

**Word as talisman:
on the 'utopianism'
of the Jubilee Centre**

James Williams



**JUBILEE
CENTRE**
A BIBLICAL VISION FOR SOCIETY

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Introduction

It's not 'intellectual' to want to have a discussion! This is what I sometimes feel like shouting during conversations when my interlocutor turns down the chance to deeply investigate a topic or strand of thought by carelessly applying a label to the direction of the dialogue. But maybe it is 'intellectual' to want to have a discussion, and maybe that's no bad thing. At issue is the syllogism (if one can call it that) underlying the carelessness:

Major premise: if something is intellectual it is undesirable

Minor premise: this conversation is becoming intellectual

Conclusion: therefore the direction of the conversation must be changed

I could try to oppose the minor premise, by arguing that the direction of the conversation is not 'intellectual' (possibly granting that it would be a bad thing if it were), though teasing that out could be tiresome. Or I could try to oppose the major premise and argue the case for the value of 'intellectual' discussion. In these contexts 'intellectual' is usually used to mean 'too difficult' or 'too removed from practical living', or both. In order to oppose the major premise, serious effort would be required on the redefinition of 'intellectual'. The word is a shield that protects the speaker's desire to avoid directly confronting either the facility or the utility of the possible conversation, while still trying to rule it not permissible. It is a talisman whose power in such usage resides more in its assumed negative connotations than in its customary sense-components.

The adjective 'utopian' often carries similar baggage, and it too can be employed as a substitute for real discussion. 'Utopian' is hardly heard as frequently in everyday conversation as 'intellectual', but in discussions about social reform or public policy it does crop up. I have heard several people say, for example, that the work of the Jubilee Centre is 'utopian'. But I have never heard them say what they mean by the word, or quite which bits of the work they are referring to. So, the listener is forced to guess, and to join the conspiracy – the temporary conversational pact to allow 'utopian' to be used as a criticism without paying much attention to its meaning – because no one quite knows what 'utopian' means. In these circumstances it is quite likely that the critic wanted the word to mean 'unrealistic', 'pie-in-the-sky' or maybe even 'sinister', but used the rather grand-sounding 'utopian' in order to smuggle in some or all of those meanings unexamined.

It is my aim to demystify the talisman, 'utopian', by looking at how it has been used over the centuries and

for what reasons. Then I will outline an evaluation of some of the Jubilee Centre's work on these terms. Recall the 'syllogism', above: I plan to show that 'utopian' does not (and should not) necessarily mean 'bad', and that in any case, by most standards, the work of the Jubilee Centre is not particularly 'utopian'.

It is my aim to demystify the talisman 'utopian'

A brief sketch of nowhere

No one could have predicted in 1516 that Thomas More's little Latin game, *Utopia*, would prove to be one of the most influential books in the Western philosophical and literary tradition.¹ The host of writings about imaginary and ideal societies continues to grow, and continues to generate a huge amount of critical, historical and sociological analysis.² Of course, while it was More who coined the word 'utopia' (a play on the Greek *outopos*, no place, and *eutopos*, happy place), the utopian mode significantly predates the sixteenth century. *The True History* of Lucian of Samosata (c.120-190 AD) is commonly credited with being the main classical precedent for More and other Renaissance utopian writers. Since Lucian, the utopian mode has most commonly operated out of a blend of ideal state discourse and fictional travel narrative. Both Lucian and More were fond of a joke or two, and their works contain great examples of the ironic threads woven into most accomplished literary utopias.

Trying to define 'utopian', certainly in a literary sense, is a somewhat hazardous endeavour.³ The wider the lens, the more diversity comes into view and the harder it becomes to sum up. Manuel and Manuel prevaricate before venturing that the utopian provides 'not a sleepy or bizarre vision but one that satisfies a hunger or stimulates the mind and the body to the recognition of a new potentiality', a definition that certainly satisfies

¹ Its full title is certainly less than snappy – *Concerning the Best State of a Commonwealth and the New Island of Utopia: A Truly Golden Handbook No Less Beneficial than Entertaining, by the Most Distinguished and Eloquent Author, Thomas More, Citizen and Sheriff of London* (Louvain, 1516).

² The mammoth *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979) by Frank and Fritzie Manuel, and the works in its bibliography, do not even count as the tip of the tip of the iceberg.

³ Witness Northrop Frye's lack of success in his 'Varieties of Literary Utopia', in *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, ed. Frank E. Manuel (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1965), pp. 25-49; there is a more convincing typology in Keith Thomas, 'The Utopian Impulse in Seventeenth Century England', in *Between Dream and Nature: Essays on Utopia and Dystopia*, eds Dominic Baker-Smith and C.C. Barfoot (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 1987), pp. 20-46.

their romantic tendencies and purple prosody.⁴ In a less swashbuckling vein the historian J.C. Davis analyses various nineteenth and twentieth century attempts to define early modern utopianism and finds them wanting, partly because not enough notice has been taken of other types of imaginary or ideal society.⁵ Distinct from the Perfect Moral Commonwealth (where mankind is perfect), the Land of Cockaigne (where nature is perfect but grotesquely abundant, and morality is not really an issue), Arcadia (where nature and man are in simple nostalgic harmony) and the Millennium (divinely instaurated and usually not described very precisely), Utopia is the place where *organisation* is idealised. Man is not idealised, and neither is nature: instead, a total social environment is projected in order to cope with man's failures. Typically, Utopias are set in a geo-historical stream that tries to be plausible in human terms, without invoking the special grace of God. One can quibble with Davis' definition, but he provides the most convincing scholarly account of what distinguishes utopian writing during one of its most fertile periods.

However it is defined, utopian writing (like most literature) is rarely insulated from other discourses. This is not a claim grounded just in theory. The framing material, and by implication the island's description as well, in More's *Utopia* issued many challenges to contemporaries in Europe to reform their societies (we could of course argue about which of these challenges were ironic, and to what extent). Just a few years later, from the pen of an elderly German monk and a very different theological perspective, came the austere and brutal *Wolfaria*. Its author poured all his energy on paper and in practice into supporting the Reformation, and *Wolfaria* itself was published as a section of a much larger pamphlet compendium about Protestant theology and clerical reform.⁶ A century later, another Lutheran, Johann Valentin Andreae, used his utopian *Christianopolis* in an attempt to rally all Christian readers, to reform themselves and truly follow the faith they professed.⁷ There can be little doubt that Renaissance utopists were interested in social and individual critique just as much as in painting a nice picture. What is less clear is whether or not they actually believed in the viability of the systems they

described and projected into mythical lands, and whether that even matters. Nevertheless, it was not long before criticisms were made that utopian writing was a distraction from real social reform. It was possible (though perhaps not fair) for observers to separate out utopian writing ('theoretical', 'useless') about lofty goals from more useful activity directed at actually achieving those goals. Milton's sneer about those who would 'sequester out of the world into Atlantick and Eutopian polities' instead of properly engaging in the work of political reform was neither the first nor the last of its kind.

This sort of hostility to utopia is partly rooted in certain opinions about the purposes and usefulness of fiction. Milton's objection would then have most force if it really was the case that utopist and critic shared a desire for reform, that the utopist believed that writing about an imaginary society would further the cause of reform, and furthermore that the belief was mistaken. Of course, if the work's primary purpose had been to satirise, provoke or amuse, then it would hardly be a fair criticism that it did not advance the cause of reform. Another root of Milton's and many others' opposition to utopian thinking lies in the different opinions about the best course of action to take in a corrupt polity. Some (like Milton) want to alter the system they live in while others want to give up on it and establish smaller polities along radically different lines (either within the mainstream society or elsewhere). So, on the one hand the criticism is aimed at those who 'sequester out of the world' into an imaginary, fantasy realm that can do no good and effect no change; on the other hand the criticism strikes at those who physically leave mainstream society, which ought instead to be the object of their reforming or purifying zeal. At heart, this is a theological issue, which should come as no surprise. For some, like the 'utopian' author of *Wolfaria*, Luther himself, and several species of seventeenth-century English millenarians, escape is not an option, and the corruption of polities means that they must be reformed, with violence if necessary. For others, like radical German Anabaptists and some types of monastics, all historical and inherited polities are so corrupt that reform is impossible and only retreat into communes or escape to the New World offer any hope of establishing the Kingdom of God. Many of the practical utopian schemes of the last 500 years that have stumbled from the page to a group of real people have been openly 'Christian', from the founding of the Hutterite community in Moravia in 1528 to the burning of the Branch Davidians in Texas in 1993.⁸

It should already be clear that in the careless use of the word 'utopian' many questions are begged that would

⁴ Manuel and Manuel, *Utopian Thought*, p.29.

⁵ Davis, *Utopia and the ideal society: a study of English utopian writing 1516-1700* (Cambridge: CUP, 1981).

⁶ Susan Groag Bell, 'Johann Eberlin von Gunzberg's *Wolfaria*: The First Protestant Utopia', *Church History* 36/2 (1967), 122-39.

⁷ J.V. Andreae, *Christianopolis*, introd. and ed. Edward H. Thompson (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1999); for more on the practical reforming efforts of Andreae see Donald R. Dickson, *The Tessera of Antilia: Utopian Brotherhoods and Secret Societies in the Early Seventeenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

⁸ A very helpful survey is found in Daniel W. Hollis III, *Utopian Movements* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 1998).

be better addressed, and that even in the first century of modern utopianism there are writers labelled 'utopian' on both sides of any practical/theoretical or realistic/unrealistic divide. However, utopianism is not limited to early modern Europe, and the strongest critics of utopia have not yet been heard. Given the association today of Marxism and Utopia in many discourses (see below) it is ironic that the disparaging term 'utopian socialism' was actually coined by Marx and Engels. Their 'scientific socialism' was a self-conscious distancing and development from earlier socialist writers (Saint-Simon, Fourier, Owen, Cabet) whose work they criticised for paying insufficient attention to present conditions, calling this 'utopian'.⁹ Once the intellectual descendants of Marx and Engels were wielding power they too were derided for being utopian. This was not on the basis of any fictional travel narratives that were being produced in Soviet Russia. The literary usage of 'utopian' was by this time being crowded out and was becoming less important: a sociological turn in utopian theory

...a meaning of 'utopian' that blended 'impractical' with 'bad'.

was well and truly established. Perhaps the most eloquent mid-twentieth century academic opponent of the politics inspired by Marx was Karl Popper. In his *Utopia and Violence* he drew on and thereby cemented a meaning of 'utopian' that blended 'impractical' with 'bad'.¹⁰ He offered a critique of the kind of social planning (totalitarian, Marxist) that proceeds with only a final, perfect goal in view, that does not consider an incremental approach or recognise the value of small gains. This 'utopian' approach leads necessarily to violence and tyranny in the short term.

Popper's agonistic definition of 'utopian' is still common today; or, at least, the 'bad' element is still around even if the speaker can't quite put her finger on the other component.¹¹ However, the strand of thought that he represents was not the only reaction to Marxism. The thought of sociologist Karl Mannheim provides a more nuanced response, exemplified in his *Ideology and Utopia* of 1936.¹² Mannheim effectively subsumed the

literary question into a wider analysis. For him, 'utopia' is the mindset that transcends reality and works to change it, while 'ideology' is the corresponding complex of beliefs that, although transcendent, works to maintain the *status quo*. He identifies five types of utopianism, beginning with the Radical Reformers' orgiastic Chiliasm (the breaking-in, from outside the realm of ideas, of a millenarian project that believes in the imminent transformation of the whole world), passing through the liberal-humanitarian utopianism of the Enlightenment, a concurrent conservative strand typified by Hegel, socialist utopianism (which tries to assert itself in practice, and progresses according to defined goals, unlike the grand indeterminate Chiliasm and liberal utopianism), and ending up with 'modern utopianism'. He believes this last version to be a pale shadow of its former selves and argues that the lack of a transcendental level to the European mind is a damaging phenomenon. The disappearance of ideology will only hurt those in certain classes, but

*[t]he disappearance of utopia brings about a static state of affairs in which man himself becomes no more than a thing. We would then be faced with the greatest paradox imaginable, namely, that man, who has achieved the highest degree of rational mastery of existence, left without any ideals, becomes a mere creature of impulses. Thus, after a long tortuous, but heroic development, just at the highest stage of awareness, when history is ceasing to be blind fate, and is becoming more and more man's own creation, with the relinquishment of utopias, man would lose his will to shape history and therewith his ability to understand it.*¹³

Mannheim thus puts a thoroughly positive slant on the 'utopian'. He claims that conservatives will use it as a manoeuvring word to ridicule ideas not realisable from within a certain social position. However, those ideas only seem unrealisable because those who prefer ideology to utopia are unwilling to examine the wider social situation and its possible flexibility.

Even though a quasi-Popperian approach is very common, contemporary discussion of what is 'utopian', and whether or not that's a good thing, is, by no means unified. The slur usage can be found almost everywhere. Three fairly conservative theologians should suffice to demonstrate this. Herbert Schlossberg misunderstands Mannheim's terminology when he suggests that he wanted to bring utopia to pass and that his work has '[t]he comprehensiveness of... vision and the completeness of... controls... characteristic of... twentieth-century utopias.'¹⁴ Schlossberg and his fellow

⁹ Hollis, *Utopian Movements*, pp.144-48, 256-60.

¹⁰ Popper, 'Utopia and Violence', *The Hibbert Journal XLVI* (1947-48), 109-116.

¹¹ John Gray, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* (London: Allen Lane, 2007) takes an entire book to say what took Popper just a few pages, and manages to lump together the Puritans, the Nazis, twelfth-century millenarians and the *gulag* in a collection of sweeping generalisations that boil down to a plea for 'realism' in politics.

¹² Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (London: Routledge, 1991. F.p. 1936).

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

¹⁴ Schlossberg, 'The Controlled Economy: Gunnar Myrdal's Subjective Conclusions', in *Freedom, Justice, and Hope: Towards a*

authors see utopianism as the construction of a complete social system that claims to guarantee the end of oppression – something they believe to be impossible and dangerous.¹⁵ In the same volume Clark Pinnock warns Christians against ‘ideological seduction from the utopian left.’¹⁶ What Pinnock is aiming at with ‘utopian’ boils down to a disdain for collectivist economics and for socialism in general. He sees the Left as providing ideas and illusions, which are ‘utopian’ because they do not take notice of the diversity or the detail of real life. He even ties in what he claims is consistent modern utopian thinking with social conditions in the developed world. Those attracted to utopianism now are part of the new class that depends in significant part on government subsidies to survive. The new middle class despises the old middle class (concerned with business) and is itself concerned with ‘the function of the production and dissemination of symbolic knowledge’.¹⁷ This is not merely an academic debate: Pinnock draws very clear lines in the sand – ‘[t]he verdict is in: socialism is a utopian vision which in practice betrays the poor and for this reason ought to be repudiated’; ‘[t]he pursuit of utopia is a betrayal of the poor.’¹⁸ Finally, Gordon Preece, in a postmodern tapestry of an article on modern sexual mores, emphasises the unreality of the utopian liberal sexual agenda [which] sees our sexuality as our property, merely limited by the rights of others, rather than part of our person. It shows a Pelagian naivety about human nature and unfettered natural freedom...¹⁹

It may seem ironic that ‘utopian’ is here applied to a vision of complete moral deregulation, whereas in most modern (post-1516) utopias the distinguishing factor is extreme regulation by the government. However, those Preece is criticising are trying to build a *complete* refusal to proscribe into their State, and in Davis’ literary-inflected analysis the completeness of the moral vision is very much a part of utopia (see above). That nicety aside, we could multiply examples *ad nauseam* of this rather flat and non-technical usage of ‘utopian’.

On the other hand, pro-utopian writers abound, too, as a few moments spent on the Internet will demonstrate. From modern-day anarchists like Ken Knabb (‘utopian

speculations can help free us from the habit of taking the status quo for granted, get us thinking about what we really want and what might be possible’) to government and policy consultants like Tsvi Bisk, ‘utopia’ is being rehabilitated. It encompasses a large element of optimism about the future and a vision that is not a blueprint. A ‘vision’ is essential for effecting social improvements, so long as it is anchored in reality.²⁰ Indeed, common sense tells us that decisions about strategy for social reform simply cannot proceed without some idea about what is being aimed at. Paul Tillich is eloquent in his analysis of the positive fruitfulness of utopia:

*Every utopia is an anticipation of human fulfilment, and many things anticipated in utopias have been shown to be real possibilities. Without this anticipatory inventiveness countless possibilities would have remained unrealised. When no anticipating utopia opens up possibilities we find a stagnant, sterile present... Cultures which have no utopia... quickly fall back into the past.*²¹

Alongside this endorsement Tillich shows that he is not blind to the dangers of utopia. Perhaps most interestingly is interesting that he inverts a commonplace about ‘utopianism’ by asserting that the best kind of utopianism is by definition realistic – exemplified by the transforming power of ‘Judaism’, ‘Bourgeois Society’ and ‘Marxism’, all of which he analyses as utopian.

Some scholars seek to rescue the term from the negative haze of its association with Communism, not just in debates with other scholars but also in pedagogy.²² Meanwhile, the most eloquent modern defender of utopianism, Russell Jacoby, argues in favour of a nonspecific utopianism but still rates the older, blueprint utopias more highly than modern forms of social organisation, which he claims are reducing to a sub-capitalist monoculture.²³ In *The End of Utopia* he is

Every utopia is an anticipation of human fulfilment

Strategy for the Poor and Oppressed, ed. Marvin Olasky (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1988), pp. 41-63 (fn. 76).

¹⁵ Of course, it is the straightforward *advocacy* of such a constructed system that is objected to. Schlossberg could hardly ‘object’ to More’s *Utopia*.

¹⁶ Pinnock, ‘The Pursuit of Utopia’, in *ibid.*, pp. 65-83 (p. 72).

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 74.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 77, 82.

¹⁹ Preece, ‘Sex and the City of God: A narrative theology of sexuality in the context of creation fall and redemption’, *Zadok Paper* S125 (Winter 2003), 13.

²⁰ Ken Knabb, *The Joy of Revolution*, chapter 4, ‘Rebirth’, opening section entitled ‘Utopians fail to envision post-revolutionary diversity’. Found online at www.bopsecrets.org/PS/joyrev4.htm; Bisk’s musings, ‘Utopianism come of Age: From Post-Modernism to Neo-Modernism’, are on the website of the World Futures Forum, at www.wfs.org/bisk.htm.

²¹ ‘Critique and Justification of Utopia’, in Manuel, ed., *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, pp. 296-309 (p.297).

²² For example, *Utopian Thinking in Sociology: Creating the Good Society. Syllabi and Other Instructional Materials* compiled and edited by Arthur B. Shostak (American Sociological Association, 2001).

²³ Jacoby, *The End of Utopia: politics and culture in an age of apathy* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), pp. 170-1 and 60-68. For more on nonspecific utopianism in particular, see *Picture Imperfect: Utopian thought for an anti-Utopian age* (New York: Columbia UP, 2005).

particularly critical of what he sees as a failure of imagination in those quarters often derided as ‘utopian’ – intellectuals and the Left. His work demonstrates incredible breadth of reading and should be of great interest to Christians with something positive to contribute to social reform. While Jacoby would likely accuse Christian reform movements of being hopelessly conservative he is nonetheless relentless in exposing the weakness and intellectual poverty of the current secular alternatives.²⁴ But of course, just as there is plenty of fluff *contra* utopia, so there is *pro*:

“Utopia” is that word used to denote the best life attainable. Since each person has their own unique vision of Utopia, the only universally agreeable description of Utopia is, “the ability for each person to live in their own vision of paradise.” Humanity should strive to obtain that ability.²⁵

Fortunately not all the pro-utopian writing of today is quite so ill-informed and ill-considered in its definitions (let alone in its hopelessly naïve exaggerations of liberalism) and there is some intellectual robustness in the idea of futurism.²⁶ In any case, I hope that this section has raised more questions about social reform and utopianism than it has answered, because it is my intention to display the complexity involved in an honest look at ‘utopian’ and its baggage.

The Jubilee Centre: a revue

This is not a management review of processes, nor is it an attempt to audit or evaluate. Rather, I aim to look at various pieces of the Jubilee Centre’s writing and activity with the fuller connotations of ‘utopian’ in view.

Almost by way of introduction we can dismiss that element of ‘utopian’ that means ‘necessarily impractical’. In literary/technical circles J.C. Davis has already dealt with the view that it means ‘impractical schemes for improving society’, showing that this is to miss the point of utopian mode.²⁷ Off the page the

²⁴ He also criticises many works in the vein of Gray’s *Black Mass*, finding their interaction with utopianism superficial and usually a pretext for conservatism. Gray is in fact quite unusual among anti-utopians in being willing to name Nazis and the Right in general as being as ‘utopian’ as Marxists and the Left.

²⁵ Jon Will, *The Ultimate Philosophy* (Publish America, 2002).

²⁶ Though note that Jacoby, writing from a post-Marxist perspective, criticises futurists for their limited vision and for focussing their utopias on commercial gain for the few in which ‘freedom corrodes to random computer options’ (*The End of Utopia*, p. 163). Overall his virtuosic, witty cultural analyses defend the utopian spirit, but deplore its recent incarnations in futurism and millenarianism – ‘at best benign or at worst irrelevant’ (p. 166). Needless to say, he has not encountered the Jubilee Centre!

²⁷ Davis, *Utopia*, p. 13, citing Irving D. Blum’s article in *Bulletin of Bibliography* 21:6 (1967). He asks bluntly who is to decide what is impractical or not.

charge might be made, but in the case of the Jubilee Centre it does not stick. The research produced by the Centre has contributed to the establishment of several charities concerned with family life, workers’ rights, debt relief and international peace-building.²⁸ It may be the case that ‘Relationism’, the overall vision inspired by the Jubilee Centre’s research into the institutional norms of the Torah and their challenge today, is less realisable in contemporary British society than its authors hope. This is clearly a matter for debate, but in the meantime it must be recognised that practical results have come from the Jubilee Centre’s work – inflicting on Margaret Thatcher her only Commons defeat, facilitating dialogue between whites and blacks in South Africa as a preparation for the end of apartheid, and raising multi-million pound bonds for urban regeneration in the UK, enabling hundreds of people to get back into work.²⁹

Similarly, any agonistic use of ‘utopian’ along Popperian lines is wilfully unreasonable. The Jubilee Centre’s approach to public policy is to commission high quality biblical and sociological research on various topics, and to seek to apply it, all the time with relationships in mind. Sometimes it and its associated charities lobby, sometimes they seek to educate, sometimes they act directly; all the work proceeds publicly and peacefully. The kind of monochrome approach labelled as utopian by Popper is noticeably absent:

[T]he Bible provides an ethical paradigm which is relevant for all societies and which has a concern for relationships as its central theme. This paradigm embodies values which should guide our decisions as we seek to transform society. However, the agenda we pursue will vary according to the political and social context in which the church operates and the nature of the church’s position in society.

*The biblical approach to bringing about social change is not by violent revolution, nor by training a small political elite, but by every disciple of Christ ‘practising and teaching [communicating] the law’ (Matt. 5:19), which is summarized by the commandments to love God and love neighbour (Matt. 22:37-40).*³⁰

²⁸ The charities are the Relationships Foundation, the R-Network, Citylife (now called Allia), Keep Time for Children (Keep Sunday Special), Credit Action, Equity for Africa and Concordis. For more detail on their practical achievements see *Jubilee Manifesto: a framework, agenda and strategy for Christian social reform* (Leicester: IVP, 2005), pp. 305-26.

²⁹ Michael Schluter and David Lee, *Keeping Sunday Special* (Basingstoke: Marshall Pickering, 1988); *Jubilee Manifesto*, pp. 314-15, 321.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.285, 330.

The work of the Jubilee Centre has proceeded slowly, through the building of relationships. A past paper explores an additional strategy, one employed in the campaign over Sunday trading in the 1980s. Christians are urged to consider adopting co-belligerence (a public stance midway between separatism and compromising alliances) in certain pressing social and political issues thereby achieving more good in the theatre of policy and legislation than might be achieved alone.³¹ This strategy of finding common ground with various groups of differing beliefs while patiently applying relational ideas to areas of public life is not 'utopian' in the myopic or violent sense. As an avowedly Christian organisation the Jubilee Centre echoes Paul in rejecting 'shameful and deceitful ways' (2 Cor. 4:2) and follows the model of Christ himself in not attempting to wield a sword (Matt. 26:52; John 18:36). For examples of the utopianism decried by Popper, one should look to anti-theistic Marxists in the twentieth century and networks of secret societies in France and Germany in the late eighteenth century.³² It remains to be seen what further fruit the Jubilee Centre's strategy of co-belligerence will bear, so how realistic ('utopian') it is cannot yet be assessed.³³

The practical achievements of the last couple of decades speak for themselves, but perhaps in published books and papers we may detect 'utopianism'. The Jubilee Centre's primary role in the network of charities associated with its ideas is research. A past commissioned paper looks at how foreigners and immigrants were treated in biblical law, and seeks to bring this to bear on some of the problems faced by today's multicultural Britain.³⁴ It makes as much sense to call this kind of research 'utopian' as it does any policy document produced by a writer who seeks to use previous authorities as a basis for creative thinking! But what of the larger scale books? *The R-Factor* sets out at a reasonably high level the idea that relationships are important, and that our society does not currently foster them as it might, indeed as it ought.³⁵ On many pages the authors do indeed imagine what a 'Relational Society' could look like. But they ground it far more in

the current social and geographical structures of late twentieth century Britain than the early utopians did with their imaginary societies. It is a fictional derivation, not a fictional creation, and the process of derivation itself is very much part of the 'ideal'. Characteristic of a Relational Society is a reduction in the need for state regulation, through the fostering of relationships at all levels of society – something noted by Onora O'Neill in her endorsement of Schluter and Lee's popular work, *The R-Option*.³⁶ By contrast, 'the utopian type of ideal society has been unchanging through history' in its insistence on the need for institutions need to do the work of coping.³⁷ Both *The R-Factor* and the *Jubilee Manifesto* are very clear on the limits of the Welfare State, which many have labelled (none too flatteringly) as the epitome of practical Western utopianism.³⁸ Following the example of Old Testament Israel, the Jubilee Centre advocates a much more diffuse and familial scheme of welfare provision than that currently provided by the British State, and of course it recognises the complexity and difficulty inherent in implementing such ideas.

The reliance of the Jubilee Centre on modern applications of Old Testament Law is central to its whole endeavour. As we have already seen, their approach to the Law sees it as a paradigm, not a blueprint.³⁹ This rules out the ('utopian?') extreme position of theonomists, or Reconstructionists, who wish to implement the Law as statute today.⁴⁰ By looking at institutional norms and relationships within Israelite society the Jubilee Centre also avoids the ('utopian?') sole reliance on 'Kingdom Ethics' (beloved of the Christian Left) as a guide to the activity of unbelievers and secular governments.⁴¹

So we suggest it is the pattern of relationships between institutions and resources – family, kinship, state, land, capital, community – as well as the pattern of relationships of all those institutions with God himself – which God wants us to replicate in societies today. Geography, language and many other aspects of culture

³¹ See Daniel Strange, 'Co-belligerence and common grace: Can the enemy of my enemy be my friend?', *Cambridge Papers* 14/3 (2005).

³² There is no shortage of critical biographies of Stalin or Mao. On the earlier examples, see John Robison, *Proofs of a Conspiracy* (New York: George Foreman, 1798), who is not shy of using 'utopian' in his analysis of the social plans of Adam Weishaupt and like-minded Enlightenment rationalists.

³³ *Jubilee Manifesto*, pp. 325-6.

³⁴ Jonathan Burnside, *The Status and Welfare of Immigrants: The place of the foreigner in Biblical law and its relevance to contemporary society* (Cambridge: Jubilee Centre, 2001).

³⁵ Schluter and Lee, *The R-Factor* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1993).

³⁶ *The R-Option: Building Relationships as a Better Way of Life* (Cambridge: Relationships Foundation, 2003).

³⁷ Davis, *Utopia*, p. 378.

³⁸ E.g., Hollis, *Utopian Movements*, pp. 266-69.

³⁹ *Jubilee Manifesto*, pp. 67-101.

⁴⁰ Rousas Rushdoony, Greg Bahnsen and Gary North are the most eloquent twentieth century defenders of theonomy. For a brief critique, see C.J.H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Leicester: IVP, 2004), pp. 403-8.

⁴¹ Michael Schluter and Roy Clements, 'Jubilee Institutional Norms: A Middle Way between Creation Ethics and Kingdom Ethics as a Basis for Christian Political Action', *Evangelical Quarterly* 62:1 (1990), 37-62.

may differ, but God wants the inter-relationship between certain key institutions to remain the same.⁴²

Assessing this stance in the terms of Karl Mannheim we see that as the Jubilee Centre looks backwards, so it is 'ideological' and not 'utopian' at all. Mannheim even chose to use for his prime example of ideology the medieval church's opposition to usury – an opposition shared by the Jubilee Centre.⁴³ Perhaps however, we are far enough from an age when the Bible was generally taken seriously in public policy that to advocate its return is now 'utopian'. In any case, Mannheim's utopian is very different from the careless use of the word by some critics of the Jubilee Centre.

It is interesting that the editors of *Jubilee Manifesto* choose a theological setting for their concerns about the label 'utopian', almost as if they expect the criticism to come from their own side. 'Some will reject the idea of any biblically-based concept of bringing about global change as utopian, and point to texts suggesting the growing power and influence of evil leading up to the return of Christ.'⁴⁴ The Jubilee Centre's works do not directly address eschatology, nor do its authors align themselves with postmillennialism, the most confident of conservative Christian views of the future up to the return of Christ, and the one most open to being called 'utopian' by its opponents. There is no need to do so, for their mandate rests on their belief that the Bible does speak to the ordering of societies and that Christians should heed that and work to improve the flawed structures around them and to ameliorate the effects of sin. Unless an unequivocal retreat from society is sounded, as in some Anabaptist/Mennonite discourse, the opportunity is always there, theologically speaking, for the New Testament people of God to seek to do good to the society around them. This will not just take the form of proclamation of the gospel, or corporate or individual acts of charity, but in seeking to encourage the relationships and values that God desires, as modelled in the Old Testament church. If the Jubilee Centre is wrong about this, it is not because it is 'utopian' in a careless, sociological or literary sense, but in a theological sense. And it is just this debate – over the Biblical justification for Christian action in the world – that the Jubilee Centre's critics need to engage in.⁴⁵ The talisman 'utopian' is a distraction from actually thinking about whether the aims of the Jubilee

Centre are proper for a Christian organisation and, following that, whether their methods are the best ones. Engagement could do worse than begin with the *Jubilee Manifesto* itself.

⁴² Schluter and Clements, 'Jubilee Institutional Norms', 49.

⁴³ Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, p. 85; P.S. Mills, *Interest in Interest: The Relevance of the Old Testament Ban on Interest for Today* (Cambridge: Jubilee Centre, 1990).

⁴⁴ *Jubilee Manifesto*, p. 328.

⁴⁵ A particularly weighty contribution in favour of a public role for the people of God is Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations: Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996).

