

BA Thesis English Language and Culture, Utrecht University

# The Utopian Environment: Educating a Social Potential

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June 2014

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## Introduction

Over the past years, the cry for “citizenship education” has been gaining force (Halpin 304). While there has been a trend of quantitative assessment and reward systems in educational policy, more and more scholars from a variety of disciplines – social sciences, philosophy, humanities – have voiced the concern that current models of education disregard the social component of life and wrongly focus on cognitive skills instead. It is a fundamental debate on the aims of our contemporary education. As David Halpin argues, modern educational policies might benefit from a “utopian frame of reference” (313) since utopian narratives aim at social re-engineering of society. This perspective can be used as input for the question what the purpose of current day education is. The utopian mirror might even spark new perspectives on purpose, aim and implementation of a balance between cognitive and social skills in education.

In his book *The End of Education: Redefining the Value of School*, Neil Postman describes the value of education in a fashion similar to the mirror function of utopian narrative:

The faith is that despite some of the more debilitating teachings of culture itself, something can be done in school that will alter the lenses through which one sees the world; which is to say, that non-trivial schooling can provide a point of view from which what is can be seen clearly, what was as a living present, and what will be as filled with possibility. (x)

Postman describes the “something” that can be done in schools not unlike the mirror function of the utopian narrative. A utopian text is a thought experiment on how to live an ideal life, both individually and collectively. Utopian texts explain the new, utopian state of affairs that is not yet achieved in the world of the reader. Simultaneously, the narrative shows in what

way this state of affairs is ideal compared to the old ways of the world: the world the intended readership still finds in reality. By doing so, the reader is informed of malpractices that require change in order to reach a utopian way of life. These malpractices are similar to, if not exactly the same as what the author has identified as inhibitions to an ideal life in their own day and age. Some of these narratives prove so enticing that they outlive their author and intended contemporary readership. Of these, the canonical utopian texts of Thomas More's humanist *Utopia* (1516), Charlotte Perkins-Gilman's feminist *Herland* (1915) and William Morris's socialist *News from Nowhere* (1890) will be the focus of this paper. The utopian narrative becomes a mirror reflecting the situation as-is in reality and a utopian "not-yet" which might be achieved. The mirror of utopia schools the reader into identifying and justifying elements in need of social reform and which conditions are necessary in order to sustain a solution to those issues. These conditions are arrived at after struggling free from the old perspectives and ways of living. This struggle shows that, in order for new behaviours to be built, old ones have to be broken with. It ensures the reader of the fact that social reform is not achieved overnight and that resistance to change – even when change is for the betterment of society – is inevitable. However, by describing the utopian state of affairs as the result of the necessary struggle the possibilities within and reassurance of the utopian state of affairs can be seen. According to Halpin, the "function of the utopian imagination" (300) serves as a means to imprint on the reader the malleability of society.

This malleability leads Gorman Beauchamp to observe the interesting point that utopists adopt either a Rousseauan or Lockean paradigm, claiming that one's environment either supports innate goodness of man to shine through or reconstructs human nature so that one conforms to behavioural patterns necessary to prolong the utopian equilibrium (287). Either way, the environment is crucial. Although much scholarly work has been done on the institutions of law, economics and the role of education in utopia, very little has been written

on how educational patterns in the utopian environment enable the internal dynamics of those institutions. Which values and beliefs do the utopian inhabitants internalise so they can function in their ideal society?

The overlap between the function of the utopian mode and Postman's definition of the ideal value of school make for an interesting interplay: in what way do utopian societies, portraying an ideal version of community, educate their own to sustain the utopian system they have once discovered to be ideal? Has only society reached its utopian potential, to be the best it could possibly be, or is the individual inhabitant offered the same possibility of perspective and growth? In what way is this accomplished? How do the educational patterns in utopia ensure that both the individual inhabitants and society as a whole stay utopian?

This paper sets out to explore the educational patterns that facilitate the utopian equilibrium so as to inspire reflection on what a utopian has to learn and needs to aspire to for that person to become an ideal citizen in an ideal society. To compose this picture, the first three chapters of this paper deal with one of the mentioned texts each. In order to establish which educational patterns are at play, we start by exploring behavioural patterns of utopian inhabitants. How do the utopians behave? Secondly, utopian society as a whole is considered. Which beliefs are the basis for utopian behaviours? What constitutes the mechanism on which the utopian society thrives? Finally, the educational patterns linking the two are identified. The final chapter compares the findings from the different narratives and provide an answer to the question which educational patterns enable citizens to live the ideal, utopian life.

## Chapter 1: *Utopia*

More's *Utopia* was first published in 1516. The text consists of two books: the first describes the conversation between the fictional character of Thomas More and Raphael Hythloday, an experienced traveller and the person to give account of the commonwealth of Utopia in book two. The structure of this Utopia was inspired by Amerigo Verpucci's *New World and Four Voyages*: a traveller to a foreign country describes an observed reality, in this case, the governance and people of Utopia. The rhetoric, argumentative style of this novel is indicative of More's classical education, especially of his reading of Plato's *The Republic*. More's desire to marry classicist philosophical truths to those of his notions of religion and God are of major influence on the society portrayed in *Utopia*. As Fatima Vieira explains, although utopian narratives had been written before 1516, More's *Utopia* is the canonical text that lends the mode its name. It derives from ancient Greek eu-topia, which means 'the good place'. Simultaneously, the word 'Utopia' reads as ou-topia, meaning 'the no-place'. This ambiguity alarms the reader of the tension between the ideal and the achievement (4). Book two describes the ideal whereas book one describes the struggle for its achievement as the voices and opinions of learned men are tuned out by the immense flattery of courtiers and advisers of monarchs. Book one also addresses the issues of education and crime in More's England:

If you allow young folk to be abominably brought up and their characters corrupted, little by little, from childhood; and then if you punish them as grownups for committing crime to which their early training has inclined them, what else is this, I ask, but first making them thieves and then punishing them for it? (532)

More, as a humanist, believed that one's education, combined with one's environment, shape the actions and behaviours of that individual. He felt that a different education elicits different behaviour in people. To prevent any inclination towards criminal activity, fear and want

should be taken out of any person's environment. Important to note is that More was a devout Catholic, to such an extent that he was executed on grounds of treason, since he would not acknowledge king Henry VIII's religious leadership over that of the Pope.

Private property does not exist in More's Utopia. Besides communal property, there is a common daily routine. All are clothed the same way. All houses in a single street are alike so they appear to be one building. Every ten years, families switch houses. Cities are built after the exact same spatial plan. Although every man is required to fit like a cog in the utopian machine, there is room for "each person's individual discretions" (551). To be able to allow for this regimented freedom, utopians need to ensure the supply of goods. "No one sits around in idleness" (551).

Utopians wake up in the morning, attend a public lecture or apply themselves to another useful activity. They work three hours, have dinner, continue working another three hours and then go to supper. There is musical entertainment afterwards and at eight o'clock in the evening they find themselves asleep.

The other hours of the day, when they are not working, eating, or sleeping, are left to each person's individual discretion, provided that free time is not wasted in roistering or sloth, but used properly in some chosen occupation. (551)

### **1.1 The highest individual potential is to be pious**

Although there is a class of learned men from which the keepers of public offices are chosen, it is not to say that this is the potential of every utopian. Rather, the common ground among them is that each of them should live a life of "good and honest pleasure" (561), achieved by supplying themselves and others with "comfort and welfare" (562), "to relieve the miseries of others, assuage their griefs, and, by removing all sadness from their lives, to restore them to enjoyment, to pleasure" (562). Utopians argue that, as this pleasurable life is good to others and one desires this for his or her neighbour, this pleasurable life is equally desirable for the

individual. Because of this, utopians “think you would have to be actually crazy to pursue harsh and painful virtue [and] give up the pleasures of life” (561). It is, to them, common sense, which “nature herself prescribes for us”, to pursue a “joyous life”. “[L]iving according to her prescriptions is to be defined as virtue” (562).

This virtuous lifestyle is not defined as strict adherence to any single religion, a quite radical idea in More’s lifetime. Rather, More sought to accommodate the various religions under a common principle. In *Utopia*, piety is defined in terms of worship of the Supreme Being, the deity responsible for the sanctity and immortality of the human soul. Failure to adhere by the strict law which states that the belief of the immortality of the soul is undisputed will result in execution of the offender. There is a religious tolerance within a certain limit: people may have their preferences, however there is a system of worship at play which guarantees the awareness of judgement of the soul after this life and notions of Heaven and Hell. The common principle of worship of the Supreme Being enables utopian society to be collectively pious whilst in the privacy of their own homes perform rituals particular to their religion. The awareness of a final judgement of the soul creates a desire to be pious, to worship the Supreme Being and the desire to be moral, to do the right thing for yourself and others. Whereas traditionally the desire to be moral meant to deny yourself pleasures of life, in *Utopia* this is, curiously enough, not the case, because of the way utopians find pleasure in life. Utopians have a peculiar take on what makes for “good and honest pleasures” (561), which are those promoted by “nature” (562). The notion of “pleasure” is explained as that which is a natural pleasure, a pleasure of “Nature”: “common sense”. In other words, it gives pleasure to pursue those things which are for the greater good of the commonwealth. As utopians take pleasure in providing for their fellow countrymen, there is very little room for individuality. Utopians are free to fill in this notion of ‘for the greater good’ in a small variety of ways as long as it is something which reason tells them is reasonable. There are “several



different classes of pleasure, some being pleasures of the mind and others pleasures of the body. Those of the mind are knowledge and the delight which arises from contemplating the truth, also the gratification of looking back on a well-spent life and the unquestioning hope of happiness to come” (564). As a result, diligence and industry are held in great esteem as they are considered prerequisites for a life free from strain. “Of all the different pleasures, they seek primarily those of the mind, and prize them most highly” (565). These pleasures of the mind “arise from the practice of virtues and the consciousness of a good life” (565) Utopians do not underestimate bodily pleasure but simply redefine what the “true” bodily pleasure is: “health itself, when not oppressed by pain, gives pleasure, without any external excitement at all” [...] Utopians regard this as the foundation of all the other pleasures, since by itself alone it can make life peaceful and desirable, whereas without it there is no possibility of any other pleasure” (565). Taking into consideration that the mind is given preference over the body, it is highly and perhaps even surprisingly pragmatic of these utopians to find them lauding the bodily pleasure of “lively health” as a prerequisite and the fundamental true pleasure without which life would not be bearable. The definitions of the true pleasures stem from the desire to live a moral, good life. Being pious, not living pleasurably, thus becomes the highest potential of the utopian individual in *Utopia*. The recognition of the true pleasure of “health” as fundamental for any higher development such as the “pleasures of the mind” (564) reflects a pragmatic ethic permeating this particular utopian society.

## **1.2 The highest potential of society is to be pragmatic**

A peculiar tension with regards to religion, given the utopian stress on piety, is that between being holy and being “sensible” (582). The former is considered more devout, the latter better for the commonwealth. Holy people are renowned for their abstinence while the commonwealth needs offspring to maintain itself: marriage and intercourse are vital to the preservation of the country. This tension seems to indicate a preference for pragmatism over

dogmatism in the sense that ensuring offspring is the practical thing to do and considered “sensible”, while the other is the pious thing to do and is admired as such, but not at all lauded for its effects on the continuance of this utopian society.

Trades are handed down in families. If one has another inclination, one can be adopted into another family to learn a particular trade. Utopians get the opportunity to learn up to two trades and then choose whichever one they prefer, “unless the city needs one more than the other” (551). This again shows pragmatism on the part of society, allowing children to be adopted if they as an individual show a preference for another trade. By learning two trades, utopians are able to better fill the need of society with either trade they have come to learn. There is a small space for the individual to pursue one’s own needs and interests within set boundaries and with the constraint that the greater good of society must come first place if there is a need to do so. Only learned men are elected for public office. However, workers can be excused from production to apply themselves to study when they show a talent for learning in their spare time. Vice versa, a learned man who excels at a particular trade he pursued in his free time may as well switch from a life of contemplation to one of production.

On the island itself, slaves are doing all jobs which the utopians deem detrimental to the soul, such as killing animals for food. The utopians however still eat this food; it is only the act of killing they will not undertake. Similarly, utopians themselves do not fight wars unless they have no other options. They usually pay mercenaries to fight their battles overseas, as well as pay mercenaries to support allies at war.

The Commonwealth of *Utopia* is able to function primarily because of the guaranteed distribution of goods necessary and convenient to life. This requires all families to bring their produce to designated halls to insure a constant influx of goods.

[I]n Utopia, where everything belongs to everybody, no one need fear that, so long as the public warehouses are filled, anyone will ever lack for anything that he needs. For

the distribution of goods is not niggardly; in Utopia no one is poor, there are no beggars, and though no one owns anything, everyone is rich. For what can be greater riches than to live joyfully and peacefully, free from all anxieties, and without worries about making a living? (586)

Ensuring the absence of want leaves utopian society to be free from jealousy, prejudice and spite so its inhabitants can apply themselves to the purer pleasures of cultivating their minds. Government is responsible for providing equal material distribution in the sense that every man gets what he needs. The general rule is that “no kind of pleasure is forbidden, provided harm does not come of it” (556). The done thing to do is to put the needs of others before one’s own.

Government prevents scarcity and want amongst its people so they are not driven to engage in any criminal activity. Moreover, the desire to be pious ensures a want for “true pleasures” that replaces a want for material pleasure. This leads to even stricter punishments when utopians do engage in criminal activity nonetheless. Still preferring a pragmatic approach, the offender is enslaved rather than sentenced to death, as their labour “is more beneficial to the commonwealth” as well as adopting a preventive function: it “deters offenders just as much” (571).

### **1.3 Educational patterns in *Utopia***

The desire to live a pious and useful life is instilled in children from the earliest age possible. Children from age five serve food during mealtimes and are educated by the priests who are in charge of ensuring the worship of the Supreme Being, whichever form that being may take in the several religions. “Instruction in good manners and pure morals is considered just as important as the accumulation of learning” (583) – prominence is given to shaping one’s ability to reason and behave politely for “[w]hat is planted in the minds of children lives on in the mind of the adults, and is of great value in strengthening the commonwealth: the decline

of society can always be traced to vices which arise from wrong attitudes” (583). Again, the perceived value to society as a whole plays a role in the institution primarily aimed at the individual.

Inhabitants are taught by example, either of what to do, or what not to do. Families provide a vocational educational environment to their children, as well as an environment which cultivates frank discussion on all sorts of subjects during mealtimes. The elders persuade the younger family members to voice their opinions in a calm fashion. Public figures are lauded by erecting statues in their honour in public places, emphasising the principle of teaching by example: utopians become inspired to also contribute to the greater good by these public signs of appreciation of intellect and piety. Similarly, the Syphogrants, whose job is to ensure that all others live a productive life, be it in material or mental matters, set an example to others by continuing to work, in spite of their being excused by law to do so. Slavery is a public example of why one should adhere to the laws set in the commonwealth as they “are permanent and visible reminders that crime does not pay” (571). Likewise, gold and silver are treated as a “mark of disgrace” (559) so utopians feel no inclination to accumulate those metals. Utopians also teach each other by showcasing their worship of the Supreme Being in public. This serves as a trigger for inhabitants to take care to live a pious life and pursue the true pleasures of body and mind.

## **Chapter 2: *Herland***

The community portrayed in Charlotte Perkins-Gilman's *Herland* (1915) consists of three million women who have been nurturing their community and country for some two thousand years. Roughly one-third of the population are children. While they were first a race of men and women, after natural disasters and a revolt against the remaining slaves who tried to overpower the remaining women, the people have now exclusively become female thanks to the miraculous occurrence of parthenogenesis. The population is kept at a number of three million since that is the number of people the land can provide for. Careful cultivation of the landscape as well as cultivation of the mind are derivatives from the ideology of nurture which pervades society in *Herland*. Van, the male visitor who wrote the book *Herland* from memory, refers to the inhabitants of Herland as "Conscious Makers of People" (69). "[C]hildren were the – the *raison d'être* in this country" (53, original emphasis). The Herlanders continually strive for improvement so their children will be better off than they themselves were, as well as have the tools to do the same for their children. The long-term effect of individual actions is constantly considered from the perspective of society as a whole.

### **2.1 Motherhood is the highest individual potential in *Herland***

Motherhood does not necessarily mean giving birth. Motherhood to Herlanders means nurturing progress and development of children: of all generations to come. The divine notion has been derived from the miracle of parthenogenetic birth, as soon as this had proven to be a recurring process and the population had to be limited, Motherhood began to imply nurture without the aspect of giving birth per se. The first birth caused a dramatic change in outlook on survival as they were on the verge of extinction. This miracle bred new hope on a continued existence. The First Mother was taken excellent care of and placed in the temple of the goddess of fertility. Continuous prayer and temple life of the First Mother initiated the

association between motherhood and the divine. The practice of parthenogenesis started the new community of Herland. Nurturing the hope of survival, the First Mother gave motherhood a divine status: “Motherhood” (58) means everything to this country of women. Capitalisation of the word “Motherhood” starts after this first instance of parthenogenesis. This first birth is truly the start of this new lifestyle which is emphasised by capitalisation of the concept.

Motherhood means nurturing the community: the next generation, the current and previous generation, as well as their environment. Motherhood is also a factor in the dealings between the visiting men and the women of Herland. The men are patted on the head in “a gentle motherly way” (126), “[w]e felt like small boys, very small boys, caught doing mischief in some gracious lady’s house” (21) . The men are taught the language, history and ways of Herland society. Later on, Jeff remarks that “[t]hey [the women] treat us – well – just as they do one another” (32). Ellador explains that “we recognize, in our human motherhood, a great tender limitless uplifting force – patience and wisdom and all subtlety of delicate method” (112). Although there are no religious rituals, Herlanders do have a concept of “a Loving Power, and assumed that its relation to them was motherly – that it desired their welfare and especially their development” (114). A “code of conduct” (114) was drafted and Herlanders’ interaction with each other is based on these ethics.

All mothers in *Herland* want the very best for their children, so the biological mother will assess her aptitude at being a mother and in case she deems herself inept, she will gladly trust more skilful women to raise her baby instead of taking the lead in that process herself. Children are raised by the community: the children are seen as the next generation who deserve the best care the community has to offer. After all, the next generation eventually takes over to ensure a continued harmonious existence in *Herland*. Every woman in *Herland* is a mother; when a women deems herself unfit to give birth herself, she “would solace her

longing by the direct care and service of the babies we already had” (71). All women of Herland are mothers in the sense that they all, cooperatively, raise the next generation: everyone is a mother to all as they desire “their welfare and especially their development” (114). “Life was, to them, just the long cycle of motherhood” (61).

## **2.2 The highest potential of society is progress**

Because of the culture of “united action” (61) in Herland, Herlanders suppose the outside world to have progressed further than they themselves have; the outside world has the knowledge and skills of both sexes, whereas Herland has only one. Also, Herland is inhabited by one developed population only, while the outside world has more. Their collaborative efforts must have brought them great progress. Herlanders feel they have a lot to learn and wish to progress further. In their opinion, male-female relationships might just bring them closer to this progress. As such, the visiting men are carefully observed and nurtured to understand and communicate in Herland. When the country became overpopulated, the inhabitants engaged in a discussion of possible solutions. The chosen approach was to determine how many people can be sustained by the land they own “with the standard of peace, comfort, health, beauty, and progress we demand” (69). This is an instance of the conscious reflection on what is reasonable. The dialogues between the men and their mentors shows the same type of reflection, for example, when Zava, Jeff’s mentor, replies to the statement that greater variation offers more opportunity for improvement. “We have always thought it a grave initial misfortune to have lost half our little world. Perhaps that is one reason why we have so striven for conscious improvement” (79). Herlanders value their land as “a cultural environment for their children” (95). They desire each other’s welfare and development, resulting in a deliberate social re-engineering which is only possible because of their sense of joint enterprise. Their levels of cooperation staggered the visiting men, as they believed women to be only capable of bickering and complaining when amongst themselves.

They encountered, however, a “daring social inventiveness” (82) which stems from the knowledge that Herland had already changed the course of the race through parthenogenesis and they could continue improving their fate with every passing generation: “[i]f we are not beyond them, we are unworthy of them—and unworthy of the children who must go beyond us” (111).

### **2.3 Educational patterns in *Herland***

Through Motherhood the desire for constant improvement develops: the women all want the best for their children and as a result want to create an environment which enables the child to develop “the evenest tempers, the perfect patience and good nature ... the absence of irritability ” (48) and to contribute to the community. By creating an environment that invites children to learn and discover the world risk-free – children are never rebuked, simply shown the error or misconduct as a unhappy choice in a game – and by explaining the relationship between any individual action in relation to the efforts, wishes and plans of previous and current generations, an inquisitive, eager communal mentality is instilled in Herland children. Case in point is the moment one of these Herland children, Ellador, caught an obernut moth and took it to one of her teachers:

“Do you like obernuts?” Of course I like obernuts, and said so. It is our best foodnut, you know. “This is a female of the obernut moth,” she told me. [...] If you had not caught this one, it might have laid eggs enough to raise worms enough to destroy thousands of our nut trees – thousands of bushels of nuts – and make years and years of trouble for us.” Everybody congratulated me. The children all over the country were told to watch for that moth, if there were any more. I was shown the history of the creature, and an account of the damage it used to do and of how long and hard our foremothers had worked to save that tree for us. I grew a foot, it seemed to me, and determined then and there to be a forester. (101-102)



The child Ellador encounters an unfamiliar insect, catches it, and takes it to an expert to learn its name. The teacher connects with her personal experience by asking about her opinion on obernuts. Then comes the name of the insect – the factual knowledge – and the act of catching the bug is put in relation to the endeavours of the community as a whole, including earlier generations. The focus is on survival of the community as was the case with the first parthenogenetic child birth. By connecting to that past, the child is invited to place itself in the bigger picture. This reinforces the collective perspective by showing how this single action influences the environment of future generations: it is how this child cultivates her surroundings and nurtures future generations by ensuring a better environment for them to grow up in.

Babies are nursed in the nursery by their biological mothers for up to two years. They are taught consequences of their actions through play. Games have been specifically designed to draw out and enhance those qualities of character the women of Herland deem necessary “for all noble life: a clear, far-reaching judgment, and a strong well-used will” (106). Babies are provided with “simple and interesting things to do” (107). Children are provided with “choices, simple choices, with very obvious causes and consequences” (107) in the shape of games. “We seek to nourish, to stimulate, to exercise the mind of a child as we do the body” (105). Herlanders distinguish between two kinds of minds: one that is critical and capable of identifying areas in need of improvement and another one that is inventive and sees possibilities to create that improvement. “Their time-sense was not limited to the hopes and ambitions of an individual life” (80). Herlanders absorb the common tendency to see the current community as a collection of generations in a longer line of previous and future ones. Since they have achieved progress in the past, they feel this is also possible in the future. Their education and code of conduct shape them to be mothers: “[h]ere we have Human Motherhood – in full working use [...] Nothing else except the literal sisterhood of our origin,

and the far higher and deeper union of our social growth” (67). In Herland, all women are mothers to all, cooperating for their collective welfare and advancement.

### Chapter 3: *News from Nowhere*

William Morris wrote *News from Nowhere: an Epoch of Rest* (1890) during a time of increasing capitalist exploitation of the working classes in England. The landscape had changed dramatically because of industrialisation. Morris disagreed with the idea that the effects of industrialisation could be called progress (Leopold vii). Workers were forced to engage in monotonous work, polluting the soul as much as the factories polluted the environment. This is the situation the main character of *News from Nowhere* finds himself in. After a heated discussion on the current socio-economic situation in England, he walks home to get a good night's sleep. Just before that, he ponders over "days of peace and rest, and cleanness and smiling goodwill" (4). In his dream, he enters into the world that England has become around the year 2020. As he finds many things altered, the two issues which strike him most are the abolition of private property and the joyfulness of the people. The utopians find pleasure in work – even in rough work at the hay fields – and when they choose to produce goods, they take the utmost care to achieve a pleasurable result. Everyone is a craftsman in *News from Nowhere*. Shopping consists of visiting a store or market, simply requesting what one needs and consequently be given it, without any form of payment. Society turned away from capitalism and producing goods no one needed. Instead, they chose to produce at first only the essentials, beautifying that produce and consequently finding pleasure in that beauty. Handicraft has been reinstated as the main mode of production. Morris longed for a more human lifestyle, one closer to nature and more beneficial to the individual's environment (Leopold xvii). Machinery and factories pollute the environment, so they have been mostly done away with. The individual lives pleurably while the highest potential of society as a whole is "good fellowship" (69): the interactions between inhabitants are based on the principle that one can follow his or her own inclinations while also enabling others to do the same. Impeding their neighbours' freedom to pursue their individual pleasure

is unacceptable to these utopians. Throughout society, adults interact with each other exactly in this fashion.

### **3.1 To live pleurably is the highest individual potential in *News from Nowhere***

In order to examine the pleasurable lifestyle of the individual utopian in *News from Nowhere*, we can draw on Freeman-Moir's take on the Deweyan notion of "artful experience" by exploring how experience is fulfilled, holistically, instead of being merely routine and mechanic (207). The answer to this question lies, in *Nowhere*, in doing work skilfully and in a pleasurable way. This can either be because the work is in line with individual inclinations and preferences – talent is not mentioned as a reason to start in a line of work, only deftness is developed while engaging in it – or because there is pleasure to be found in the pleasurable company of fellow workers, as Dick mentions: "when we have a pleasant spell of work on, and good fellows merry about us; we feel so happy, you know" (Morris 41).

In Guest's experience, people need incentives to work. This follows from the assumption that people are inherently disinclined to work. Dick, Guest's guide, cannot possibly imagine people not wanting to work. As O'Sullivan remarks, "opportunities for self-expression via pleasurable tasks has replaced the prospect of starvation as the main incentive to labour" (105). There is pleasure to be found in doing things skilfully and artfully. Guest inquires after the system of education of the mind, to which Dick replies that doing anything skilfully requires intelligence and thinking:

[P]erhaps you have not learned to do these things I have been speaking about; and if that's the case, don't you run away with the idea that it doesn't take some skill to do them, and doesn't give plenty of work for one's mind. (Morris 25)

No one is obliged to remain engaged in one line of work; neighbours do each other the service of giving them the opportunity to do other work for a while. This is regarded as a service to them as they have the desire to occupy themselves with something else. This freedom extends to the concept of love, marriage and households. If the love between two people has gone, they are both free to seek love elsewhere. This is possible since the utopians in Nowhere believe that the unhappiness of the couple will have negative effects on their surroundings, especially when children are involved. This negativity is prevented to ensure a joyful environment one can take pleasure in.

### **3.2 The highest potential of society is “good fellowship” (41)**

The main thing to do in Nowhere is to seek one’s pleasure in work and company while allowing others to do the same. Even in households, this is the case:

[T]hough separate households are the rule amongst us, and though they differ in their habits more or less, yet no door is shut to any good-tempered person who is content to live as the other house-mates do: only of course it would be unreasonable for one man to drop into a household and bid the folk of it to alter their habits to please him, since he can go elsewhere and live as he pleases. (56)

Even Guest, feeling estranged in his outlandish clothing, does not escape this moral code:

‘And you know, I mustn’t preach to you, but surely it wouldn’t be right for you to take away people’s pleasure of studying your attire, by just going and making yourself like everybody else. You feel that, don’t you?’ said he, earnestly. (30)

This fragment shows that Dick, Guest’s guide, is aware of not being in a position to impose limits on Guest’s desire to change his clothing to fit in with the utopians. However, Dick does inform Guest that is quite not-done to take away “people’s pleasure” (30).

Everyone is free to do as he or she pleases, since it will help them live pleasantly so they will remain pleasant to those around them. Transgressions are seen as errors of friends; not of fiends. There are no punishments for criminal offences, as the offences are not considered to be out of criminal intent, since the utopians mean no harm to one another.

### **3.3 Educational patterns in *News from Nowhere***

Allowing for personal growth is key in *Nowhere*. School requires uniformity which is felt to deny the simple fact that everyone has a different level and disposition towards different occupations. Therefore there are no schools to be found in *News from Nowhere*. Children are encouraged to go camping in groups during summer so they will learn how to provide for themselves and learn from their peers. This learning from their peers and their environment is an educational pattern that lasts throughout their life, as information on new subjects is readily available to them and they inquire after this information with their neighbours. “children are mostly given to imitating their elders, and when they see most people about them engaged in genuinely amusing work, [...], that is what they want to be doing” (27). As to languages, English, French, German, Welsh and Irish are learned by children, as “our guests from over sea often bring their children with them, and the little ones get together, and rub their speech into one another” (26). There is only a system of experiential learning in *Nowhere*. Children, as well as adults, learn by experiencing their surroundings. Children are not schooled but learn skills which enable them to live and maintain the peacefulness of society: cooking, thatching, sewing, all manner of things related directly to daily life as they experience it. This is their education: their experience of daily life and their environment. Knowledge and training is available to everyone and everyone can pursue their own interests by asking their neighbours and friends about them. In case they do not know, they are always able to direct their neighbour to some other neighbour who does. As such, learning is considered to be the acquisition of any skill and not exclusively “book-learning” (27). The latter is some people’s

passion and they are granted that passion, however, it is not encouraged in any way.

Producing artful utilities is considered more valuable, although this is not clearly stated. There simply is more of the latter going around in the country of Nowhere, increasing the odds of a child picking up on this philosophy of work. In the words of Freeman-Moir, “[i]n utopia, the craft of experience should ensure that habits [...] will be intelligent, flexible, and artful, not unintelligent and merely routine” (210).

## Conclusion

Each of the discussed narratives shows a utopian lifestyle based on different principles from the others. *Herland* leaves the impression of a far-stretching “nursery” (*Herland* 95), *Utopia* has a rather mechanical feel to it and *News from Nowhere* constructs a pastoral simplicity to life. Regardless of these differences, there are similar constructions at play in all three texts: there is a shared belief in the togetherness and reciprocity between individuals. *Herland* strives for betterment of the race while in *Utopia* people seek to live piously through pursuing the natural pleasures of the mind in particular: finding joy in contemplating the services one does to others, so they may live a joyous life themselves. In *Nowhere*, the people express themselves through doing pleasurable work while simultaneously giving space to their neighbours to do the same. A social awareness is constructed by the environment new-born utopians find themselves in. In *Utopia*, the individual is educated to be pious so natural, true pleasures are pursued. *Herland* rears individuals to value motherhood above all else to contribute to the progress of society. Inhabitants of *Nowhere* live pleurably through their “craft of experience”, creating a society thriving on “good fellowship”. The individual potential is linked to interaction with fellow utopians in each narrative: More’s utopians ease each other’s burdens, Gilman’s utopians nurture their fellow women and Morris’ utopians live pleurably so they make for pleurable company. The self-society dynamics in the examined narratives all show a shared, social potential of all individuals instead of an individual, cognitive potential. The shared potential utopians are educated for enable utopian society to maintain a harmony particular to that utopia. The “connection between individual contribution and individual benefit” (Leopold, xviii) is substituted by one where individuals contribute to the whole and cooperate to ensure the plenty that benefits all equally.

The social potential, although varying in form, is primarily internalised through experiential learning. Learning by example is evident in these utopias: women are trained for



specific work by experts in *Herland*. In *Utopia*, trades are passed down in families, making the family environment a key factor in the education process. Children in *Nowhere* learn new skills by simply being around each other during camping trips in summer and by seeking out neighbours who engage in the work the learner aspires to employ him- or herself in. The notion of apprenticeship can be found in each text. In *Utopia* the learner and teacher are not at all on equal footing. This is the case in *Herland* and *News from Nowhere*. Also, the individual is given unlimited room for growth in the latter two novels. As well as for developing mental faculties, no restrictions are placed on the number of trades an individual can apply him- or herself to. In *Utopia*, the limit is set at two trades while expansion of the mental horizon is encouraged. Within certain limits there is still room for individual inclinations in *Utopia*. Women in *Herland* each “go without a certain range of personal joy” (72) when it comes to rearing children, as Somel explains to Van. Children are raised by society as a whole, not exclusively by the biological mother. Moreover, because of the population limit, some women choose to deny their longing for a pregnancy and turn to taking care of the other children instead. *News from Nowhere* shows a remarkable range of personal liberty in this respect, as the only limit appears to be to enable others to pursue their pleasure. The utopian environment reinforces social potentials by reflecting on the effects of individual behaviours on society as a whole.

The reader is submerged in these utopian environments and gradually discovers the self-society dynamics through the eyes of a traveller in *Utopia*, explorers in *Herland* and those of a dreamer in *News from Nowhere*. Exploration of these thought experiments “can provide a point of view from which what is can be seen clearly, what was as a living present, and what will be as filled with possibility” (Postman x). The concept of citizenship education calls for a social dimension to which utopian fiction offers a playground of possibilities.

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