



A Modern Utopia

H.G. Wells

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In A Modern Utopia, two travelers fall into a space-warp and suddenly find themselves upon a Utopian Earth controlled by a single World Government.

A Modern Utopia Details

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From Reader Review A Modern Utopia for online ebook

Shoma Patnaik says

If this book consisted only of the last chapter and perhaps a few excerpts from the ninth, I might have enjoyed it. Unfortunately, it's an awkward, tedious mess of words and dry sociological debate with an adventure into a parallel universe thrown in accidentally amongst the discussions on eugenics and self-cleaning apartments.

Perhaps it was just my mood but right from the beginning, the book and its narrator *irritated* me. The protagonist is so pompous, you want to club him before you're past the first chapter. His grandiloquence on every subject is a chore to read through and often it is patently ridiculous. A "World State" that knows everything about you (even the places you've checked into), shipping off "undesirables" to isolated islands, deciding who gets to marry and have children and who doesn't - Wells' idea of Utopia often borders on a dystopian police state. When people are classified and graded like apples and eggs, it is impossible to be fair. Who exactly is "undesirable" and "inferior"? How long until these terms are twisted for the benefit of the powerful as they always have been throughout history?

The chapter on women in utopia fails to prove their better treatment under Wells' ideal regime. He grandly states that they are to be equal to men but Wells' idea of equality seems to begin and end at childbearing. Women, whom he considers as possessing "*weaker initiative*" and "*inferior invention and resourcefulness*" aren't fit for much else other than continual childbearing. It is also interesting that a certified philanderer like Mr. Wells (an "*inveterate womanizer*" the introduction calls him) considers female infidelity a public offence while if a woman "*does not mind*" her husband's transgressions (which after all can have such trifling consequences as "*violent perturbations of jealousy*") then "*nobody minds*". The entire chapter is so infuriatingly absurd that I had a half a mind to chuck the book into the nearest bin.

Similarly, Wells' views on racial equality while certainly ahead of his times had an artificiality to it. *Maybe* "negroes" are handsome, *maybe* there may be a few good souls among the non-white multitudes. And simply letting an "inferior" race be is not a solution. No, if such a race exists, according to Wells, it must be terminated but humanely of course. Still, he makes a few valid points and recognizes the racial cruelties in world history as well as the unreasonable arguments against racial equality that people tend to harbour.

The only thing that saved the book for me was Wells' idea of the samurai, although it wasn't perfect (Wells considers acting and singing undignified, the husbands of his female samurai have no obligation to follow the Rule while the wives of their male counterparts enjoy no such luxury and devotes an unnecessarily long rant to the vilification of women's fashion).

However, I loved his descriptions of the samurai pilgrimage (although he ignores the idiocy of going off alone into the wild without fire and a tent) and the general idea of a ruling class that has actual responsibilities and virtues instead of the indolent gentry of the time. The last chapter again was moving and vivid in its descriptions of a return to a less perfect world. Unfortunately, Wells fails to make the reader feel any desire to return to his Utopia.

Katherine (Kat) Nagel says

Updated 2015-01-07

Although I originally read this book two years ago, I wanted to re-read it before I give it away. (I often do that with books I didn't like the first time around. Sometimes my opinion changes.)

I enjoyed the book more, this time around, and I think I learned something from it. The archaic language was less of a problem, and some of Wells' attitudes made more sense to me. In particular, I was somewhat less offended by his attitude toward women than I was when I read it before.

Based on this re-reading, I've added several more Utopian books to my To Read list. I'd like to compare his imagined solutions to the problems of civilization with those of other authors from different backgrounds writing during different centuries.

Original review:

Really ambivalent about this book.

I wouldn't recommend the book to most of my friends. Well's writing style would bore most modern readers. the stilted dialog, and his very preachy attitude, are very different from the sort of modern science fiction my friends and I read and discuss.

On the other hand, this book really made me think. Well's vision of an ideal world is so different from mine! He was reacting to the things he disliked about life in 19th c. England, but some of the 'cures' he recommends for those problems would fit right in to my vision of Hell. I had fun teasing out *why* he proposed some of the stranger features of his utopia. As a result, I learned more about conditions in Victorian England than I ever did in history classes.

Dan Pollard says

This book it's not what I was expecting from Wells. The writing comes across as holier-than-thou and an excuse to put his extremist ideas of what a utopia should be on paper. I read only 40 pages but couldn't bring myself to digest anymore of his pompous, classist opinions.

Doug says

2.5 stars

As unrealistic & undesirable as Plato's Republic imo. But worth reading to get a sense of the ideas & predictions. For example, he predicts more modernized cars & public transportation systems. The Appendix in the version I read is even more convoluted and yet more interesting than the actual story.

James says

After reading a couple of chapters, I realised that I have already read this book. What stands out for me regarding this book is, at the time, like now, so many writers and readers alike were/ are fascinated by a

“Dystopian Future” the futuristic thought that the world will come to an end in doom and gloom. Amongst these thoughts are that the world must either come to an end violently in splintered city groups, zombies or technology, seeing the fall of civilisation in a melting pot of depravity. OR, you have the wonderful romantic view that the world will come to an end naturally, but, these are seldom, few and far between. It is the common thought that mankind can only end in violence, splintered factions and oddly, the common prevalent theme of ignorance, illiteracy and books are bad.

What we have here, is a “Utopian Future” NOT “Dystopian Future”, however, what is written here could easily be a future hell for many people. To have a Utopian book of bliss is an original idea, is really where all the praise ends. Wells tries to structure everything on the prevalent philosophical thought and logical rational thinking. By doing so, the book falls short of what it potentially could be. The issue with ‘Utopian Books’ is that it focuses too much on the ‘Good News Side’ and, by human rational, Good News rarely sells. Humanity is drawn by bad news, because it gives their own lives a sense of purpose, it ensures that an individual’s life is better knowing that someone else’s is worse. As such, you have two men walking through the Swiss Mountains philosophising their own world and trying to give it mean. By default the story line becomes too week to implausible to follow and ultimately a turn off in the eyes of the reader. It is a turn off to think that someone else’s life is better than their own.

Argi says

Clearly some things are dated and obviously the products of his time, but I do think he was still a bit ahead of his time. Some of his ideas merit thinking about. Also, the way the story and idea are presented is quite unique.

Margaret says

This is the most frightening utopia I've ever read. It makes me think that Aldous Huxley and George Orwell must have based their dystopias to some extent on H.G. Wells's idea of what a utopia would look like.

The book is written more as non-fiction than fiction. Mostly, Wells outlines what he thinks would make for the best possible society, which is essentially a police-state, with a thin fictional premise of two travelers getting lost in the Alps.

About halfway through the book I started highlighting the sections that were most terrifying. One passage I didn't highlight from the earlier chapters describes how, in the modern utopia, anyone who gambles, cheats, or has other desultory habits, will be placed on an island with others of his/her kind and not allowed to leave.

Here are a few of the other horrifying "utopian" ideals Wells proposes:

"Now what will be the nature of the Utopian contract of matrimony? From the first of the two points of view named above [earlier he states that men needed to be at least 26 and women 21 before getting married], that of parentage, it is obvious that one unavoidable condition will be the chastity of the wife . . . A reciprocal restraint on the part of the husband is clearly of no importance whatever" (94).

"a phase in the world's development is inevitable when a systematic world-wide attempt will be made to destroy for ever a great number of contagious and infectious diseases, and that this will involve, for a time at any rate, a stringent suppression of the free movement of familiar animals [in other words, there are no pets in a modern utopia. All cats and dogs have been killed to prevent humans from contracting diseases from them]" (110)

"Four main classes of mind were distinguished, called, respectively, the Poietic, the Kinetic, the Dull, and the Base" (130)

A group called the samurai are the ruling class, about 4% of the population. They must follow a rigid "Rule" of conduct: "You have forbidden alcohol, drugs, smoking, betting, and usury, games, trade, servants . . . They must sleep alone at least four nights in five" (143, 146)

"Women samurai who are married . . . must bear children" (146).

"Practically all political power vests in the samurai. Not only are they the only administrators, lawyers, practicing doctors, and public officials of almost all kinds, but they are the only voters" (152).

Is this the society you would want?

David says

Condition: Time = Extent (...Olympics Begin)

Olympic flame for London is lit in Greece

By: Associated Press

ANCIENT OLYMPIA, Greece (AP) — The flame that will burn during the London Games was lit at the birthplace of the ancient Olympics on Thursday, heralding the start of a torch relay that will culminate with the opening ceremony on July 27.

Actress Ino Menegaki, dressed as a high priestess, stood before the 2,600-year-old Temple of Hera, and after an invocation to Apollo, the ancient Greeks' Sun God, used a mirror to focus the sun's rays and light a torch.

The triangular torch is designed to highlight the fact that London is hosting the Olympics for the third time. It also staged the games in 1908 and 1948.

Under bright sunny skies there was no need for the backup flame that was used during the final rehearsal for the Olympic torch lighting a day earlier.

After the choreographed ceremony, the priestess handed the flame to the first torchbearer, Greek swimmer and Olympic silver medalist Spyros Gianniotis.

The 32-year-old Gianniotis, the Liverpool-born son of a Greek father and a British mother, was the first of 490 torchbearers who will carry the flame across 1,800 miles of Greek soil before the flame is handed to London organizers on May 17 in Athens.

Gianniotis then handed over the torch to 19-year-old Alex Loukos, born of a Greek father and British mother and raised in the east London borough of Newham next to the Olympic Park.

"It is an unbelievable honor to be a torchbearer ... especially carrying the flame in Olympia and representing the city of London," Loukos said. "I have grown up with London 2012 — from helping with the bid in Singapore when I was 12, to witnessing the incredible regeneration of my home in East London."

The final torchbearers for the Greek relay will be two veteran athletes: Greek weightlifter and three-time Olympic gold medalist Pyrros Dimas — who was elected a Socialist member of Parliament on Sunday — and former Chinese gymnastics champion Li Ning.

From Greece, the flame will travel to Britain for a 70-day torch relay covering another 8,000 miles across the United Kingdom. In contrast to the two previous Summer Games, where the Olympic flame relay went around the globe, it will leave the U.K. only once to pass through Ireland on June 6.

The relay will end at the Olympic Stadium during the opening ceremony with the lighting of the cauldron. The games will run through Aug. 12.

It's the second time London officials have come to Ancient Olympia for a flame lighting. London also received the flame before the 1948 Olympics.

"In 1948, shortly after the Second World War, my predecessor stood where I am today and made the first tentative steps in turning the world from war to sport," London organizing committee chief Sebastian Coe said. "We find ourselves in challenging times again and turn to sport once more to connect the world in a global celebration of achievement and inspiration."

Also attending the ceremony was International Olympic Committee President Jacques Rogge.

"With this ceremony, we begin the final countdown to a dream that came to life seven years ago in Singapore," he said, referring to the city where London beat Paris, Madrid, New York and Moscow to secure the games in 2005. "London is ready to welcome the world for the third time."

This was the final lighting ceremony Rogge will attend as IOC president. He will step down in 2013, at the end of his third four-year term.

On Wednesday, Rogge was made an honorary citizen of Ancient Olympia, in a ceremony that also marked the reopening of the museum of Ancient Olympia.

Susan says

It was not easy to stick with this, but it was worth it. Some of Wells' utopian ideas seem to be present in our world, often in some bent form not quite what HG had in mind. The way the writer got his ideas onto the

page was just so drawn-out sometimes as to make tedious reading; I guess it's just the 1905 way of putting ideas down on paper. But the ideas are wonderful, albeit hilarious at times in the convoluted way described.

One of the funniest aspects of the story was (Wells was his own protagonist) that he had a companion who was a botanist who did not seem to add anything at all to the story....hmmmm. Also, the first person he and the botanist meet up with while descending from the Swiss Alps of Utopia is a Hippy! A bonafide self-absorbed wandering malcontent disenfranchised with utopia, with long hair and wearing sandals.....LOL!

HGW was the Mac-Daddy of science fiction writing, inventing the genre because no one would believe or publish his ideas in scholarly or scientific magazines. And he was prophetic, as a few to follow would also be, like Arthur Clarke and Phillip Dick. But this book, imagining a fully-realized Utopia (on another planet of course.....Earth is too entrenched in it's NOT-Utopianess to fix), is somewhat of a departure in that it foretells a possible peaceful and sane society for humankind, with the full invention and universal use of as-yet-uninvented technologies.

"Down the mountain we shall go and down the passes, and as the valleys open the world will open, Utopia, where men and women are happy and laws are wise, and where all that is tangled and confused in human affairs has been unravelled and made right."

Shel says

Written in 1905, H.G. Wells' unusual fiction/non-fiction hybrid describes his ideal world state.

"Our business here is to be Utopian, to make vivid and credible, if we can, first this facet and then that, of an imaginary whole and happy world...It is no doubt an optimistic enterprise."

A Modern Utopia, has elements of a classic utopia (a stranger visits an ideally structured, considered society, explores, and returns home), but Wells undertakes his visit to Utopia with unapologetic, intentional philosophical discourse.

"It will be evident to the experienced reader that by omitting certain speculative and metaphysical elements and by elaborating incident, this book might have been reduced to a straightforward story. But I did not want to omit as much on this occasion. I do not see why I should always pander to the vulgar appetite for stark stories," said Wells in his introduction to the book.

Wells' Utopia is also not the classic small, isolated enclave, but rather an entire world set in alternate "space." In *A Modern Utopia*, the Utopia is the reality and the world we live in is the dream; the nightmare we remain in by inaction and feeble will (imagine that after Neo took the pill in *The Matrix* he awakened into a cleaner, smarter, more humanely ordered society instead of one at war with machines).

"Utopia, where men and women are happy and laws are wise, and where all that is tangled and confused in human affairs has been unraveled and made right."

What makes a society Utopian, in Wells' view, is similar to many other utopian authors: equality, vegetarianism, liberalism, and a more collaborative and less ego-driven society. Attaining Utopia is a collective act of will that requires individuals to care about humanity, work to structure society and see beyond their own ego-driven interests. (**Pairs well with:** *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*, 2010, in

which religious scholar Karen Armstrong makes a similar argument.)

"If we are to have any Utopia at all, we must have a clear common purpose, and a great and steadfast movement of will to override all these incurably egotistical dissidents."

Since Wells' wrote *A Modern Utopia* society seems to have made strides towards his vision including: longer life spans, reduced inequality by race and sex, a healthier, fairer system of employment, and a more connected global society.

Unique ideas in Wells' Utopia include: a class structure topped by a "samurai" level of enlightened ascetics; the allowance for group marriages of three or more persons; regular pilgrimages made by individuals into the wilderness alone to recharge and reflect; and the absence of pets (they are deemed unsanitary).

Wells uses the foil of a botanist skeptic (see the aforementioned "incurably egotistical dissidents") who follows his protagonist around Utopia and is generally dismissive. The botanist is an ego-driven character interested only in himself and his own passions.

Quotes:

"I do not like your Utopia, if there are to be no dogs," the botanist.

"They have extended the level of years far into the seventies, and age, when it some, comes swiftly and easily. The feverish hurry of our earth, the decay that begins before growth has ceased, is replaced by a ripe prolonged maturity."

"Were the will of the mass of men lit and conscious, I am firmly convinced it would now burn steadily for synthesis and peace."

"I am amazed, I have been amazed as long as I can remember, and I shall die, most certainly in a state of incredulous amazement, at this remarkable world." — a Utopian

"In all the round world of Utopia there is no meat. There used to be. But now we cannot stand the thought of slaughter-houses." — a Utopian

N.A. Ratnayake says

As much as I admire H.G. Wells, I still always find myself struggling to finish utopian novels. Despite his interesting ideas and the honorific of "classic" and "canonical", I'm afraid that I fell into the same complaints with *A Modern Utopia* as with many others: it is dry, overly-reliant on description instead of humanity, and prone to far more hastily-accepted assumptions than the bulk of the rest of the genre.

Wells does, to be fair, answer the question that is skirted in most utopias, but central to my distaste for them: If we live in a utopia, for what shall we strive?

Worth a read for the clarity of thought and excellent writing, and for its own sake as a member of canonical collection of classical science fiction. I probably will not read it again or refer back to it, however.

Florbert M says

Utopia and philosophy

3 rating is like a neutral rating. This is a difficult book to get through but it might be of great use to students in social science and philosophy to understand the strength and weakness of some of the theories. One needs to be familiar with names like plato, aristotle, th more, Aquinas, comte, rousseau, marx.. Questions about social order, women place, political practice, religion (despite its contribution to equality) and culture problems are discussed but not solved, leaving the world at the starting point as we can easily see many years after the book was written!

Kari says

I really liked it until he started talking about women and children.

Alec says

This idea of a utopia had some good aspects, but others involved very dated ways of thinking that most defiantly wouldn't work today.

Some good points were everyone getting a liveable minimum wage and help if they didn't have a job etc.

Although if that applied to you, you were discouraged from marriage and having children (possibly forbidden I can't remember). Everyone cycled everywhere or went on really cool sounding trains. Plus people had the freedom to live anywhere in the world easily. The government made sure every child in the world got a great education, were healthy, had enough to eat etc.

H. G. Wells tried quite hard to create equality although it failed a bit as he wrote this in 1903, so his idea of gender equality was women getting paid to have children and being given money throughout he year to support them so they needn't rely on a man for income. Which probably seemed like quite a good, revolutionary idea back then, but now that idea should be changed to women getting paid equally to men for work. He also suggested racial equality somewhat i.e inter racial marriage, and equality in work, education etc. Although he did suggest terminating lesser races that didn't help 'the World State' to prosper, which implied non white races.

This book wasn't so much about his journey through the utopia, but him describing all the functions of it. But I did like the little bits of the story line, especially the nature guy, and the idea that the Samurai had to spend at least a week alone in nature (I think everyone could do with that sometimes). I quite liked the botanist as well (until he was racist), and the Voice's sassy comments about how he couldn't listen to his botanist anymore.

Overall, this book wasn't what I expected it to be, the blurb was a bit misleading, and some aspects of the utopia I didn't agree with. But it still had its merits and was an ok read.

Thomas Edmund says

Part fever dream, part intellectual proposal, part inter-dimensional adventure, H.G. Wells's *Utopia* is described by an eloquent narrator arguing with his 'naysayer' botanist colleague.

Strangely unlike most such explorations, Wells does not rely overly heavily on technology, (hence the 'modern' *Utopia* I guess) instead he discusses the culture, politics and legal systems of his ideal world.

To be frank the first few chapters are straight boring aside from a few tidbits. The real meat of the discussion is how *Utopia* deals with failure. Wells proposes an almost compassionate eugenics program to best service society, although before anyone gets offended I recommend reading all the way through to the 'Samurai' or ruling class of *Utopia*, and his final chapter on Utopian races.

Despite some rough language, Wells does propose a humane and forward thinking society. I have no idea whether such a system would actually work or be accepted by the masses, but the book stands out to me as a thoughtful and a work before its time.

In concluding I must point out that there really is no enjoyable tale to accompany this discussion. Really we are reading Wells's proposed *Utopia* interspersed with a few intriguing happenings for his narrator and botanist friend. If you're looking for an exiting 1984, or *Brave New World* tale this isn't it.
