehow disappear – the institutional arrangements here are only gestured at – in a commonwealth where authority was collective but thoroughly decentralised. Fourth, society would not, as sometimes thought, have eradicated the very distinction between town and country (perhaps in some pastoral uniformity), but rather mitigated the antagonism between the two – introducing something of nature into the city, and something of the vitality and intelligence of urban life into the rural environment. Lastly, this would be a world in which art would have become part of the texture of everyday life, an element of everything we make and that has a form, and not a separate and refined cultural sphere monopolised by a minority.

I do not deny that these are all elements of Morris's hopes for the future, but some caution is needed here. In particular, note that utopias can play a constructive role

without being what I will call here stipulative blueprints. By *stipulative* blueprints I mean plans which have to be realised in every detail. This point is of significance for reflection on both Morris's romance and the functions of utopia.

Utopian designs do not have to be construed as a target that you are required to hit, they can rather play the role of guiding lights, a reference point to help you steer where you want to go. To adopt an analogy used by the philosopher John Stuart Mill, in his 'Thoughts on Parliamentary Reform' (1859), we might think of an unrealisable or even demanding ideal as like the North Star, in that it can provide a useful guide to navigation even if we can or want to sail no further than Hull. For example, reflection on a more desirable but unfeasible goal might help you decide between two feasible but less desirable alternatives; maybe one of the latter would be closer to the more desirable goal than the other, or maybe one of them would cut off further progress towards that goal in a way that the other might not. We can think of the constructive purpose of *News from Nowhere* as a guiding light (a North Star) without holding that it is possible or even desirable for humankind ever to realise all of its details together.

Interestingly, in his review of *Looking Backward*, Morris remarks that it is a common mistake to think of utopias as complete and final blueprints which require only to be implemented. Both those who love, and those who hate, particular utopias, often treat their ideal descriptions as if they were 'conclusive statements of facts and rules of action' requiring only to be put into practice.[8] However, Morris recommends rather that we think of them in a more provisional way, because human progress does not admit of 'finality', and because utopian descriptions are bound to contain 'errors and fallacies' (reflecting present assumptions or missing or underestimating some factor that will turn out to be crucial).[9] There is no suggestion that he exempts his own work from these judgements.

In *News from Nowhere*, Morris also insists on the open-endedness of his account. The book sketches only 'Some Chapters' of the ideal society, and he emphasises that Nowhere has a future which is contestable and unpredictable. Many of the younger generation, for example, fear a 'work-famine', a development about which old Hammond is much more sanguine (p. 84). Whilst Henry Morsom (the Wallingford antiquary) insists that his confidence in the future is grounded in self-assurance and not knowledge; conceding that he does not know what might follow, or threaten, this epoch of rest, he nonetheless insists that 'we will meet it when it comes' (p. 155).

In this recognition of error and open-endedness, some students of utopianism have seen Morris as reflecting, and contributing to, a shift in utopian literature, occurring around the middle of the nineteenth century: a shift from what Miguel Abensour has called 'systematic' to 'heuristic' accounts of the ideal society, from

stipulative blueprints to the imaginative exploration of alternative social arrangements.[10]

The second constructive thread identified above concerns transition. Arguments about construction are not only about where we might want to end up, but also about how we might get there. There is a strangely resilient myth according to which utopias depict ends but are peculiarly silent about means; that is, that they have nothing to say about how the ideal society came about. This myth should not really survive a reading of Thomas More, since Utopia has a founding father, the somewhat shadowy figure of 'Utopus', who first conquered and then transformed its inhabitants and landscape. The Morrisian version of the myth has it that this was true of the utopian form until *News from Nowhere*.[11] In fact, what is distinctive about Morris's utopia is not the fact that it addresses issues of transition, but rather what it says about them.

Nowhere has a very specific historical, as well as a geographical and temporal, location. It was not discovered or projected but rather 'fought for', and Morris's account of that struggle is detailed, historically informed, and written with clear political intent.[12] The longest chapter of the work, entitled 'How The Change Came', draws on Morris's understanding of past events (including the Paris Commune), and his own political experiences (including of 'Bloody Sunday' and the strike wave of 1888-89). The book's protagonist, William Guest, may have simply woken up in this new world, but he quickly learns that Nowhere itself was not chanced upon but rather emerged out of a long period of class struggle, a difficult and uneven advance through demonstrations, general strike and civil war. Morris portrays this revolutionary struggle as an instrumental and educational necessity. It was the only strategy which could have overthrown the old society, and it also provided the schooling without which the new society would fail. As Hammond explains, it was 'the very conflict itself' which helped to develop the required habits of self-reliance and the 'due talent for administration' which the new society needed (p. 132).

The third constructive thread concerns motivation. Utopias not only articulate a goal, and discuss how to get there, they also often (seek to) encourage us to move towards it. The detail of utopian description seems important here. On their own, for example, an understanding of the values that socialists seek (equality and community perhaps) can seem too abstract to motivate. One also needs a sense of the kinds of institutions and ethos that would embody those values (the kind of property relations and decision-making procedures that are envisaged, for instance). In the opening paragraphs of the book, when he is still in his own world, Guest appears to gesture at this motivational need. 'Up at the League', the discussion of 'the fully-developed new society' had been predictably frustrating, and our protagonist's discontent and unhappiness are articulated in the cry: 'If I could but

see a day of it […] if I could but see it!' (p. 3). I understand Guest, here, not as requesting a detailed stipulative blueprint that he might help put into effect, but rather as hoping to renew his motivation for the struggle after the familiar frustrations and unhappiness of the socialist meeting held in the present.

Moreover, that request for renewed motivation seems to be echoed and answered in the book's closing paragraphs. In what some have seen as an allusion to More's closing distinction in *Utopia* (between the 'wish for' and the 'hope of seeing realised' the ideal commonwealth), Morris contrasts a passive and wistful 'dream' with an active and practical 'vision' of what might be (p. 182).[13] Guest articulates the hope that what he has experienced in Nowhere was no mere reverie, leaving himself and the world unchanged, but rather a premonition that might guide and motivate the striving to bring about a time of 'fellowship, and rest, and happiness' (*ibid.*). Some readers will share in that hope. They will never get to live in Nowhere, but the happiness and understanding gained by visiting it in their imagination might not have left them motivationally unaltered. As old Hammond had earlier speculated: 'I may have been talking to many people', since 'this new friend of ours' (Guest) might turn out to be an intermediary carrying 'a message from us which may bear fruit for them, and consequently for us' (p. 116).

VI

Second, utopia has a critical function. Modern readers sometimes unthinkingly conflate this with its constructive function. To see that they are conceptually distinct, it might help to imagine a pessimist, who holds that social improvement is not possible, responding to a description of the ideal society. The pessimist can, without inconsistency, allow that this description has critical purchase on what exists, without conceding the possibility of social change. Even if the flawed existing world is not open to amelioration or improvement or transformation, utopias can still allow us to see how far what we have has fallen short of the ideal which we can imagine. We can diagnose the illness, the pessimist might say, even where no cure is possible.

The critical function here typically concerns social criticism; that is, utopias help us reflect on the flaws of extant societies, usually those in which the relevant authors and readers live. We might think of utopias as helping to establish the kind of cognitive 'distance' from its object that criticism requires. Utopias often seek to shock the reader out of conflating the desirable and the familiar, by presenting us with radically different surroundings. We are like Guest, who is 'so utterly astonished' during his opening swim at Hammersmith, that for a moment he 'forgot to strike out, and went spluttering under' the water (p. 6).

It is important not to misunderstand the kind of critical distance I have in mind

here. It could be thought that utopias necessarily embody 'radical detachment', a complete break with the assumptions and patterns of thought of the world of the author (and reader).[14] This association might be encouraged by Guest's suggestion that Hammond treat him '[a]s if I were a being from another planet' (p. 47). However, it would be misleading to portray Guest (or indeed Morris) as 'radically detached', as emotionally and intellectually cut off from the object of criticism. We have travelled not to Alpha Centauri in the twenty-eighth century, but to the Thames Valley a hundred or so years after the revolutionary upheaval usually placed in 1952. In short, Guest belongs to, just as Nowhere has developed out of, 'civilisation', a term that Morris uses with ironical intent – and a nod to the French utopian socialist Charles Fourier – to indicate his own contemporary society. Indeed, the critical purchase of Nowhere seems to depend, in part, on its connections with the world of its author and readers. If we shared nothing with the inhabitants of Nowhere, it is not clear what lessons we might draw from their lives. Nowhere embodies a version of (some of) Morris's hopes; and his readers listen, in part, because, and to the extent that, they also connect with his aspirations, thinking of these future solutions as relevant to their own contemporary problems. Morris is clearly trying to disrupt smug satisfaction with contemporary society, but he does that precisely by pressing the links between the nineteenth century and this alternative world; he does not simply wish the inhabitants of the latter well, but fights for the success of what he thinks of as the shared enterprise that they are all embarked upon.[15]

Utopias typically contain both direct and indirect criticism. By direct criticism, I mean explicitly identifying a flaw in the present. By indirect criticism, I mean implicitly drawing attention to a flaw in the present by portraying a society that does not contain it. I am inclined to think that it is this latter, the implicit and indirect mode, which is more characteristic of the genre here; the utopian author presents us with a very particular kind of 'mirror to our failings'; illuminating flaws in our own non-ideal circumstances by describing an ideal society without those weaknesses. The mechanism generating the criticism here is comparison. You might never have noticed the flaw in some familiar thing until an analogue without that flaw is placed alongside it. Presented with an image of an ideal society, you are led to compare it against your own society, and find the latter lacking in some respect.

News from Nowhere contains plenty of both kinds of criticism (direct and indirect). Moreover, there seems no necessary tension here; in Morris's text, at least, the two threads are structured so as to illuminate and reinforce each other.

Examples of the indirect mode of criticism could be drawn from any of the constructive threads identified above in Morris's review of Bellamy. Take, for instance, the example of art. An attentive reader will notice that conventional contemporary

tokens of art – such as the paintings, classical music and sculpture that populate *Looking Backward* – seem to be absent from Nowhere. Instead, the beauty, elevation and pleasure that art once provided for a few, have been reabsorbed into the textures of everyday life; they are now found in the damascened clasp of the brown leather belt around Dick's waist (p. 7), the curious carvings of the oak chair that Hammond's father made (p. 47), the ornamented lead-glazed plates in the Bloomsbury dining room (p. 87), and so on. Nowhere reverses the nineteenth-century pattern in which 'there was so little art and so much talk about it' (p. 88). Indeed, art is so ubiquitous in Nowhere, a part of everything which its inhabitants have given form, that, Hammond explains, they no longer have a separate word for it (p. 115).

Examples of the direct mode of criticism are also easily found in *News from Nowhere*. Guest is frequently driven to comment explicitly on negative features of the nineteenth century. These unmediated swipes at 'civilisation' include his reflection on the architectural achievement of his own world, which is said to have combined 'ugly and pretentious' (p. 35) villas for the better off, with slums for the poor where in a 'wretched apology for a house' men and women lived – a memorable image this – 'packed amongst the filth like pilchards in a cask' (p. 57). Similarly, we might consider old Hammond's discussion of the quality of wares on the world-market of the nineteenth century, a discussion which prefigures Morris's brilliant late essay on 'Makeshift' (1894). The critical claim here is that, whilst the nineteenth-century machines that made the relevant wares were undoubtedly wonders of 'invention, skill, and patience', their output consisted of 'measureless quantities of worthless make-shifts', which were 'made to sell and not to use' (pp. 82-83).

The social criticism that I have focused on does not exhaust the critical dimension of Morris's utopian romance. These other critical threads include: political criticism of other socialists (primarily state socialists and anarchists); some self-criticism (including self-deprecating allusions to the shortness of his own temper); some jibes at contemporary literature (for failing to address contemporary life); and so on. In addition, *News from Nowhere* might be said to prefigure the sub-genre which modern utopists (following Tom Moylan) call 'critical utopia'. (I say 'prefigure', since this sub-genre is classically located during the 1970s revival of literary utopia in the hands of Ursula Le Guin, Marge Piercy and others). Its precise features are sometimes a little loosely drawn, but the critical utopia seems to involve: a rejection of literal 'blueprints'; a focus on the social conflict between the original world and the utopian society opposed to it; and the presentation of the utopia itself as imperfect, subject to difficulties, liable to change.[16]

I have already alluded to some of the adumbrations here. For instance, I have suggested that we should not think of Nowhere as a stipulative blueprint, stressed its

(transitional and other) connections with Morris's present, and noted some of the uncertainty and open-endedness which marks its future (such as the contested worry about a looming work-famine, which, to be clear, involves the fear of losing a pleasure).

Nowhere is also marked by other kinds of imperfection; some which might be viewed as universal (flaws in all known societies), and some as non-universal (distinctive flaws of Nowhere). An example of universal imperfection – the unreasonableness of 'love' – is considered below (in an adjacent context). As an example of a non-universal imperfection consider the failure of the inhabitants of Nowhere to share Morris's own deep and abiding love for books (their design and physicality as well as their contents).[17] Morris tells us that they are 'not great readers' (p. 121), that they do not encourage early bookishness (p. 27), and indeed that they are apt to tease those who write creatively (p. 19). These attitudes might seem in tension with Morris's own conviction that creative writing – and I might add the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake – is one of the occupations '*necessary* for a happy community'.[18] The suggestion here is that this slight shortfall in one of the ingredients of human happiness should be taken, not as reflecting any change in his perfectionist commitments, but rather as embodying Morris's historical and critical sensitivities. He would have us understand, not endorse, Ellen's impassioned reaction (a 'storm of eloquence') against her grandfather's literary enthusiasms, expressed in her insistence that it is not 'books' but rather 'the world we live in' that interests 'us' (p. 129). I would expect Morris himself to be suspicious of this simplistic and problematic contrast between books and the real world, and suggest we understand Ellen's 'scepticism' about books as embodying, not the author's own preferences, but rather the understandable ways in which the inhabitants of Nowhere have come to terms with their own history. This scepticism embodies what Robert the weaver, in a related context, pertinently refers to as 'a kind of revenge' for the stupidity of the nineteenth century; an over-reaction, we might say, to the ways in which the latter had despised hand work and disproportionately rewarded head work (p. 19).

VII

So utopias function to change and to criticise the existing world. A third function of utopia is to clarify, to elucidate or illuminate something. In this mode, we might think of utopias as a kind of thought experiment, as imaginative devices which help us understand something better.[19]

Thought experiments are not, of course, uncontroversial; there are concerns, for example, about their dependence on intuitions, and about their relation to more formal kinds of argumentation. But they are widely used (not only in the philosophy

of mind and philosophy of value, but also in the natural sciences).[20] Thought experiments can be used negatively to undermine some view (for example, by showing how it conflicts with other beliefs we hold), or positively to support some view (for example, by clarifying some advantage that it might have), or heuristically (for example, to illustrate what precisely a claim involves, or to elicit new or refined intuitions).

The suggestion here is that utopias often function as a type of thought experiment which can help us understand something better. I take it that they typically clarify the character, advantages and disadvantages of particular social arrangements. More precisely, they ask us to think about values, and about the kinds of institutions and ethos that might embody those values. In this way they can address questions about the desirability, feasibility and accessibility of particular social arrangements. What if, they ask, a community were organised in the following way … where the 'following way' varies according to the author and the text concerned.

That variety makes it difficult to generalise about the strengths and weaknesses of utopian thought experiments. However, I venture two suggestions here; concerning possible failings and possible advantages of utopian thought experiments, respectively. In both cases, it is important to remember that I am concerned, for the moment, only with the clarificatory role that utopias might have.

A potential failing of utopian thought experiments, in this context, is that they are not always good at isolating variables. That is, utopias typically raise many issues in combination, introducing lots of different innovations together. Yet isolating concerns is often crucial to clarificatory success. For example, utopias do not always make it easy to understand what underlines the evaluative judgement that they elucidate. A reader might find Nowhere attractive, but be unclear about the source of that judgement. Is it the quality of social relations, the distributive arrangements, their emotional involvement in the romance, the familiarity of the English countryside, that the sun always seems to be shining, or something else, that is doing the relevant work? In short, the clarificatory function of utopias is not always helped by their raising so many issues together. This would seem to be a characteristic, rather than a necessary, failing of utopias, considered as thought experiments.[21]

A potential strength of utopian thought experiments, in this context, is that they are often good at interrogating and challenging our brute intuitions. The role of intuitions here is complex and contested, but most of those who allow that they are important would insist that the relevant intuitions are not those we might call brute intuitions (embodying our immediate judgement), but rather their refined and improved counterparts, what we might call our considered intuitions (our reflective judgements). The suggestion here is that utopias are often effective at challenging and

questioning our brute intuitions; not least, as suggested earlier, good at shocking us out of confusing the desirable with the familiar. For example, it is clear that Nowhere as a whole, notwithstanding the kindnesses of its population, is a challenge to Guest's 'wonted ways of looking at life' (p. 116). For example, his conventional thoughts about punishment – not least, that the sanctity of life might be at risk from 'the absence of gallows and prison' in Nowhere (p. 144) – are challenged, not only by Hammond's arguments but also by his experience of the aftermath of the death by violence near Maple-Durham.

I want to address here an additional worry about utopian thought experiments. It might be thought that in failing to respect feasibility constraints, the results that utopian thought experiments generate are of little practical use (and that practical results are what we are interested in here). I have already sought to cast doubt on the entailment claim here, in suggesting that non-feasible goals might still guide us. Here, I want to add that it is a mistake to assume that utopias necessarily fail to respect feasibility constraints.

Utopia is sometimes identified with a denial of feasibility constraints, but that is not a feature of my usage here. I have referred to the ideal commonwealth, but insisted that I was neutral about just how 'ideal' utopia has to be. In particular, it seems helpful to distinguish between the desirability of social arrangements (that is, whether they are normatively preferable); the feasibility of social arrangements (that is, whether they are compatible with, say, what is known about social design and human nature); and the accessibility of social arrangements (that is, whether they are reachable by us from where we are currently situated).[22] Notice that these categories might not overlap with one another. In particular, the most desirable social arrangements might not overlap with the best feasible social arrangements, and the best feasible social arrangements might not overlap with the best social arrangements that we can get to from where we are currently situated. Utopian social arrangements, on the account offered here, might be concerned with inquiring into the most desirable, the best feasible, or the best accessible, arrangements (or indeed some combination or subset of these).

News from Nowhere can be seen, in part, as a complex thought experiment seeking to think through some aspects of the desirability and feasibility of Morris's account of a communist society. This is not the place to attempt a detailed account of the latter, but its central commitments are to equality (ideal arrangements seem to provide for a rough equality in the balance of amenity and burden in the life of each person), and community (understood crucially as caring about the needs and happiness of others in a non-instrumental way). Other significant threads include Morris's thoughtful enthusiasm for sustainability, work and art (properly understood); and his

nuanced opposition to asceticism, to luxury and to the use of machinery in 'civilisation'. All these threads are embodied in the narrative of Morris's book, and his engagement with them is often much more serious than some appearances and much commentary would suggest. Morris is no idle dreamer here, but is rather engaged in serious reflection on difficult questions of socialist design.

The chapter entitled 'On the Lack of Incentive to Labour in Communist Society' provides an obvious example of Morris attempting to think through issues of feasibility. In Nowhere productivity may be limited (not least, in conformity with Morris's conviction that free persons lead simple lives and have simple pleasures), but it is nonetheless clear that there is enough for all essential human needs to be met, and moreover that people are at liberty to take what they need when they need it. There are lots of controversial assumptions here, and lots of questions we might have about them. For example, even in a society which only produces 'the real necessaries' which support life, there will also be questions about the supply of labour (p. 80). Simply put, if people can just take what they need, why would they ever engage in production? The difficulty of this question is scarcely lessened by the fact that in Nowhere, not only do the incentives of starvation (and fear of starvation) no longer survive, but also they have not been replaced, either by centralised coercion, or a 'code of public opinion' (that does the work of coercion) (p. 50). Not unreasonably, Guest wants to know 'how you get people to work when there is no reward of labour, and especially how you get them to work strenuously?' (p. 78).

Part of the answer to Guest's question involves a denial of the assumption that these absences (of starvation, coercion and social pressure) entail that there is no reward of labour (*ibid.*). Hammond insists that most productive activity in Nowhere is pleasurable, and identifies several forms that it takes. Most work is now intrinsically pleasurable, in that Morris assumes that it involves self-realisation (the development and deployment of our essential human powers), and that self-realisation is satisfying. This kind of work needs no external incentive; the motivation here is 'pleasure in the work itself', the reward of creation which, in a brilliant and illuminating analogy, Hammond describes as '[t]he wages which God gets' (p. 79). The rewards of the remaining work look less intrinsic, but Hammond insists this productive activity is still pleasurable because, variously, it has grown into 'a pleasurable *habit*', or there is pleasure in contemplating one's contribution to the wealth of the community, or there is a certain 'honour' in having so contributed (*ibid.*). However, where there is work which remains irredeemably 'disagreeable or troublesome' to do by hand, it is either given over to 'immensely improved machinery' (recall the 'force barges' seen on the Thames), or the inhabitants of Nowhere see whether they cannot do 'without the thing produced by it' (p. 84). (Elsewhere, Morris willingly entertains the consequences

of giving up 'a great deal of what we have been used to call material progress, in order that we may be freer happier and more completely equal').[23]

The coherence or plausibility of this account of incentives is not at issue here. The point is rather that Morris is using the utopian narrative to think through issues of socialist design; in this case, clarifying his account of how one might respond to the 'motivational gap' that opens up once starvation, and fear of starvation, is eradicated. Pleasurable work is central to Morris's account of the successful functioning of the ideal commonwealth; not a nice optional extra, but a crucial step in elucidating the purported feasibility of certain threads in his vision of a communist future.

VIII

So utopias can work to construct, to criticise and to clarify. A fourth function is context-revelation; that is, they reflect their own world, telling us something about the context in which they were written. Utopias not only reveal something of the personality and values of their individual authors, but also provide a guide to the social world in which they were created and to which they are often a reaction. Utopias reflect that historical context both directly and indirectly.

Directly, utopias reflect that context by simply incorporating features of the context in which they were written. This can take the form of an explicit acknowledgement that some feature of the author's own world also appears in the ideal alternative; for example, it might be that said feature is viewed as a permanent feature of the human condition by an author whose ideal is constructed with an eye to its feasibility (hence that feature will reappear in their ideal description). More often, perhaps, this characteristic of utopia reflects the unthinking contamination of the ideal description by non-universal features of the non-ideal context in which they were written. In this case, the original context appears directly, but unwittingly, as an implicit imaginative failure to think through alternatives. In both these cases, the recovery of the historical context requires little in the way of 'inversion' (see below).

Indirectly, utopias typically reflect that context 'inversely'; that is they describe an ideal society which avoids certain features of the world of their author. In this case, in order to recover those aspects of their context, we need to reconstruct the target that they are reacting against. The ideal society is typically offered as a solution to the problematic features of the non-ideal context, and, in such circumstances, the latter can be recovered from the former. The point is illustrated, in another context, by Miriam Eliav-Feldon who has suggested various ways in which the social programmes of a group of renaissance utopias were products of contemporary conditions. For example, their recurring concern with *Sanità* – not least, the

extravagant praise for the sewage arrangements and public health mechanisms of the utopias of Thomas More, of the philosopher and statesman Francis Bacon, of the Dominican Friar and philosopher poet Tomasso Campanella, and others – reveals something important about the squalor and disease of the renaissance world.[24]

Both directly and indirectly then, utopias provide us with information about the non-ideal world in which they were written. Morris recognised the point, drawing an analogy with historical accounts which, however accurate and judicious, will always 'be our pictures of the past'; he continues, 'still more strongly may it be said of the future', where there is less data and more uncertainty, that they will be *our* pictures.[25]

In the 'direct' cases, the contemporary features are simply reproduced in the ideal description. Two examples from *News from Nowhere* can be given here. The first direct example concerns an imperfection in the existing world which Morris appears to think of as universal, and so includes in his account of Nowhere; namely, the fickleness of the human heart (the unreasonableness of 'love' mentioned earlier). When Dick says '[f]or as you know love is not a very reasonable thing, and perversity and self-will are commoner than some of our moralists think', I take him to be making a claim about the universality of an unreasonable bundle of emotions, the truth of which the author regards with sympathy (p. 31). The personal unhappiness that can result from this unreasonableness is accordingly a feature, not only of contemporary 'civilisation' (indeed, a feature of which Morris himself had some experience), but also of Nowhere (in, say, the past uncertainties of Dick and Clara's relationship as recounted by Hammond, and in the death by violence that the travellers come across near Maple-Durham). This purportedly universal imperfection is included in Nowhere precisely because Morris's ideal is constructed with one eye on its feasibility.

The second direct example is a case where we might judge that Morris includes a non-universal feature of his world unreflectively, or, in this particular case, at least not reflectively enough. It concerns Morris's attitude towards what his contemporaries would have called 'the woman question'. At times, the work strikes some modern readers as written from a rather masculine perspective. Of course, some of this 'male gaze' *might* be accounted for by the narrator's recognition that he was seeing the new world 'from the outside', and that throughout he was conscious of being 'still wrapped up in the prejudices, the anxieties, the distrust of this time of doubt and struggle' (p. 181). However, such an explanation does not appear to be available for the account of the sexual division of labour in Nowhere. Morris's vision of a fully emancipated society – whilst it may have got rid of economic exploitation and marital oppression – seems to have left some fairly conventional social roles for women. The best carver amongst the 'obstinate refusers' may be a woman, but for every Philippa there can seem to be at least half-a-dozen happy and well-knit young women taking pleasure

in serving food or in sweeping a floor. Morris seems aware that his account might attract controversy; for example, Guest addresses the issue directly, and, referring to these housekeeping roles, asks old Hammond 'that seems a little like reaction, doesn't it?' (p. 51). Yet Hammond's response will not convince all modern readers; he suggests that in circumstances of genuine equality and independence 'women do what they can do best, and what they like best', and, moreover, that housekeeping is no longer considered 'unimportant' or 'not deserving of respect' (pp. 51-52). Not all modern readers will be persuaded. At the very least, it seems plausible to think that this particular gendered division of labour constitutes a point at which Morris has allowed contamination of his ideal by some contestable assumptions from his own contemporary circumstances.

In the 'indirect' cases, the features of the contemporary world can be recovered by inversion. (There is no suggestion that this is always the only way of recovering knowledge of that context, merely that it can be so recovered). Again, I provide two examples.

The first indirect example concerns costume. Generalising a little, we can say that the clothes in Nowhere are typically practical, classless, simple, well-made, often brightly coloured and sometimes highly decorated. Loose kirtles and flowing gowns, we might note, enable women to row, to carve, and to make hay. Guest notes that 'the shape of their raiment […] was both beautiful and reasonable – veiling the form, without either muffling or caricaturing it' (p. 120). (Interestingly, this wording is directly echoed in *Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome* (1893), where Morris notes that bad costume 'either muffles up or caricatures the body, whereas good costume at once veils and indicates it').[26] Invert the picture and you have something of Morris's account of nineteenth-century costume. The absurdity of top hats, on the one hand, and rags held together by dirt, on the other; the overall picture dominated by drab black-browns, and with women in particular 'bundled up with millinery' and 'upholstered like arm-chairs' (p. 13).

The second indirect example concerns architecture. Generalising is perhaps a little harder here, there being so much variation between the size, locality, function and so on, of buildings. However, we might say that the built environment in Nowhere is typically clean in both senses (that is, not dirty, and possessed of simple lines), distinctive (larger buildings embracing the best of the Gothic with the 'Saracenic and Byzantine' without however 'copying' any one of them), often delicately ornamented but unpretentious, spacious (plenty of 'elbow room' inside) and solidly constructed of stone and other appropriate local materials (houses sometimes of brick, but also timber and plaster). Again, invert the picture and you have something like Morris's account of the architecture of present-day 'civilisation' (not, to be clear, that of an

earlier period when beautiful buildings were typically the norm). In 'civilisation', buildings tended to be both dirty and ugly, derivative in design, often vulgar (especially in wealthier properties), of cramped proportions (especially in poorer properties), and ill-built (constructed of poor quality and unsympathetic materials). In Nowhere, Dick explains, that some of these older ugly buildings are kept, not only 'as a kind of foil to the beautiful ones we build now' (p. 28), but also as a historical record 'of what our forefathers thought a handsome building' (p. 44).

It would be a mistake to think of these two examples as trivial. Dress and architecture are emblematic of the society which produces them; part of the texture of everyday life in which 'art' now consists. Moreover, for Morris, it is an important feature of the ideal society that its inhabitants have learnt 'to take pleasure in the details of life'.[27]

IX

So utopias function to change, to criticise, to clarify and to reflect historical context. A fifth function of utopia is to console – that is, to offer comfort at a time of difficulty. This function typically concerns the impact of utopia on the prospective reader, and more especially the solace that it might offer them. I suspect that, of all the functions discussed here, consolation is the one that will generate the most suspicion. Consolation has many associations, and not all of them are viewed positively. Two forms of consolation are closely associated with utopia; I will call them 'escapism' and 'hope', respectively.

By 'escapism' I have in mind the phenomena of focusing on something pleasant or enjoyable as a diversion from the harsh realities of the existing world. We might think of utopias as, in part, a repository for our desires, and in particular our ideas about how we would like the world to be. So understood, visiting that world in our imagination provides a diversion or a vicarious gratification. By focusing our attention on something pleasant or enjoyable we escape, at least for a while, the difficulties and failings both of our own lives and of the society in which we live.

Talk of 'escapism' often generates a hostile response. Critics emphasise the 'inadequacy' of the consolation offered here; after all they suggest, when we return, as we eventually must, from our speculative thoughts, the harshness of our lives and of the world are left unchanged by our dreaming. This might seem a tendentious characterisation; after all, a life and world with consolation (even inadequate and short-lived consolation) looks different to a life and world without. Of course, it might be that the real worry here is that if we are consoled we might not be so inclined to criticise and construct. However, the potential to console does not necessarily 'crowd out' the other functions of utopia. Indeed, we might think that solace can stand in a

fruitful relationship to construction, criticism, clarification and so on. Exhausted by our critical and constructive activities, for example, a little escapism might form part of some merited relaxation and metaphorical recharging of batteries.

By 'hope' I have in mind the expectation of some desirable thing, or of an increased expectation of that desirable thing. So understood, I take it that hope might be more or less rational, depending on the justification for the belief that the object of one's hope could obtain. In this form, consolation would also, and perhaps more obviously, appear to stand in a potentially fruitful relationship with, some of, the other functions of utopia. Hope typically provides, not a temporary distraction from the readers' travails and difficulties, but an injection of meaning and understanding into them (potentially justifying, or further justifying, the relevant expectation).

In short, utopias can offer consolation to their readers, and they often do this in two rather different ways. They can not only provide escape from, but also introduce hope into, our own flawed contemporary lives and world.

In turning to consider Morris, I want to suggest that *News from Nowhere* can be considered as both a product and a source of escapism. That Morris's utopian romance is a source of escape seems clear enough. To show Hammond that he understands the way in which the inhabitants of Nowhere live in the present, Guest ventures an analogy with childhood, suggesting that he had perhaps once felt like that himself 'when I was a happy child on a sunny holiday, and had everything I could think of' (p. 117). Hammond is not offended by the implication that Nowhere might embody a 'second childhood of the world', and tells Guest that '[y]ou will find it a happy world to live in' (more ominously, he continues, 'you will be happy there – for a while') (*ibid.*). His words also apply to some – although, of course, not all – of the audience. Morris's daughter, May, suggested that some readers – perhaps those sceptical of the economic and political arrangements of Nowhere – might prefer 'to skip all the explanations of old Hammond and read the tale as a romance, full of the joy of life, full of fun, with sly digs at the author's self, and gibes at some of the falsities of modern life'.[28] And Morris's narrative certainly includes numerous episodes in which the reader is invited to escape from the trials of their own world, and share in the ordinary daily pleasures of Nowhere. I might admit to finding some escapist pleasure, not least in Morris's evocation of the English countryside during summer, in his enjoyment of the forms of the everyday and in his description of the familiar yet transfigured upper Thames.

That the book was also a product of escape may be less obvious. However, May Morris reminds us that the late 1880s were a difficult time (not least, politically) for her father (ending with his Hammersmith branch leaving the Socialist League). During this period, the writing which filled Morris's leisure hours – which included

News from Nowhere along with *The Glittering Plain* – constituted 'his principal solace'; creating these stories, May Morris explains, enabled her father to withdraw 'from the anxieties of the outer world'. In particular, she continues, his utopian romance was 'partly written, one must think, to keep up his courage in a time of quarrelling of Comrades', and was born out of the 'spirit of discontent and longing' described in its opening pages.[29]

Morris's book also seeks to bring hope, as well as escape, to its readers. Their experience of Nowhere parallels, to an extent, that of the work's central protagonist. We all get to visit Nowhere, and at the end of the book, we are all returned to this world. Guest himself wakes up in 'dingy Hammersmith' and realises that he has been 'dreaming a dream' (p. 181). We might well expect that, with this realisation, Guest would be plunged into despair, but surprisingly this does not happen. In the text, Morris offers two reasons why despair does not follow, both of which seem to involve claims about the knowledge (of self and society) his protagonist has gained.

The first reason concerns Guest's compatibility with the new world which he had been conscious all along of seeing 'from the outside' (*ibid.*). Consider, for example, the observation that the historical understanding of both Hammond and Ellen had throughout functioned as 'a blanket' for Guest, offering him some protection against 'the cold of this very new world', where he was otherwise 'stripped bare of every habitual thought and way of acting' (p. 89). Guest appreciates, that for all the friendship and love that he had experienced, he belongs not to Nowhere but to the present world of 'doubt and struggle' (p. 182). Ellen's last mournful look is an eloquent statement of the point; it had seemed to say 'it will not do; you cannot be of us; you belong so entirely to the unhappiness of the past that our happiness even would weary you' (p. 181).

The second reason concerns Guest's new understanding and appreciation that another way of life is possible. The experience of visiting Nowhere has persuaded him that – in Morris's doubly-gendered vocabulary – a world in which 'mastery has changed into fellowship' is not only feasible, but can also develop out of our own strivings to bring it about (*ibid.*). It is this knowledge which provides the (increased) expectation of the desirable future, which grounds, we might say, the rational hope. Again it is Ellen who articulates the point, wisely consoling Guest that he can 'now be the happier for having seen us, for having added a little hope to your struggle' (pp. 181-82).

X

So utopias function to change, to criticise, to clarify, to reflect context and to console. Sixth, and lastly, utopias cheer. By which I mean nothing more complicated than that

they entertain and amuse their readers. Of course, entertainment and amusement are not the same thing – we might be entertained by the dramatic narrative without being amused by it – but I will focus on the humour here.

The relationship between utopia and humour is at least as old as Thomas More's *Utopia*. And humour has remained a central, if perhaps understudied, thread in the utopian tradition.

That pattern of being understudied is largely repeated here. Of all the functions of utopia that I discuss, I have perhaps the least to say about cheer. However, that does not reflect my judgement of the importance of this subject matter. I am certain that humour is a hugely important part both of our lives, and of the good life. I rather regret not having more to say about its character and meaning.

What I will discuss here is the humour of *News from Nowhere*. This might raise a second worry. Having already announced that I have nothing profound to say on the topic, you might now think that I reveal myself as humourless, since I will maintain that Morris's humour here is not always successful. Of course, tastes in humour are notoriously varied – historically, culturally and personally – and, as a result, you might well discount my own judgment on this issue.

Perhaps the first point to make is that that although *News from Nowhere* contains some humour, it is not as central here as in some other utopian works. It would be hard to make sense of a 'Bowdlerised', so to speak, version of More's *Utopia* which removed all the humour; even those who don't see the latter as fundamentally a work of satire (typically attacking sixteenth-century politics and scholasticism), allow that the irony, satire and other humour of the book are an essential part of it.[30] It would be harder to make an equivalent claim about the centrality of humour to *News from Nowhere*.

That said, the amount of humour *within* the book should not be underestimated. Dick, for example, laughs: 'loud and merrily' at the idea of being paid for work (p. 9); at Bob the weaver's questioning of Guest (p. 15); at people not liking to work (p. 35); at paying for clothing (p. 119); at Guest's recognising an allusion to Dickens (p. 19); at the idea of a 'school' (p. 25); at the current use of the Houses of Parliament (p. 28); at the Old Grumbler (p. 131); at Guest's surprise that pound locks are still used (p. 146); and at Guest's reminding him of trouble and pain (p. 178). Whilst Hammond laughs: at being asked about the 'woman question' (p. 51); at Guest's seeming undervaluation of housekeeping (p. 52); at Guest's memory of education (p. 56); at being asked about the whereabouts of parliament (p. 64); at some anarchist ideas (p. 77); and at the behaviour of the reunited lovers (p. 118). Similarly Clara laughs: at Guest's worries about finery (p. 123); at several versions of the Old Grumbler's favourite refrain ('you like that, do you?') (pp. 127, 131); and at the present use of

Eton College (p. 138). And Ellen laughs: at Guest's joke (p. 157); at her own thoughts (p. 158); at Guest's attentions (p. 162); and at Guest's historical knowledge (p. 169). We might also note the variety of reasons that Guest is said to laugh, namely: sometimes to join in (pp. 15, 127); sometimes to disarm (pp. 55, 70); and sometimes simply and authentically (pp. 67, 77, 131). Or, we might also note the frequent association of laughter and work: the road menders laugh as they work (p. 41); as do the women sweeping the Hall at the Hammersmith Guest-House (p. 122); those working the force barges (p. 140); the neighbours of the 'obstinate refusers' (p. 148); the 'obstinate refusers' themselves (p. 151); and the harvest party at Kelmscott church (p. 179). This is far from a complete account but the point is hopefully made; *News from Nowhere* contains more laughter than you might remember.

In addition, the laughter here is far from irrelevant to Morris's thought. I have said humour is not essential to *News from Nowhere*, but it remains important, capturing an aspect of the 'demand for the extinction of asceticism' in its author's conception of the ideal society.[31] 'Civilisation', Morris held, would have us ashamed of our animal natures, and yet these are central to our happiness. There is no shame, he insists, in the pleasurable exercise of our energies, and the enjoyment of the rest that such exercise makes necessary; we should not feel the least degradation 'in being amorous, or merry, or hungry, or sleepy'.[32]

Notwithstanding the quantity, and import, of the laughter inside *News from Nowhere*, I do not find all the attempts at amusing the reader outside of the text to be successful. Part of the problem here is a heavy-handedness which perhaps reflects the author's lack of confidence. I offer three examples. The first concerns the repetitious treatment of the absence of payment for personal services and goods, first introduced when Guest attempts to offer a gratuity to Dick for rowing him out into the Thames. We are told variously that Dick is confused by being asked 'How much?'; that Guest worries he is offering to pay a wealthy person; that Dick is puzzled (not offended) by the coins; that Dick has heard of the custom, but that it is not used here; that Dick thinks it would be inconvenient to be paid; that Dick laughs at the very idea; that Guest doubts Dick's sanity; and so on (p. 9). The repetition here is not only unnecessary to convey the idea, it also kills the potential humour of the incident. The second example, which follows something of the same pattern, concerns the occasion when Dick steps in to prevent Henry Johnson interrogating Guest about his origins and appearance. We are told that Johnson is also known as 'Boffin'; that Boffin dresses showily; that Guest is surprised by the familiar tone of Dick's address to 'such a dignified-looking personage'; that Boffin works as a dustman; and that his nickname is shared with a Dickens character (p. 19). Whatever possibilities for humour there might have been in a gentle allusion to *Our Mutual Friend* (1865), little survives the

lengthy and repetitive explanation. The third example introduces a more political thread, but also exhibits something of the same problem. Morris's anti-parliamentarian and abstentionist comrades in the Socialist League and elsewhere were presumably amused by the uses to which the Houses of Parliament were put in Nowhere; namely, as a subsidiary market and 'a storage place for manure' (p. 28). However, we might doubt whether most readers' amusement is much increased by being reminded of this scatological joke on a further four occasions (pp. 36, 64, 99, 139).

Which is not to say that I find no humour in *News from Nowhere*. I offer two brief examples. The first is Guest's remark, dismissed by himself as scarcely a good joke, that despite not being the best rower he might 'manage to do a little more with my sculling than merely keeping the boat from drifting down stream' (p. 157). The second is an observation from the very beginning of the book, and before Guest has left the contemporary world, about the depressing political meeting that he has just attended. We are told that since the Socialist League's meeting was attended by six people, there were 'consequently' six factions of the party represented (p. 3). It seems to me that these more successful moments of humour are made more confidently, and more in passing, as well as having an element of self-deprecation.

XI

I have suggested here that utopias have six main functions. That is, that they typically work to construct, criticise, context-reflect, clarify, console and cheer. In each case, I have sought to say something about the relevant function, before elucidating and illustrating it with examples from *News from Nowhere*. In these brief concluding remarks, I will comment on the status of these six functions, and offer a final observation about Morris.

Since this list of functions is open to misunderstandings, a little final attempt at clarification might be helpful. First, we know that this is not a list of conditions for being a utopia – since utopia here is not defined by its function – but nor is it a list of functions that all utopias have. Unlike *News from Nowhere*, some utopias might only do some of these things (indeed, some might conceivably do none of them). Second, this is not a list of functions that were intended by particular utopian authors. I am happy to allow that these depictions of the ideal society might have uses that were never considered by their creators. Third, whilst I do not deny that there might be tensions between (different elaborations of) these different functions, I cannot see any necessary conflicts here. (As a possible 'tension' consider the suggestion that clarificatory ambitions require isolating variables by abstraction, whilst construction, perhaps especially in its motivational dimensions, requires a lot of overlapping detail). Fourth,

it seems likely that different people might be interested in utopias for different reasons. For instance: historians might be especially interested in the ways in which utopias reflect their author's historical context; political theorists are perhaps more likely to attend to the critical and clarificatory functions of utopian thought experiments; radicals are perhaps more likely to be attracted to their potential for changing the world; and the human beings amongst us might enjoy without embarrassment the consolation and cheer that utopias also provide. Fifth, and finally, I do not insist that this is a complete list of functions. Indeed, I am open to further suggestions for additional functions; although, for reasons that will already be apparent, I would prefer any such suggestions to begin with the letter 'c'.

I conclude with an observation about Morris. If this article reads as an account of the functions of utopia with some examples from Morris's romance tacked on, then I will have failed to convey something of importance. My ambition here was not to impose a framework on a text which is indifferent (or deeply resistant) to it, but rather to capture some of the things that Morris, as a knowledgeable and reflective utopian writer, is doing in this work. I have written elsewhere about some of his other connections with the utopian tradition.[33] Here, I have sought to suggest that it is precisely the depth and sophistication of Morris's engagement with utopianism that makes *News from Nowhere* such a good vantage-point from which to raise these questions about the function of utopia.

NOTES

1. For helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article, I would like to thank Owen Holland and Lucinda Rumsey.

2. Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, trans. by Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1954), p. 173.

3. Ernst Bloch's work resists easy summary, but his magnum opus offering a critical history of the utopian impulse is *The Principle of Hope*, trans. by Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice and Paul Knight, 3 vols (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986). Bloch's not entirely persuasive discussion of *News from Nowhere* can be found in II, pp. 613-15. For an introduction to his work, see Vincent Geoghegan, *Ernst Bloch* (London: Routledge, 1995).

4. The quoted definition is from Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 9. (Afterwards Levitas).

5. I make no great claim to originality here. For example, two and a half of the items on my list are mentioned, albeit in the context of definition, in Levitas, p. 208. My discussion might be seen as adding structure and detail to an account of individual functions which I am surely not the first to notice.

6. Parenthetical page numbers in the main text refer to my edition, in the 'Oxford World's Classics' series, of William Morris, *News from Nowhere*, ed. by David Leopold (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). (Afterwards Leopold).

7. *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, ed. by John Robson et al., 33 vols (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963-91), XIX, p. 322.

8. William Morris, *Political Writings: Contributions to 'Justice' and 'Commonweal' 1883-1890*, ed. by Nicholas Salmon (Bristol: Thoemmes, 1994), p. 420.

9. *Ibid.*

10. The distinction originates in Abensour's 1973 doctoral dissertation 'Les Formes de l'Utopie Socialistes-Communistes', parts of which appeared in a two-part article 'L'Histoire de l'utopie et le Destin de sa Critique', *Textures*, 6-7 (1973), 3-26; *Textures*, 8-9 (1974), 55-81.

11. Paul Meier, *William Morris: The Marxist Dreamer*, trans. Frank Gubb, 2 vols (Hassocks: Harvester 1978), I, p. xii.

12. Raymond Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays* (London: Verso, 1980), p. 204.

13. *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, ed. by Edward Surtz and J.H. Hexter (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963-97), IV, p. 247. (Afterwards More).

14. For the idea of 'radical detachment', see Michael Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 36. ff.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 39.

16. See Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*, ed. by Raffaella Baccolini, 2nd edn (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2014), p. 10.

17. For some sense of the latter, see William Morris, *The Ideal Book: Essays and Lectures on the Arts of the Book*, ed. by William S. Peterson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

18. Paul Meier, 'An Unpublished Lecture of William Morris', *International Review of Social History*, 16: 2 (August 1971), 217-40 (230). (Afterwards Meier).

19. On thought experiments in general, see James Robert Brown and Yiftach Fehige, 'Thought Experiments', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta (Spring 2016 edition), available online: <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/thought-experiment/>.

20. For their use in political theory, see Kimberley Brownlee and Zofia Stemplowska, 'Thought Experiments', in *Methods in Analytical Political Theory*, ed. by Adrian Blau (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

21. For possible exceptions see Joseph H. Carens, *Equality, Moral Incentives, and the Market: An Essay in Utopian Politico-Economic Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); and Barbara Goodwin, 'Fragment from the Future', *Justice by Lottery*, 2nd edn (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2005), pp. 3-28.

22. For adjacent distinctions, see Allen E. Buchanan, *Justice, Legitimacy, and Self-Determination: Moral Foundations for International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 38 fn. 44; and Eric Olin Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias* (London: Verso, 2010), pp. 20-25.

23. Meier, p. 239.

24. Miriam Eliav-Feldon, *Realistic Utopias: The Ideal Imaginary Societies of the Renaissance, 1516-1630* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), ch. 2.

25. William Morris and Ernest Belfort Bax, *Socialism: Its Growth and Outcome* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1893), p. 287.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 311.

27. *William Morris: Artist, Writer, Socialist*, ed. by May Morris, 2 vols (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1936), II, p. 459. (Afterwards *AWS*).

28. *Ibid.*, I, p. 505.

29. *Ibid.*, I, p. 503.

30. See, for instance, Edward Surtz, 'Utopia as a Work of Literary Art', in More, IV, pp. cxlvii-cliii.

31. *AWS*, II, p. 458.

32. *Ibid.*, II, p. 457.

33. See my 'Introduction' to Leopold, p. xxiii ff.