

## Shaw, Wells and the Fabian Utopia

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The first problem associated with a paper on this subject concerns the probability of prosecution under the Trades Descriptions Act, since the words 'Fabian' and 'utopian' are commonly thought of as mutually exclusive. The Fabians, after all, were the exponents of gas and water socialism, followers of the creed of the inevitability of gradualness, disciples of the Roman Fabius Conctator who of all men was moved by practical considerations. The Fabians regarded themselves as scientific socialists, extolled and practised the virtues of political science and despised the romantic bravura of more headstrong fellow socialists. For the Fabians, even Marx was a romantic whose principal tenets, in the words of Bernard Shaw, "could not by themselves qualify anyone....to manage a wheelstall for five minutes, much less govern a modern state". The Fabians, then, regarded themselves, and were generally regarded, as practical people. It was the Fabian Shaw, for example, who first secured the building of public conveniences for women in his capacity of St Pancras vestryman. Men, he declared, regarded women as inferior in everything but the size of their bladders.

All the same I want to suggest that Fabianism contained strong visionary elements which were nourished by versions of utopia; that, indeed, one cannot really understand even the prosaic Fabians without taking account of the more visionary side of their politics. Who provided the Fabian utopias? Principally the Society's great popular writers, Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells.

Shaw was clearly one of the most influential members of the Fabian, but Wells was a member for only five years, from 1903-8. It is well worth pointing out that though these Fabian years had little long-term influence upon Wells, his influence upon the Fabian was more profound. Wells had professed himself a socialist for many years before joining the Fabian, having attended lectures at William Morris's house in the late 1880s. He was, however, temperamentally unsuited to Fabianism's cliquishness. Like Edward Ponderevo a "cascading sort", Wells set himself the task of turning the Fabian to a mass movement aimed principally at the young: "make socialists", he said, "and you will achieve socialism; there is no other way". He wrote two tracts for the Fabians, *This Misery of Boots* and *Socialism and Marriage*, in which socialism was envisaged as an emotional crusade not some "odd little jobbing about municipal gas and water". Wells's attempts to transform the Fabian were to fail but his influence upon the Society's thinking was deep and enduring. He himself left bitter and disillusioned, hitting out at the Webbs (those "prigs at play") in *The New Machiavelli* and caricaturing Fabian leaders as being useful only if one wanted "to dig a hole with a cricket bat". But the fact remains that during his years in the Fabian membership quadrupled only to decline again when he left. His influence was particularly great with the Young Fabians for whom he remained a champion.

What were the principal themes explored in these 'Fabian utopias' of Shaw and Wells? Here of course we must simplify and systematise and no doubt do some injustice to the complexity of these writers' thought; but there appear to be three

main themes which can be described as Platonic, scientific and spiritual. I propose to look at each.

I have called the first category of Fabian utopia Platonic and must admit at once that I mean no more by this than simply government by a class of guardians, or to use more modern terminology, of political scientists. It goes without saying that the Fabians tended to cast themselves in that role and it is no coincidence that the Webbs founded the London School of Economics and Political Science to provide continuity in scientific leadership. Although in many respects similar to the scientific utopia (as we shall see) the Platonic is distinguishable not merely by virtue of its being run by men who are schooled in the arts and crafts and government and economics and not in pure sciences but also by the minor part that technology plays within society. More important, the well-organised Platonic society is not considered as an end in itself but either as a platform for the scientific conquest of the universe or as a kind of purgatory for the socialist heaven.

For Bernard Shaw and H.G. Wells the Platonic utopia was clearly not the ultimate goal, but equally clearly any development beyond it is to be considered extremely long-term and in much of their writing Shaw and Wells were willing to address themselves to the problems of building the Platonic utopia.

For Shaw socialism was undeniably paternalistic, and he did not beat about the bush in saying so. "If you ask me 'Why should not the people make their own laws?' I can only ask you 'Why should not the people write their own plays?'" Although classifying himself as a democrat, Shaw did so on his own terms and for him democracy meant: "A social order aiming at the greatest available welfare for the whole population".<sup>1</sup> He called himself a totalitarian democrat because he believed that a government could be judged only on its capacity to get things done. This amounted to benevolent dictatorship on behalf of the working class by the guardian class, which would be in no way representative of them nor responsible to them. Now Shaw was well aware that many socialists would have good socialist grounds for opposing his scheme of democracy, but in fact his totalitarian plan was not designed for society as we know it. He really had in mind a new kind of society based on nothing less than complete equality of income. This, Shaw always said, was his most distinctive contribution to socialist thought. Income, he said, was the only thing about human beings that you could equalize, and there was really very little difficulty about managing it. It has to be acknowledged, however, that Shaw withdrew from this position towards the end of his life, accepting that the masses should be given only half of their share, the remainder to be distributed among the guardians so that they might cultivate the arts.

Shaw's guardians were to receive a Rousseauian education and the rest of society a highly formal and disciplined one; they were to be regimented and indoctrinated "in order to secure the utmost freedom". In their schools socialism was to be proselytised and heresy punished. For the majority education was to be a training in dedication. "For my part", Shaw tells us, "I cannot understand how anyone who has the most elementary comprehension of socialism can doubt that compulsory labour and the treatment of parasitic idleness as a sin against the Holy Ghost must be fundamental in socialist law and religion".<sup>2</sup> It is therefore not surprising to find

Shaw announcing in *Tribune* that the Russians were the freest people in the civilised world.<sup>3</sup>

It was precisely because the equal society would be run by the guardians (the scientists of politics) — the criterion of whose decisions would be (naturally) wisdom — that revolt was unthinkable. “When a railway porter directs me to No. 10 platform I do not strike him to the earth with a shout of ‘Down with Tyranny’ and rush violently to No. 1 platform”,<sup>4</sup> Shaw explained. He clearly believed that his indoctrinated majority would concede to the guardians an expertise as great in government as that believed to be possessed by the railway porter in respect of train times. If history has any lessons for us they surely include the following. Even indoctrinated men have a habit of arriving at their own view of what is in their best interests and that, in any case, men seem quite willing on occasions wittingly to act against their own best interests. Dostoevsky opposed this kind of Shavian rationalism when, in *Notes from the Underground*, he declared: “One’s own free and unfettered volition, one’s own caprice, however wild, one’s own fancy, inflamed sometimes to the point of madness — that is the one best and greatest good”.<sup>5</sup>

It is nevertheless true that the guardians who appear in Shaw’s plays make a good case for their own ability to rule, none more so than King Magnus in the play *The Applecart*. Democracy as usually understood was for Shaw a complete sham, a “big balloon filled with gas or hot air, and sent up so that you shall be kept looking at the sky whilst other people are picking your pockets”. All associated with this sham were tainted, indeed the whole process of enfranchising the working class and then competing for its vote was farcical. “As to building Communism with such trash as the capitalist system produces it is out of the question. For a Communist Utopia we need a population of Utopians and Utopians do not grow wild on the bushes nor are they to be picked up in the slums; they have to be cultivated very carefully and expensively”.<sup>6</sup>

Shaw’s guardians, in a society of equal income, would come naturally to the fore; they represented a higher evolutionary type, like Carlyle’s heroes. In the course of fulfilling their evolutionary duty they would transcend the ethical codes and spiritual limitations of ordinary human beings. This is why Shaw supported the European dictators, imagining them to resemble his Fabian friend Lord Olivier, Governor of Jamaica, though he did later acknowledge that Hitler seemed to lack the latter’s kindly objectivity. The world, said Shaw, was divisible into three categories of people. In every thousand there were seven hundred philistines, two hundred and ninety-nine idealists and one realist. The philistines would accept most conditions without serious reflection; the idealists would reflect upon their situation and weave around it a web of sycophantic acceptance. Only the realist would recognise the situation for what it was, uncover its shams and decry its abuses. Thus the realist was the natural guardian and his great enemies were the idealists. In brief then it is only under the leadership of such men and women capable of defining and preserving the ‘great abstractions’ of politics, that the socialist utopia may be achieved.

Though Shaw in his plays provided many examples of guardians, or supermen as he sometimes called them, we are left with no picture of a Shavian Platonic utopia. For this we must turn to Wells, especially to his *A Modern Utopia*. Wells’s Utopians do

not believe that all men are equal, neither do they believe in the accidental categorisation of people into social classes. Instead, Utopians are classified according to temperament. There are four classes: the poietic, the kinetic, the dull and the base. The first two classes are thought to constitute the “living tissue of the state”. Significantly none of these classes is hereditary; people may drift in and out of their own accord — much as the dead may commute between Heaven and Hell in Shaw’s *Man and Superman* — though naturally they will tend to stay in the class which seems to suit them best. The characteristics of these classes are as follows. The poietic possess creative imagination: they are the artists and the truly creative scientific minds, the great philosophers and the moralists. The kinetic class comprises very capable but conventional people. “The most vigorous individuals in this class”, we are told, “are the most teachable people in the world, and they are generally more moral and more trustworthy than the poietic types”. Wells explains that there are two main kinetic types, the mainly intellectual — who comprise, for example, judges and administrators (at best) and rather average scholars and men of science (at worst), and the mainly emotional — comprising (at best) great actors, popular politicians and preachers. The dull class is made up of men and women of “altogether inadequate imaginations” described by Wells as incompetent, formal and imitative and as counting “neither for work nor direction in the State”. Lastly come the base, comprising men and women with no moral sense and who, moreover, are frequently inclined towards cruelty. They are characterised by a “narrower and more persistent egoistic reference than the common run of humanity”.

The political structure of Utopia, however, is not based upon these social divisions. Power lies in the hands of a voluntary nobility known as the *samurai*. The *samurai* are described by Wells as fulfilling functions similar to those of Plato’s guardian class. They are not an hereditary class — in fact any intelligent, healthy and efficient adult over twenty-five may elect to follow the Common Rule. First, though, they will have to have followed a course of instruction at college and to have passed an examination. Having then elected to follow the Common Rule they are required to keep themselves in peak physical and mental condition in order to serve the state. “We prescribe a regimen of food, forbid tobacco, wine or any alcoholic drink, all narcotic drugs”. They are required to sleep alone four nights in every five and to take a cold bath and to exercise every morning. In addition they are obliged to read from the *The Book of Samurai* for ten minutes each day. They are not permitted to act, sing or play public sports, neither may they buy or sell or “avail themselves of the coarser pleasures wealth can still buy”. Finally, every *samurai* is obliged, for one week in each year, to go to some wilder part of the world on his own and to fend for himself entirely. “We civilised men”, says Wells, “go back to the stark Mother that so many of us would have forgotten were it not for this Rule”.

The task of the *samurai* is to “direct and co-ordinate all sound citizens of good intent”. Practically all responsible positions in Utopia are held by *samurai*: “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”. Although the Order occupies power — indeed you have to be a *samurai* to vote — at least one tenth of the supreme

legislative assembly must be elected from outside the Order because it is believed that "a sort of wisdom....comes from sin and laxness".

Wells has been criticised for being more concerned with inessential detail than with the more important aspects of his ideas. His picture of the duties and way of life of the *samurai* offers an example of this inconsistency, for although we know that the *samurai* take a cold bath every morning we have little idea of the nature of the legislative and administrative machinery in which they work, nor — more importantly — how the Order allocate tasks of varying status among themselves. We know only of their success in the tasks of government, for war and poverty have been eliminated, disease cut to a minimum, and the "order, beauty and resources of life" enormously increased.

There are other criticisms one might raise against Wells's Utopia, but it remains true that he does contrive to give the flavour of an efficiently organised state in which life appears to be more orderly and vigorous than ours today. The major social and economic problems of modern capitalist society appear to have been solved, though perhaps at the expense of compassion. But we find a question shaping in our minds as the discussion progresses: what is the **purpose** of it all? We are told that those who comprise the 'living tissue' of the state, the poietics and the kinetics, appear to be "not only in good health but in training". In training for what? We can only answer this question by turning now to the scientific and spiritual utopias for which the Platonic variety may be seen as a precursor.

Science is associated nowadays with utopia chiefly because of man's supposed capacity to change his environment through technology. Yet a belief in the virtues of scientific method seems at first sight to be the polar opposite of the utopian disposition. None did more to reinforce this division in socialist thought than Marx and Engels who used the word 'utopian' as an implied criticism, usually to be linked with bourgeois sentimentality when describing socialists like William Morris, and who used the word 'scientific' principally to describe their own deterministic theories. But belief in scientific method and in the inherent virtues of those who seek scientific 'truth' can itself be highly idealistic and notions of a society run along scientific lines by scientists completely utopian, whatever the state of that society's technology. The importance of science for H.G. Wells could not be overstated. The nature of scientific investigation demanded the most exactly utilitarian verification if such work were to be deemed successful; it would have to work and to go on working, and it would have to be seen to work. Scientists would have to concern themselves with certainty and predictability, or in moral terms with truth. This would have to be their ultimate value and in living their lives accordingly they would be training themselves to manage societies much as they had managed their laboratories and experimentations.

Wells recognised science, originally anyway, as a value system and one synonymous with socialism. In 1908, for example, he wrote: "The fundamental idea on which socialism rests is the same fundamental idea as that upon which all real scientific work is carried.... It is an assertion that things are in their nature orderly, that things may be computed, may be calculated upon and foreseen".<sup>7</sup> Yet Wells

clearly came to recognise that science was capable of gross inhumanity. Griffin, in *The Invisible Man*, is a scientist. His discovery is motivated by a desire to help scientific development and thus his fellow men. But Griffin is an evil man and he uses his scientific knowledge for evil purposes. He has no guiding morality in terms of which to put his knowledge to beneficial use. In *The Island of Dr Moreau* we meet another scientist of unquestioned ability. But Moreau is a sadist and the central paradox of the story is that he and his assistant have set themselves the task of 'humanising' the animals on their island by the most inhumane techniques imaginable, including vivisection, muscle grafting, the reordering of certain nerve and brain functions, all performed wherever possible without any anaesthetic. Moreau is giving us as clear a warning as did Griffin that science itself is **not** a value system but a set of techniques which can be put to the service of any value system, beneficial or pernicious.

All the same Wells never lost faith that through scientists or their science the great changes which would create of this world a utopia would come. Wells's scientists are not like Arthur Koestler's sleepwalkers. Careless they may be, but they usually represent the **conscious** instruments of great change. In the novel *The Food of the Gods*, for example, Mr Bensington and Professor Redwood are immediately identified as distinguished scientists, building what Wells describes as a "reef of science", and conscious of their great work. "Without some great inspiration.... what young man would have given his life to this work as young men do? No, they **must** have seen the glory, they must have had the vision, but so near that it has blinded them".<sup>8</sup>

Bensington and Redwood between them made Herakleophorbia, the food of the gods. It was at once both a substance and a method of feeding which produced giant growth in the recipient, if suitably placed on the curve of growth. The two scientists set up an experimental farm in Kent to feed their wonder food to some chicks. They appointed a manager to the farm, with his wife, and here their problems began. The couple were unsatisfactory from every point of view and their carelessness led to some grotesque results. The earliest of these produced the headline "Giant Wasps in Kent" and the first to be shot measured twenty-seven and a half inches across its open wings and had a sting three and a half inches long. The hasty departure of the farm manager and his wife was followed by the invasion of the Kent countryside by pullets the size of emus. Worse was to follow with the appearance of rats approximately six times the normal size. Interestingly Redwood and Bensington assert that such things don't much matter anyway. Their work is far too important for them to be concerned with its consequences for "little people". These mishaps notwithstanding, the most important development is the administration of Herakleophorbia to children, for immediately the contours of tomorrow's world emerge.

Wells thus lays the foundation for a comparison between scientific progress on the one hand and human small-mindedness on the other, between the two kinds of intellect which he describes elsewhere as "creative" and "legal".<sup>9</sup> The creative minds welcome the development towards greatness in all its aspects, the legal minds attack it on all fronts. The bureaucrats for example: "Then comes the

question of school administration, cost of enlarged desks and forms for our already too greatly burthened National Schools. And to get what? A proletariat of hungry giants". The 'establishment' is represented by a local Kentish vicar who claims: "We are fortunately situated....we are out of it all", meaning democracy, secular education, skyscrapers and motor cars — the horrors of the age. The vicar's guiding principle, to be cut on his tombstone, was *Ut in Principio, nunc est et semper*. For Wells such men were fit only to be fed to the Martians of *The War of the Worlds*. What about the politicians? Wells tells how one man achieves power on the basis of his declared hostility to the increasingly numerous giants and how he proscribes many of their activities to the extent that violence results. "For him", says Wells. "there is no fault so important as self-contradiction, no science so significant as the reconciliation of 'interests'. Economic realities, topographical necessities....existed for him no more than railways or rifled guns....exist for his animal prototype. What did exist were gatherings, and caucuses, and votes — above all votes. He was votes incarnate....this vote-monster....". What concerned the politician was not the stupendous events occurring around him but "....the effect of these things upon his Majority, the cardinal reality in his life". What finally of the common people? They simply ignored the new developments, exhibiting their customary "invincible inertia".

But the giants knew plainly what was afoot. They realised that in them and through them a new world would be shaped from what Wells calls "the great struggle between big and little". They knew also that the struggle would be a violent one, and they accepted that fact. In the words of one of the giants:

It is the step we fight for and not ourselves.... We are here, Brothers, to what End? To serve the spirit and the purpose that has been breathed into our lives. We fight not for ourselves — for we are but the momentary hands and eyes of the Life of the World.... Through us.... the Spirit looks and learns. From us by word and act and birth it must pass — to still greater lives.... We fight not for ourselves but for growth, growth that goes on for ever.... Tomorrow, whether we live or die, growth will conquer through us. That is the law of the spirit for evermore. To grow according to the will of God. To grow greater my brothers. And then — still greater. To grow and again — to grow. To grow.... Till the earth is no more than a footstool.... Till the spirit shall have driven fear into nothingness, and spread....". He swung his arms heavenwards — "There!"

Here are set out the contours of the Wellsian scientific Utopia. Here is Wells's new man, created by science, and here are his enemies; democracy, bureaucracy, and conservatism — the littleness of the 'legal' mind.

Wells wrote many utopian novels but though they are diverse and varied each is set in the bedrock of science. One which follows on conveniently from *The Food of the Gods* is *Men Like Gods* which depicts a planet peopled by men who might well have feasted on Herakleophorbia, though in truth they did not. Their planet parallels Earth, tracing a similar path through space, enjoying a similar climate and

topography. It is the citizens who provide the totally new dimension. The novel concerns one Alfred Barnstaple, sub-editor of a rather torpid progressive journal and much given to pessimistic introspection. He inhabited that most pre-eminently political of periods, the inter-war years, and appears to have lost confidence in his progressive politics which seem to be failing domestically, in Ireland, and at the League of Nations. Barnstaple needs a holiday to recharge his batteries and decides to travel north alone. His journey is interrupted, however, by the intercession of a kind of whirlwind which sucks him out of his home-counties environment and puts him down in Utopia, along with others who were using the road at the same time. Briefly to summarise the plot, Barnstaple finds himself in the company of a sybaritic politician who somewhat resembled Balfour or even Baldwin, a mercurial and chauvinistic younger politician who is clearly meant to stand for Churchill, a number of parasitic aristocratic figures, some American and French hangers-on, a Roman Catholic priest, an actress and a 'media person'. Here, then, are gathered together the various representatives of 'littleness', of the legal mind. Of the whole group of humankind only Barnstaple appreciates the greatness and grandeur of the civilization into which they have been thrust. Indeed the others, led by the Churchill figure, Catskill, decide to attempt to subjugate the Utopians, believing them to have become effete. They are easily defeated with some loss of life and, eventually, the survivors, including Barnstaple, are sent back into their own world. The true theme, though, is not humanity's vain attempt to colonise Utopia; it is its total failure to appreciate the wonder of Utopia and indeed its attempt to destroy Utopia in order to substitute its own set of immature values and social arrangements.

Utopian society corresponds to that of William Morris's *Nowhere*. "We are very well off as to politics", says Old Hammond in that celebrated work of utopian fiction, "for we have none". Neither has Utopia. Government has become "diffused back into the general body of the community",<sup>10</sup> so that important technical decisions are left to "the people who knew most about that matter". Utopians have come to this happy state of affairs after a long process of evolutionary development, though a decisive stage in that development had been the enlargement of freedom brought about by vastly increased personal wealth and leisure making possible "a vigorous development of scientific enquiry....and, trailing after it a multitude of ingenious inventions which produced a great enlargement of practical human power". Moreover the vast expansion of mechanical power was only a prelude to similar breakthroughs in physiological and psychological power. Life for the majority of Utopians in this the Age of Confusion seems to have been remarkably like life under a capitalist system as Wells saw it. New ideas and new conventions of human association were necessary if society were not to end in disaster and collapse. What came to triumph was a philosophy stressing brotherhood and cooperation. "Propositions that had seemed, in former ages, to be inspired and exalted idealism began now to be recognised not simply as sober psychological truth but as practical and urgently necessary truth".<sup>11</sup> The emergence from the Age of Confusion, as Barnstaple was given to understand, did not represent a violent change but an "increase of light, a dawn of new ideas". Extensive private property began to be seen as a public nuisance preventing the proper organisation of the functions of the state. Of course those in positions of power attempted to maintain their positions, but the

coming of the 'universal scientific state', as Wells has it described, could not be prevented. Education became the chief instrument of the reformers, training each child to the full measure of its abilities, inculcating each with kindness and civility.

The young Utopians, trained in this way, devoted themselves to the service of the community. Those who chose not to were simply cast aside, for Wells's Utopians were intensely competitive, seeking a distinction which could only be granted to those who worked in the service of the community. Thus idlers found no mates with the result that "the idle strains, the people of lethargic dispositions or weak imaginations, have mostly died out". Though most Utopians lived with their mates there was no family life as the world would recognise it. They had not, they claimed, abolished family life but enlarged it to embrace all citizens.

Having rid themselves of parasitic fellow citizens, the utopians then turned their attentions to the systematic extermination of noxious species of insects and animals, the existence of each species having to be justified before an almost Benthamite enquiry. Utopia became a world in which "ill-bred weeds...had ceased to thrust and fight amidst the flowers and where leopards void of feline malice looked out with friendly eyes upon the passers by". Needless to say, the men and women who inhabited this world were of great physical beauty and had goodwill in abundance.

None could have been more aware than Wells of the kind of objections which might be made against his Utopia; hadn't he himself objected to Morris's deceptively similar *Nowhere*? He endeavours to meet the objections by allowing a debate between the Utopians and the champions of littleness. Amongst the latter Catskill is given the best arguments. "Because our life is dreadfuller, sir, it has, and it must have, moments that are infinitely brighter than yours. It is titanic, sir, where this is merely tidy".<sup>12</sup> He goes on to suggest that the energy and beauty of life are the result of struggle, competition and conflict. For Utopians however these are things of the past. They now live in a state of security, of "some form of socialism". Everything is ordered and provided for, he suggests, everything is secure. There is no cloud on the horizon but one; the Nietzschean spectre of degeneration which could surely reduce the Utopians to the state of the Eloi of *The Time Machine*.

These objections are answered by the Utopians who point out that although pain, filth and indignity may have gone, competition remains, for each strives to outdo his fellows in distinction, and how can a race degenerate when the indolent and inferior do not generally procreate? Humankind is depicted as being ensnared by nature whereas in Utopia nature has been controlled, allowing the citizens to turn their attentions to their inheritance, the stars. For Barnstaple, anyway, Utopian life is far superior to life on Earth. "The lives of the people", he muses, "must be like the lives of very successful artists or scientific workers...a continual refreshing discovery of new things, a constant adventure into the unknown and untried".

As if to underline the Spartan qualities of the Utopians Wells provides us with a brief character sketch of the woman Lychnis who tends Barnstaple when he becomes ill. She had been cast out by Utopia because, after losing her family at sea, she had turned to melancholia, and had "rediscovered the lost passion of pity. first pity for herself and then a desire to pity others". There was no place for pity in Utopia, for as Wells explains: "In a world of fear, weakness, infection, darkness and

confusion, pity, the act of charity, the alms and the refuge, the deed of stark devotion, might show indeed like sweet and gracious presences; but in this world of health and brave enterprises, pity betrayed itself a vicious desire".<sup>13</sup>

Barnstaple returns to Earth entirely convinced of the virtues of Utopians, intoxicated by their imagination. "All this world", he is told, "is in a mood like striking camp in the winter quarters when spring approaches". Like the giants of *The Food of the Gods*, they have in mind a destiny beyond their own world, not merely the conquest of space but the conquest of the concept of space and time. "Some day here and everywhere", Barnstaple is told, "Life of which you and I are but anticipatory atoms and eddies, Life will awaken indeed, one and whole and marvellous, like a child awakening to conscious life. It will open its drowsy eyes and stretch itself and smile, looking the mystery of God in the face as one meets the morning sun. We shall be there then, all that matter of us, you and I".<sup>14</sup>

Barnstaple returns to Earth fully confident now of the eventual victory of the scientific application of utopian socialism. "The grabbers and fighters, the persecutors and patriots, the lynchers and boycotters and all the riff-raff of short-sighted violence, crowded on to final defeat.... Their enterprises and successes, their wars and glories, flare and pass. Only the true thing grows, the truth, the clear idea, year by year and age by age, slowly and invincibly, as....the dawn grows amidst the guttering lights of some belated orgy".<sup>15</sup>

From these two books can be seen the major role that Wells ascribes to science in the creation of his new social order. It is to be built by men of science on the assumption that man's problems in the future will require a series of highly complex technological responses, which cannot be provided by democracy. The social arrangements of the new world will be based upon technology's having conquered nature and provided abundance. But most of all, it is science and the continued thirst for knowledge that provides the most crucial and satisfying activity for the citizens. For H.G. Wells as for many socialists influenced by materialist theories of evolution, the prospect of the physical death of the Earth sometime in the future brought them to occasional despair. The message from Utopia, though, is one of abundant hope. The death of mere worlds no longer holds a sting, for men's future, as part of 'God's mystery', is eternal.

Finally and logically we come to the Fabian recognition of the necessity of something beyond the well-ordered state, the spiritual utopia, and if we deal with it more briefly than with the Platonic and scientific this is not because it is to be considered less important. It is the most important of the three, representing for both Shaw and Wells the irrefragible essence of what they individually regarded as socialism. "Unless we believe", said Shaw, "that the life force in us is a divine spark that can be nursed into a steady flame and finally into an illuminating fire, then there is no sense in belonging to a Fabian Society, or indeed in taking the trouble to feed ourselves".<sup>16</sup>

Shaw described himself as an Atheist who had lost his faith and certainly by the turn of the century he was becoming increasingly interested in the Bergsonian concept of *Elan Vital*, the Life Force, and was developing an approach which would bring together his theories about progress through great men, about socialism, and his readings of Bunyan, Schopenhauer, Blake and Butler. His synthesis was an

evolutionist philosophy which, said a critic, gave him "simultaneously a fresh sense of individual significance and a cosmic sanction for his socialism".<sup>17</sup>

This life force within us naturally aspires to what Don Juan in *Man and Superman* calls a "higher organisation, wider, deeper, intenser self-consciousness, and clearer understanding". By making himself the servant of the Life Force, by willing what it wills, mankind has developed and will develop much further. Shaw rejected Darwin's theory of natural selection, with its emphasis on pure chance, and held to Lamarck's view that a species evolved through the exercise of will, with the characteristics thus acquired by one generation being transmitted to the next. What Shaw opposed, however, was nothing less than the taking in hand of evolution to achieve 'socialist' goals. Now it is one thing to recognise the reality and supreme importance of evolutionary change, as, for example, Teilhard does in *The Phenomenon of Man* (1955); it is quite another to offer practical proposals for speeding evolution up by means of deliberately devised programmes. Shaw suggests, in the Preface to *Back to Methuselah* (1921), that since a weightlifter can, by training hard, 'put up' a muscle, an earnest and convinced philosopher ought, with similar dedication, to be able to 'put up' a brain. That Shaw was in earnest should not be doubted. For him "the only fundamental and possible Socialism is the socialization of the selective breeding of man; in other terms, of human evolution".<sup>18</sup> We must "breed political capacity", and the way to do that is to maximise the natural leadership and talent existing in society. He uses the analogy of a domestic electrical system to explain the role of the natural leader. Think, he says, of the great quantity of highly susceptible copper wire which gorges itself with electricity and gives no light whatever. But "here and there occurs a scrap of intensely insusceptible, intensely resistant material: and that stubborn scrap grapples with the current and will not let it through until it has made itself useful to you and those two vital qualities of light and heat".

Tanner, in *Man and Superman*, can be assumed to personify Shaw's idea of the natural leader, a man with two responsibilities, one of which he is aware of from the beginning of the play and one of which he is slowly made aware of as the play progresses. The first is the responsibility of assuming a political role. It is made clear to us that Tanner will naturally enter parliament, besides which he has a reputation for radical politics, having just written a book entitled *The Revolutionist's Handbook*. The second responsibility Tanner owes to the Life Force. He has to marry Ann and, we may assume, join her in the making of superchildren. He is, in short, a physical embodiment of Shavian evolutionary theory.

Tanner, of course, is a modern Don Juan whose self-awareness causes him to reject the primrose path of dalliance so as to fulfil his life's true purpose — or in Tanner's terminology, the purposes of the Life Force. The importance of the Don Juan myth to understanding the play is underlined by the dream sequence in hell in which Don Juan, amid sundry interruptions, conducts a dialogue with the Devil on the relative merits of heaven and hell. The latter place is depicted as pleasant enough: man can do pretty well what he pleases but he must accept the limitation that there is nothing for him to strive after. Don Juan is bored in Hell. 'As long as I can conceive something better than myself', he complains, 'I cannot be easy unless I am striving to bring it into existence'. The Devil argues the necessity of accepting the impossibility of genuine progress towards a higher form of humanity. "Beware of

the pursuit of the superman", he warns: "it leads to an indiscriminate contempt for the human". Critics who argue<sup>19</sup> that this quotation indicates Shaw's awareness of the possible inhumanity of his evolutionary theories would do well to remember that it is the Devil who speaks these lines; in fact they suggest a philosophy totally alien to Don Juan's and, of course, Shaw's.

The central theme, then, of Shavian socialism, is evolution, an ever-continuing, upward thrust towards, at the social level, a higher form of social structure, organised, as we have seen, by social scientists, and at the individual level eventually towards a higher form of life altogether. Shaw wishes to lead us eventually to a period of human development when matter will have been dispensed with, when the pleasures of cerebration will intensify "to a chronic ecstasy surpassing that now induced momentarily by the sexual orgasm".<sup>20</sup>

The basis of this philosophy is the view of the living organism as the result of the animation of matter by the life force. The ultimate purpose of the life force is to transcend this need to incarnate itself in matter by making matter conscious of itself. Thus eventually life becomes pure thought and concerns itself with pure contemplation. The logical difficulty here, as Joad pointed out, is that there will be nothing left for pure thought to contemplate. All the same, we do not understand Shaw's socialism if we make no attempt to come to terms with its cosmic evolutionary aspect. Recognising that man was incapable of socialism, Shaw did not reject socialism: he rejected man. He set in train the quest for a new man — socialist man — as different from bourgeois man as bourgeois man is from Neanderthal man.

For Wells too the spiritual content of his socialism was of paramount importance. In a sense his position was partly defined by his personality. "I dismiss the idea that life is chaotic", he said, "because it leaves my life ineffectual, and I cannot contemplate an ineffectual life patiently.... I assert therefore that I am important in a scheme, that we are all important in that scheme, that the wheel-smashed frog in the road and the fly drowning in the milk are important and correlated with me."<sup>21</sup> The scheme, Wells believed, was to create what Marx called a 'species consciousness' through a continuous and unfolding series of syntheses which history showed already to have begun. "The essential fact in man's history.... is the slow unfolding of a sense of community with his kind.... of the development of a common general idea, a common general purpose...."<sup>22</sup> A world socialist state would not represent the culmination of this process, though it would certainly be a crucial stage. In fact such a state could only be created by the very attitudes which it would be its task further to advance.

The advance of socialism, as far as Wells was concerned, would be manifested not so much in a change in economic relationships as in a change "in the spirit and method of human intercourse". Wells had little time for the socialism of elitist 'condenscension' (or thought he had), nor for the socialism of revolt, for neither could foster the great collective enterprise; neither could "bring us at last to the great harmonious service of God". Wells believed that to emphasise materialism and economics was to miss socialism's major thrust which "is and must be a battle against human stupidity and egotism and disorder, a battle fought through all the forests and jungles of the human soul".

Socialism, then, has a key part to play in man's achieving his great goal but it is not itself that great goal: socialism is not the spiritual utopia. Wells becomes disarmingly coy, however, when attempting to assert what exactly this utopia would be like. He admitted as much himself, describing his thoughts as "vague and mystical". In *The Food of the Gods* and *Men Like Gods*, as we have seen, a future is hinted at which is both cosmic and eternal — rather like Shaw's. But even the imaginative Wells feels obliged to take refuge in figures of speech and to hide behind capital letters. His giants, for example, "stand on this earth as on a footstool and reach out their hands among the stars" in their quest for the "Spirit of Man" which will "ultimately even transcend the limitation of the Species and grow into the Conscious Being, the undying conscious being of all things".<sup>23</sup>

This is indeed the language of mystics, if less elegant. The opaqueness of the concept of man's ultimate destiny ought not cause us to underestimate its importance for Wells however, for it was no less than crucial. The world socialist state was to provide the organised and collectivised will which would eventually enable man to transcend his species and live with God, not the anthropomorphised God of the Christians but the organising spirit of the universe. Though this was man's ultimate purpose its implications were as much for the present as for the future, as the following quotation clearly indicates: "I see myself as part of a great physical being that strains and I believe grows towards beauty, and of a great mental being that strains and I believe grows towards knowledge and power. In this persuasion.... I find both concentration of myself and escape from myself; in a word, I find salvation."<sup>24</sup> Wells's ultimate purpose, then, was to be pursued actively and immediately, however daunting the task might appear.

Let me, by way of brief conclusion, point out several important features common to these Fabian utopias which we have been considering. Firstly they are elitist; in each case society is to be run for its own good by a self-selected elite who alone understand society's true purposes. Second they are anti-democratic in the sense that that phrase is commonly used in the western world, scorning parties and parliaments and representative theories, and third they hold the common people in contempt. There is simply no place for the small man; if Shaw does not eliminate him Wells will not allow him to procreate, so his days are numbered.

One final feature common to the Fabian utopias is that both Shaw and Wells not only showed the world how utopia might be achieved but threw themselves into the task of bringing it about. and in this, to quote Wells, they found their own salvation. For them utopianism was not, as Marx would have us believe, some barrier which stood between them and positive political actions, rather it stimulated those actions and gave them a significance, as Wells's Mr Barnstaple clearly shows. One might almost say that the Fabian utopia, however long-term a project it was, began the moment one rolled up one's sleeves, metaphorically speaking. Goethe once advised a friend against emigrating to America and countered the various advantages his friend adduced by pointing out that "America was here or it was nowhere". "This is the true joy of life", said Shaw, "the being used for a purpose recognised by yourself as a mighty one; the being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrap heap; the being a force of nature instead of a feverish selfish little clod of ailments".<sup>25</sup> For Shaw and for Wells, to paraphrase Goethe, utopia was now or it was never.

## Notes

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3. *Tribune*, 28.5.1943.
4. *Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism*, London (Constable) 1929, p.376.
5. *Notes from the Underground*, (Penguin edn) 1976, pp.33,4.
6. *On The Rocks*, in *The Bodley Head Collected Plays with Prefaces*, V or VI, London 1973 edn, p.597.
7. W. Warren Wagar, ed., *H.G. Wells, Journalism and Prophecy*, London (Bodley Head) 1965, p.277.
8. *Food of the Gods*, New York (Airmont Classic edn), 1965, pp.13,14.
9. *The Discovery of the Future*, London (Fisher and Unwin) 1902, p.24.
10. *Men Like Gods*, London (Odhams) n.d., p.225.
11. *Ibid.*, p.231.
12. *Ibid.*, p.247.
13. *Ibid.*, p.255.
14. *Ibid.*, p.363.
15. *Ibid.*, p.321.
16. Louis Simon, *Shaw on Education*, New York (Columbia University Press) 1958, p.190.
17. *Ibid.*, p.142.
18. Frank Harris, *Bernard Shaw — an unauthorised Biography based on first hand information*, London (Gollancz) 1931, p.160.
19. For example A.M. Gibbs, *Shaw*, Edinburgh (Oliver and Boyd) 1969.
20. *New York Times Book Review*, 18.11.1945.
21. *First and Last Things*, Collected Works, London, 1933, p.133.
22. *Ibid.*, p.142.
23. *Ibid.*, p.149.
24. *Ibid.*, p.43.
25. Ruth Adam, *What Shaw Really Said*, London (MacDonald) 1966, p.25.