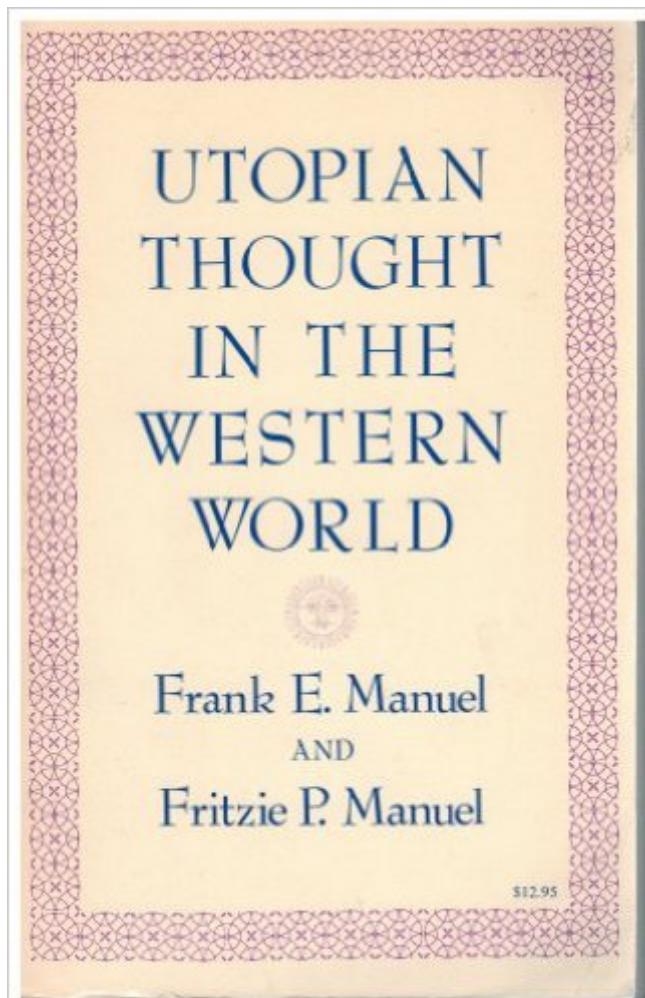


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Utopian Thought In The Western World



Synopsis

This masterly study has a grand sweep. It ranges over centuries, with a long look backward over several millennia. Yet the history it unfolds is primarily the story of individuals: thinkers and dreamers who envisaged an ideal social order and described it persuasively, leaving a mark on their own and later times. The roster of utopians includes men of all stripes in different countries and eras--figures as disparate as More and Fourier, the Marquis de Sade and Edward Bellamy, Rousseau and Marx. Fascinating character studies of the major figures are among the delights of the book. Utopian writings run the gamut from fictional narratives to theoretical treatises, from political manifestos to constitutions for a new society. The Manuels have structured five centuries of utopian invention by identifying successive constellations, groups of thinkers joined by common social and moral concerns. Within this framework they analyze individual writings, in the context of the author's life and of the socio-economic, religious, and political exigencies of his time. Concentrating on innovative works, they highlight disjunctions as well as continuities in utopian thought from the Renaissance through the twentieth century. Witty and erudite, challenging in its interpretations and provocative in the questions it poses, the Manuels' anatomy of utopia is an adventure in ideas.

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Customer Reviews

"The great utopians have been our great realists." With this powerful insight the Manuels embark on a journey of 2,500 years which leaves the mind spinning. From Plato's Mediterranean Republic to

More's island of Utopia; from Bacon's New Atlantis to Marx's Paradise of the Proletariat; and from Campanella's City of the Sun to McLuhan's Global Village, the utopian instinct has set in motion a series of visions which have been the key drivers behind major social and scientific accomplishments in the western world. In chronicling what they call "the utopian propensity of mind," the Manuels essentially create a new genre, at once literary and philosophical. At its broadest, it would reach into the religious sphere - the "utopian moments" of Eastern Enlightenments, the Revelations of St. John on the island of Patmos. But the Manuels, wisely, pull back from the cosmic view to the generally secular, social, visions of a better world on earth. The best utopians are realists, in that they focus the fire of their vision on the concrete specifics of this world, transporting them into the framework of an ideal universe. The vision, to quote a poet, is that of "real toads in imaginary gardens." Setting out from points of contact in the real world, they move into uncharted territories and terrains, places where no one has yet gone. Etymologically, "Utopia" is the Great Good Place which is No Place. Chimerical, fantastic, improbable, and motivating, Utopias are the engines behind our evolutionary imaginations. At 900 pages and 17 pounds, this beautifully written, erudite and witty book from the 1970s is an unrecognized national treasure, waiting, like some ancient artifact of utopia itself, to be uncovered and released to the world.

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