

Trumpeter (1994)

ISSN: 0832-6193

EUTOPIAS: MAKING GOOD PLACES WITH ECO-  
LOGICAL AWARENESS

Alan Whitbecker  
Marsh Institute

About the Author: *Alan Wittbecker* is a ecologist with the Marsh Institute in Idaho. He is working on wetland design projects. This article is taken from a work in progress, *Eutopias*. The Marsh Institute is a Delaware corporation founded March 20, 1970 for the purpose of ecological research and education. Its first project was cleaning up trash after Earth Day 1970. The research station in Northern Idaho maintains several long-term projects, branches exist in other states for local projects. For more information write: Director, G.P. Marsh Institute, PO Box 1, Viola, Idaho, 83872-0001.

## Overview

This article compares characteristics of traditional ideal cities, utopias, with an ecological design for extended human communities, Eutopias. The dominant industrial system is compared with utopias; the immense problems that result are recognized. A structure of *Eutopias* is identified on three levels, the globe, republics, and individual, each with unique responsibilities and styles. Arguments for implementing a eutopian scheme are presented. *The main focus in this paper is on an eutopian framework, often referred to as simply Eutopias.*

## Felicity's Children

POEM align=center; Wherefore not Utopie, but rather fitly My name is Eutopie, a place of felicity

The City, Amanote, speaks these lines in Thomas More's 1516 fantasy, *Utopia*, about a perfect commonwealth, a society without the problems and poverty of a young English capitalism. While relating his story in Latin, More made puns on the Greek names he used: The name of the city, Amanote, means dream town; the name of the traveler himself, Hythlodae, means dispenser of nonsense. The title is also a word play; to the Greek word meaning place (topia), could be added a prefix meaning no (ou), or good (eu). He used "u" as an ambiguous prefix. No place sounded like good place.

The citizens in More's utopia were uniform and regimented: everyone had the same clothing, housing, and work schedule. Strong peer pressure existed for people to use their leisure time constructively for the public good or to improve their personal virtues. The electoral unit, the family, was autocratically ruled by the patriarch and a hierarchy of princes. Decisions were made by councils elected from public officials, who met regularly with these princes. The utopians solved the problem of population growth by setting up external colonies, where

it was considered unjust for natives to hold onto land that they were not using — much in the way the Spanish and English were doing in the Americas during the same century.

Utopias as visions of ideal societies can be found in almost every culture: in prophecies, visions, dreams, myths, and ideologies. Plato envisioned a perfect model for the Athenian form of social organization; his Republic was located on an island in his present, 4th-century BC Christian utopias, such as Augustine's *City of God*, began with inward change, but lead to heaven. These first utopias were idyllic; they described the good life, either material or spiritual, as tranquil and unchanging, but located in other places. In these utopias, liberty was less important than happiness or goodness.

With the exploration of all the continents and oceans, utopias began to be located in other times (the past or the future). For Saint-Simon, Fourier, Comte, and Marx, the good times were in process, and the goals for the future were fixed and codified. The predicted Utopia would be achieved eventually, given institutional and technological propensities. Later utopian thought put less emphasis on individual and social content. Teilhard de Chardin regarded man as the spirit of the Earth, part of a process leading to the "hominization" of the Earth and the spiritualization of humanity. Other thinkers, including Skinner and Maslow, emphasized the psychological dimension of utopias, recommending personal changes.

In the past century, the concept of place began to be combined with different prefixes to indicate wrongness (dys) or badness (kako). Among others, Huxley and Orwell traced paths of visions gone awry. As the visions became less positive, utopias became less adequate and less desirable. We need utopias to define visions for the future, but we need a different kind now, not the visions of no-places or of the wrong-places, but of good places, Eutopias, not dim shadows from a far future, but an immediate light, however imperfect.

## **Images Cast Shadows**

Our dream of civilization and nature in modern Western culture is the dream of order and beauty, according to Aldous Huxley, but the dream is a nightmare that reflects an unbalanced and immature image of the Earth. The collective image that people make is a world, derived from the German word meaning "man-image." The image is constructed metaphorically, but considered "as if" it were true. Each world is based on a root metaphor, according to Pepper, which forms a good metaphorical device to discuss them. Root metaphors are comprehensive and dominate our attitudes towards things. If the image is incomplete or does not fit environmental conditions, it may fail. People who constructed their worlds from preconceived notions sometimes did not survive.

The Aztecs, for example, based their cosmology on the belief that the Sun needed human blood to survive and sacrificed great numbers of lives to ensure the Sun's life. Their political policy was based on raids for victims, and this policy contributed to their overthrow and decline with the arrival of the Spanish. The use of flawed images can destroy the environments of cultures as well as the cultures themselves, the Easter Islanders, for instance.

Modern industrial cultures also have defective images. An image of a culture can be stated as a series of principles, such as: "the universe is mechanical; humanity is master of the universe; and all persons are equal." Metaphors extend down to all levels of a society, also, to the economic and personal. Metaphors limit cultural possibilities. For example, the metaphor "labor is a resource" implies that, like any common resource defined by industrial society, labor is cheap and can be used up. Modern economies, embracing another metaphor "nature is capital," draw on the accumulated "capital" of ecosystems for production. By ignoring the real cost of the capital, as well as the costs of natural services, such as nutrient recycling, soil building, and atmospheric renewal, these economics create a temporary wealth that will disappear when the capital is exhausted or collapses. Decisions regarding resources are made on short-term economic grounds and lead to material shortages and environmental degradation.

Powerful images can influence cultures over centuries. The principle of plenty, restated in Christian terms, presents that an intelligible creator gave an Earth of unlimited bounty to humanity for its use. This principle seemed to be confirmed in the Renaissance with the discovery of the richness of heaven, microscopic life, and unexplored continents. Many modern political ideologies and economic systems have been shaped by the principle of endless wealth. Adam Smith calculated that the real price of anything was just the toil acquiring it. These ideas are parallel to the idea of unlimited good, where anything, even virtue, can be multiplied indefinitely. The invalidity of this principle comes with the recognition of limits. Without limits any good becomes devalued and is wasted. The universe is limited; the Earth is limited; individuals have limits. These metaphors are defective because they do not fit our surroundings. The crises of cultural images have tremendous physical consequences.

For most of human history, the habitable Earth has been a mosaic of separate territories and peoples. Different groups developed distinctive ways of dealing with their nonhuman surroundings. Each way of dealing can be referred to as a culture, a pattern of behavior based on shared beliefs adapted to the local environment. Culture can be expressed as a symbolic language. The particular symbols concerned with cultural institutions as manipulative objects are political symbols. Politics deals with words, which are arbitrary symbols for events or things. The wrong relationship of things and symbols can result in misguided politics and violence. Political decisions are made on narrow political and economic grounds. The gradual narrowing of the focus has resulted in a citizenship in industrial cultures that is the abandonment of responsibility on

the assumption that others know how to manage things; government itself is the assumption of responsibility, without knowledge, that leads to six immense and interrelated problems.

1. Expanding human populations overburden natural and human systems. Most people are hungry; fewer are fulfilled. Even low average levels of food and fulfilment can be maintained only through theft from other species and from future human generations, through the degradation of billions of humans as well as the ecosystems on which they depend.
2. The overuse of ecosystems results in deforestation, devegetation, and desertification, then in depletion of raw materials and depletion of agricultural land. Economic and political pressures, derived ultimately from population pressures, force farmers to intensify their efforts to increase crop production, instigating a dismal cycle of population expansion, environmental deterioration, and poverty.
3. Manufacturing for a large population in "free" economies results in the production of waste, in a spectrum of pollutions, in the acidification of rain, in salinization of waters, in the eutrophication of water bodies, and in the storage of solid wastes/garbage in landfills.
4. Many manufacturing processes result in the production of new dangers, such as uncontrolled genetic manipulation, nuclear wastes (from reactors and weapons), and new substances and products, which are not easily incorporated into natural cycles.
5. Population pressures, resource shortages, and manufacturing "side-effects" cause instability in many societies. Militarism, intolerance, crimes, and health problems are symptoms of the instability. Confusion and misinformation contribute further to the destruction of cultures.
6. The instability of cultures, as well as stress, insecurity, and insufficient diets, results in psychological problems for people. Individual powerlessness and disillusion provokes further disintegration.

## **One World Through Reason**

After the war in 1918, there was a popular vision of One World, without walls or barriers, created through reason. Historically, the consolidation of states has not been reasonable. France, Germany, the United States, and Italy, among others, were united by force. The notion of world government seems to satisfy a basic human craving for unity and order, but, at the current stage of international relations, there seems to be no agreeable path toward a benevolent world order.

The partial adaptation of international institutions is insufficient for a world order, especially if these bodies are only advisory. The United Nations (UN) is the only body with the machinery for constructing a world system; the beginnings of ecological politics can be found in the special services of the UN - UNESCO, FAO, WHO, and the various technical aid services. As long as ecological and political problems are addressed in a framework of nationalism and military power, however, these organizations are treated as peripheral and relatively impotent.

As it is structured, the UN is not capable of handling the responsibility for international order. It cannot deal with wide- spread starvation or acid rain or the whole complex of global problems. The UN's solution to economic problems is "sustainable development" — that is, "growth that respects environmental constraints," as if growth respects any constraints. The Bruntland Report indicates a five to ten-fold increase in world industrial output within the next hundred years before population stabilization occurs. While the appeal of growth is unarguable, it is really not likely to be sustainable in any meaning of that word, since sustainable growth does not recognize known ecological limits. Other actions of the UN, such as restricting membership in the Security Council to great powers, and its use of the veto principle, indicate that it is imprisoned by the status quo. Furthermore, the UN has no power to coerce its members when it does make good recommendations.

Our attempts at social improvements have proceeded without order, without sufficient insight and perspective, without sufficient confidence, without a comprehensive plan, and without a great dream. Our politics has been corrupted by special interests. The structure of our civilization comes from anonymous builders and mediocre designers, minimal engineers and rapacious financiers. We work within the rules as they have been for decades, rejecting any alternatives as too utopian. The rules themselves have been shaped by centuries of social metaphors and utopian ideals.

## **Going Nowhere - Utopian Characteristics**

Utopias provide images of ideal societies in abstract settings literally nowhere. Utopias promise newness, order, happiness, and re-inheritance for the disinherited. They banish the irrational, the irreparable, and all conflict. Common ideas can be discerned in a reading of utopias:

- the quest for human perfectibility — the dismissal of social causes of disharmony — through constant attempts at self- improvement;
- the emphasis on order — the elimination of chaotic, uncoordinated, accidental events that cause waste and conflict — in a predictable society with planning and control;

- universal fellowship, which is brought into being by removing barriers to harmony (property, for example);
- the expansion of consciousness with new, cohesive rituals; creation of new social forms — often a radical departure from old conditions, with plastic variance in all aspects of life from diets to dyads;
- location outward in a distant place (an island or space colony) or time or inward frame of mind. The common characteristics of many utopias, however, make them unworkable and unsatisfactory.

*Ungrounded.* Utopias are literally no-place. They do not exist in place, either a human place or an ultrahuman place. They are designed to be no-place, without weeds, storms, or hard ground. Because they are nowhere, utopias lack a reference point. Because utopias are not grounded, their ideal qualities do not have to fit together; any combination of details is possible, regardless of whether it could work together.

*Static.* Utopias present a static order. Many utopian plans emphasize the physical order of a model city, a perfect design centered in a mathematical space. The perfection of the social structure of the inhabitants reflects an ideal physical order. The utopia arises fully formed, not as the result of a historical process or of a dynamic movement, and so it shows no concept of transition. If the utopia operates at all, it does so without problems; everything is managed. The interpretation of society and nature is limited by physical metaphors (especially those based on physical mechanics). The shape of the city and the shape of the people are set and unchanging.

*Teleological.* Utopias assume the possibility of human perfectibility. They present a final state of society, where perfection has been achieved. The characters, who are symbols and not inhabitants of a place, lack a psychological dimension because the irrational, the internal conflict, and the irreparable have been banished from the ideal and from the brains of the characters. Human happiness is determined by reason in a single, inflexible, final order. A utopia tends to impose a monstrous discipline on the activities and interests of the society.

*Ingenuous.* In order to eliminate uncertainty, many utopias construct one ideal community of immense size as the model for all communities. Utopias tend to be centralized. H.G. Wells, in seeking to protect individual liberty through government centralization, concluded that utopia could only take place on a global scale, ruled by a government of Platonic philosopher-kings. The subjects naively would derive their identity from global structure. Some utopias tend to universalize the best of a society, so that all societies may fit the mold. To ensure continuation of the best, they rely on segregation to resolve social difficulties. For example, Fourier segregated workers according to emotional tendencies, while Wells exiled criminals and misfits to prison islands. Further-

more, nature in Utopias has been regarded as unmanageable (Wells) or totally manageable (Saint-Simon). Waste is not considered. Good is considered unlimited — the metaphor of unlimited good, remember, leads to devaluation and waste.

*Simplistic.* Utopian laws are often simple and arbitrary and not concerned with the laws of nature; they try to comprehend, predict, and control human behavior on the basis of a materialistic philosophy. Utopias deny the depth and complexity of social, biological, and even physical problems in emphasizing a simple model. The excesses of geography are removed; utopias are rarely cold or too hot or too wet or too dry — the very places that are still wilderness on the planet. They remove the "useless" and unfriendly animals and plants. Utopias neglect the element of chance, in the form of earthquakes, fires, comets, and most natural disturbances. Most utopias ignore the problem of scale. What can be done on a small or imaginary scale may not be possible on a large scale. There are simply too many factors and connections. Ubiquitous problems, like hunger or illiteracy, are considered wrongly as global problems; also, they are usually coupled together.

*Homogeneous.* The creators of utopias conceive their inhabitants as one people, with a common color or temperament, regardless of real social, cultural, or biological differences. Clothing and housing are often uniform. With undifferentiated growth, the monocultural mass produces beauty and satisfaction for everyone. Nothing like this seems to have happened in mass societies, although monumental and heroic structures have been produced. A utopia uses its central technological, or political, or moral theme to solve all problems; thus, all problems in a typical utopia are solved if every member of society has a radio, is a communist, or acts like a Buddhist.

*Incomplete.* Other societies have been ignored in utopias, except as examples of errors of thought or false images. Utopias have been blatantly anthropocentric in their concerns. Hence, utopian topics include industrialization, modernization, food capacity, housing, population explosion, and material possessions, but not the necessity of wilderness or the rights of animals. Nature is regarded most often as an object of conquest or a storehouse of resources.

Regardless of how ineffectual utopias seem, they express human truths, for instance, 'with voluntary cooperation, state compulsion is unnecessary' (William Morris). They present new possibilities, such as 'welfare through science' (Francis Bacon) or the recovery of lost 'natural qualities' (Denis Diderot). And, they have the power to transform society, as was done by the rational state (John Locke) or the classless society (Karl Marx).

Utopias are not just irrelevant fantasies; they have guided many of our modern qualities. For instance, contemporary industrial culture has mimicked utopian models in allowing for the interchangeability of people and places. Like utopias, modern industrial landscapes are flatscapes where variety disappears and signif-



icance is ignored for the comfortable standards of meaningless continuity. The characteristics of industrial cultures bear a strange resemblance to the characteristics of utopias, from simplification to ingenuousness, homogeneity, and incompleteness.

## Getting Somewhere - Eutopian Characteristics

From political character studies to technological promises, utopias have kept close to the contemporary forms of society. The possibilities described for the future seem to be circumscribed by the limits of human vision. The entire literature of utopia, imaginative as it is, cannot match the diversity of cultures for richness or the depth of nature for wonder.

The second meaning of utopia — eutopia — is rarely used. It means simply "good place." Good places already exist, on every continent and in most every culture. These are Eutopias. There do not seem to be many. They can be described. Some of the traits that make them good can be understood and repeated. A formal compilation of general characteristics of good places, a Eutopias, a general description of good places, extends the application of utopian thought. Perhaps the number of good places can be increased with understanding of traditional ways and with more effective metaphors. Many archaic societies employ a set of principles, different from industrial cultures, that may be more adaptive. Instead of regarding the "universe as mechanical, humanity as master, and all persons as equal," the Yaruru consider the "universe static and internal, humans sensible to other's wants, and all beings equal;" by contrast, the Navajo consider the "universe personal and orderly, events primary, and the family first."

Other modern metaphors can promise more adaptive behavior. A machine metaphor used by Kenneth Boulding, "the Earth is a spaceship" suggests the limits of the Earth and the value of its life-support system, but it masks other realities. The metaphor of the spaceship is a closed system model, which leads to inadequate understanding of open, natural systems. The Earth is an open system that sustains life. The Earth has no single captain with authority. In fact, the image of a spaceship does not fit a large, organic, nonmechanical system. Another metaphor in popular use, such as "the Earth is a garden," is a better model for reintegrating humanity into a balance with nature, because the garden is a small balanced system directed by humanity (and part of the larger environment and dependent on it). The rule of the garden is empirical and based on observation: If you do something, then something else happens. Even so, the metaphor of the garden has important limits. Humanity does not have adequate knowledge to direct all of the processes of nature.

In naming a new science of ecology, Ernst Haeckel combined two Greek words

(eco-logos) meaning "the study of the house." Ecology relates to dwelling, to the frame that contains us. The desire to refine a focus on our problems has allowed the frame of reference to be neglected. This metaphor has turned attention to the whole. But, it too is limited. The house herein is not a construct any more than a spaceship. There is not just one house; there are many unique ones with individual characteristics and connections.

Eutopias, as a general description, uses a root metaphor of many places (perhaps on the level of bioregions). This Eutopias is a framework for human cultures, to preserve the unique image that a society needs to guide it and to make it different from others. To be effective, in contrast with the ideal characteristics of ideal cities, a Eutopian framework embodies attributes that are compatible to the values and norms of living cultures.

*Grounded.* The making of places is an ordering of a distinct structure and center. Humans and their communities are embedded in places. The Taureg of the Sahara have created an image, a world, that cannot be relocated to the rain forest of the Campa in Peru. When the symbols of a world lose their meaning, through wrongful application or abstraction, sickness and disintegration result. Attachment to place is a form of deep love, from which many other virtues for living well, such as frugality and humility, spring. Place allows us to rediscover a participating consciousness and a symbiotic connection to the living Earth. The organization of perception, meaning, and thought is intimately related to specific places. The commitment to a place implies acceptance of its limits. Place is a focus of meaningful events and a platform for ordering a world. The individual image of a place is modified by memory, experience, emotion, imagination, and intention. The social image of a place is influenced by individuals, myths, history, and consensus. The images reinforce each other over time. Each place and culture is unique.

*Dynamic Order.* Nature and human nature are not static orders; they are flexible, historical, and irreversible. Worlds have been built by peoples over so many thousands of years that it is not necessary to start from raw sensations for a new image. Societies build images that reflect knowledge of themselves and their environment. The problems of many human societies can be rooted in their anthropocentric images of the universe. But, the solution cannot be a uniform cosmology of the Earth. The strengths of cultures lay in the diversity of values and in their fitness to particular places. A holistic eutopian cosmology can preserve the differences in a whole image of the Earth. The image cannot be a rigid shell to contain everything, but rather a flexible, organic network holding all human and natural groups. The eutopian cosmology recognizes the value of the total biosphere, respects all forms of life, present and future, and provides equal opportunities for human beings. The eutopian order permits traditional cultures and natural processes to be self-ordering and self-renewing without the imposition of a rigid order from above.

*Adventitious.* Societies are part of an unending, imperfect process, without any

final state. Furthermore, the attempt at perfectibility through self-improvement causes disharmony, which is part of the same imperfect process. Each eutopia is a practical application to place. It accepts confusion and conflict — but constructive, scaled conflict, not insolvable, that can lead to education, understanding, and the abandonment of stupidity. Many utopias imply that society can be remade according to reason. But reason is not large enough. Experience is necessary; the unconscious is necessary. Utopias pretend that all factors governing a system are known and that their effects can be calculated. Unknown factors determine a large part of the operation of any system. Furthermore, there is chaos in every system; there are plagues and random frenzies. Eutopias recognize and absorb unknown factors.

*Sophisticated.* All the contents of the human species cannot be captured by a single policy. The eutopian framework protects difference and diversity from a uniform global policy. Within the framework, cultures are decentralized and autonomous; people identify with their local culture. Because the Earth is finite, there are physical and biological limits to growth and progress. Eutopias voluntarily limits human influence within ecosystems. This does not mean that humanity cannot modify some ecosystems or become space-faring — just that it should not dominate every ecosystem or transform the entire matrix to human products (in order to luxuriate or to explore space). The process of producing goods results in waste, even at low rates of use. The principle of limited good is respected; desired things exist in nonexpansive quantities.

*Complex.* The eutopian framework is multidimensional and pluralistic. Balanced development, rather than growth, is emphasized. When a culture falls out of balance with its local environment, massive disruption often results; industrial cultures have only avoided disruption by trading advantageously with other locales, using fossil fuels, and promoting institutional inequality. Small cultures have built-in checks; furthermore, their cultural definition of good helps to maintain balance between other species and the use of ecosystem productivities. Regional areas are limited in size, to avoid problems of scale. Historical smallness, even lacking natural resources, has not been an obstacle to wealth for many countries, for instance, the sovereign German states of Hamburg or Bavaria. The merits of urbanization do not require a large population. Local concentrations of artists, philosophers, and scientists are capable of creating a distinct civilization. Cities fifty times as large as classical Athens or Florence have not been fifty times as creative.

*Heterogeneous.* The eutopian frame is unselective. It accounts for all human diversity and variability, for prisoners and misfits, artists and technophiles, the insane and the aged. It is pluralistic. It rewards and uses individual differences in constitution and character. Humans are not perfect or interchangeable. It accepts inequities, although biological injustices exist and can be ameliorated, and social injustices can be rectified. The eutopian frame incorporates the positive features of traditional civilizations. Through its respect for the validity

of all cultures and understanding of the responsibilities of cultures, it works to define an authentic concept of humanity. It tolerates fluctuation, irregularities, uncertainty, and diversity, which are characteristics of open systems.

*Comprehensive.* The levels of application of human norms are both universal and local, depending on the context. For example, there are some universal human behavioral standards, such as a prohibition against incest or against eating human flesh, but local expectations conform with cultural values (and indeed, cannibalism and incest have been important parts of some societies). The eutopian frame tolerates and integrates all cultures. Each culture determines the style and complexity of its individuals. Eutopias strives for concerned noninterference, but offers advice and assistance to all cultures to integrate new attributes or common concerns, such as the equality of women, into the culture. Eutopias considers the total community. Human cultures make a place within nature. Culture is an immeasurable complex of material and spiritual achievements inside nature, by modifying and using nature. Nature changes with culture. Nature is the locus of the centers and images of all living beings. Nature is thus an important basis for all cultures. The self-ordering processes of nature must be protected through formal preserves of areas or through limited human impact on other areas.

## Eutopian Structure

What is it, though, that would have these attributes? A city or community or state or the globe? Many of the dystopians like Huxley have outlined the fate of a good place that has to compete with an institution of an industrial state. Complete isolation is almost impossible. So a Eutopia cannot be just a small isolated place. Many of the utopians like Wells have predicted what would happen if the state covered the entire Earth and there was no escape. No set of rules will be acceptable to all people. Both globalism and the simple community are necessary, if the community is not to be diseased and the globe impersonal. Therefore, Eutopias is a framework that possesses three levels of authority, each with its own area of responsibility: a global authority, community republics, and extended individuals.

There is a global authority to protect both the planet and human cultures. This authority, the United Republics (UR), based on the United Nations, but with significant differences, is responsible for all land, air, and water utilization, for global cycles, and for interactions between Republics. The UR gives equal opportunity to nonwestern, nonindustrial cultures to flourish. The United Republics, an elected body, shall have the regulatory powers necessary to maintain a healthy global environment. It shall have regulatory and advisory powers to maintain the independence and integrity of its constituent republics. It shall have regulatory and punitive powers to rectify resource and human rights in-

fringements; only this body will have police powers and impersonal weapons. Various advisory bodies will recommend policies and actions to republics. The United Republics has four basic functions: To ensure a healthy biosphere, to manage common resources, to protect unique human cultures, and to provide services to the republics and individuals.

The planet is experienced on a smaller frame of reference than global unity or nations; people live on the local level. Local knowledge is knowledge in place, earned in place by generations of inhabitants, through visions and trials, experience, and stories. Thus, individuals are preserved in societies that are preserved in places that are preserved by individuals and societies. Laws, politics, architecture, sports are things of place. They are shaped with local knowledge. A local area is limited by the limits of vision, a horizon. Local organizations, called republics (from the Latin words meaning "thing of the people"), are based on traditional cultures, which have long-term lasting power. As protectors of place, Republics have five explicit functions: To conserve local ecosystems, to manage local resources, to maintain the health of the culture and individuals, to provide power for individuals, and to provide for the needs of individuals. The locus of political sovereignty is the individual, who is limited in giving away proxy rights. Politics has to be a participatory process, where an individual has some power over decisions affecting him or her. Participation is necessary, not only politically, but to establish the existence of common values throughout the population as a whole. Individuals have responsibilities that cannot be evaded or given away. The basic five responsibilities are: To participate in the life of the community, to cultivate the self, to practice simplicity, to share in the governing process, and to be peaceful (that is, practice nonviolence toward others and ecosystems).

Utopias are the inventions of great visions. Eutopias are the inventions of good actions — perhaps later there will be enough time for greatness. Where utopias offer revelations promising a desired future, Eutopias offers limited references for improving our situation now. There is no mechanical prescription for making good places; there is no blueprint or timetable. Eutopias is a proposal for immediate action. Humankind possesses incredible scientific evidence of environmental wobble, biological imbalances, and unfitness of many domestic species, and social collapse, but knowledge moves few to action. Eutopias urges a reaction to the slow catastrophes of overpopulation and environmental degradation. Our goal should not be to survive under any conditions, however.

A eutopian framework should be implemented immediately. Most global studies state or imply that change cannot be fast, that people cannot adjust, that social disruption would result, and that chaos would finish what ignorance and technology could not. The first Club of Rome report claims a 20-year feedback lag. *The Ecologist* plan cites a social inability to adapt to rapid change; the attempt would be self-defeating. These studies propose slow, long-range plans, while warning at the same time that the Earth is facing imminent, drastic

change, assuming that the plans could be implemented before some unrecognized critical level is surpassed. Furthermore, a long view seems meaningless when so much suffering already exists. An immediate, realistic, coordinated program of action is needed, capable of being implemented by communities and global agencies.

Paradoxically, the best thing to do is stop — stop growing, stop producing, stop running. Let us just freeze growth and see what happens. Let us just freeze the populations — a year or decade of no births. Let us freeze production and have a decade of recycling. The transformation must be complete; it cannot be done partially. Global political and economic institutions must all be changed. The approach must be pragmatic and flexible. By its nature, the eutopian frame could reduce some of the stresses of transition, the uncertainty, ambivalence, or reversion. The readjustment to the realities of our new intricate involvement in the whole order of nature and her ecological balance will cause social strains. Some capital of energy and materials may be wasted. Population will be matched to solar budgets or net ecosystem productivities. Production will be redirected to communal needs in transportation, housing, food, and recreation.

For most people in agrarian countries, even freedom from hunger and sickness is utopian. For most people in industrial countries, the choice of a fulfilling profession is utopian. Grinding poverty, economic dislocation, homelessness, are more painful than a transformation to Eutopias. Already most cultures have been transformed by cash crops, mining, tourists, highways, high-rise housing, and condominiums. Physical disruption has been more extensive than the transition to Eutopias could ever cause. Industrial cultures have replaced older patterns with great suddenness. Eutopias cannot seem more sudden than the loss of a home or place. Industrial cultures have reduced people's control over the means of production and power. Eutopias does not offer less control. Whole communities have been destroyed by industrial scale. Our social structures are already changing rapidly and impractically. Let us just make the changes conscious and more practical. Eutopias offers movement towards common, achievable goals. Eutopias would be a framework for cultures, where different human experiments are tried. Its variability would insure that we could reject any of the local visions that fail.

There will continue to be problems. People cannot be given material equality instantly. But things can be leveled within a culture; cultures with excess may be taxed by the United Republics. Providing work for everyone is one way to narrow income differences. Crime and civic unrest will not disappear. The United Republics and republics could reduce many kinds of global and victimless crimes with new policies. People will still choose badly in Eutopias. If a form of government is bad or ineffective, it can be altered. In the eutopian framework, people can learn from mistakes or unintended side-effects-as when doing good causes evil. The scale is small, so the catastrophe is small. There will always be some injustice, inadequacy, and unpredictability. Large political and economic

institutions have only made it worse. If Eutopias turns out not to be the proper framework to solve these problems, it might lead to a better way.

The UR can be granted immediate responsibilities and powers, by all nations, for protection and preservation, as well as some temporary powers, such as taxation. Five immediate steps would be necessary: (1) Transference of powers, where major countries relinquish control over military matters and economic imperialism. If the USA or Russia is to be a world leader, let her lead in tolerance or in trust. Let her be the first to give allegiance to a world organizing body and the first to divest themselves of nuclear weapons. If they fear for safety, they need only remember the success of nonviolence in India or of guerrilla actions in Southeast Asia and Central America. (2) Disarmament: Complete disarmament could be accomplished within a week. Earl Osborn proposes this concept of sudden disarmament in response to the tedious phase-out envisioned by most plans. The UR could post a police force to disable all military ordinance. A thousand planes each carrying one hundred trained inspectors could be distributed at all major centers in the nuclear countries within 24 hours. (3) Formation of independent republics: Independent cultural areas within nations shall have the status of independent republics within the UR. Any culture would be given legal recognition, protection, and full autonomy over their boundaries by application to the UR, which would determine priority of claims. No action would be taken to disband existing nations. Republics could still remain allied with nations as independent or dependent regions. (4) Implementation of catastrophic measures: Immediate educational and material aid to disrupted areas; conservation and restoration of earth parks; a year of consideration, with reduced births and reduced development; (5) and Define paths for individuals to our human identity, to include other beings and the Earth, to include our own posterity and its image of the future, without which we lose the will and capacity to solve problems.

Taking these steps would solve many of the problems addressed earlier. The satisfaction of physical and cultural needs, as a result of living in stable and small societies, would contribute to the health of people. Fitting economic costs and needs to the limits of ecosystems and monitoring the economic process would reduce wastes and pressures on natural processes. The coupling of agricultural productivity to a solar budget, and the conscious restoration of degraded systems, would contribute to the health of ecosystems. Sufficient wilderness would allow the self-maintenance of global cycles. With the increase in security, wealth, and self-esteem, human populations could be dependent on ecosystem productivities and still be diverse and unique.

With the removal of war capabilities and the equalization of wealth, the remaining issues are not the kind to incite violent passions. Disagreements over the best way to raise wheat or maintain a forest may be more easily resolved than deciding the best nation or truest religion. The death of large-scale dogmatic ideology and national idolatry could also mean the end of organized slaughter.

In designing worlds, everyone can participate. We can reduce the violence to nature and ourselves and transmute it to debate. That which has been hitherto left unsaid — the goals of humanity, what we want to become, what we could become — could become explicit.

Human ills cannot be cured by a return to idyllic hunting and gathering groups or to a quasi — agricultural, ecologically-caring society. There is no possibility of complete return. Much of industrial nations are urban; agricultural countries pack their surplus peoples in cities. Nor can there be a return to 4th century B.C. Greece, or to 17th century China, or to 1910 France, or to any time. Many traditional cultures no longer exist; others are disintegrating under pressure from industrial cultures. Nor can there be a jump to a complete technological future, where technology transforms hydrogen into wealth for everyone. Eutopias is based on the values and forms of traditional cultures.

The eutopian framework is an open, flexible, and partially- planned global relation, instead of a finished, closed, completely-planned society, as imagined in utopias. Eutopias accepts the imperfect nature of humans and the changing ambiguity of nature. Eutopias detoxifies cultural rivalries. Racism, sexism, ageism, and speciesism lose their importance in a cooperative society of advanced communication, automation, equality, humane scale, and meaningful preservation.

The Eutopian framework addresses the inadequacies of the present system; it offers a drastic system change from the institutional gridlock of elitism, but the change is not so drastic that the feasibility of acceptance is too low. The benefits must be worthwhile to justify the costs. The benefits cannot be vague and unsatisfying when the costs are immediate and painful. Communication and education must prove that the benefits exist, so that the eutopian alternative can be implemented.

Creating the future is necessary to maintain the present. It is meaningful to construct a world that we will never live to see, to plant trees that take two hundred years to mature, to save some of the forests and soils — not for the oil and timber elite or even for the backpacking elite, not for social abstractions or for personal profit, but for the forests themselves, for our heirs to see and save. Now is the time to define goals in terms of population, quality of life, and preservation of biomes. Goals are not some final state reached once and for all time, but a horizon. Eutopias offers continuity.

Science presents us with too many facts, yet we crave to have more. Philosophy presents us with too many values, but we have too few. Technology presents us with too many things, but we do not know what we need. We do not need more information or rules, but *we need meaningful ideas*. Our attitudes and feelings toward nature need to be revitalized with evocative metaphors that let us accept responsibility for the part of the Earth that we build, namely human culture and human landscapes. In order to know what is important, what is valuable, we need wisdom, but practical wisdom, prudence, and intellectual control in



virtue, in place of the theoretical wisdom taught by institutions.

Wisdom is the disciplined use of the imagination with respect to alternatives, exercised at the right time and in the right measure. Wisdom is knowledge of the total system. Wisdom is a new kind of fitness. To survive, we must accommodate ourselves to the conditions of the Earth. Lacking wisdom, we must behave "as if" we were wise, as if we had good sense. Humans have no choice but to live by fictions, as if this world is the ultimate reality, as if we are responsible for our actions. The truths of our unique cultures and the wild Earth are apprehended through fictions and myths. The poetic language of mythology can fit all the facts and values, things and images, into our hearts so that we can feel them and act upon them — so that we can make good places.

if we could contrive...some magnificent myth that would in itself  
carry conviction to our whole community... Plato *Republic* 3:4 14

---

**Citation Format**

Whitbecker, Alan (1994) EUTOPIAS: MAKING GOOD PLACES WITH ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS *Trumpeter*: 11, 2. <http://www.icaap.org/iuicode?6.11.2.9>

Document generated from IXML by ICAAP conversion macros.  
See the [ICAAP](#) web site or [software repository](#) for details