

## Utopia

### Definition of Utopia

The literary term utopia denotes an illusionary place that projects a perfect society to the reader. Here, the “perfect society” refers to ideal conditions achieved within the material world as opposed to the expected idealism of afterlife in Christianity or other religions. Further, the citizens presiding in such utopias are bearers of a perfect moral code, or at least every violator of the moral code is harshly punished. A utopian society is basically one where all the social evils have been cured.

An important distinction to be appreciated is that amongst the imaginary utopias and live heterotopias. However, the terms should not be treated as opposites of each other. They denote a midway experience referring to instances that are real as well as unreal. Most of the examples that Foucault provides of heterotopias include several utopian aspects. However, the relationship between these two notions has tended to be ignored in the interpretation of heterotopia.

### Description of Utopian Literature

A piece of writing that concerns itself with the description of a perfect society in the physical world as opposed to the perfection of afterlife is termed as Utopian literature. However, the original motives behind utopian novel were political, social and philosophical. Plato’s Republic, is usually considered the first example of the genre.

Some traces of utopian elements can be found in Arthurian literature in the idealization of King Arthur’s court at Camelot, but the trend followed by medieval poets involved romanticizing an imaginary past rather than using hypothetical utopias for the purposes of critiquing political institutions and suggesting alternatives. It was by the time of Sir Thomas More (in his book Utopia in 1516) that the notion of utopia was practically manifested, and his name for the imaginary kingdom then became the new name for referring to the genre.

The common characteristics of the genre include an elaborate description of the geographic structures of the imaginary landscape by the native guides that familiarize the narrator to the ways through the region. He is an outsider to the utopian society, and harbors extensive skepticism regarding modern political, social, economic, or ethical problems. One of the common misunderstandings is that utopian models serve to project a better way of life. To the contrary, the reason behind such literature is to help the reader envision the problems, paradoxes, or faults entrenched within the existing political framework.

### Examples of Utopia

- Andreae’s Christianopolis
- Campanella’s City of the Sun, Bacon’s New Atlantis,
- Samuel Gott’s New Jerusalem, Winstanley’s The Law of Freedom in a Platform
- Edward Bellamy’s Looking Backward
- William Morris’s News from Nowhere

- Theodor Hertzka's Freeland
- H. G. Wells's A Modern Utopia

The examples quoted above portray various scenarios of utopia.

## **Functions of Utopia**

Over the time, the vision encapsulating the notion of utopia has suffered radical transformations. The events of war, church reform, revolution and economic changes have contributed towards the construction of a new type of utopia.

The term utopia formulated new shapes and new prefixes and each type having its own function and its own use. They are generally employed as a means of constructing an organized society in the reader's mind. The writer makes use of the tool so as to highlight the discrepancies prevalent within an existing political and legal framework. A utopian society is framed in a manner which presents to the reader an ideal sociopolitical culture. The writer is basically presenting his audience with a standard example of a socially and morally fit society through the use of utopia so as to make them realize the various deficiencies of their existing societal framework. It is used as a tool for exposing the flaws prevalent within an existing political structure. Further, the tool has been widely employed in writings where the writers have intended to make an impact on the conscience of the reader. The writer uses utopia in order to portray a scenic picture in the eyes of the reader, in an attempt to make him fully appreciate the various diverging factors contributing towards the failings of the existing society. It basically deals with constructing a standard sociopolitical society in the reader's mind in order criticize the prevalent legal norms.

<http://literarydevices.net/utopia/>

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# Dystopias: Definition and Characteristics

**Utopia:** A place, state, or condition that is ideally perfect in respect of politics, laws, customs, and conditions.

**Dystopia:** A futuristic, imagined universe in which oppressive societal control and the illusion of a perfect society are maintained through corporate, bureaucratic, technological, moral, or totalitarian control. Dystopias, through an exaggerated worst-case scenario, make a criticism about a current trend, societal norm, or political system.

## Characteristics of a Dystopian Society

- Propaganda is used to control the citizens of society.
- Information, independent thought, and freedom are restricted.
- A figurehead or concept is worshipped by the citizens of the society.
- Citizens are perceived to be under constant surveillance.
- Citizens have a fear of the outside world.
- Citizens live in a dehumanized state.
- The natural world is banished and distrusted.
- Citizens conform to uniform expectations. Individuality and dissent are bad.
- The society is an illusion of a perfect utopian world.

## Types of Dystopian Controls

Most dystopian works present a world in which oppressive societal control and the illusion of a perfect society are maintained through one or more of the following types of controls:

- Corporate control: One or more large corporations control society through products, advertising, and/or the media. Examples include *Minority Report* and *Running Man*.
- Bureaucratic control: Society is controlled by a mindless bureaucracy through a tangle of red tape, relentless regulations, and incompetent government officials. Examples in film include *Brazil*.
- Technological control: Society is controlled by technology—through computers, robots, and/or scientific means. Examples include *The Matrix*, *The Terminator*, and *I, Robot*.
- Philosophical/religious control: Society is controlled by philosophical or religious ideology often enforced through a dictatorship or theocratic government.

## The Dystopian Protagonist

- often feels trapped and is struggling to escape.
- questions the existing social and political systems.
- believes or feels that something is terribly wrong with the society in which he or she lives.
- helps the audience recognize the negative aspects of the dystopian world through his or her perspective.