The Pessimistic Eutopias of H.G. Wells

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H.G. Wells wrote more works that fall within the utopian genre[1] than any other writer. While we think of the dystopia as primarily the creation of Evgenii Zamiatin, Aldous Huxley and George Orwell, Wells wrote a number of dystopias before them, and Wells is famous for his positive utopias such as *A Modern Utopia* (1905).[2]

An analysis of these utopian works should lead to a greater understanding of Wells's social and political ideas and help illuminate his general position on the human condition and the extent to which he believed it could be improved. Limiting the scope to the utopias gives a partial view, but since these works are such an important part of his corpus and a major means of conveying his ideas, such a partial view is still of value.

I shall examine Wells's utopias chronologically from *The Time Machine* of 1895 to *The Holy Terror* of 1939 and end with a brief glance at *Mind at the End of Its Tether* of 1945. Hope and despair intermingle, follow each other with rapidity, and Wells ends, after his last utopia, where he began — with the belief that when all is said and done the human race will end badly.

The basic plot of *The Time Machine (1895)*[3] was to become a standard approach to exploring either the past or the future — a machine is invented and the inventor visits a number of different time periods. The stages of the future which the hero visits are a series in the development of the division of society into two classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The two societies that develop, the Eloi and the Morlocks, represent the extreme development of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat respectively. The Eloi are completely pleasure oriented and even seem willing to be food for the Morlocks. The Eloi have no concern with or for each other. The Morlocks are underground factory workers turned beasts. During the traveller's final trip, to the end of the world, he discovers that the human race no longer exists on a destroyed world.

There is no optimism in *The Time Machine*; it is Wells's most wholly negative picture until *Mind At the End of Its Tether*. Neither hold out any hope for humanity. Clearly Wells's position will change, but *The Time Machine* is fairly typical of his early works.

Among Wells's other early dystopias were "A Story of the Days to Come" (1899)[4] and *When the Sleeper Wakes* (1899).[5] The story, whose theme is developed in the book, describes the world from 2100 to 2104 which is dominated by a company with monopolies of water and electricity and another company controlling labour.

Both "A Story of the Days to Come" and *When the Sleeper Wakes* develop the class theme of *The Time Machine* but at a time before the Eloi and Morlocks. It is an intensely stratified world. "... the ancient antithesis of luxury, waste and sensuality on the one hand and abject poverty on the other still prevailed" (p.42).

A third of the population works perpetually for the Labour Company. "Nowadays there are no workhouses, no refuges and charities, nothing but the Company offices are everywhere. ... any man, woman or child who comes to be hungry and weary and with neither home nor friend nor resort, must go to the Company in the end — or seek some way of death" (p.130).

The world had become almost completely urbanized. Machines had driven people off the land as sheep had done earlier. "The whole world was civilized; the whole world dwelt in cities; the whole world was property" (p.96).

The old diseases had been conquered, personal violence had ended, and everyone had adequate clothes, food and shelter, but the average individual had not changed much. People were still easily led, "helpless in the hands of demagogue and organizer" (p.97). Few ever left the great cities and most people had little education. As a result they were not able to judge intelligently the appeals made to them.

The world was a plutocracy which, during the course of the novel, comes into conflict with self-appointed leaders of labour. The latter temporarily win and replace one dictatorship with another. The controlling factor is wealth; it really makes no difference who officially rules.

Religion has even become a profit-making enterprise.

> They were travelling seated on one of the swift upper ways, the place leapt upon them at a bend and advanced rapidly towards them. It was covered with inscriptions from top to base, in vivid white and blue, save where a vast and glaring kinematograph transparency presented a realistic new testament scene, and where a vast festoon of black to show that the popular religion followed the popular politics, hung across the lettering. Graham had already become familiar with the phonotype writing and these inscriptions arrested him, being to his sense for the most part almost incredible blasphemy. Among the less offensive were "Salvation on the First Floor and turn to the Right." "Put your Money on your Maker." "The Sharpest Conversion in London, Expert Operators! Look Slippy!" "Be a Christian — without hindrance to your present Occupation." "All the Brightest Bishops on the Bench to-night and Prices as Usual." "Brisk Blessings for Busy Business Men" (p.140).

By and large people live in hotels, an extrapolation, as Wells noted, of a tendency beginning in the Victorian city. "People had their sleeping rooms, with it might be antechambers, rooms that were always sanitary at least whatever the degree of comfort and privacy, and for the rest they lived ... eating, reading, playing, conversing, all in places of public resort, going to their work in the industrial quarters of the city or doing business in their offices in the trading section" (p.142).

Wells also pointed with real concern to the serious problem of new industrial disease and the puerile excuses used to keep people at killing work for the pleasure of the upper classes. Labour had lost any sense of craftsmanship. "The latter-day labourer, male as well as female, was essentially a machine-minder and feeder, a servant and attendant, or an artist under direction" (p.154).

"A Story of the Days to Come" and *When the Sleeper Wakes* show an intermediate stage on the road to the Eloi and the Morlocks. The period is one of turmoil and conflict, revolution and violence. Poverty still exists although muted, but wealth certainly still rules. Neither capitalism nor socialism will bring a better world. Revolutionary leaders are not trustworthy but may hold all the hope there is. This hope is a slight one; this future of Wells is bleak indeed.

The early Wells dystopias continue with his famous novel *The First Men in the Moon* (1901)[6] with its horrifying civilization — the Selenites — breeding people for specific tasks. It is the height of specialization. The Selenites are like an insect hive. "In the moon ... every citizen knows his place. He is born to that place, and the elaborate discipline of training and education and surgery he undergoes fits him at last so completely to it that he has neither ideas nor organs for any purpose beyond it" (p.143).

Again, in symbolic form we see the degrading effects of class society. Human or Selenite rulers use the talents of their subjects for their own purposes. Humans are not yet Selenites but all Wells's dystopias have pointed toward human becoming more like Selenite.

The Food of the Gods (1904)[7] is a less powerful work, but the point is similar. A new food produces men and women who are giants, both physically and intellectually, and gradually reshapes plants and animals to their size. The little people (us) try to kill the new race and fail. They, in their turn, decide to allow the little people to live, but confidently expect them to die out in the long run.

The new race is superior to mere homo sapiens. While one regrets the end of one's own species, it is clear that some sort of evolutionary imperative is at work. In fact, the best part of our civilization will survive only if we don't. We have been superseded.

This imagery can be read as metaphor or, as was so often intended at the time, desired reality. The giants were, among other things, a first, crude version of the samurai first presented in his next work, *A Modern Utopia* (1905),[8] and found in one form or another in most of his eutopias.

With *A Modern Utopia* Wells abruptly changed direction in his utopian writing and published his first major eutopia. He began by discussing some fundamental differences between his *modern* utopia and older ones. He said,

> The Utopia of a modern dreamer must needs differ in one fundamental aspect from the Nowheres and Utopias men planned before Darwin quickened the thought of the world. Those were all perfect and static States, a balance of happiness won for ever against the forces of unrest and disorder that inhere in things. One beheld a healthy and simple generation enjoying the fruits of the earth in an atmosphere of virtue and happiness, to be followed by other virtuous, happy and entirely similar generations, until the Gods grew weary. Change and development were dammed back by invisible dams for ever. But the Modern Utopia must not be static but kinetic, must shape not as a permanent state but as a hopeful stage, leading to a long ascent of stages. Nowadays we do not resist and overcome the great stream of things, but rather float upon it. We build now not citadels, but ships of state. For one ordered arrangement of citizens rejoicing in an equality of happiness safe and assured to them and their children forever, we have to plan "a flexible common compromise, in which a perpetually novel succession of individualities may converge most effectually upon a comprehensive onward development." That is the first, most generalized difference between a utopia based upon modern conceptions and all the utopias that were written in the former time (pp.5-6).

He went on to argue that the modern utopia must be placed in the world as we know it, with people who have strengths and weaknesses, passions, desires, and conflicts, both within and among themselves. He said, and to Wells this was a most important point, "No less than a planet will serve the purpose of a modern utopia" (p.11). Wells believed that in modern times an isolated utopia is simply out of date and impossible. An isolated island has no point in 1905, a utopia must be planetary, a world state, or it will fail.

Wells discussed what to him were apparently fairly simple problems such as the need for a common language (Wells was a supporter of Esperanto) and for freedom of movement. He then moved to the more complex problem of privacy. "The room, or apartment, or home, or mansion, whatever it may be a man or woman maintains, must be private, and under his or her complete dominion ..." (p.41). But what, he asked, of private grounds. If freely allowed, "... the poorer townsman (if there are to be rich and poor in the world) will be forced to walk through endless miles of high-fenced villa gardens before he may expand in his little scrap of reserved open country" (pp.41-42). To Wells this was unfair, and he decided to limit the land taken for solely private use and tax it more heavily.

People will not live in heavily industrialized areas but travel to work by train so children, in particular, will not be exposed to unhealthy conditions. "... in Utopia there will be wide stretches of cheerless or unhealthy or toilsome or dangerous land with never a household; there will be regions of mining and smelting, black with the smoke of furnaces and gashed and desolated by mines, with a sort of weird inhospitable grandeur of industrial desolation ..." (p.49). He did not imagine that such places could be cleaned up.

All land will be owned by a local authority as will the basic resources for production.

> In Utopia we conclude that, whatever other types of property may exist, all natural sources of force, and indeed all strictly natural products, coal, waterpower, and the like, are inalienably vested in the local authorities (which, in order to secure the maximum of convenience and administrative efficiency, will probably control areas as large sometimes as half England). They will generate electricity by water-power, by combustion, by wind or tide or whatever other natural force is available, and this electricity will be devoted, some of it to the authority's lighting and other public works, some of it as a subsidy, to the World-State authority which controls the highroads, the great railways, the inns and other apparatus of world communication, and the rest will pass on to private individuals or to distributing companies

> at a uniform fixed rate for private lighting and heating, for machinery and industrial applications of all sorts (p.77).

Other forms of property may be held individually. "A modern Utopian most assuredly must have a practically unqualified property in all those things that become, as it were, by possession, extensions and expressions of his personality; his clothing, his jewels, the tools of his employment, his books, the objects of art he may have bought or made, his personal weapons (if Utopia have need of such things), insignia, and so forth" (pp.92-93). Such property can be inherited and so, under heavier tax, can a house and private garden. It will even be possible to set aside, under certain conditions and with a time limit, money for the education and advantage of minor children (p.94). On the other hand, all shares will be sold at a person's death and most will go to the state. "... the State will insure the children of every citizen, and those legitimately dependent upon him against the inconvenience of his death; it will carry out all reasonable additional dispositions he may have made for them in the same event; and it will insure him against old age and infirmity ..." (p.95).

The economic system of *A Modern Utopia* is capitalism, but not anything approaching laissez-faire capitalism. It is a capitalism regulated by both law and commonsense.

> Besides strictly personal possessions and shares in business adventures, Utopia will no doubt permit associations of its citizens to have a property in various sorts of contracts and concessions, in leases of agricultural and other land, for example; in houses they may have built, factories and machinery they may have made, and the like. And if a citizen prefer to adventure into business single-handed, he will have all the freedoms of enterprise enjoyed by a company; in business affairs he will be a company of one, and his single share will be dealt with at his death like any other shares ... So much for the second kind of property. And these two kinds of property will probably exhaust the sorts of property a Utopian may possess.
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> The trend of modern thought is entirely against private property in land or natural objects or products, and in Utopia these things will be the inalienable property of the World State. Subject to the rights of free locomotion, land will be leased out to companies or individuals, but — in view of the unknown necessities of the future — never for a longer period of than, let us say, fifty years (pp.96-97).

The state also takes to itself the responsibility of ensuring all housing to be sound and healthy. It will find work for any in need of it, and "... by itself acting as the reserve employer — maintain a minimum wage that will cover the costs of a decent life" (p.139).

No one who earns only the minimum wage is allowed to have children (p.141). This illustrates, among other things, one of the purposes of law in the future state — to ensure continuing improvement of the human race through eugenic encouragement or prohibition. Wells was convinced — together with many other thinkers of his time — that controlling the right to have children was absolutely

essential for the future improvement of society. *The Food of the Gods* read as a metaphor for planned control of heredity was a pointer to an improved future.

Criminals, in particular, should not be allowed to breed, but, as was noted, the prohibition extended to all who were unable to earn more than the minimum wage.

> The State is justified in saying, before you may add children to the community for the community to educate and in part to support, you must be above a certain minimum of personal efficiency, and this you must show by holding a position of solvency and independence in the world; you must be above a certain age, and a certain minimum of physical development, and free of any transmissible disease. You must not be a criminal unless you have expiated your offense. Failing these simple qualifications, if you and some person conspire and add to the population of the State, we will, for the sake of humanity, take over the innocent victim of your passions, but we shall insist that you are under a debt to the State of a peculiarly urgent sort, and one you will certainly pay, even if it is necessary to use restraint to get the payment out of you; it is a debt that has in the last resort your liberty as a security, and, moreover, if this thing happens a second time, or if it is disease or imbecility you have multiplied, we will take an absolutely effectual guarantee that neither you nor your partner offend again in this matter (pp.183-184).

On a more positive side, people are encouraged to marry and have children if they are in a position to support them. But childless marriages are allowed to expire at the end of a set period of time (p.96).

Wells argued for the equality of men and women and said that there is only one way of equalizing them. This can be achieved

> ... by insisting that motherhood is a service to the State and a legitimate claim to a living; and that, since the State is to exercise the right of forbidding or sanctioning motherhood, a woman who is, or is becoming, a mother, is as much entitled to wages above the minimum wage, to support, to freedom, and to respect and dignity as a policeman, a solicitor-general, a king, a bishop in the State Church, a Government professor, or anyone else the State sustains. Suppose the State secures to every woman who is, under legitimate sanctions, becoming or likely to become a mother, that is to say who is duly married, a certain wage from her husband to secure her against the need of toil and anxiety, suppose it pays her a certain gratuity upon the birth of a child, and continues to pay at regular intervals sums sufficient to keep her and her child in independent freedom, so long as the child keeps up to the minimum standard of health and physical and mental development. Suppose it pays more upon the child when it rises markedly above certain minimum qualifications, physical or mental, and, in fact, does its best to make thoroughly efficient motherhood a profession worth following. And suppose in correlation with this it forbids the industrial employment of married women and of mothers who have children

> needing care, unless they are in a position to employ qualified efficient substitutes to take care of their offspring (pp.187-188).

Wells's image is somewhat less than egalitarian. He said, "... it is obvious that one unavoidable condition will be the chastity of the wife. Her infidelity being demonstrated, must at once terminate the marriage and release both her husband and the State from any liability for the support of her illegitimate offspring" (p.194). On the other hand, "a reciprocal restraint on the part of the husband is clearly of no importance whatsoever" (p.195). But to be fair to Wells, he did go on to say, "There should be an implication that it is not to occur" (p.195).[9]

Wells came to the conclusion that the difficulty of running this complex world state precludes democracy because a "more powerful and efficient method of control than electoral methods can give" is needed (p.258). Therefore, he invented an elite of dedicated men and women called the samurai.[10]

> Typically, the *samurai* are engaged in administrative work. Practically the whole of the responsible rule of the world is in their hands: all our head teachers and disciplinary heads of colleges, our judges, barristers, employers of labour beyond a certain limit, practising medical men, legislators, must be *samurai*, and all the executive committees, and so forth, that play so large a part in our affairs are drawn by lot exclusively from them (p.278).

The samurai are under an austere rule which prohibits them from in any way gaining from their powerful positions. They are not allowed to buy or sell on their account or to be in any way involved with selling (p.287). They may not act, sing, or recite (p.289). And there are a variety of other minor prohibitions one might expect for a new nobility. There are also many things they must do.

> There would be many precise directions regarding his health, and rules that would aim at once at health and that constant exercise of will that makes life good. Save in specified exceptional circumstances, the samurai must bathe in cold water, and the men must shave every day; they have the precisest directions in such matters; the body must be in health, the skin and muscles and nerves in perfect tone, or the samurai must go to the doctors of the order, and give implicit obedience to the regimen prescribed. They must sleep alone at least four nights in five; and they must eat with and talk to anyone in their fellowship who cares for their conversation for an hour, at least, at the nearest clubhouse of the samurai once on three chosen days in every week. Moreover, they must read aloud from the Book of the Samurai for at least ten minutes every day. Every month they must buy and read faithfully through at least one book that has been published during the past five years, and the only intervention with private choice in that matter is the prescription of a certain minimum of length for the monthly book or books (p.297).

The rules for women samurai are generally the same except that, if married she must have children. If she does not have children she must either divorce or leave the samurai. Women samurai may marry outside the order; men cannot.

The samurai are probably the most important part of Wells's eutopia. His worry over the developing class structure depicted so well in his dystopias is transmuted here into a new vision of a dedicated selfless class serving others, doing those things that most men and women are unwilling or unable to do. The samurai rule quietly from the background. But the main message comes across loud and clear; eutopia cannot be created without rule, or help.

In *In the Days of the Comet* (1906)[11] the human race gets the help from a passing comet which changes everyone's personality. The whole concept of ownership simply disappears as do all the "baser passions". Old cities are torn down, a commune is formed and everyone lives happily ever after due to a power completely outside their control.

In the Days of the Comet is, for all its happy ending, a deeply pessimistic book. Only fate, in the form of the passing comet, can save humankind from itself. Only when human nature changes will society change, and Wells was very uncertain about the possibility of changing human nature.

Six years later, Wells participated in a project with a more positive attitude. Wells and twelve other writers put together a book entitled *The Great State. Essays in Construction* (1912).[12] In a series of essays they described various aspects of a world much like that described by Wells in *A Modern Utopia.*

Wells's contribution was the first essay, "The Past and the Great State", (pp.3-46) in which he first argued that what they were doing was to project the small, face-to-face community of the past onto the whole world. He then went on to fill in a few of the details.

As with many other writers of this time, Wells was ambivalent about the delights of rural life, and he said that "the agricultural population" could spend the winters in the cities.

> A fully developed civilization employing machines in the hands of highly skilled men will minimise toil to the very utmost, no man will shove where a machine can shove, or carry where a machine can carry; but there will remain, more particularly in the summer, a vast amount of hand operations, invigorating and even attractive to the urban population. Given short hours, good pay, and all the jolly amusement in the evening camp that a free, happy, and intelligent people will develop for themselves, and there will be little difficulty about this particular class of work to differentiate it from any other necessary labour" (p.35).

The Countess of Warwick, in "The Great State and The Country-Side" (pp.49-65), agreed with Wells's approach. She emphasized that the huge cities we know today will gradually shrink and more human sized towns will be the normal residence for most people. "The radical distinction between the Country and the Town will have disappeared" (p.51). The state will own all the land and farming will be on a large scale on state farms run by trained managers. "Farming will be a profession of the same rank as medicine, public administration, and education" (p.55).

Wells's ambivalence regarding the future continued in *The World Set Free* (1914).[13] Much of the book is taken up by devastating future wars. Although an eutopia is achieved, the world must go through hell first. Much of the world reverted to a barbarian civilization, capitalism was restored, and a total, world-wide rebuilding became both necessary and possible. It is not certain that Wells believed that only virtually complete destruction would make the world state possible, but that is the message here.

He started with agriculture, making the same point as he had in his essay in *The Great State*.

> The central idea of the modern system is the substitution of cultivating guilds for the individual cultivator and for cottage and village life altogether. These guilds are associations of men and women who take over areas of arable or pasture land, and make themselves responsible for a certain average produce. They are bodies small enough as a rule to be run on a strictly democratic basis and large enough to supply all the labour, except for a certain assistance from townspeople during the harvest, needed upon the land farmed. They have watchers' bungalows or chalets on the ground cultivated, but the ease and costlessness of modern locomotion enables them to maintain a group of residences in the nearest town with a common dining-room and club-house, and usually also a guild house in the national or provincial capital (p.235).

Other reforms, such as a universal language, a common monetary system and a reformed calendar were put into effect. The key to the possibility of the transformation Wells envisaged was an abundance of power. With unlimited power, produced through the discovery of something like atomic energy, it becomes possible to get out of the old cities and establish more congenial arrangements. "... our cities are now true social gatherings, each with a character of its own and distinctive interests of its own, and most of them with a common occupation" (p.241).

Wells was still suspicious of democracy, and he suggested an elaborate electoral system whose sole purpose is to defuse dissent. Party politics have disappeared and formal government has been significantly reduced. This is due to the disappearance of the military, the legal establishment, and "all the bickering aspects of life."

> The majority of our population consists of artists, and the bulk of activity in the world lies no longer with any Necessities, but with their elaboration, decoration and refinement. There has been an evident change in the quality of this making during recent years. It becomes more purposeful than it was, losing something of its first elegance and prettiness and gaining in intensity; but that is a change rather of hue than of nature. That comes with a deepening philosophy and a sounder education. For the first joyous exercises of fancy we perceive now the deliberation of a more constructive imagination. There is a natural order in these things, and art comes before science as the satisfaction of more elemental needs must come before art, and as play and pleasure come in a human life before the development of a settled purpose ... (pp.249-250).

It must be remembered that Wells's advocacy of art over science is rooted in a society made possible by science. It is also made possible by an educational system explicitly concerned with what we now call behavioural engineering. It is designed to rid children of "... the old Adam of instinctive suspicions, hostilities, and passions ..." (p.259). It is intended to release mankind from self, from ego, and to develop an altruism, an identification with others, and with the world wide purposes of the new civilization.

Wells seemed to be saying that if we have a chance to virtually start over, it will be possible to create eutopia, given, of course, unlimited power. In *Men Like Gods* (1923)[14] he continued the theme of possibility, but the men and women of this eutopia are so far advanced beyond the men and women of what they call the Age of Confusions as to imply impossibility. And the eutopia here is also based on a destructive war and great advances in science.

The most obvious characteristic of this future is the great development of the people. They are bigger, better formed and more intelligent. Wells said that this is possible in part through eugenics, something we could start doing immediately, but in part awaits future discoveries. "For centuries now Utopian science had been able to discriminate among births, and nearly every Utopian alive would have ranked as an energetic creative spirit in former days" (p.80).

All the greatness of this utopia is due to the development of a society populated this way and their ability to think scientifically about social problems. "There is no rule or government needed by adult Utopians because all the rule and government they need they have had in childhood and youth" (p.80).

The people lead joyful lives. They create, compete to constantly better what they have done before, and take healthy exercise although much of the good health is founded upon an educational system which keeps the child free of psychological problems and allows it to develop to its fullest capacity in whatever direction its talents lie.

> Every Utopian child is taught to the full measure of its possibilities and directed to the work that is indicated by its desires and capacity. It is born well. It is born of perfectly healthy parents; its mother has chosen to bear it after due thought and preparation. It grows up under perfectly healthy conditions; its natural impulses to play and learn are gratified by the subtlest educational methods; Hand, eyes and limbs are given every opportunity of training and growth; it learns to draw, write, express itself, use a great variety of symbols to assist and extend its thought. Kindness and civility become engrained habits, for all about it are kind and civil (pp.78-79).

This is Wells's most positive image and yet the question "are these people human?" nags; if not, what does that say about the possibility of betterment. In *The Open Conspiracy* (1928)[15] Wells set out a program for achieving utopia which depends, in part, on creating a new breed capable of being samurai or like gods. At the same time he continued to argue for more mundane changes such as collective ownership of the land and seas.

In the U.S. revised version of 1931, entitled *What Are We to Do With Our Lives?*, there is a chapter with the title "No Stable Utopia Is Now Conceivable", but Wells set forth a program for how a utopia might be achieved if conditions improve. Still, it will take great effort to limit population growth while improving the human race, establish a really effective world organization, and bring about a world-wide eutopia.

Wells's next and last major eutopia was *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933).[16] It is set about 150 years in the future and is based on "... the realization [by intelligent people] that human society had become one indivisible economic system with novel and enormous potentials of well-being" (p.19). Following from this realization is "... the necessity of disavowing the sovereignty of contemporary governments, of setting up authoritative central controls to supplement or supersede them, and of putting the production of armaments, the production of the main economic staples and the protection of workers from destructive under-payment, beyond the reach of profit-seeking manipulation" (p.26).

Both inflation and deflation have been overcome by world-wide monetary controls, there is no gambling, and no usury. Land and the natural resources are owned by the world state and leased with no right to sublet. There is a world-wide information bank, as we would call it, which compiles, verifies and makes accessible all available knowledge.

It is, for a time, a fairly authoritarian world. "... medicine men, sorcerers, priests, religious teachers, and organizers of sedition ..." (p.348) were fined or exiled. Education is wholly in the hands of the state; the right of parents to educate their children in their beliefs is no longer recognized. Only after all false belief is eradicated does freedom become possible. The earlier samurai are here called Fellows and lead the world from the interval of authority to a period of self-discipline and dignity. There is now, at the end of the struggle,

> no need to govern the world .... We have made war impossible; we have liberated ourselves from the great anti-social traditions that set man against man; we have made the servitude of man to man through poverty impossible. The faculties of health, education, and behaviour will sustain the good conduct of the race. The controls of food, housing, transport, clothing, supply, initiative, design, research, can do their own work. There is nothing left for a supreme government to do. Except look up the world it has made and see that it is good. And bless it (pp.376-377).

Wells gave an extensive history of the difficulties of the future before the eutopia is achieved. He discussed the necessity of war, dictatorship, and a period of puritanism to cleanse the world and the people so the social sciences will be able to construct the new system with new people in a new world.

Most of the still essential labour is provided by two and a half years public service required of everyone as part of their education. They are then free to develop those

talents that interest them most. As a result of their education they serve humankind and are not primarily concerned with selfish ends. They are free even if originally forced to be.

Wells saw a future in which humanity will transcend *homo sapiens* and become a new species. Wells's new being has a touch of Olaf Stapledon and the Arthur C. Clarke of *Childhood's End* (1953).

> The body of mankind is now one single organism of nearly two thousand five hundred million persons, and the individual differences of every one of these persons is like an exploring tentacle thrust out to test and learn, to savour life in its fullness and bring in new experiences for the common stock. We are all members of one body. Only in the dimmest analogy has anything of this sort happened in the universe as we knew it before. Our sense of our individual difference makes our realization of our common being more acute. We work, we think, we explore, we dispute, we take risks and suffer — for there seems no end to the difficult and dangerous adventures individual men and women may attempt; and more and more plain does it become to us that it is not our little selves, but Man the Undying who achieves these things through us. As the slower processes of heredity seize upon and confirm these social adaptations, as the confluence of wills supersedes individual motives and loses its present factors of artificiality, the history of life will pass into a new phase, a phase with a common consciousness and a common will. We in our time are still rising towards the crest of that transition. And when that crest is attained what grandeur of life may not open out to Man! Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard; nor hath it entered into the mind of man to conceive. ... For now we see as in a glass darkly ... (pp.429-430).

Six years later Wells wrote a final eutopia that, while advocating the world state, sounds like the mildest of reforms in comparison with his earlier works. *The Holy Terror* (1939)[17] presents an unusual, strong leader who, through world control of aviation, wins the Final War of Ideologies and establishes the world state. He also finds it necessary to become a dictator in order to achieve his ends.

Wells was never very optimistic about the future and was always rather ambivalent about science. His problem with science was not with the activity but with whether people would use it for good or bad ends. At the beginning, all Wells's works were dystopias, many of them dystopias of science used for authoritarian ends.

Wells never trusted humankind or democracy. In all his eutopias, even his most optimistic ones, there is a need for strong leadership and the dedication of an elite. As he grew older, he moved toward the position that the earth must suffer at least one more devastating war and a dictatorship if significant improvement was to be possible. Finally, he concluded that there was no hope. As with his first vision, his last, *Mind at the End of Its Tether* (1945),[18] sees a world where the human race has disappeared altogether.

In 1940 C.E.M. Joad wrote, in "An Open Letter to H.G. Wells", of Wells's "irrepressible optimism" and "an unrepresentative phase of discouragement".[19] I have presented Wells as a pessimist with periodic phases of optimism. Joad's assessment is the dominant one, but it is clear from the evidence that it is, at the minimum, an overstatement to speak of discouragement as "unrepresentative" in Wells's thought.[20]

On the surface, Wells was certainly the great optimist, full of plans for revolutionizing the world, but any real examination of those plans must lead one to question the degree of his faith in them. Most of his plans require accident (*In the Days of the Comet*), a new breed of human beings (*Men Like Gods*), or a dedicated class of people who are willing to sacrifice their lives for the betterment of the world (*A Modern Utopia*). This last is the most hopeful of his plans, and he stuck with it for some years. Certainly he also believed, as did many others at the time, that it would be possible to selectively breed for a better human being. But he also lived long enough to see the perversion of this idea in Hitler's Germany and elsewhere.

In addition, his earliest works were all dystopias showing horrible futures for the human race. There is usually an optimistic side to dystopias. They say to the reader that if we avoid taking this path we can avoid this future, but if we continue on this path this is where we are going. It is your choice. The writer confidently assumes that if a sufficiently horrifying future has been presented, the reader will recognize the folly of continuing in that direction and change. There were undoubtedly some elements of this in Wells's dystopias. But when he presented his positive visions and tells us how to reach eutopia and it requires overwhelming effort, one must wonder just how much of an optimist he was and how much it was a facade, given up at the end, designed to make us think that it was possible to achieve utopia. Maybe, just maybe, belief in its possibility could turn it into reality. He worked hard for his eutopias. Wells, however pessimistic he was, had more faith in the human race than it has ever had in itself.

Notes

1. The words utopia, eutopia and dystopia mean no place, good place and bad place respectively. The first two words were coined by Thomas More in the book we call *Utopia*. (More's title was *Libellus Vere Aureus Nec Minus Salutaris Quam Festivus De Optima Reip[ublicae] Statu, Deq[ue] Insula Utopia).* Utopia is most often used to mean "a non-existent good place" but at times keeping the distinction is useful. Dystopia is a twentieth century coinage. For further discussion of these terms, see Lyman Tower Sargent, "Utopia: The Problem of Definition", *Extrapolation*, 16 (May 1975), pp.137-148 and "Introduction", *British and American Utopian Literature 1516-1975; An Annotated Bibliography* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1979), pp.ix-xxii.

2. Of course there is a huge literature on Wells. A few of those on his utopianism are the following: Jorge Luis Borges, "The First Wells", in his *Other Inquisitions: 1937-1952*, trans. Ruth L.C. Simms (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), pp.86-88; Alfred Borrello, *H.G. Wells: Author in Agony*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972; Christopher Collins, "Zamyatin, Wells and the Utopian Literary Tradition", *Slavonic and East European Review*, 44 (July 1966), pp.351-360; Georges Connes, *Étude sur la pensée de Wells*, [Paris:] Librairie Hachette, 1926; Peter Conrad, "Futuristic America: H.G. Wells", in his *Imagining America* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), pp.130-158; Maria-Agnelies Hardt, S.A.C., "Die Anthropologie H.G. Wells' Darstellung und Kritik seines Utopischen Menschenbildes", Diss. Bonn, 1949; Roslynn D. Haynes, *H.G. Wells: Discoverer of the Future. The Influence of Science on His Thought*, London: Macmillan, 1980; Mark R. Hillegas, *The Future As Nightmare: H.G. Wells and the Anti-Utopians*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1967; J.A. Hobson, "The New Aristocracy of Mr. Wells", *Contemporary Review*, 89 (April 1906), pp.487-497; David Y. Hughes, "H.G. Wells: Ironic Romancer", *Extrapolation*, 6 (May 1965); pp.32-38; John Huntington, "The Science Fiction of H.G. Wells", in *Science Fiction; A Critical Guide*, ed. Patrick Parrinder (London: Longman, 1979), pp.34-50; William J. Hyde, "The Socialism of H.G. Wells in the Early Twentieth Century", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 17 (April 1956), pp.217-234; J. Kagarlitsky, *The Life and Thought of H.G. Wells*, trans. Moura Budberg, New York: Barnes & Noble, 1966; David Lodge, "Assessing H.G. Wells", in his *The Novelist at the Crossroads and other Essays on Fiction and Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971) pp.205-220; Frank McConnell, *The Science Fiction of H.G. Wells*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981; Norman Mackenzie and Jeanne Mackenzie, *H.G. Wells; A Biography*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973 (U.K. ed. as *The Time Traveller*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1973); John Macy, "H.G. Wells and Utopia", in his *The Critical Game* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1922), pp.267-276; Heinz Mattick, *H.G. Wells als Sozialreformer*, No. 29 of *Beiträge zur englischen Philologie*, Leipzig: Bernhard Tauschnitz, 1935; Alessandro Monti, "Appunti preliminari per un saggio su Wells", in *Utopia e Fantascienza* (Turin: Giappichelli, 1975), pp.99-128; Peter R. Morton, "Biological Degeneration: A Motif in H.B. [sic.] Wells and Other Late Victorian Utopianists", *Southern Review* (Australia), 9 (1976), pp.93-112; Heinz-Joachim Müllenbrock, "La position de Wells dans le développement de l'utopie anglaise moderne sous l'aspect sociologique", *Moreana*, No. 34 (May 1972), pp.25-38; [Violet Paget,] "On Modern Utopias: An Open Letter to Mr. H.G. Wells", by Vernon Lee (pseud.) *Fortnightly Review*, 86 (December 1906), pp.1123-1137; Patrick Parrinder, "H.G. Wells and the Social Novel", Diss. Cambridge, 1969; Ingvald Raknem, *H.G. Wells and His Critics*, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1962; Stuart Sherman, "The Utopian Naturalism of H.G. Wells", in his *On Contemporary Literature* (New York: Peter Smith, 1931), pp.50-84; [Christopher St. John Sprigg,] "H.G. Wells: A Study in Utopianism", in his *Studies in a Dying Culture*, by Christopher Caudwell (pseud.) (London: John Lane The Bodley Head, 1938), pp.73-95; Darko Suvin and Robert M. Philmus (eds.), *H.G. Wells and Modern Science Fiction*, Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1977; W.J. Sykes, "Is Wells Also Among the Prophets?", *Queen's Quarterly*, 49 (Autumn 1942), pp.233-245; Antonina Vallentin, *H.G. Wells: Prophet of Our Day*, trans. Daphne Woodward, New York: John Day Co., 1950; W. Warren Wagar, "H.G. Wells and the Radicalism of Despair", *Studies in the Literary*

Imagination, 6 (Fall 1973), pp.1-10; Jack Williamson, *H.G. Wells: Critic of Progress*, Baltimore: Mirage Press, 1973; George Woodcock, "The Darkness Violated by Light: A Revisionist View of H.G. Wells", *Malahat Review*, no. 26 (April 1973), pp.144-160; and Yevgeny Zamyatin, "H.G. Wells", in *A Soviet Heretic: Essays by Yevgeny Zamyatin*, ed. and trans. Mirra Ginsburg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp.259-290.

3. *The Time Machine*, London: William Heinemann, 1895. *The Time Machine* has a complex publishing history, and there are significant differences among the editions. On this problem, see Bernard Bergonzi, "The Publication of *The Time Machine*, 1894-5", *Review of English Studies*, ns 11 (February 1960), pp.42-51. See Wayne Connelly, "H.G. Wells's 'The Time Machine': Its Neglected Mythos", *Riverside Quarterly*, 5, no. 3 (August 1972), pp.178-191; Mark M. Hennelly, Jr., "*The Time Machine*: A Romance of 'The Human Heart'", *Extrapolation*, 20, no. 2 (Summer 1979), pp.154-167; David J. Lake, "Wells's Time Traveller; An Unbelievable Narrator", *Extrapolation*, 22, no. 2 (Summer 1981), pp.117-126; William G. Niederland, "The Birth of H.G. Wells' Time Machine", *American Imago*, 35, nos. 1-2 (1978), pp.106-112; Robert M. Philmus, "Revisions of the Future: *The Time Machine*", *Journal of General Education*, 28 (Spring 1976), pp.23-30; and Philmus, "*The Time Machine*; or the Fourth Dimension as Prophecy", *PMLA*, 83, no. 3 (May 1969), pp.530-535.

4. "A Story of The Days to Come", in *Tales of Space and Time* (London: Macmillan, 1920), pp.167-324. Originally published as a linked series of stories in 1899 in *Pall Mall Magazine* — "The Cure for Love. A Story of the Days to Come (Anno Domini 2090)", vol. 18, pp.186-199); "The Vacant Country ...", vol. 18, pp.309-323; "The Ways of the City. A Story of the Days to Come (Anno Domini 2090-2095)", vol. 18, pp.491-505; "Underneath. A Story of the Days to Come (Anno Domini 2098)", vol. 19, pp. 81-94; and "The Magnanimity of the Man of Pleasure. A Story of the Days to Come (Anno Domini 2097)", vol. 19, pp.222-234. Page references to *Three Prophetic Novels of H.G. Wells*, New York: Dover Publications, 1960.

5. *When the Sleeper Wakes*, London: Harper & Bros;, 1899. Also published in *The Graphic*, 59 (January 7-May 6, 1899), pp.9-11,41-43,73-75,105-107,137-139, 169-171,201-203,233-235,265-267,297-299,329-331,361-363,393-395, 433-435,465-467,497-499,529-531,561-563. A slightly altered version was published as *The Sleeper Wakes*, London: Thomas Edmonds, 1910. An Esperanto edition was published as *La Dormanto Vekiĝas*, trans. A. Frank, London: Esperanto Pub. Co., 1929. Page references to *Three Prophetic Novels of H.G. Wells*, New York: Dover Publications, 1960. See Richard D. Mullen, "H.G. Wells and Victor Rousseau Emanuel: *When the Sleeper Wakes* and *The Messiah of the Cylinder*", *Extrapolation*, 8 (May 1967), pp.31-63.

6. *The First Men in the Moon*, London: George Newnes, 1901. Page references to New York: Airmont Pub. Co., 1965. See Carlo Pagetti, "H.G. Wells: *The First Men In the Moon*", *Studi Inglesi*, 5 (1978), p.189-210; and Pagetti, "*The First Men in the Moon*: H.G. Wells and the Fictional Strategy of his 'Scientific Romances'", trans. Marie-Christine Hubert, *Science-Fiction Studies*, 7 (July 1980), pp.124-134.

7. *The Food of the Gods, And How It Came to Earth*, London: Macmillan, 1904. Originally published without the subtitle in *Pearson's Magazine*, 16-17 (December 1903-June 1904), pp.708-728, 101-115,211-228,324-340,434-451, 551-564,660-675. A parody was published as *The Food of the Dogs and What Became of It* by G[eorge] E[dward] Farrow (1904).

8. *A Modern Utopia*, New York: Scribners, 1905. Originally published with subtitle "A Sociological Holiday", *The Fortnightly Review*, ns 76-77 (os 82-83) (October-December 1904, January-April 1905), pp.740-753,928-846,1116-1135,158-187,348-380,554-587,755-780. Page references to Lincoln: University Nebraska Press, 1967. See David Y. Hughes, "The Mood of *A Modern Utopia*", *Extrapolation*, 23, no. 2 (Summer 1982), pp.117-137.

9. A critique of Wells's position is provided by Cicely Hamilton in her presentation of the position of women in a eutopia closely related to that of *A Modern Utopia*. See her "Women In the Great State", in *The Great State: Essays in Construction* (London: Harper & Brothers, 1912), pp.221-247.

10. Two slightly later utopias are based on Wells's samurai. See *Proposals for a Voluntary Nobility*, Norwich: Samurai Press, 1907; and Ralph Straus, *5000 A.D. A Review and an Excursion. Read Before ye Sette of Odd Volumes at Oddenino's Restaurant on Jan. 24th, 1911*, (London: Privately printed [1911]), pp.39-56. pp.9-39 is a survey of previous literature.

11. *In the Days of the Comet*, London; Macmillan, 1906. Also published in *The Daily Chronicle*, Nos. 13,725-13,756 (February 20-March 28, 1906). All instalments appear on p.8 except No. 13,746 (March 16), p.10. See Joan Evelyn Schulz, "A Study of H.G. Wells's *In the Days of the Comet*", Diss., Illinois, 1963.

12. *The Great State: Essays in Construction*, London: Harper & Brothers, 1912. 1914 ed. as *Socialism and the Great State*, New York: Harper & Bros. Wells's essay was published as "Socialism", *Harper's Magazine*, 124, No. 740-741 (January-February 1912), pp.197-204,403-409. Warwick's essay, "The Great State and the Countryside", was published in *The Fortnightly Review*, ns 91 (March 1, 1912), pp.427-436. See also Wells's "An Apology for a World Utopia", in *The Evolution of World-Peace*, ed. F.S. Marvin, no. 4 of The Unity Series (London: Humphrey Milford and Oxford University Press, 1921), pp.159-178. For an important comment, see George Orwell (pseud.), "Wells, Hitler and the World State", *Horizon*, 44 (August 1944), pp.133-139.

13. *The World Set Free; A Story of Mankind*, New York: E.P. Dutton, 1914. Originally published in *English Review*, 16-17 (January-May 1914), pp.186-210,321-341,468-494,30-57,179-209.

14. *Men Like Gods*, New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1922. Also published with, except for the first instalment, subtitle "An Original Romance", *The Westminster Gazette*, Nos. 9175-9210 (December 5, 1922-January 17, 1923). All instalments are on p.12 except no. 9196 (January 1, 1923), p.3.

15. *The Open Conspiracy; Blue Prints for a World Revolution*, London: Victor Gollancz, 1928; revised edition with additional subtitle *A Second Version of this faith of a modern man made more explicit and plain*, London: Hogarth Press, 1930. U.S. ed. of rev. ed, as *What Are We To Do With Our Lives?*, Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1931.
16. *The Shape of Things to Come*, New York: Macmillan, 1933. Page references to 1945 edition. Another version was published as *Things to Come; A Film Story based on the Material in His History of the Future "The Shape of Things to Come"*, London: Cresset Press, 1935. See the attack on this book by Owen Francis Dudley, *Human Happiness and H.G. Wells; An Antidote to "The Shape of Things to Come"*, London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1936.
17. *The Holy Terror*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1939.
18. *Mind at the End of Its Tether*, San Francisco: Millet Books, 1973.
19. C.E.M. Joad, "An Open Letter to H.G. Wells", *New Statesman and Nation* (August 17, 1940), p.155. Wells replied in the issue of August 24, 1940, p.180 and Joad responded August 31, 1940, p.208.
20. This is certainly not the first time that Wells has been presented as a pessimist. For other such presentations, see, for example, Hillegas, *The Future As Nightmare* and his earlier article, "Cosmic Pessimism in H.G. Wells's Scientific Romances", *Papers of the Michign Academy of Science, Arts, and Letters*, 46 (1961), pp.655-663; W. Warren Wagar, "H.G. Wells and the Radicalism of Despair"; Anthony West, "The Dark World of H.G. Wells", *Harper's Magazine*, 214 (May 1957), pp.68-73; and George Woodcock, "The Darkness Violated by Light".

Science and Society: A Brief Look at *THE INVISIBLE MAN*

Kirpal Singh

Relatively little has been written about *THE INVISIBLE MAN* (1897), the novel Wells published after the phenomenal success of *THE TIME MACHINE* (1895) and *THE ISLAND OF DOCTOR MOREAU* (1896). In this short and exciting story — no less a person than Joseph Conrad considered the book a splendid achievement[1] — Wells examines the impact of science on society from an essentially societal point of view. We are made to see the Invisible Man through the eyes of the various individuals who come across him. The story offered Wells a greater scope to explore issues already raised in the earlier scientific romances because of its contemporary setting. The emphasis on society marks a significant development in Wells' art for it prepares the reader for the larger viewpoint of *THE WAR OF THE WORLDS* (1898). While a good deal of the novel's success is due, no doubt, to what Patrick Parrinder terms "ironic reversals"[2], its relevance for the present reader lies primarily in the response it offers to the pursuit of scientific knowledge for selfish ends.

Griffin, the Invisible Man, after years of patient research invents the means to make himself invisible. The narration of the ordeal that he underwent in the course of his invention is humanly moving and shows Wells' fine ability to render forcefully the more private sensations of pain and suffering. Once invisibility becomes a possibility Griffin dreams of all the things he could do with a new found sense of liberation:

> I was invisible, and I was only just beginning to realise the extraordinary advantage my invisibility gave me. My head was already teeming with plans of all the wild and wonderful things I had now impunity to do. (*The Invisible Man* in *Seven Science-Fiction Novels of H.G. Wells*, Dover Pub. New York, 1934, p.266.)

Invisibility had been a motif in the discussion of right conduct since ancient times.[3] What makes Wells' treatment of it unique is the attempt to detach it from magic or fantasy and provide it with a scientific base.[4] Hence Griffin is presented as a scientist. The question the novel poses and answers is: can a scientific objective be tenable if it alienates its pursuer from the society around him? Wells' answer is an emphatic 'no'. Far from being an aid to progress, science can often undermine the peace and goodwill existing in society. Griffin intrudes into Iping village and brings chaos and confusion to it. He is hardly the benign scientist who experiments in order to arrive at a fuller understanding of life or the material conditions that govern it. On the contrary he envisages unlimited power and liberty for himself. Like Moreau of the earlier novel he aims at self-edification. And the end of both these malevolent scientists is tragic.

The very first experience of invisibility in society proves Griffin to be at the mercy of the crowds and the vehicles that clash and knock against him in busy Oxford Street. Instead of making fools of others (as he had planned to do) he is himself made a fool (p.267). Our sympathy for him, as he is reduced to a figure of ridicule, is balanced by