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I would, first of all, like to thank Professor Geuss on this rare opportunity – as this year marks half of a millennium since the publication of More's *Utopia* – to discuss with him precisely that which he seems to bear witness to better than anyone else: the possibility of non-doctrinary utopian thought in an age hostile to utopianism. My questions concern one doubt that is sparked by this commendable striving. In such an attempt to provide an apologia for utopia as Geuss's, the focus is understandably on finding a justificatory function for utopian thought, that is on the process of 'extricating' from it the importance and the mission that it must still have for us today: Geuss thus wishes to 'investigate the way in which wishing, hoping, and desiring interact with knowing; to throw light on connections that might otherwise escape notice; provide ideal types that can stimulate further thinking; serving as a source of useful hypotheses'; and, instead of offering 'categories of immediate action' and definite answers, he asks the reader to 'reflect on such things as the socially recognised limits of that which is possible, the consequences and conditions of what we desire, the mutability of our needs'. One nevertheless gets the impression that the concept of utopian thought is so reductively and, to an extent, normatively reformulated that some of the classical, and perhaps equally valuable, elements of the complex of utopian thought are left out. To put it as a question – hasn't the tradition of utopian thought been significantly impoverished precisely by the arguments which have undoubtedly managed to convince us that thought can be 'cleansed' of utopian elements only at its own peril, but arguments which have also reconfigured these elements into some kind of 'realistic' utopia or hypothetical utopian speculation, into a contextualized utopia, one that no longer needs to be closed, complete, stable and immutable, but that is rather linked with historical transformations and the development of human needs?

It seems to me that giving up a 'picture of society in which everything is optimally arranged, in every aspect unsurpassably good', giving up the idea of 'unchanging perfection' doesn't necessarily mean that we can (or have to) do away with one common element that we find in every form of utopian thought – one that projects, after all, a certain kind of stasis, resistance to further dynamic, motion, complexity of the world, that projects an end to 'bad kind of complications' (that thereby also projects unsurpassability, because there is no further need for surpassing) – in other words, the common element which presumes that at least *some* aspect of society is thought of as optimally arranged once and for all. To put it more acutely, utopia doesn't have to be total, it doesn't have to project a society that has solved all its problems, but it can, or has to, think of at least one of them as *definitely* solved. It is my impression that the final argument of the paper "Some Varieties of Utopia" refers precisely to this kind of 'non-comprehensive' completeness, as well as the example of universal healthcare in "Realism and the Relativity of Judgment". The question, however, remains whether, for example, a picture of a world without illness or disease would also count as one such desirable kind of utopia? Or that of a world without war, hunger or forced labor? Or whether, on the contrary, this would already constitute an unjustifiable step toward the pacification

of all tensions that resembles the unfounded ‘utopianism’, in the sense of ‘lack[ing] the specification of a mechanism for realising the utopian state’? As it seems to me that the latter is true, I would also like to ask: isn’t the contemporary ‘responsible’ kind of utopian thought, as one might call it, confined for this reason to the last defensive line, to offering merely the examples of minimal and totally ‘realistic’ visions? But, to what extent can we still call that ‘utopian’ in any sense of the word – and not simply a political program; how much of the ‘utopian’ is left when we do away completely with the element of the ‘definite solution’, and why wouldn’t we rather speak then, in terms of classical political philosophy, of a ‘political ideal’, or even a project of reform?

If this intuition is correct to any degree, wouldn’t we have to exclude from such a reduced tradition of ‘desirable’ utopian thought almost all (not incidentally) ‘islands’, except perhaps Bacon’s *New Atlantis*: the one from Plato’s *Critias* as well as More’s *Utopia* and even Huxley’s *Island*? All these visions include – the first one in the form of memory, the second as fantasy, the third in a resigned manner as a failed attempt – what You rightfully point out: the withdrawal from the world as it is, with a specifically utopian fundamental rejection of this world. They see this world, however, as shot through precisely with the kind of freedom-negating, unworthy social dynamic that the ‘island’ visions should prove to be unnecessary. In one inspired paragraph from *Minima Moralia*, Adorno contrasts the image of the linear expansion of productive forces, the increase of production, the never-ending creation and growth, the obese voracity, the image of the imperative of expansion, of *gleichmacherei*, the swollen collectivity as the blind frenzy of *making* – he contrasts this image with Maupassant’s vision of ‘lying on the water and watching the sky in peace’, of not doing anything, like an animal, of not being anything, ‘without any further designation or accomplishment’. Would such form of resistance to the ‘logic of capital’ today be unacceptable, left outside of the scope of justifiable visions due to its aspiration to a genuine state of peaceful completeness? Or would precisely such vision provide the kind of ‘fertility, suggestiveness and stimulation’ that You consider to be constitutive of the ‘right’ kind of utopian thought?

If one were to use strictly philosophical terminology, one could perhaps say that You point out carefully the problems of ‘absolutism’, but not of ‘contextualism’: it isn’t clear how the latter manages to avoid arbitrariness, ad hoc judgment and action and how it can accomplish more than simply demonstrating the irreducibility of every nominalized particular situation in its concrete complexity, and how it manages not to preclude any kind of ‘principled’ judgment. The attempt to connect ‘realism’ and the aspiration to the impossible is infinitely interesting, inspiring and instructive, nevertheless the fact remains (not only mental but historical as well) that realism which pays attention to the context, in its abandoning of troublesome universal standards, ends up in some form of conservatism, the standpoints of which one wouldn’t exactly call utopian to say the least – quite the contrary. Edmund Burke would already be a decent example. In the Preface to *Politics and Imagination*, You reject the idea that Conservative Realpolitik should be contrasted with utopian speculation, arguing that even the deepest kind of political conformism and any defense of the status quo require acts of imagining of some kind. However, as You lucidly note in the essay ‘Authority: Some Fables’ from *A World*

Without Why, drawing on Hegel, Marx and Freud, the role of the imagination in politics has more often been ‘to reinforce the hold of the past over the present’, than the ‘production of unrealistic fantasies about a utopian future’. The nostalgia for the golden age and its gorgeous landscapes, however, has politically always had the function of conserving an idealized origin and, at best, the function of a reasonable word of caution to the unbridled optimism of what we usually call the utopian projection of a bright future. Since it seems that you in large part accept this objection, how does your dichotomy of realism/moralism relate to the dichotomy of political empiricism/rationalism of Talmon and Oakeshott, for example, or even with the traditional division between utilitarian and deontological ethics?

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I wish to focus my comments or questions on three relatively interconnected problems. First, I agree with the idea that we should stop making relatively useless analogies between utopian thinking and any kind of finite projections or blueprints, as well as viewing this form of thinking as something that necessarily has no connection with concrete everyday experience. However, even if we accept Geuss’s position that utopian thinking is ultimately a form of posing questions, there still remains the issue whether this ‘method’ of questioning (of social practice) is primarily an individual /private or collective/public endeavour. I am not saying that we have here some sort of a binary opposition. My question mainly pertains to strategy. If we paraphrase the words from the second essay in Geuss’s *World without Why*: when we are using utopian thinking, do we first need to break down the familiar forms of everyday speech (and then perhaps in consequence certain routine patterns of action and interaction); or do we first need to create positive new meanings, ways of speaking and acting, and eventually modes of living?

2. In light of these issues, how do we envision social engagement that would be driven by utopias and the role of intellectuals?

3. When this type of non-dogmatic utopian thought eventually generates some sort of social action, does its inherent openness imply that utopian social movements cannot have rigid hierarchies or organizational structures? Was the Occupy movement in any sense utopian?

Raymond Geuss

May I start with Predrag’s question – you put your finger, of course, on what is the really central issue for me. Which is: I want, at the same time, to propound a certain kind of realism, which means, in some sense, I want to connect all forms of thinking with action, and that means I’m going to have to take some existing structures for granted, that’s what realism to some extent means. I can analyse them in various ways, but I have to start from them. And I want to combine that with utopianism, which, whatever it is, doesn’t have that form. And I fully admit that I have not gotten very far with that. I do want to make clear in response to something you said – I of course do not mean to deny that there can be definitive solutions to