

Utopia, Equality and Liberty: The impossible ideal

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Summary

The purpose of this article is to derive the logical but unexpected consequences in terms of social justice, of the presuppositions on utopian constructions. In the conditions generally in effect in urban utopias which lay claim to a certain amount of social justice combining equality, fairness and liberty in different ways, equality is likely to interfere with liberty, even create inequalities, and liberty can adapt to inequalities, perhaps even create losses of liberty. Thus, the illusory perfection of Utopia is exposed. Analysis of the mechanisms and operating conditions of urban utopias, which have appeared recurrently especially since the Renaissance, makes it possible to show how the authors intend to ensure that urban utopias are possible, and that which is implicitly necessary for this. The criticism of the liberal utopia currently dominating a broad segment of the world, makes it possible to both illustrate and expand the previous observations, particularly with regard to their urban aspect. Is the solution to abandon utopia?

Keywords: *equality, social justice, liberalism, liberty, urban utopia.*

Introduction

Most of the many and very disparate urban utopias imagined since ancient times lay claim to a certain social justice combining equality, equity and liberty in different ways. However, the means invented for getting there establish rules of the game that are more or less restrictive and occasionally detailed to the point of being absurd with regard to the urban framework and individual behaviours. These rules are assumed to be adequate for achieving the utopian ideal but they rest, in fact, on implicit axioms concerning the individuals' characteristics and their compliance with the proposed rules and lifestyles. Thus, social injustice hides behind the mask of the utopian ideal. By demonstrating the utopian logic to expose its weaknesses, we want to show that in general, the perfection presumed is impossible. "tr.: *In the abstract of the imagination as well as in concrete realizations, utopian rhetoric's inevitable, implicit axioms are such that no utopia is in a position to achieve an ideal social justice, i.e., perfect liberty and perfect equality and/or equity.*" The imperfection of utopias in terms of social justice is undoubtedly related to their lack of philosophical thought (Paquot, 1996) but also to the absence of genuine psychological, social, and economic thought, as well as a want of serious reflection on justice, equality and liberty.

We will set aside the explicitly accepted, desired or planned imperfections of certain utopias, notably those that justify inequality in how individuals are treated on the basis of such criteria as competence or merit. According to Fourier (1829, 1953) and his disciple, Considérant (1848), social inequalities in wages and housing are planned. Six social classes are recognized, corresponding to six categories of housing. Despite segregation being rejected in favour of a certain amount of integration in the phalanstery, luxurious housing and more modest accommodations were not randomly allocated. It is even more surprising that, despite More's egalitarian design, he alluded to a slave class given lowly tasks in his *Utopia*.

Our exercise instead is to draw out the logical but unforeseen consequences in terms of social justice of the presuppositions of utopian constructions. The outcome is that in the conditions that are generally in effect in utopias, equality is *likely to interfere with liberty, even create inequalities, and liberty can tolerate inequalities, even losses of liberty.*

The terms and concepts discussed – utopia, social justice, equality, equity, liberty – deserve to be clearly defined to the full extent possible (section 1). We can condemn the utopian illusion of perfection on these semantic foundations. By analyzing the operating mechanisms and conditions of urban utopias, which appear recurrently, especially since the Renaissance, we will show how the authors intend to ensure that they are *possible*, and that which is implicitly necessary for this (section 2). The criticism of liberal utopia currently dominating a vast portion of the world, simultaneously provides us with an illustration and an extension of the previous findings, in their urban aspect in particular (section 3). Does the solution lie in renouncing utopia?

The Utopian Imagination

Utopian thought has a certain number of recurring traits and in general presents itself in the form of an urban utopia, an ideal city. It explicitly or implicitly makes reference to one conception of social justice among the many forms this concept can take.

From utopia to the ideal city

Let's immediately set aside the common, often pejorative, meaning of utopia. Utopia is not necessarily this make-believe fantasy outside of the real, the rational, and the achievable. Utopia is not only pure fiction as first presented by Voltaire's Eldorado in his novel *Candide* (1759). Utopia *can be* all that, but not only. Limiting ourselves there would greatly reduce the content and range of utopias.

To cut short the full, contradictory examination of the too numerous definitions in the literature and dictionaries, we will select the following traits. We will consider utopia as being an *a priori rational* construction of the imagination, of an *ideal* world, a *universal* human organization in the sense that it touches all aspects of life, and is intended to be applied everywhere. Utopia is located outside of experienced time and space, even if it is often historically implied and its interior space is highly organized. Its society functions according to different principles from those of the time when it is created. It is generally the result of a fundamental *criticism* of the existing society; the product of a rational search for another form of what is *possible*: a "[tr.] mental exercise on the lateral possibilities" (Ruyer, 1950, 9), close to the mental experiment of scientific theory (Bailly, Huriot, Baumont and Sallez, 1995; Baumont and Huriot, 1997), but different in that it does not submit itself to the comparisons and checks of internal and external consistency that the scientific process requires (Ruyer 1950).

The utopia is nearly always *urban*, the urban microcosm being the ideal framework for exploring the *possible options*. The city is the preferred medium of the social utopia because it can easily be considered as a society per se, which concentrates all sorts of activities and economic, social, educational, cultural, etc. interactions. Proximity is the medium for interactions, while concentration and diversity summarize the social aspect. In the utopia, socio-spatial segregation is the most visible and keenest expression of inequality and injustice.

All these aspects distinguish the utopia from myth, the fantastic, or science fiction (Wunenburger, 1979).

The word 'utopia' is inherited from the ideal world imagined by Thomas More (1516) and which he named *Utopia*. In doing so, he seems to play on the ambiguity of the term: *Utopia* is *eu-topios*, or the place of happiness; or alternatively, *ou-topios*, nowhere, therefore a place

that doesn't exist. "[tr.] Utopia doesn't exist but it is assumed to exist" (Lacroix, 1994, 70). Utopia rests on this point of view: "Let's assume...". We are exploring here the reasons that may lead us to think that this assumed place *cannot* exist.

Social justice in the plural

The reasons for the non-existence of the ideal can be found in the field of social justice. The idea is that in general, the utopian society ideal cannot achieve social justice. Utopia is, in fact, generally accompanied by more or less restrictive and more or less implicit rules that block the way to achieving the ideal, justice.

Social justice, like spatial justice, which is a major component of social justice, is judged here according to criteria of equality or equity and liberty. Although they only rarely spell out a theory on justice, utopias claim that they achieve a just society where individuals are free and where equality (or equity) is guaranteed.

Equality

Equality is often claimed but the concept of equality receives very different interpretations depending on the historical period and geo-political context (Rosanvallon, 2011). This is a dual question: equality of what and equality of whom? Equality of social conditions, equality of work conditions, equality of incomes, opportunities, rights, obligations, satisfaction, well-being or degrees of utility? When, for example, we refer to equality of incomes, is it for equal work, equal skills or in an absolute sense? Equality on the basis of a single criterion may be accompanied by the absence of other forms of equality. The principle of equality in the Declaration of the Rights of Man is equality before the law, an equality of rights. It can tolerate many other inequalities.

Equality expressed with regard to society as a whole can only be achieved in a sub-group of the society. Plato's equality, like More's, was compatible with a slave class. The egalitarian principle in 19th century America was also deemed compatible with slavery, then with racism and the resulting discrimination and spatial segregation (Rosanvallon, 2011).

Equity

With regard to equity, isn't this a particular form of equality, the equality of satisfaction, or opportunities or outcomes? Simplifying to the extreme and taking inspiration from Aristotle, we could consider that equity consists of applying the same rules to individuals with identical characteristics (horizontal equity) and different rules for different individuals (vertical equity). But the latter principle is not sufficient. Equity is only achieved if the rules are adjusted in such a way that corrects the non-egalitarian consequences of the differences in characteristics. The policy of redistribution goes in this direction. But equity, too, is multi-dimensional and although it is possible to know if a rule increases equity, it is impossible to determine the conditions in which perfect equity would be achieved because it is impossible to define perfect equity.

Liberty

Liberty is liberty of choice and action. It is also multiform and very difficult to accurately define. Let's consider that liberty is a set of effective options. Everyone has the *option* to act and to interact to achieve what he wants and to ensure equality or equity.

The analysis of the links between utopia, equality and liberty places us in an embarrassing situation. We can show that the association of the three concepts is generally impossible. Egalitarian utopia is likely to deny liberty, if not equality itself. Free utopia can limit liberty and/or result in inequality and inequity.

Utopia affirms the *possibility*, indeed, the will, to establish an ideal society, most of the time in the context of an urban microcosm. The *possible*, whether purely imaginary or intended to be tangible, necessarily assumes that there are playing rules that are consensual or imposed, more or less restrictive, more or less agreed to. The possibility of the ideal does not always go without saying. The ideal, even if imaginary, city's rules of the game still rest on axioms that are to greater or lesser degrees burdensome, simplistic, and most often implicit. Although utopias are generally the result of a rational intellectual construction (Ruyer, 1950), the reasoning is imperfect and no utopia is completely free of flaws of logic. The failure of a single axiom is enough to destroy the possibility of the sought-after ideal. More generally, it could be suggested that since the utopia proposes another *possible* world, this world is necessarily *imperfect* (Lacroix, 1994).

Utopia: Behind the mask

The rules making it possible in principle to achieve the ideal are found on two levels: the conception of the *framework for living*, and the regulation of behaviours by the *rules for living*. But all constraints engender their own limits. No objective can be achieved without a minimum of agreement on the part of the individuals involved. The agreed-upon rules are assumed to be sufficient to achieve the ideal (hypothesis of transcendental institutionalism). The consequences of these rules are paradoxical: equality is reduced to uniformity; this limits liberty and can produce inequality.

Determinism of the life framework

From Antiquity to the present, most utopias are located in a rigorously organized and planned urban framework - from the urban form to the smallest details of the housing, even the furniture - more often than not in an appalling uniformity despite the nuances Paquot (2005) introduces on this point.

Utopian architects

The conception of a rigorously and geometrically organized framework for living is the act of utopian architects. Spatial and architectural organization is highly charged with religious and cosmic symbolism but its efficiency, hierarchy and control functions quickly take the upper hand. The regular grid planned for Miletos by Hippodamos (two and one-half millennia ago), taken up again by Thomas More in particular in the city of Amaurote, the capital of Utopia (1516), could be related to the cosmic symbolism of the figure 4 and the cardinal points. But it is also the eternal harmony of the cosmos which, reflected in the geometric harmony of the space, is supposed to determine the harmony of a rigid social structure (Servier, 1991). Another simple form that has widely been used in utopias is the circle, the basis of concentric organization. Symbol of the absolute, of perfection and cosmic harmony, and the eternal

course of the stars, the circle also brings the compactness and efficiency of the concentric structure, in essence focussed on a centre. The concentric form thus incorporates the idea of hierarchy and domination. In the 18th century, visionary architect Claude-Nicolas Ledoux (1804) designed the city of Chaux based on this concentric-hierarchical principle. Chaux is a "factory-city" organized for the operation of salt works¹. The boss' house stands in the centre of the circular city, giving the boss an optimal view for overseeing the workers in the workshops distributed all around a circle, like the absolute monitoring of actions and gestures in Bentham's Panopticon.

Geometry and spatial order are at the core of the plan and city that Haussmann dreamt of and realized with the support of the Saint-Simonian Napoleon III. In Paris, spatial order took the place of the disorder inherited from the Middle Ages. The crooked, unhealthy streets gave way to the geometry of straight lines, right angles and uniform architecture.

Mathematics and simple geometry are again what governed Le Corbusier's (1925) hygienics-based, functionalist conception of urban space and the tenets of the Charter of Athens. Towers and bars are designed as machines to be inhabited. Man is the sum of the functions work, recreation, housing, and movement. Geometry and technical advancement shape the city to these functions.

In these few examples as in many other cases, the city's form is at the service of social harmony and everyone's happiness. Spatial order is assumed to determine social order, harmony and happiness. "[tr.] Utopian architecture...is the spatial projection of what the utopian would put into practice." (Wunenburger, 1979, 141).

Social utopias

This determinism is not limited to architects' utopias. "[tr.] All utopians become city planners at the same time." (Wunenburger, 1979, 140). Most social utopias deem spatial organization of primordial importance. Whether Plato, Renaissance utopias (notably More's Utopia and Campanella's City of the Sun), 19th century utopias (Owen, Fourier, Considérant, Godin, Cabet, etc.) or the ideal cities of the 20th century, the framework for living is thought out so as to determine individual happiness and social harmony. Determinism's concern about the framework for living occasionally goes well beyond the urban plan. Housing itself is subject to nit-picky planning: identical houses, not to mention identical furniture (Cabet, 1842).

Added to this strict internal organization is the idea of closure. "[tr.] Utopian perfection is thought of as completion, totality, harmony and... this requires a boundary and closure." (Lacroix, 1994, 130). In Antiquity and through the Renaissance, the ideal city is surrounded by walls and/or isolated from the rest of the world by natural barriers. Utopia is an island, like Bacon's New Atlantis (1626). Campanella surrounds his City of the Sun (1623) with seven fortified walls.

Closure also takes the form of demographic limitation. Plato's ideal city has 5,040 citizens; 6,000 families (each including 10 to 13 adults) populate each of More's 54 Utopian cities; 1,500 to 1,600 individuals form Fournier's phalanstery; each unit of LeCorbusier's Ville Radieuse houses 2,700 residents.

Later, ideological or political closure will supplant material closure, although this will not disappear altogether. "[tr.] Closure is what enables the system." (Barthes, 2002, 714).

¹ Ledoux's project was partially realized in the form of a half-disk at the salt works in Arc-et-Senans in the department of Doubs.

Thus, utopian spaces are generally characterized by a simple geometric order, more or less strict uniformity and at least until the Renaissance, isolation marked by physical boundaries.

“Social man does not define himself solely by his housing” (Lefebvre, 1961, 196). The determinism of urbanism is undoubtedly deemed inadequate by the utopian. So, he adds a set of very detailed rules for behaviour.

A controlled life

Simplistic, undifferentiated *rules for living* go along with a geometric, uniform *framework for living*. The uniformity of the rules for living assumes that there is a “standardized man” (Baumont and Huriot, 1997), a “utopically correct individual”. Each behaves honestly, virtuously and altruistically. Conflicts are nonexistent because natural harmony rules. Everyone has the same desires and the only differences allowed between individuals are those allowing harmonious complementarity and spontaneous mutual support. Use of time during the day is occasionally very specifically controlled. Work, whatever it may be, is performed joyfully and with good humour. The workday is short – 6 hours per day in More’s Utopia, 4 hours per day in Campanella’s City of the Sun – but efficiency creates abundance. All the details of routine life are controlled with a view to achieving the ideal. Even where private property continues to exist, sharing is the rule and the community often replaces the family in a number of its functions, as with Fourier. Individual behaviours and community life are imagined with great naiveté. The inhabitants of the ideal cities are “robots” (Cioran, 1960). Society is based on “[tr.] the rejection of individual values, on a mediocre ideal of life and a spiritual life limited to the size of an elementary school library.” (Servier, 1993, 9).

Consent is indispensable

“For it to be possible to change the world, a great many individuals must believe that it is possible.” (Loty, 2011).

Social utopia rests on rules for living that are simple, even simplistic. Social utopia assumes that the perfect city is inhabited by perfect individuals who are naturally suited to the prescribed rules. Everyone is supposed to follow these rules without protest. But no utopia asks the question about consent. Now, if we take as a given that the diversity of actual individuals is the opposite of the human uniformity of most utopias, we can take this consent as even more of a given.

Raising the question brings us to identifying three cases.

(i) The individuals motivated to live in the ideal city are themselves ideally constituted, utopically correct, such that they accept as natural what outside observers consider as constraints. The inhabitants of the ideal city naturally and sincerely share the objectives and principles proposed to them. In other words, they are exactly as the utopist assumes they must be for the utopia to function.

This case can be imagined but is not *possible*, particularly due to human diversity, the variety of preferences, and diverging individual interests which give rise to competition and conflicts. “[tr.] There is no single social harmony between conflicting interests of the members of the society.” (Sen, 2010, 248). However, it is that which is both assumed and not justified in most utopias; it is the key axiom of the ideal city.

(ii) The personalities, preferences, physical and intellectual abilities of utopians are not so uniform and utopically correct as the utopists would like. The utopians can nonetheless

accept the constraints imposed on them if they find sufficient benefits in the utopian life to compensate for these constraints. This is nothing more than an individual free choice determined by weighing the advantages and disadvantages. The compensating advantages may be immediate in terms of material and psychological comfort: the reassuring aspect of a harmonious society; family functions taken over by the community; a simple, frugal life; abandonment of free will to the benefit of the society which sees to satisfying needs; the ease of material and intellectual conformity, etc.

In this case, utopia is *possible* to the extent that the advantages are perceived as more significant than the constraints. In this regard, utopian literature deftly sets out as self-evident the production of material abundance and the ability to meet all one's need. This is a key component of utopian perfection and is implicitly enough of an advantage for obtaining consent.

(iii) the inhabitants of the ideal city are not utopically correct but their weighing of the advantages and disadvantages is not free; it is conditioned by persuasion or constraint that is more or less violent.

First of all, the propaganda that is orchestrated by the designers or leaders of the utopian society is what biases choices and affects consent. The rhetoric is well honed. It moves from an apologetic in support of the utopian society and/or the disparagement of all other forms of society, to promises of a glowing future, often by means of falsehoods and bad faith. In its modern form, this propaganda goes through media checks. The desire to persuade has a corollary: imagined or genuine closure, and isolation from all external counter-propaganda, the barrier making all comparison impossible. Impassable walls, barriers and borders. Then it's the control of behaviours themselves through more or less violent means, then repression and fear-mongering. The utopia then veers toward totalitarianism and its excesses. The utopia lasts for as long as fear dominates. Each individual submits to the rules, is quiet or accommodates – perhaps even collaborates with – the system to derive some advantages. The utopia lasts for as long as there is not a collective awareness of the unacceptable, inspiring revolt or revolution.

Paradoxically, many utopias muddle the axiom of the utopically correct individual with isolation and the more or less rigid control of behaviours. Above, we emphasized the closure of many of the Renaissance utopias. Control is no less present. More prohibited places of vice and recreation (like Cabet in the 19th century, 1842); in his Utopia, everyone is under everyone's surveillance; social pressure protects against all deviation. Fourier (1829) described a quasi-libertarian and hedonistic society; he advocated a community life where social harmony quite naturally stemmed from the harmony of the passions, everyone seemingly free to choose his trade and follow his passions, which were assumed to be honest, virtuous and altruistic. However, Fourier (1849, 1953) and Considérant (1848) described a "tower of order", the absolute control centre of the phalanstery. "[tr.] The Tower of Order rises from and dominates the central point of the palace. This is where the observatory, the carillon, telegraph, clock, carrier pigeons, and the night watchman are gathered; this is where the phalanx flag flutters. –The tower of Order is the centre of leadership and movement of the commune's industrial operations; it orders the manoeuvres with its wings, signals, lunettes and megaphones, like an army general placed on a high knoll" (Considérant, 1848, 65).

We are well aware of the forms of closure and propaganda, controls and repression that accompany many of the social utopias that have been realized. The totalitarian regimes of the 20th century clearly illustrate this utopian paradox.

The bias of transcendental institutionalism

Another axiom trumps everything: *the determinism of the rules*. The utopist decrees the rules for both town planning and behaviour, which together are supposed to be sufficient to produce the ideal urban society. In other words, this axiom is an extension of the “institutional transcendentalism” condemned by Sen (2010), under the condition that by “institutions” we mean not only the rules for living – North’s (1990) rules of the game – but also the conception of the framework for living, which produces the spatial dimension of the rules for living. Sen rightly shows that transcendental institutionalism is neither necessary nor sufficient for the emergence of a just – we’ll say “ideal” – society here. The utopists “[tr.] greatly exaggerate the virtue specific to the institutions”, naively considering them as causes rather than consequences (Ruyer, 1950, 77). They seek to shape man through the institutions instead of letting man shape the institutions.

A new axiom emerges in this context: that of the *unquestionable* nature of the proposed ideal. The ideal city is by nature the best possible organization, it is what is best for each individual as well as for society. It is therefore assumed that its organization cannot be improved or questioned because it is the best possible. Dispute is assumed to be impossible by nature. “[tr.] No utopia, even among those invoking/describing themselves as most imaginative, do not imagine a “temple of free contradiction”, a school open to everyone where all philosophies might be freely expounded.” (Servier, 1991, 210) That is the political version of utopian closure and it produces two consequences.

(i) Since the utopian society is the *absolute* ideal, it can only be definitive. The utopia rejects all change because any change is inconceivable, because no other possible organization exists. The utopian city is set forever, immutable and timeless.

(ii) Because no internal discussion is conceivable, the *possibility* of the ideal city necessarily assumes the *consent* of all its inhabitants. Even a libertarian utopia like Kropotkine’s (1905, see Antony, 1995, updated 2011), close to the ideas of the anarchist geographer, Elysée Reclus, who places maximum restriction all constraints (no State, no institutions), bases a totally self-managing society on individuals inclined to cooperation and mutual assistance and requires total compliance.

Uniformity, liberty and equality

The utopian rules very often lead to standardizing the framework for living and individual behaviours, and amount to the assumption that individuals are formatted, standardized and utopically correct. Whether consented to or not, the immediate consequence is an infringement on liberty. Institutional uniformity is contrary to human diversity. “[tr.] The diversity of life styles and systems is a sign of human liberty” (Gray, cited by Sen, 2010, 37, note). Uniformity unquestionably limits the liberty to affirm one’s differentness, one’s uniqueness (one’s “individualism of uniqueness”, according to Rosanvallon, 2011), infringes on liberty to choose one’s framework for living and lifestyle. Liberty is not only the ability to do what one wants to do or values, but also the freedom to choose to do it, which Sen calls “procedural liberty” (2010). Two circumstances arise then:

(i) The individual is utopically correct. He desires exactly what is imposed on him or, reversing the logic, he is forced to do that which he wants to do: so he has the liberty to carry out what he wants to, but not procedural liberty. The inhabitant of Cabet’s Icaria may like the furnishings of his apartment but he cannot choose them and neither can he change them by moving as they are the same everywhere. The Phalansterian may approve of how the community is organized but this is not the result of his choice because it is imposed on him.

(ii) The individual is not utopically correct. His ideas, convictions, tastes and desires do not match the uniform rules imposed on him. Whether or not he has consented to the utopia's rules, these two aspects of his liberty are infringed upon, as he cannot do what he wants to do. If he is consenting, this means that he has chosen to limit his liberty in favour of other genuine or illusory advantages. It's possible to assume that in this case, the greater the uniformity, the greater the number of individuals who lose their liberty.

Taking human diversity into account, each person's liberty will be more or less seriously affected depending on how close his aspirations are to that which the utopia proposes.

In that sense, uniformity is a factor of *inequality* as it makes some individuals freer than others.

More generally, the principle of equality, which infringes on liberty by imposing uniformity, can also have inegalitarian consequences (Pollman, 2009). "[tr.] The law, in its majestic equality, forbids everyone, rich and poor alike, to sleep under bridges, have sex in the streets and steal bread" wrote Anatole France (cited by Pollman, 2009, 26). To return to our initial remark on equity, the equal treatment of unequal individuals is inequitable and unjust. According to Marx, the principle of equality of the law is unjust because it reproduces the inequalities of fact. Moreover, the principle of equality also helps to legitimize them by making the individual responsible for his situation: "[tr.] By setting down the principle of equality among individuals, particularly in the form of equality of opportunities, democratic societies individualize inequality; if the game is open and everyone can compete and be classified according to merit, failure is attributable to the individual himself." (Castel, cited by Pollman, 2009, 31).

We note that inequality of opportunities is occasionally put in the same category as perfect competition, which we will analyze in depth in the following section. It is, in effect, the key to the liberal doctrine that we consider a utopia in its own right.

Liberalism's lures

Even if liberalism is not generally conceived as, or admitted to be, a utopia, it can be interpreted as such. It has most of the features and is occasionally denounced under this name, by Bourdieu for example (1998): "[tr.] Is the economic world really, as prevalent discourse would have it, a pure and perfect order, with the logic of its predictable consequences implacably unwinding...And what if neoliberalism weren't in reality but the implementation of a utopia, converted into a political program, but a utopia which, with the help of the economic theory whose name it invokes, succeeds in thinking of itself as the scientific description of reality?" (Bourdieu, 1998, 2010 version, 11).

Liberalism shares a number of traits with utopia.

In its theoretical justification, it skilfully combines the imaginary and the rational, it formulates simplistic axioms on behaviour that cannot be ignored, that result in the idea of a standardized man. The city is thought of in simple geometric shapes (Baumont and Huriot, 1997, Huriot and Bourdeau-Lepage, 2009) and those who live there have no choice but to give in to the game of the real estate markets and apply the simple rule of going with the highest bidder.

In the materialization of liberalism, we find more utopian features, specifically the preponderance of the simple principle of the free market and the barely concealed wish to convince that the system is the best, even the only one possible, especially when it shows its weaknesses.

The liberal utopia is certainly the one that has most effectively stood the test of time, in thought and practice alike; it has materialized in various more or less pure (or more or less regulated) forms. Pure liberalism, in principle, rejects all regulation and minimizes the role of the State. It supports an idea that was developed primarily starting in the 18th century and which led to the perfect market theory, where the markets' absolute freedom would produce the best possible situation.

As an economic doctrine with scientific pretences, as a concrete economic and social system, liberalism – 250 years old – also presents itself behind a mask of perfection that hides its true nature. If liberalism is thought of as perfectly egalitarian and free, it runs into inconsistencies that limit the liberty it lays claim to. If it is applied, it is necessarily inegalitarian.

The roundabout origins of liberalism

It is always problematic to establish the historic origin of an idea. We are placing it at the time when this idea settled in and spread in Europe. The symbolic starting point is certainly Mandeville's famous *Fable of the Bees* (1714), which shows that private vices (the egotism of seeking after one's own interests) produce public virtue (harmony and wealth for everyone). The fable should be put into the context of the philosophy of *natural order*, which was very in vogue at the time. This is the belief that the world – the living world in all its aspects as well as the physical environment – is subject to superior, universal and eternal natural laws. These laws rule naturally, it cannot be otherwise. The more moderate think, however, that they must be updated and their application seen to. The resulting order is world harmony, social harmony in particular. Thus, natural order must be allowed to be established, or its reign facilitated, by guaranteeing *natural liberty*, the *liberty to trade*, in particular.

Regarding liberalism, Adam Smith's ideas were vastly caricaturized, even distorted to the point of misinterpretation. It's true that *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) has the too-famous image of the invisible hand which, like a natural law, makes the interests of individuals and the collective converge. Smith also evokes individuals' natural tendency to trade and sings the praises of the freedom to trade in keeping with the complementarity of activities and the division of labour. However, Smith is far from the naïve defence of individual egotisms often attributed to him. The key is found in his *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) where he develops a concept of natural justice based on the ideal of "sympathy" between individuals. Everyone is naturally inclined to be sensitive to the happiness or suffering of others and to take this into account in his or her choices. It is not egotism but sympathy that makes it possible to achieve everyone's best interests. Liberal utopia has greatly moved away from this fairly libertarian perspective, when all is said and done.

Later, the idea of free trade inspired Walras, then the construction of the strange, modern theory of the perfect market.

The free market without freedom

The liberal utopia refers back to the perfect market theory, where buyers and sellers are all completely free to act. More specifically, the perfect market is liberty in the context of perfect competition, i.e. in a context of limited freedom. In fact, in a perfect market, the only individual freedom is to respond to the prices the market sets by adapting their supplies and demands. Liberty stops there. This utopian market functions *if and only if* the participants have no interaction among themselves. This is the "strategic isolation" of agents in perfect competition (Gabzsewicz, 1993). Everyone only interacts with an abstract body of the market

through the intermediary of price alone. All must obey the market law and not seek to obtain what he wants by any means except the market – no bartering, sharing, stealing or violence. The participants cannot short-circuit the market by negotiating advantageous bilateral trade.

To all this must be added the axiom that a person cannot demonstrate the wish to have any influence whatsoever on the market. The market is “atomic”, made up of a multitude of participants, none of which has the power on his own to have an impact on the outcome of trades. In this the individuals are equals through their absence of power and their uniform submission to the market. Otherwise, the market is imperfect and moves away from the ideal. The (natural?) desire for power and the existence of increasing returns (making a large firm more productive than a small one) make the emergence of large production units and individuals who have the ability to significantly influence the market game highly likely (Sraffa, 1926). The individuals are free but the market is freer, which becomes imperfect and inegalitarian.

Who enforces these operating rules of the perfect market? The Walrasian auctioneer, inevitably in one form or another of market control.

Thus, freedom to trade comes with the absence of all other freedom and the so-called coordinating market cannot be so unless it is itself coordinated or regulated. The liberal utopia is based on a wobbly theory requiring a limitation of freedoms. It requires an individual be reduced to his trade function and entirely subjugated to the market.

More serious still, the perfect market model is aspatial or ageographic (Krugman, 1991; Fujita and Thisse, 2003; Huriot and Bourdeau-Lepage, 2009). Worse than More’s Utopia, the “nowhere” country, is the country without any other dimension than a point, therefore, without distance, cities or villages, and without movement. Not only does it exclude this dimension but is also logically and fundamentally incompatible with all ideas of space, location, agglomeration, and movement. All spatial dimensions render the market imperfect and inegalitarian.

Why would this type of model have been so successful? In part, it’s because it is ideal from the limited perspective of Pareto efficiency unjustifiably named Pareto’s ideal. We know however that this criterion can lead to choosing an infinite number of incomparable social configurations and that it can lead to declaring the most inegalitarian situation possible as ideal, considering that the only changes it allows are those unanimously agreed upon.

Despite this flaw of theoretical justification, liberalism has been developing for two centuries and has dominated the world since the fall of the centralized socialist regimes. These last decades have seen the domination of the market, or markets, grow with the increasing economic and financial deregulation justified by dogma without a real foundation. It is the most extensive and longest lasting realization ever of a utopia. Never in its absolute form, of course, but always with the idea that it must be as close as possible.

We are seeing where this absence of regulation leads: financial, economic, and political crises. But there is also, and especially, dramatic growth in the inequalities among nations, cities and individuals.

The conjunction of this unbridled liberalism and the technical progress in transportation and communications has produced a globalization that is itself a source of disparities. This globalization is paradoxically far from being “global”, leaving many countries and many individuals behind. Being in the network or not is the question, and it’s identical to the question of counting or not; or being in a position to live decently, or not; or conversely, being subject to segregation, or not.

The free market without equality: from urban segregation to unequal globalization

The perfect market cannot function in real terms. It is egalitarian but without space and without other freedom than that of buying and selling in accordance with one's budgetary constraints. It is egalitarian in that it allows everyone access to the market. It is egalitarian if no account is taken of each person's resources. Abilities to buy and sell depend on these resources that are discreetly called "initial endowments"; this is the market value of everything an individual has before entering into trade. And are these endowments equal? The theory appears to say nothing on this point. Using sleight of hand, it could be said that the rules of perfect competition (an impossibility of any market power whatsoever) logically guarantee that the initial endowments are equal, and by the same token, so are all businesses' production levels. The perfect market would then be a strictly uniform world of powerless individuals. This position is extremely fragile as any deviation destabilizes the whole. The perfect market allows no deviation. Let's add that the deviation of a single market destroys the efficiency of the whole (Huriot and Perreur, 1970). Through this requirement of totality, the perfect market has much in common with many other utopias.

The materialization of liberalism can only be achieved through imperfect, inegalitarian markets.

In an imperfect market, the agents remain free to trade. From the moment that their abilities to affect the market vary, their powers are unequal, and therefore, so are their opportunities to profit from the system. The market becomes unequal by nature.

The principles of socio-spatial segregation

The city is a very significant illustration of the market as a creator of inequalities.

In contemporary theory of urban land (the new urban economy) or the more general theory of the formation, growth and structure of cities, land and real estate markets function according to the bid price rule, or the highest bidder. The market allocates a given urban space, whether or not it is built up, to the highest bidder. This is the rule that determines the size and structure of the city. "The highest bidder" means there are differences in ability to pay, or willingness to pay. This ability is carved out of the weighing of travel costs and housing costs. The procedure is compatible with absolute equality of resources if preferences are different and such that the allocation of urban space doesn't disgruntle anyone. But it is also compatible with differences in income, a highly likely situation. The difference in ability to pay is the key to urban structure. In a city, there are places that are more desirable than others, either for households due to the amenities, facilities and attractiveness, or for businesses because they are more productive and make higher profits possible. Through the bid price rule, the heavy competition for these places always causes them to go to those who can pay the most. This is the logic that has the best services in the city centres, next to the wealthiest households, at least in France. By the same token, certain seashore areas or mountain resorts are monopolized by the wealthiest.

So, inequalities and spatial segregation. The wealthiest live in the best locations from the perspectives of access, provision and various amenities. The headquarters of the most powerful companies occupy the mega-centres. But the process doesn't stop there. A cumulative dynamic strengthens the inequalities. The best-placed individuals have more opportunities to increase their wealth and power because they are close to these opportunities and to one another. What's more, wealth attracts wealth, as birds of a feather

flock together, and this environment's very close networks of interaction and mutual assistance (Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot, 2010). The firms occupying the most prestigious towers and most expensive business centres are displaying their power (Huriot, 2011) and increasing their opportunities for profit. Their mutual proximity facilitates their business by favouring the face-to-face contacts that are indispensable in the head office and superior services milieu (Bourdeau-Lepage and Huriot, 2005).

As for the poorest, the cumulative process is the same only in the reverse. The poorest, who are only able to live in the least accessible, least desirable places, have few opportunities to get out of their poverty. Unemployment makes them poorer, eliminates the option to live near employment opportunities, and limits the available information, therefore reinforcing unemployment and poverty. This means that poverty maintains or reinforces poverty through the market game just as wealth reinforces wealth.

The facts on inequalities and segregation

In France in recent years, it seems difficult to demonstrate an absolute impoverishment of the poorest in concrete terms. But the above cumulative mechanisms have worked marvellously for the wealthiest, considerably widening the gap between the two categories. Statistics abound on the *absolute* increase in the wealth of the richest and the *relative* pauperization of the poorest. Limiting ourselves to studying the *Rapport sur la situation des finances publiques* [tr.: report on the state of public finances] delivered to the French government in April 2010, the rich got richer much more quickly than the rest of the population. From 2004 to 2007, declared incomes of the richest 1% grew by 16%, and those of the richest 0.1% by 27%, as compared to just 9% for the most modest 90% (Pech, 2011, 34), not to mention the excluded, the unemployed and other outcasts living on a few hundred euros per month.

At the urban level, the combined effect of the market bid rule and the cumulative processes mentioned above maintain or emphasize spatial segregation, which manifests particularly through the phenomenon of housing project ghettos (produced jointly by the market and the monumental errors inspired by Le Corbusier's utopia) where hardship and isolation regularly result in revolts, and through its opposite, the wealthy neighbourhood (Ouest de Paris, Neuilly-sur-Seine), even the "gated residential enclaves", these "ghettos of the rich" expanding somewhat everywhere in the world (Paquot, 2009). The studies conducted on Paris confirm that there is a growing segregation of the rich (Préteceille, 2006). Using Sen's analysis of abilities, it is demonstrated that the "[tr.] well-being of the inhabitants of the Île de France is improving but that the social divide is growing" (Bourdeau-Lepage and Tovar, 2011).

Globalization and inequalities

Finally, the conjunction of this unbridled liberalism and technological progress in transportation and communications has produced a globalization that itself is a source of disparities, and which is paradoxically far from being global, leaving many countries and individuals behind! More than ever, to be or not to be - in the network - that is the question (Taylor 2004), as is to be or not to be taken into account, or to be or not to be in a position to live decently, or conversely, to be or not to be subject to segregation. Globalization could be deemed the last phase of the liberal utopia where, thanks to the new information technologies and financial liberalization, movement of hot money and the financial market dominate the economy.

The dominance of speculation is the extreme outcome of liberal popular ideology and it is the negation thereof. Negation because it is the absolute, Kafkaesque domination by the irrational and the very short term over the other markets as a whole, the economy as a whole, and over policy, society and each individual. It means the de facto disappearance of liberty on most markets, subjugated to the capital market and at the same time slave to the imaginations of a few credit rating agencies that are lent endless trust.

The necessary consent is definitely there, still, like the blind belief that there is no alternative. Consent from all stakeholders, from those who handle the workings of the markets and those who benefit from the market's blessings. Consent through interest, for the most part, consent but not comfort perhaps for the others. As for belief, this is provided by serious persuasive methods: You don't want liberalism? Fine, but you're going to fall back into the ravages of collectivism, or at the very least, you'll be losers. That's the major offensive of all die-hard defenders of liberalism, relayed by the media, to persuade us that there is no alternative, that it's inevitable and inescapable, on pain of catastrophe (an unnamed catastrophe, the word alone being convincing enough in liberal rhetoric). The only wrench in the works of this fine mechanism is that it's impossible to convince everyone. Because those who globalization deprives of power (poor countries, "non world-class" cities, social outcasts) are not entitled to speak. They are marginalized. And they could stay that way a long time. So, is liberal globalization inevitably destined to remain partial because it engenders its own limits by developing inequalities and marginalities?

Conclusion: The uncertain quest for an ideal

Utopia is the search for an ideal, unique, unquestionable and definitive society, projected into an urban space. The social ideal is first and foremost social justice. Utopia therefore seeks to build itself on the foundation of an ideal theory of justice, and the principles of perfect social justice. We have been able to show that no utopia can, or even wants, to perfectly respect equality (or equity) and liberty. Our reasoning is based in part on the existence of a number of forms of equality and various aspects of liberty. Equality on the basis of a particular criterion can result in inequality from other perspectives. The liberty to act in one area can interfere with the liberty to act in others. Moreover, one form of liberty may result in inequalities and conversely, equality, depending on the concept thereof, can limit liberty. We are facing a fundamental impossibility to achieve absolute justice because absolute justice doesn't exist. There is not a single principle of justice. In these conditions, should we follow Sen (2010) who moves away from the outset from the search for an ideal justice? Accordingly, must we reject all utopias? Ideal justice doesn't exist. Even if it did, knowledge of it would be neither necessary nor sufficient to act justly because we can always say: If A is more just or less just than B, without reference to an imaginary C which would be the most just possible. Sen militates for a comparative method that does without any reference to an ideal. For us, this approach means that utopia's impossible ideal justice should make us reject all utopias.

This position is itself difficult to justify for two reasons, one of which is based on criticism of what Sen proposes, and the other, despite everything, connected to a nuanced defence of the utopian imagination.

What does Sen propose as a guide to determining what is more or less fair? Some principles of justice are certainly necessary. According to Sen, they must be the result of "[tr.] an agreement arising from a reasoned debate." The debate must be as broad as possible, and on a foundation resembling that of Adam Smith's "impartial spectator", for the purpose of simultaneously avoiding all localism and all "positional points of view" (according to which

our conception of liberty depends on our position in society and our own interests). The idea of debate is the opposite of the principle of transcendental institutionalism. This debate must be supported and call on reason or reasonable indignation. On these bases, it urges justice that respects human diversity and procedural liberty, and proposes the concept of *capability*, which integrates this procedural liberty: “[tr.] An individual’s capability can be defined as liberty of well-being (that of improving one’s own well-being) and liberty of action (that of advancing all the objectives and values he wishes to promote).” (Sen, 2010, 349).

The success scored by the idea of capability is understood. What we’re concerned about is less this concept than the supposed procedure for determining the principles of justice. If we briefly examine the idea of impartial, reasoned debate, it is not hard to see in it at least two difficult-to-justify implicit axioms: (i) it is *possible* to have an impartial debate. Of course, Sen takes every precaution to guarantee this impartiality, but nothing that he proposes guarantees it absolutely except considering that impartiality absolutely exists. Sen, who is aware of this imperfection, softens his point of view, but then he removes its relevance. (ii) Debate is reasoned or reasonable. This is a questionable trust in the universality and all-powerfulness of reason.

Thus, one could think that the process of rejecting the ideal or utopia ends up coming back to another form of utopia. Sen’s process would be utopian because it rests on two implicit, simplistic axioms that lead to claiming capability as the ideal principle of justice. Rejecting transcendental institutionalism may not be enough to avoid utopia.

Finally, should utopia be rejected? Yes, unquestionably, when it is deceptive (again, it’s necessary to be aware of it) and leads to, or is liable to lead to enslavement to immutable rules or result in totalitarianism and dehumanization. No, when it is the bearer of achievable hopes. It is sometimes said that today’s utopia is tomorrow’s reality. Utopia, as the search for other *possibilities* in response to an unacceptable situation, can only be encouraged. The countless social utopias claiming liberty and equality despite their flaws, ended up producing social progress, universal suffrage, the vote for women, social security, progressive taxation, and the welfare-state (currently in danger). Utopia is not a goal in and of itself. It is a mistake to construct utopias to rigorously implement them. Utopia is only – but this is a lot – a crucible for new ideas.

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