



Avalon in Space, Is Dreaming of Utopia No Longer Possible? A Philosophical Analysis of “Passengers”

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Abstract

The intersection of literature and philosophy has long provided a space to explore complex ideas such as human existence, morality, and utopian ideals. By merging narrative with philosophical thought, this relationship has deepened the understanding of these abstract themes. In the last century, cinema has joined this dialogue, offering a visually rich platform for further philosophical exploration. The 2016 film “Passengers”, directed by Morten Tyldum, exemplifies this by engaging with the concept of utopia within the context of futuristic space travel. The film explores the age-old question of whether a perfect society, free from Earth’s imperfections, can be achieved. This article critically examines “Passengers” and how it engages with and critiques the concept of utopia within contemporary philosophical discourse. Through a cinephilosophical lens, the study aims to explore the contradictions inherent in the pursuit of utopia, reflecting on human ambition and idealism. By tracing the historical evolution of utopian thought, the article argues that “Passengers” symbolizes the shifting boundaries of utopia, which has transformed from a hopeful vision of the future into an elusive “no-place” and “no-time,” mirroring the anxieties and limitations of modern aspirations.

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Keywords

Utopia; Dystopia; Literature; Philosophy; Idealism; Paradise; Society; Cinema; “Passengers”; Morten Tyldum



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Авалон в космосе: возможно ли еще мечтать об утопии? Философский анализ фильма «Пассажиры»

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Аннотация

Пересечение литературы и философии давно служит пространством для исследования сложных идей, таких как человеческое существование, мораль и утопические идеалы. Соединяя повествование с философской мыслью, это взаимодействие углубляет понимание данных абстрактных тем. В прошлом веке к этому диалогу присоединилось кино, предоставив визуально насыщенную платформу для дальнейшего философского осмысления. Фильм «Пассажиры» (2016) режиссера Мортена Тильдума демонстрирует это на примере концепции утопии в контексте футуристического космического путешествия. Картина поднимает давний вопрос о том, возможно ли создание совершенного общества, свободного от недостатков земной жизни.

В данной статье проводится критический анализ «Пассажиров» и того, как фильм взаимодействует с концепцией утопии в рамках современного философского дискурса. Используя кинофилософский подход, исследование направлено на выявление противоречий, присущих стремлению к утопии, а также на размышление о человеческих амбициях и идеализме. Отслеживая историческую эволюцию утопической мысли, статья утверждает, что «Пассажиры» символизируют изменяющиеся границы утопии, которая трансформировалась из оптимистичного видения будущего в неуловимое «нигде» и «никогда», отражая тревоги и ограничения современных стремлений.

Эта статья представляет собой расширенную и доработанную версию доклада, представленного в виде тезисов на Международной конференции по тенденциям и проблемам в коммуникации и медиа (International Trends and Issues in Communication & Media Conference 2023).

Ключевые слова

утопия; дистопия; литература; философия; идеализм; рай; общество; кино; «Пассажиры»; Мортен Тильдум



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Introduction

Utopias, though classified as a literary genre, hold a distinctive position as texts where the tradition of philosophical inquiry is most clearly articulated. Their defining feature is the explicit integration of social philosophy within their narratives. The origins of the genre, with its earliest works authored by philosophers rather than literary writers, emphasize its deep philosophical foundations. From Thomas More's seminal work *Utopia* to contemporary examples, utopian texts have served as a vehicle for the expression of modern reflective assumptions, scientific methods, and social ideals. Since the twentieth century, the relationship between the utopian tradition and philosophical thought has not only endured but also intensified, as evidenced by the incorporation of critical philosophical perspectives on modernity within utopian –predominantly dystopian– literature.

Literary traditions found renewed expression in cinema, where narratives and themes are vividly reimaged for the screen. Utopianism, too, has found fertile ground in cinema, where idealized societies, dystopian futures, and the inherent tension between utopia and dystopia are portrayed with striking immediacy. Iconic films such as *Metropolis* (1927), *Blade Runner* (1982), or *The Matrix* (1999) exemplify how cinematic narratives engage with these themes, offering critical reflections on society, technology, and the human condition. Like their literary counterparts, these films interrogate the viability of utopian ideals, often exposing the contradictions and perils that lie within the pursuit of a perfect society. *Passengers* (2016), directed by Morten Tyldum, is a science fiction film that, despite its commercial presentation, offers significant philosophical reflection and an exploration of utopian themes, as well.

This article examines *Passengers* as a philosophical text that explores the tension between utopia and dystopia. The main research question of the study is how contemporary cinema addresses the concept of utopia and how this concept is positioned within current philosophical discussions. While considering the prevalent approaches in the literature on the concept of utopia, the study offers an original contribution by presenting it through a new classification. In re-evaluating the historical and philosophical origins of the concept, the article argues that utopia functions on four distinct levels and this four-tiered classification clearly reveals how the concept of utopia has transformed over time. Moreover, the article approaches *Passengers* not only through the tension between utopia and dystopia but also within the context of the contradictions between modernity and postmodernity. The central thesis proposed here is that utopia first found its place in the spatial realm and later in time, evolving as a concept. With postmodernity, however, as utopia can no longer find a place within the confines of space, it begins to find a home in outer space. Postmodernity enables utopia to be sought beyond time and space, in a future that is indeterminate or in a different dimension altogether.



In this way, the study offers a new theoretical framework to the existing academic discourse on utopia and opens a new interpretive space at the intersection of cinema and philosophy. While *Passengers* depicts a world trapped between utopia and dystopia, it also reflects a utopia shaped by the contradictions of modern and postmodern thought, illustrating the futility of striving for ideals in a world where the very possibility of such utopias seems increasingly distant.

Aim and Methodology

This study is structured as a philosophical film analysis of *Passengers* using thematic analysis. Recurring or prominent themes in the film's narrative are identified and interpreted within the framework of utopia and dystopia discussions. The analysis is shaped around three main themes: the Relationship Between Utopia and Space, Temporality and Utopia, and Individual and Collective Utopias. These themes question how time and space in the film transform within the utopia/dystopia framework and whether the characters' utopian dreams are individual or collective pursuits.

Although the analysis of the film is conducted through a cinephilosophical approach, it should not be viewed as an independent methodology but rather as a conceptual framework that elucidates the role of film analysis in the production of philosophical thought.¹ In this context, cinema is considered not merely a tool reflecting utopia and dystopia debates, but also a space that directly generates philosophical questions. Through this approach, the aim is to shed light not only on the visual and narrative aspects of the film but also on how utopian thought is shaped within the tension between modernity and postmodernity.

First, the concept of utopia is initially explored through its historical and philosophical foundations. Accordingly, a four-way classification is made regarding the concept of utopia. Second section argues that the ideals of progress and reason central to modernity are reflected in utopian thought, illustrating how these visions were responses to the socio-political challenges of their time. The last of all, the discussion progresses to the concept of the "beautiful place" (eutopia), illustrating how utopian ideals gradually evolve into an imagined future state, a "beautiful time", before ultimately transforming into dystopia, rendered obsolete or corrupted by historical developments.

While the film's visual and auditory elements are acknowledged, they play a secondary role to the exploration of deeper philosophical themes. The methodology integrates thematic analysis with philosophical inquiry, treating the film

1 Cinephilosophy combines philosophical inquiry with film analysis, treating films as "texts" that actively engage in philosophical discourse (Cox & Levine, 2018, pp. 27-29). While terms like "philosophy of cinema" or "filmosophy" (Frampton, 2006) are often used to describe similar approaches, cinephilosophy distinguishes itself by rejecting the traditional divide between cinema and philosophy, viewing them as two inseparable dimensions of a unified act of thought production (Öztürk, 2021, pp. 13-24). Indeed, as Frampton too points out (2006, p. 21), it is misleading to consider the mind of the film and the mind of the viewer as two separate worlds. Like any work of art, cinema finds meaning in the simultaneous union of work and thought.



as a text that participates in the philosophical discourse surrounding utopia. Key scenes are examined for their representation of utopia, and the collapse of utopian dreams, providing insights into the film's engagement with the philosophical tradition of utopia and its transition.

Four Aspects of Utopia

The term *utopia* was first introduced in 1516 by Sir Thomas More in his work *Of a Republic's Best State and of the New Island Utopia*, which outlines an ideal society from economic, social, political, legal, and moral perspectives. The word itself has roots in Ancient Greek, combining "ou" (οὐ), meaning "no," or "eu" (εὖ), meaning "good," with "topos" (τόπος), meaning "place" (Sargent, 2005, p. 1039). The use of the letter "V"¹ accommodates both meanings. Thus, *utopia* may signify both "no place" and "good place" –the former emphasizing its fictitious nature, while the latter underscores its ideal qualities.

Following More's work, the term came to denote a literary and philosophical genre that describes imaginary ideal societies. The term, originally a neologism, has evolved into an umbrella concept, giving rise to various new neologisms (dystopia, heterotopia, ecotopia, etc.) over time (Vieira, 2010, pp. 3–4). This linguistic expansion introduces complexities that warrant further examination, particularly regarding classification and dating. Defining what constitutes a utopia is complex, as is determining when the first utopia was written. Without clear definitions, discussions about utopia can become convoluted. However, a four-part distinction proposed in this article may clarify these issues and indirectly address when utopia first emerged.

First, utopia is the title of a text written by Thomas More in 1516, functioning as a proper noun. When referencing this specific work, it is capitalized and italicized as *Utopia*. Secondly, the term evolved into a generic noun, signifying a literary genre or style. Any narrative that depicts human communities solving economic, political, and ethical problems or living under significantly better conditions than our current reality is considered part of the utopian tradition or evaluated within the scope of utopian literature.

The debate over the origins of utopia and the definition of utopian literature is closely linked to the utopian impulse and its conceptual boundaries. According to Krishan Kumar, if we view utopian dreams as foundational, the roots of utopian thought can be traced to myths of lost paradises, golden ages, or ideal cities, often found in religious or mythological narratives. These include the Krita Yuga in Indian civilization, the Taoist Age of Virtue in Chinese culture, and the Garden of Eden in the Old Testament (Kumar, 1987, pp. 8–19, 1991, pp. 4–11). However, it remains debated whether such myths truly constitute utopias.

Such an expansion inevitably introduces greater complexity, necessitating a turn to anthropology and philosophy for clarification. In this broader context, utopia encompasses two additional concepts. The first is that utopia also refers



to individual aspirations to transcend present limitations in pursuit of something better. In contemporary usage, the term often describes seemingly unattainable dreams (Geoghegan, 2008, pp. 14–16). Thus, in its most expansive sense, utopia represents an act of imagination, functioning more as a verb than a noun, signifying a process of envisioning possibilities rather than a fixed place—what Ernst Bloch termed the “utopian impulse” (Bloch, 1995, p. 12).

Human continuously reshapes the world, a process extending beyond imagination to tangible transformation. Homo sapiens became *fully human* upon acquiring the capacity to perceive and alter the world. This metaphysical capacity is also the source of utopia, enabling humans to transform both the natural world and the socio-political order. Bloch (1995) referred to this foresight and transformation as the utopian function, fundamental to human nature alongside reason and language. Consequently, humanity can be understood as both homo faber (tool creator) and homo utopicus (utopia creator).

Although the utopian impulse is inherent in all acts of imagination, it finds its clearest expression in the literary tradition. Utopia is thus distinguished by texts that stand out as a response to social conditions marked by corruption or injustice. A significant change in the utopian literary tradition is its gradual break with religious elements. Earlier visions inspired by religious ideals, such as a paradise lost through original sin, were gradually replaced in the sixteenth century by depictions of a rational, efficient society (Manuel & Manuel, 1979, pp. 112–114). In these secular utopias, economic and political systems are founded on ethical principles and transform the quest for a perfect society into one structured by reason and efficiency.

This leads to the fourth significant point about utopia: Thomas More, a humanist, presented his text not just as a narrative but as a practical model for society. Utopia is a fundamental manifesto for modernity, linked to the experience of modernity itself. As Krishan Kumar argues (1987, pp. 43–45) a society cannot be a true utopia unless its development intersects with philosophical humanism. He suggests that it is a misconception to claim that utopias existed before modern times, as pre-16th-century writers were not genuinely interested in realizing ideal societies. In contrast, modern thinkers actively sought to create utopias, making the socio-political significance of this shift profound. Utopia emerges as a distinctly modern concept, with modernity inherently utopian and contributing to utopia as a social philosophy—one of today’s most perplexing questions.

Philosophical expression varies in form, shaped by historical contingencies. At the dawn of the modern age, the boundaries between poetic and theoretical thought became fluid, leading to the emergence of utopias. These envisioned perfect societies transformed from abstract moral ideals into concrete forms of economic and political organization, seen as achievable through human reason and organizational skills. This marks the transformation of utopia into a fully developed social philosophy, unfolding as utopian thought became increasingly secular.



Utopia as a Unique Conceptual Frame for Modernity

This perspective opens the possibility of connecting utopia with modernity's vision of the future. The effort to transform an idealized society from fiction into reality relies on the belief that present reality can be perfected to the level of a utopia, a defining feature of modernity. It is no coincidence that the writing of *Utopia* and the resurgence of utopian literature, focused on economic and political organization, coincide with the rise of the modern age. Both modernity and utopianism represent perfectionist impulses, reflecting the desire to bring rational perfection from the eternal realms into the temporal world (Kumar, 1987, pp. 43–45). In modernity, utopia is no longer seen merely as a cautionary tale; it becomes a blueprint and vision for the future.

More initially used the term *Nusquama*, meaning “nowhere” in Latin, to describe his imaginary island, but later adopted the term *Utopia*. This choice was highly significant for More, as he did not intend to imply that he was merely describing a non-existent place. Vieira (2010, p. 4) argues that had More published his book under the name *Nusquama*, he would have inherently denied the possibility of such a place ever existing. Instead, he sought to convey a novel concept that resonated with the intellectual currents of his time. The term *Utopia* encapsulated a humanist perspective, reflecting the idea that humanity is not merely destined to accept its circumstances but is endowed with the capacity to use reason to shape its future (Manuel & Manuel, 1979, p. 1).

In this context, it is evident that what has become pervasive is not only the title of More's work but also the fundamental elements defining its rational essence: the endeavor to conceptualize a social order superior to the existing one and the concrete efforts required to actualize it. The aspiration to create a paradise on earth will likely continue to influence our imagination, extending beyond literature and resonating profoundly within modern socio-political thought. Since the publication of *Utopia*, the relationship between dream and reality has evolved; they are now seen as interconnected components of an ideal equation, supported by a new cultural ethos. As dreaming has moved beyond mere poetic thought, utopianism has transcended the boundaries of literature, blurring the demarcation between narrative and politics.

According to Gianni Vattimo (2012, pp. 100–102), there is a significant connection between utopias and modern rationalism. While the concept of utopia can be traced back to Plato, its contemporary form is deeply embedded in the history of modern rational thought. The term utopia is distinctly modern, as it pertains to the realization of an ideal society through rational design and planning. Concepts such as rationalism, collectivism, and absolute centralism shape the ideal societies depicted in utopian visions and also underpin the foundations of modern Western civilization, which has successfully achieved globalization.

This underscores the inherent ambiguity of boundaries: the simultaneous and mutual blurring of fiction and reality. As sociologist Zygmunt Bauman insightfully



notes, just as utopia constructs fictional designs, modernity has spawned entire social systems based on rational models and has given rise to central administrative organizations equipped to implement these designs (Bauman, 1987, p. 2). Thus, while utopianism is distinctly modern, modernity itself is inherently utopian.

The modern individual, confident in the power of reason and freed from long-held idols, believed in the potential for remarkable success. This conviction led to the emergence of various utopias along the path to Enlightenment. An ideal social order could be realized through a humanist economic and political framework, as depicted in More's *Utopia*, or through social reform, education, and disciplined leadership, as envisioned by Campanella in *The City of the Sun*. Alternatively, it could be achieved by harnessing nature with advanced technologies based on scientific principles, as described in Bacon's *New Atlantis*.

In the 18th century, an important realization emerged, highlighting a persistent issue: the absence of the ideal society and organization envisioned in utopian models. While utopia was conceptually defined as a beautiful place, it was equally characterized as a non-existent place. Despite the idealistic portrayal of utopian societies, they remained incongruent with the realities of contemporary existence. At first glance, this discrepancy may not seem contradictory, given that the societies depicted are entirely fictional. Nonetheless, it is essential to recognize the nuanced tension between the meticulously crafted ideal of the utopian socio-political order and its perceived feasibility. This tension is a defining characteristic of both utopian literature and modern organizational structures.

In its formative period, the absence of a concrete domain in utopian thought unequivocally marked its status as a mere dream. However, the narratives that depicted events on remote, unexplored islands granted these visions a certain degree of plausibility. During the 16th and 17th centuries, much of the world remained uncharted, and the freedom to imagine these distant islands significantly enhanced the allure of utopian literature. This imaginative latitude, however, was transient. As geographical discoveries and territorial expansions increasingly interconnected and familiarized the world, the concept of hidden islands became untenable (Mattelart, 2005, p. 27). The encroaching reality of an interconnected world began to undermine the feasibility of such alternative realms. Consequently, within two centuries, the era of spatial utopias came to an end, signaling a pivotal shift in the landscape of utopian thought.

Nevertheless, modern utopian concepts required a new domain in which to reside. Consequently, from the 18th century onward, the focus shifted from eliminating the "absolute" absence of utopia in terms of spatial dimensions (topos) to addressing it through the dimension of time (chronos). "As spatial categories became problematic, time offered itself as a possible setting" (Nate, 2009, p. 82). Although time and space did not seamlessly converge, they could function as complementary elements. While the placelessness inherent in utopian thought could be situated in spatial terms, its ideal perfection could be projected into



(future) time. This shift marked a significant transformation within utopianism and modernity: ideal places (eutopia) were reimagined as ideal times (euchronia). These ideal times were not envisioned as a nostalgic return to the past but as a promising future, perceived as a *tabula rasa* for the creation of entirely new possibilities.

It would be a significant oversimplification to attribute the shift in utopian visions from distant places to distant times solely to geographical necessities. The pursuit of scientific and technological progress also played a crucial role in shifting emphasis to the future. In fact, the logic of scientific advancement and technological innovation should be regarded as a more potent influence than the topographical constraints imposed by geographical discoveries. The humanistic tradition that celebrated rational knowledge had been a hallmark of utopian literature since its inception. However, following Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, the integration of scientific thought with the notion of progress endowed utopian visions with both a historical and, more crucially, a global dimension. This evolution in utopian thought emerged during the Age of Enlightenment, a period in which Western thinkers who believed in the feasibility of a perfect socio-political order also embraced the idea that reason and the scientific advancements it fostered would lead humanity toward perfection (Vieira, 2010, pp. 11–12). For instance, Benjamin Franklin's lament in a letter expressing his regret at having been born too early to witness the anticipated progress and perfection underscores this sentiment.¹ Although the ideal of modern rational thought had not yet been fully realized, it was confidently projected to manifest in the future.

Modernity cannot simply reduce the future to an abstract concept while maintaining a clear temporal separation from the present. Such an approach contradicts the fundamental nature of modernity. By linking the present to the future as recent time, modernity redefines the present, not merely as a moment in time, but as the first expression of future possibilities. The present is understood not only as the culmination of past events but, more importantly, as the origin of future potential. As a result, it is inconceivable that the aspiration for perfection embodied in utopian thought could be projected into the future without influencing the present.²

During the Enlightenment, individuals framed their optimistic visions within a comprehensive theory of progress and regarded scientific inquiry as a key

1 “The rapid Progress true Science now makes, occasions my regretting sometimes that I was born so soon. It is impossible to imagine the height to which may be carried, in a thousand years, the power of man over matter. We may perhaps learn to deprive large masses of their gravity, and give them absolute levity, for the sake of easy transport. Agriculture may diminish its labor and double its produce; all diseases may by sure means be prevented or cured, not excepting even that of old age, and our lives lengthened at pleasure even beyond the antediluvian standard. O that moral science were in as fair a way of improvement, that men would cease to be wolves to one another, and that human beings would at length learn what they now improperly call humanity!” (Franklin, 1772, p. 46).

2 Terry Eagleton, in his discussion of utopia, asserts that “if a transformed future is not in this sense anchored in the present, it quickly becomes a fetish.” This observation encapsulates the crucial relationship that utopian thought constructs between the future and the present, emphasizing that visions of the future must remain grounded in present realities to avoid becoming idealized abstractions (Eagleton, 2000, p. 34)



intellectual pursuit. Rather than concentrating exclusively on future concerns, they derived insights from the social structures and orders of their own time. It was argued that to achieve a perfect future, the existing social order must undergo reform, and that progress, understood as a universal and inevitable historical force, must fundamentally reshape all cultural frameworks (Vieira, 2010, p. 13).

Dystopia, Utopia's Counterpart: How Dreams Evolved into Nightmares

In the 19th century, the Industrial Revolution, propelled by advancements in science and technology, precipitated a profound transformation in social structures. This upheaval necessitated the reconfiguration of social, political, and economic systems around the dynamics of capital, labor, and production across Europe. Such a sweeping change inevitably influenced the nature of utopian thought (Roemer, 2010, p. 82). As Karl Mannheim astutely notes, utopianism ultimately converged with socialism, or more precisely, found expression in its socialist form, reimagining the future through the lens of classless, communist societies (Mannheim, 1955, pp. 215–216). This development also signaled the final emergence of utopia.¹

Since the publication of Thomas More's *Utopia*, idealized societies have typically been portrayed as collectivist and egalitarian.² In this context, it is unsurprising that visions of utopia following the Industrial Revolution began to resemble socialist or communist frameworks. Utopian narratives not only present idealized social orders but also reflect the struggles that inspired them. The shift toward mass living and regimented, long-hour labor intensified alienation from both personal life and work, making the rise of socialism as a utopian ideal a logical development. Socialism, in this sense, emerged as a response to the perceived failings of capitalist utopia (Leopold, 2007, p. 223).

Framed through iconic figures, Karl Marx's vision of utopia emerges as a direct response to the earlier ideas of Adam Smith. The liberal optimism of the Enlightenment, encapsulated in Smith's works, posited that individuals pursuing their own economic interests would naturally contribute to social welfare and collective happiness. In this view, progress was driven by property owners seeking to improve their own conditions (Smith, 1993). However, within a century, this liberal philos-

1 Despite the failure of the Soviet Union's attempt to implement socialism, some argue that socialism can still function as an active utopia, with Zygmunt Bauman being one of its most notable proponents. Bauman characterizes socialism as an "active utopia," highlighting its aspiration to promote human freedom and social equality. Rather than presenting a fixed or static system, this ideal envisions a social order that is continuously evolving and subject to negotiation. Moreover, Bauman argues that while socialism offers a compelling alternative to modern capitalism, this alternative can only be realized through sustained effort and active engagement (Bauman, 1976).

2 Interestingly, in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, *Utopia* was often seen as the founding text of modern socialism. More's name was also included on a stele commemorating the eighteen founders of communism, erected in post-revolutionary Moscow at Lenin's behest (Davis, 2010, p. 30).



ophy, which linked moral values to wealth, failed to deliver universal happiness. Instead, the rise of modern capitalism and industrialization, bolstered by technological advancements, exacerbated inequality and dissatisfaction.

This outcome, rather than being a catastrophic failure, can be interpreted as the fulfillment of Smith's 18th-century vision, which largely materialized in the 19th century. Yet, this realization ultimately reflected capital's aspirations. Smith's assertion that a free market, guided by property rights and individual freedom, would benefit all proved illusory, as the resulting wealth primarily enriched the bourgeoisie. Consequently, as capital and the means of production became concentrated in the hands of a few, the working class, burdened by the demands of production, found themselves increasingly alienated from their labor and struggling to survive.

An alternative to this 'dystopian' reality would be the establishment of a classless society achieved through the expropriation of the means of production, equitable distribution of wealth, and dismantling of the state apparatus, which Marx and Engels famously denounced as a "committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie" (Marx & Engels, 1948, p. 11). This merging of utopianism with Marxist thought, along with the belief among certain European intellectuals in the historical necessity of overcoming individualism and private property, profoundly shaped the evolution of utopian ideas.

The individualist and property-centric utopias of the Enlightenment, including those in the Robinsonade tradition, gradually gave way to new visions. As critiques of private property intensified and the call for an egalitarian, collectivist society gained momentum, the ideal of a socialist society became increasingly prominent. By the late 19th century, works such as William Morris's *News from Nowhere* and Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* vividly portrayed this vision. In this context, the inclusion of Marx and Engels' *The Communist Manifesto* among utopian texts represents a defining development in the trajectory of utopian thought.

Interestingly, many contemporary studies of utopianism often open with Oscar Wilde's famous remark: "A map of the world that does not include utopia is not worth even glancing at." However, it is rarely acknowledged that Wilde's statement originates from his 1891 essay, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, in which he critiques the helplessness of modern humanity amid the rise of mechanization and private property. In this essay, Wilde advocates for the equitable distribution of the means of production to benefit society as a whole, thus reinforcing the historical intersection of socialism and utopianism (Wilde, 1891). Yet, this convergence also signals the twilight of traditional utopian visions.

Indeed, the darker undercurrents of utopianism were already evident before this twilight. By the late nineteenth century, the optimistic promises of scientific progress began to falter, as reflected in the emergence of science fiction nightmares that replaced utopian ideals, such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and H.G. Wells's *Time Machine*. The term "dystopia," coined by British politician



John Stuart Mill in 1868, actually predates the development of dystopian literature itself. Mill introduced the term in a speech, capturing early anxieties about societal decay long before dystopian narratives were fully realized. These anxieties only deepened with the devastation of World War I, which revealed the lethal potential of technological advancement and further shattered the optimistic dreams of a utopian future.

The optimistic euchronic hopes of the late 19th century were shattered in the early 20th century, a disillusionment that profoundly shaped the intellectual climate of the era, with only a few exceptions (Vieira, 2010, p. 23). The rise of dystopian literature is closely linked to the waning of socialist ideals following the October Revolution. Initially, the 1917 Russian Revolution inspired European intellectuals, fostering the belief that socialism had finally brought utopia to fruition. However, it soon became apparent that, much like liberal principles, socialism had failed to deliver on its utopian promises.¹ This growing disillusionment reached a critical point with Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1921), widely regarded as the first dystopian novel born from disappointment with Soviet totalitarianism.²

The dystopian genre expanded as the totalitarian horrors of Nazi Germany, the Second World War, and the brutal practices in China and Cambodia further exposed the failings of utopian visions (Claeys, 2017, pp. 128–136). Even the capitalist world, previously seen as a beacon of liberalism, was increasingly criticized for creating an international “welfare-tyranny” (Huxley, 1946) that oppressed its citizens through technological means. By the 1950s and 1960s, discussions of the “death of utopia” became prevalent, with this theme intertwining with notions of the end of philosophy, ideology, and history (Vieira, 2010, p. 27). In this context, dystopian narratives came to the forefront, envisioning futures where perfection could only be achieved through immense personal sacrifice. Subsequent to this period, numerous influential dystopian classics emerged, including Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, Katherine Burdekin's *Swastika Nights*, George Orwell's 1984, Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange*, among others.

Cinephilosophy: Adam and Eve in Space, A Paradise of Eden in the Middle of Nothing

Up to this point, we have outlined the conceptual framework of utopia and traced its historical evolution. As has been shown, the 20th century saw the decline of utopian visions and the rise of dystopian narratives, marking an era of despair.

1 For an “ambivalent utopia” that illustrates how both communitarian/socialist and individualist/capitalist models fail the individual, see Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*. While Thomas More's *Utopia* is often considered a foundational text in the optimistic visions of modernity's future, Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* can be regarded as the definitive manifesto marking the conclusion of utopian fiction.

2 Following this disillusionment, the term utopia retained its association with socialism or communism within leftist thought, while in liberal discourse it became increasingly synonymous with totalitarianism, particularly in relation to Stalinism (Jameson, 2004a, p. 35).



Perfection or utopia, being inclined to define a certain ideal, is closely related to modernity, while postmodernity opposes the limits imposed by the definition of the ideal and, in this sense, does not allow for the emergence of a utopian time or space. However, as mentioned above, humanity is also not the kind to give up dreaming of utopia. In such a case, it is reasonable to wonder what kind of narrative utopianism would acquire.

Written by Jon Spaihts and directed by Morten Tyldum, *Passengers* proposes a new form of resistance to despair. In essence, the film poses the question: if the perfection sought in the modern world remains unattainable in a world dominated by Newtonian absolute time and space, could it perhaps be realized in a new, postmodern realm where time and space become fluid and relative, in accordance with Einsteinian principles, both present and absent at the same time? *Passengers* offers a new and strange exploration of this possibility.

The film centers on two passengers, Jim Preston and Aurora Lane, aboard the spaceship Avalon, which is undertaking a 120-year interstellar journey. The vessel carries 5,000 passengers and 258 crew members, all placed in hibernation pods to survive the lengthy voyage and ensure safe arrival at their distant destination. The ship functions autonomously, controlled entirely by an artificial intelligence system. A malfunction, however, causes Jim to awaken 90 years ahead of schedule. Confronted with the prospect of spending his life in solitude, he falls into despair. Upon discovering Aurora, another hibernating passenger, Jim becomes captivated by her and ultimately decides to wake her. Unaware of Jim's actions, Aurora initially believes, like Jim, that her awakening was the result of a technical error.

Jim's untimely awakening raises a fundamental question about how the relationship between technology and humanity can become utopian in *Passengers*. The technology inside the ship offers a perfect order where everything functions flawlessly; automatic food dispensers, entertainment systems, and the ship's self-repairing mechanisms represent a god-like order designed to meet all human needs. However, the perfection of this order also contains a fragility that forces the utopian narrative into a dystopian territory. Although the machines work flawlessly, even the smallest malfunction can bring down the entire system that sustains life, turning existence into a hellish experience. This situation highlights how uncertain the place of technology in human life is, and how dangerous our trust in it becomes, directly proportional to our dependency on it. Despite this perfect system, a person can suddenly find themselves alone, lost in a void where everything loses its meaning. What happens to Jim, and by extension, to Aurora, is precisely this.

Passengers not only explores the tension between modern and postmodern utopias but also raises fundamental questions of posthumanist thought. Posthumanism challenges the absolute centrality of the human being and proposes an understanding of existence that integrates biological, technological, and artificial



elements (Braidotti, 2013, p. 2). In this context, the spaceship Avalon in the film is not just a setting but it also functions as a posthuman entity: a world where passengers' biological time is suspended, their lives are predetermined, and the technological infrastructure shapes human existence.¹

The central posthumanist crisis in the film begins with Jim's unintended awakening. Avalon was designed to sustain a posthuman order—where passengers remain in hibernation, biological aging is halted, and the constraints of time and space are transcended. However, Jim's premature awakening exposes the fragility of this system and raises the question of how humans fit within posthuman structures (Wolfe, 2010, p. 45). Despite the technological promise of a perfect order, human biological and psychological vulnerabilities reveal an inherent paradox: If utopia is built upon the transcendence of human biological limitations, how does subjective human experience find its place in such a system?

At this point, the film highlights a key distinction within posthumanist discourse. While classical utopias, derived from liberal humanism, idealize human reason and individuality, posthumanist utopias attempt to establish systems that transcend human biological constraints altogether (Hayles, 1999, p. 283). *Passengers* dramatizes this tension between the two approaches. Despite the seemingly flawless technological order of Avalon, Jim and Aurora experience loneliness and existential crises, questioning how posthumanist utopias can accommodate human emotions and social bonds.

Also, Jim's premature awakening disrupts the predetermined order of time aboard Avalon. While the other passengers remain in suspended animation, frozen in a state of timelessness, Jim alone is subjected to the relentless passage of chronological time. He wakes to find himself trapped in a temporal paradox: although his surroundings remain static, his own biological clock continues ticking forward, forcing him to experience time as an oppressive force rather than a neutral medium. His solitude amplifies his awareness of time's weight—each hour, day, and year stretches unbearably, underscoring his helplessness against the vast expanse of the journey ahead.

It is precisely this existential confrontation with time that invites a Bergsonian interpretation. Henri Bergson's concept of duration (*la durée*) argues that time should not be understood as a series of discrete, measurable units but as a continuous, organic, and internal flow. According to Bergson, duration transcends

1 Furthermore, *Passengers* examines how posthuman existence shapes human emotions and relationships. Posthumanism asserts that human emotions and identities are not solely determined by biological processes but are also shaped by environmental, technological, and artificial intelligence systems (Wolfe, 2010, p. 78). The presence of the artificial intelligence bartender Arthur in the film is significant in this regard. Although Arthur can communicate in a human-like manner, he lacks emotional depth and ethical consciousness. However, as the film progresses, Arthur does not merely serve as a narrator but actively influences Jim and Aurora's relationship, raising the fundamental posthumanist question: Can artificial intelligence develop emotions comparable to human feelings, or is it merely simulating them? This question is central to posthumanist thought, particularly in Haraway's discussions of cyber-organisms and human-machine integrations (Haraway, 1991, p. 149).



the artificial structure imposed by clocks and calendars, instead reflecting a more fluid reality shaped by individual consciousness and experience (Bergson, 1944, p. 3). Jim's condition—being awake while others remain in suspended animation—forces him into a heightened awareness of this duality: while the ship's systems continue to function according to mechanical time, Jim experiences a subjective, elastic form of time, where minutes may feel like eternities and memories blend seamlessly into the present.

This shift from external, chronological time to internal duration parallels the inner journey of Jim and Aurora as they embark on their voyage through space. Their isolation in space leads not only to the physical traversal of distance but also triggers an internal transformation process through which they begin to explore the essence of time and existence. In their relationships with each other and their environment, Jim and Aurora move beyond linear time, aligning with Bergson's notion of duration; their experience evolves into a holistic flow rather than a mere sequence of moments.

According to Bergson's understanding of duration, every moment in time is a part of an inseparable whole, which carries an intrinsic meaning within the lives of individuals (Bergson, 1944, p. 24). Similarly, Jim and Aurora's journey reveals that the time they spend together in space is not just about measuring physical distances. Rather, it forms part of an inner time that is shaped by personal discoveries and conscious transformations. Their journey becomes not merely a travel across galaxies, but an exploration of their inner worlds, filled with emotions and thoughts lost in the depths of time. In this context, Bergson's concept of duration is intricately linked not only to their physical movement across space but also to how they internalize time as an ongoing flow that shapes their individual existences and transforms their experience.

In modern utopian thought, time is regarded as a measurable category that progresses in a specific and chronological order. As a legacy of the Enlightenment reason and the Industrial Revolution, modern humans aim to control time, organize it along a planned trajectory, and even dominate it. However, in the postmodern experience, time loses its mechanical certainty and takes on an internal, flexible quality. Jim's situation provides a striking example of this transformation. The technological perfection of Avalon promises to eliminate time by keeping humans in sleep during a journey that spans years. However, the system's malfunction detaches Jim from the homogeneous and orderly understanding of time promised by modernity, subjecting him to Bergsonian duration. When the linear time promised by technology is interrupted, what remains is a qualitative experience of time, lived within the flow of individual consciousness. In this context, Jim's dilemma is not only physical solitude but also the fact that time, once controlled by modernity, must now be experienced not as an external category but as an internal form of existence (Bergson, 1944, p. 32).



The love that will blossom between Jim and Aurora also presents a romantic narrative that aligns with the notion of qualitative/internal time. Their relationship unfolds in a way that reflects the shift from the external, mechanized concept of time to a more subjective, experiential understanding. As they grow closer, their connection transcends the rigid temporal structures imposed by technology, creating a space where time is no longer just a passing measurement but an emotional and existential experience. In this way, their love story becomes a profound manifestation of Bergson's idea of time, where moments are experienced deeply, not just chronologically, reflecting a break from modernity's obsession with linearity and control. Their romance, in essence, becomes a journey into the heart of time itself, where their emotional states, growth, and shared moments are defined by their internal rhythms rather than the ticking of a clock.

A deep bond inevitably develops between Jim and Aurora, evoking the imagery of a modern-day Adam and Eve as they attempt to build a life together aboard the ship. This fragile harmony is abruptly shattered, however, when an unwitting robot bartender discloses the truth behind Aurora's premature awakening. Feeling profoundly betrayed, Aurora's anger is both immediate and justified. Meanwhile, the Avalon faces escalating technical failures, placing the lives of all aboard in jeopardy. The survival of the passengers depends on Jim, whose technical expertise positions him as the mission's only hope. Despite the immense personal cost, Jim dedicates himself to averting disaster, risking his life to save others while also seeking to regain Aurora's trust and love.

The spaceship Avalon functions as a modern-day island, evoking the geographic motif central to early utopian visions (Shell, 2014, pp. 56–60). While it may initially seem implausible to view a spaceship as an island, this comparison is, in fact, fitting. Before Jim makes the fateful decision to wake Aurora, he poses a critical question: "Suppose you were stranded on an island. You wanted to take her with you, but that would also mean confining her to the island. Would you do it anyway?" This rhetorical inquiry firmly grounds the narrative within the island metaphor, positioning Avalon as an isolated, self-contained world adrift in the cosmic expanse—a contemporary counterpart to the ocean-bound utopian islands of literary tradition.

The ship's name, Avalon, carries profound symbolic weight. In Arthurian legend, Avalon is the fabled island where King Arthur is taken to heal after being mortally wounded in his relentless pursuit of the Holy Grail (Lynch, 2009, p. 171; Putter, 2009, p. 41). It is depicted as a paradise of eternal youth and beauty, yet one from which there is no return. Should Arthur leave Avalon, his mortal wounds would reemerge, sealing his fate. In some versions of the myth, Avalon becomes Arthur's final resting place, where he remains in eternal peace. This mythical resonance directly parallels the fate of the passengers aboard the spaceship Avalon, whose voyage toward a distant utopia mirrors Arthur's journey to eternal rest. Like Arthur, the passengers are suspended in limbo (neither dead nor alive) held in a state of



hibernation. The antagonists inhabit a realm from which they cannot escape without forfeiting their lives. This connection is underscored by the presence of the android bartender named Arthur, a deliberate reference that deepens the parallel between the ship and the legendary island.¹

However, there is something unsettling about film's particular island, Avalon. A growing malfunction in the ship's systems, damaged by an asteroid shower, sets in motion the chain of events that awakens Jim nearly a century too early. If we interpret Jim's awakening through the lens of the "creation of Adam," as the internal logic of the argument suggests, we observe a significant shift in perspective. Unlike the traditional narrative, where Adam is awakened by a conscious, supreme being, Jim's emergence is driven by the indifferent, "blind" forces of the universe. His "birth," a consequence of a cosmic error and sheer chance, is devoid of any theological or teleological significance. When malfunctions aboard the Avalon endanger the lives of all its passengers, the film's narrative transitions from utopian optimism to dystopian unease. Rather than delivering its occupants to an idyllic new world, the ship becomes an omen of destruction. The breakdown of its systems reflects the larger disintegration of utopian ideals, serving as a stark reminder that technological progress inherently carries the potential for dystopian outcomes.²

In the film, Avalon offers its passengers a flawless future, but this future is only sustainable in their unconscious state, where subjective experience is suspended. The film presents this unconscious state as a prerequisite for the continuity of a technologically controlled utopia. This depiction aligns with posthumanist thought, which redefines human consciousness as a distributed and networked existence, detached from the physical body (Hayles, 1999, p. 284). In *Passengers*, Avalon functions as a self-sustaining posthuman system, maintaining human survival through technological automation while eliminating the need for subjective awareness. This framework reflects the posthumanist view that intelligence and

1 Göktürk states that the island has long been a central motif in utopian thought. In Christian tradition, the concept of the island was transformed into the "Fortunatae Insulae," or "Islands of the Fortunate," representing peaceful realms where souls favored by God would dwell. During the Middle Ages, these imagined islands became so influential that expeditions were launched to find them, and they even appeared on sixteenth-century maps, despite their nonexistence. With the advent of the modern age, islands also emerged as fictional settings in utopian literature. Their isolation from the outside world, self-containment, and timelessness makes an island ideal environment for utopian writers. On the utopian island, limitations translate into an orderly structure. A clearly bounded space allows for everything within it to be observed and understood from a collective perspective, enabling the precise depiction of the model society's functioning. The island's closed nature further ensures the safety of this ideal society, shielding it from external disruptions or attacks. Meanwhile, the island's separation from the flow of historical time grants the utopian vision a sense of continuity and permanence, transcending the temporal constraints of the real world (Göktürk, 2012, p. 18).

2 The malfunction introduces a familiar cinematic trope: the hostile AI, evocative of HAL 9000 in Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A *Space Odyssey*. At first glance, HAL and the Avalon's systems appear to be stark opposites. While HAL seeks to eliminate the crew, Avalon's systems revive Jim, seemingly offering him life. However, a closer examination reveals a deeper continuity rather than a contrast. For Jim, this premature awakening is not a gift of life, but rather a solitary death sentence, adrift in the emptiness of space. Beneath its utopian façade, the technological salvation both films promise exposes a deeper distrust and disillusionment with technology.



agency are no longer exclusive to human consciousness but are instead embedded within broader technological and environmental systems (Wolfe, 2010, p. 78).

The representation of Avalon also engages with Rosi Braidotti's concept of posthuman subjectivity, which rejects the centrality of the autonomous individual and instead emphasizes a networked, relational, and evolving form of consciousness (Braidotti, 2013, p. 93). In the film, the hibernating passengers embody this shift, existing as part of a larger technological organism rather than as self-determining individuals. However, this state of existence reveals the paradox of posthuman utopia, where individual consciousness must be neutralized for the system to function harmoniously. The film presents this erasure not as a moment of transcendence but as a condition of dependency, where the passengers' survival is entirely dictated by the technological infrastructure that sustains them.

This paradox also reflects the tension between utopia and control in posthumanist discourse. While posthumanist perspectives advocate for the dissolution of rigid humanist boundaries, *Avalon* demonstrates how such dissolution can lead to a form of passive existence, where technological perfection replaces individual agency (Ferrando, 2019, p. 89). In this sense, the film critiques the idea that a posthuman utopia can exist independently of human subjectivity. Instead, *Passengers* illustrates how the suspension of consciousness within Avalon transforms the ship into a space of existential stasis rather than progress. The film thus exposes the limitations of a posthuman utopia that prioritizes systemic continuity over individual experience, revealing the inescapable link between subjectivity and the concept of utopia itself.

It should also be noted that, the transitivity between utopia and dystopia in the film serves as a concrete reflection of the tension between modernity and postmodernity. Avalon's transformation from utopia to dystopia exposes the failure of modernist rationality and underscores the impossibility of utopias maintaining a fixed place in the postmodern world. As Jim and Aurora attempt to realize a modernist form of utopia, they are forced to confront its contradictions, making the film a text that interrogates what it means to think about utopia in the postmodern condition.

Jim, a mechanic by profession, is disillusioned with living in a society characterized by the motto, "It's easier to buy new than to repair old." Notably, this philosophy is also reflected in dystopian works such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*. Increasingly alienated in a consumerist culture, a "surplus human" as Bauman puts it (Bauman, 2004, p. 37), Jim embarks on a journey in the hope that his skills might once again find currency in a world where the value of fixing what's broken has been reclaimed. In contrast, Aurora's predicament is more complex. She is motivated by a dual aspiration: to achieve significance and to discover the true love she has long yearned for. Her dissatisfaction with a world disenchanting by rationalism casts her as a romantic, her cool exterior and sharp demeanor concealing a deeper longing. This yearning is reflected



in the symbolism of her name –Aurora, the “northern lights,” evoking a vision of beauty and transcendence.

Both Jim and Aurora are fundamentally in search of personal fulfillment. Expressed through Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptual framework, both are in pursuit of a “line of flight.” Deleuze and Guattari analyze society and thought through structured systems—hierarchies, the state, capitalism, and disciplinary mechanisms. Lines of flight are not merely acts of escape but dynamic forces that disrupt these structures, opening pathways to new possibilities. They do not simply signify a departure from a system but rather the dissolution of its fixed points, generating the potential for transformation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 13). In this sense, lines of flight are not only routes out of oppressive systems but also vectors of both individual and collective liberation. It is precisely this impulse that drives the journeys of our protagonists.

Furthermore, the protagonists’ sense of rootlessness in space can be interpreted as a deterritorialized, rhizomatic unfolding, in stark contrast to the tree-shaped modern utopia. Modern utopias often rely on hierarchical, tree-like structures—where the root provides a stable foundation, and the branches extend outward in a linear progression. By contrast, Jim and Aurora’s journey embodies the fluid, decentralized nature of a rhizomatic process. According to Deleuze and Guattari, rhizomes have neither a central point nor a clear origin; instead, they form networks of multiplicity, growth, and constant reconfiguration (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 6). In their isolated existence aboard the spacecraft, there is no central anchor or predetermined trajectory. Their journey, therefore, becomes a network of possible paths, lacking linear progression or fixed destinations. This rhizomatic structure allows for a form of freedom that resists the rigid, top-down frameworks of traditional utopian thought. Their rootlessness in space does not signify a lack of direction but a new realm of possibility—one that disrupts conventional structures, echoing rhizomatic growth that spreads in all directions without a clear center (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 8).

However, their rootlessness in the void of space also evokes the notion that lines of flight do not always lead to liberation. Deleuze and Guattari caution that lines of flight, while potentially creative and transformative, can sometimes lead to dead ends or even self-destruction (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 229). A line may open up new possibilities, but it may also carry the subject toward a destructive abyss. In this context, Jim and Aurora’s attempt to create a line of flight appears to have failed. Their rootless existence signifies not a passage toward freedom but rather the collapse of possibilities and an enforced entrapment. Although the vast openness of space seems to hold rhizomatic potential, their experience suggests that a line of flight can sometimes turn into a dead-end or a “black hole” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 203). Thus, their journey reveals the precarious tension between the creative force and the destructive risk inherent in lines of flight. Jim and



Aurora's narrative ultimately exposes the reality that freedom is never guaranteed—lines of flight can just as easily lead to exhaustion and closure as to liberation.

Thus, in their attempts to escape their dystopian circumstances and attain individual utopias, they awaken to a shared nightmare. The film simultaneously underscores the issue of class through their stark differences. Jim, a working-class man, contrasts sharply with Aurora, who hails from a privileged, affluent background. This inequality manifests not only in their social standing but also in the nature of their aspirations. The class dimension of Jim's desire for usefulness becomes apparent when juxtaposed with Aurora's more individualistic pursuit of love and success. Traveling in economy class, Jim endures a year of isolation, sustained by little more than oatmeal, while the ship's artificial intelligence system denies him even the basic luxury of a cup of coffee. As a beleaguered representative of the working class, Jim is occasionally rendered invisible, his presence on the ship perceived as nothing more than a technical glitch. In contrast, Aurora enjoys the privileges of first class, replete with all its comforts. This stark disparity serves as a reminder that even in a voyage toward the void, class continues to dictate the quality of one's experience.

Passengers not only shapes the tension between modernity and postmodernity through individual existential crises but also within social and ideological contexts. While modernity associates utopia with rational planning and the ideology of progress, postmodernity exposes the limits and contradictions of this progress (Jameson, 2004b, p. 37). In the film, the spaceship Avalon is presented as a spatial reflection of modernist utopias, yet its collapse can be read in parallel with Lyotard's (1984, p. xxiii) notion of the loss of faith in grand narratives.

The situation Jim and Aurora face illustrates, as Bauman (2004, p. 56) critiques modernity, the inherent risk of utopias—initially promised as visions of order—inevitably transforming into dystopias. Although utopia in the modern world is framed as a regulatory mechanism, the moment individuals cease to be subjects and instead become objects within this order, utopia turns into dystopia (Bauman, 1987, p. 17). Avalon's promise of technological perfection reveals its internal contradiction by evolving into a structure that eliminates individual freedom and will.

The postmodern idea of utopia, on the other hand, is characterized by an attempt to create a space beyond place and time, a realm without geography or history. In *Passengers*, utopia is no longer situated within a specific territory but rather in the boundless void of space. However, this displacement also raises the question of whether utopia can exist at all. When considered through Foucault's (1986, p. 24) concept of heterotopia, Avalon can be read as both a utopia and a dystopia; while it promises an ideal life, it simultaneously turns its inhabitants into prisoners of physical and temporal confinement.

A striking observation that arises from this is the failure of socialism, once bold in its ambitions to transcend earthly divisions, to extend its influence into space. Instead, the space race has embraced a liberal utopian ethos, wherein individuals



are free to pursue their own self-interests. In this context, Adam Smith's vision of a capitalist utopia continues to dominate, clashing even in space with the ideals of Karl Marx. This tension underscores the persistence of economic ideologies and class struggles, suggesting that the dream of a classless society has yet to transcend the bounds of Earth.¹

As the film progresses, its utopian dimension becomes increasingly apparent. Aurora articulates her desire to begin anew and strive for an ideal existence with the declaration, "We are creating a new civilization." However, two distinct utopian consciousnesses emerge in this narrative. Aurora's vision is oriented toward the future, as she continually emphasizes her aspirations for a perfected society. In contrast, Jim's utopia is grounded in a more archaic model, rooted in nostalgia for a time when repair and restoration held intrinsic value. Paradoxically, as Svetlana Boym has demonstrated, nostalgia illuminates not only a longing for an authentic past but also sustains hope for an imagined future (Boym, 2001).

In this context, Aurora's forward-looking ideal and Jim's backward-looking dream are united by their shared desire for improved times, or *euchronia*. This envisioned time, although inspired by past ideals, remains constantly in progress as a purely internal/spiritual concept, representing a future that has not yet fully arrived. These dreams are presented as ideals, yet they remain confined to a personal scale. Jim, who envisions shaping an entire civilization through his repair skills, ultimately finds himself tasked with fixing a single spaceship. Aurora, who aspires to achieve extraordinary feats and experience a legendary love, must come to terms with the reality that her love for Jim will remain unknown to the world, and that they will live together as mere individuals.

This shift from grand utopian projects to more modest, intimate, and individual dreams of happiness reflect a broader transformation in the nature of utopian aspirations. Aurora's friend's advice, "I hope you find that you don't have to do incredible things to be happy," encapsulates this sentiment. However, the film complicates this message by adhering to the conventions of American cinema, where heroes are expected to perform extraordinary acts. Jim risks his life to save the passengers, while Aurora ensures that Jim does not drift away into space. These epic elements, central to commercial filmmaking, underscore the tension between grand narratives and personal fulfillment, highlighting the contrast between large-scale utopian ideals and the intimate pursuit of happiness.

One particularly symbolic moment occurs when Jim, true to his nature, digs a hole in the spaceship's main deck and plants a tree. This tree unmistakably represents the "Tree of Life," a symbol often associated with the connection between the earthly and the divine (Eliade, 1954, pp. 12–15). In classical tradition, the proper

1 This reality is starkly illustrated by the case of Jeff Bezos, the world's richest man, who recently completed a space flight lasting just 11 minutes. Upon returning to Earth, his first act was to thank Amazon's loyal customers, acknowledging that "You guys paid for all of this" (P. Marx, 2021). His declaration underscores the extent to which space travel, once the domain of collective human aspiration, has been reduced to a capitalist endeavor, available only to the few who can afford it.



setting for this tree is not a spaceship but the Garden of Eden. Within religious utopias, the Garden of Eden serves as a locus of divine beauty and abundance, where humanity, embodied by Adam and Eve, lives in harmony with God. As a foundational narrative of utopian thought, the Edenic story symbolizes happiness, purity, and spiritual fulfillment. Indeed, the first vision of happiness conceived by religious utopian consciousness is the Garden of Eden, with the Tree of Life at its heart. Acting as the axis mundi, the central pillar of the universe, the Tree of Life unites past, present, and future, serving as a bridge across different temporal dimensions (Eliade, 1987, pp. 36–38, 43). Its presence on the spaceship thus evokes a yearning for a return to Edenic perfection, while also suggesting the persistence of these ancient utopian ideals in the modern quest for meaning.

By the end of the film, the Tree of Life that Jim had planted has grown into a colossal entity, enveloping the entire main deck and transforming it into a genuine garden of paradise. However, this paradise is notably different in one key respect: there is no presence of God. If there is a deity, He is asleep. Throughout the film, Jim and Aurora repeatedly attempt to contact the captain for the guidance they need, but their efforts prove futile. At one point, Gus Mancuso (Laurence Fishburne), a deckhand who has also accidentally awoken due to a malfunction, provides them with both spiritual and technical assistance. However, his death soon leaves Jim and Aurora to navigate their challenges alone. This moment resonates with Nietzsche's famous proclamation: "God is dead!"

Without the benefit of divine intervention, Jim and Aurora are compelled to find their own meaning and direction in their "miserable" lives. The transformation from being mere recipients of the Tree of Life to actively planting and nurturing it themselves underscores the enduring significance of philosophical humanism in utopian fiction. It highlights a shift from reliance on divine authority to self-determination and individual initiative. When the crew finally awakens eighty-eight years later, they discover a Garden of Eden and a Tree of Life that are the products of human effort, not divine intervention. Aurora's voice from the past resonates into the future, affirming the meaning of their creation: "We built a life together. A perfect life." This final scene encapsulates the film's central message: the perfection and meaning sought in utopian visions are no longer dependent on divine or external forces but are realized through human will, effort, and cooperation. The utopia achieved by Jim and Aurora is not a celestial paradise but a human paradise, crafted by two individuals who, in the absence of gods, become the architects of their own destinies.

Conclusions

The examination of utopian ideals within both literary and philosophical contexts unveils a complex and multifaceted history of human aspirations. Originally, utopia functioned as a symbol of hope and progress during the early stages of modernity, mirroring the philosophical foundations of that era which emphasized



human potential and advancement. However, these ideals have evolved significantly over time. As the nineteenth century progressed and dystopian narratives emerged, the feasibility of utopian aspirations came under increasing scrutiny, bringing contemporary concerns and the inherent flaws of human nature into sharper focus.

In this context, the cinephilosophical analysis of *Passengers* is particularly revealing. The film not only reflects this transition from utopian to dystopian visions but also presents a revised interpretation of utopia. Set in a futuristic context and centered on existential challenges, *Passengers* illustrates how modern cinema engages with these themes. While the starship Avalon initially represents an idealized future, it also offers a nuanced and individualized portrayal of utopian dreams, recognizing the limitations inherent in such aspirations. Through its narrative, the film underscores the persistent allure of utopian ideals while acknowledging their complexities and constraints in the contemporary world.

Although film, science, technology, and human intellect offer a utopian order that ensures stability and comfort, *Passengers* also critiques the rigidity of modernist utopianism. Rather than simply asserting the deterministic triumph of modernity, the film highlights the fragility of this vision by emphasizing the necessity of personal will, improvisation, and adaptation. The presence of natural elements such as trees and animals aboard the spaceship does not merely symbolize nostalgia for the past; it also represents a dynamic and evolutionary utopia that is continuously redefined through human intervention. In this sense, the film suggests that utopia is not a fixed place or time but an ongoing process shaped by human actions.

Furthermore, while the film does not directly answer whether a non-anthropocentric world is possible, it problematizes the idea that modernity's utopian vision is absolute. The experiences of the protagonists demonstrate that utopia cannot be achieved solely through rigid rational planning; it must also incorporate uncertainty, emotion, and lived experience. In this regard, the film offers a 'line of flight', implying that utopian desires do not always conform to predetermined structures but rather emerge through constant negotiation and transformation. This interpretation moves beyond reading the film as a mere affirmation of modernity's triumph, positioning it instead as part of an evolving discourse on utopia.

Nevertheless, it can be argued that the assured utopianism of modernity has largely lost its foundation, and the former glory of idealized lands has diminished. Utopias, once envisioned as existing beyond the confines of space and time, now appear to seek refuge in the realm of outer space. This spatial shift is evident in contemporary endeavors, such as Elon Musk's ambition to colonize Mars, which is built upon similar utopian ideals. The passengers in *Passengers* embody the contemporary dream of new utopias achievable only in distant worlds light years away, reflecting a recurring notion: "We are going to a new place to live, and this time we will create it perfectly."



These idealized visions are, however, tempered by a sobering reality. In the final days of his life, the late Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami was deeply moved by the lyrics of Mohsen Namjoo's song he heard while ill: "Another life is needed for time was spent in this one in hopefulness." When considering utopias imagined beyond Earth, these words prompt a reframing of the sentiment: "Now another world is needed for time was spent in this one in hopefulness."

The fate of the surviving passengers on the Avalon and their success or failure in establishing a perfect world on Homestead II remains uncertain. What is significant is that the notion of utopia has become so thoroughly deterritorialized that achieving it appears increasingly improbable. Even if such an ideal world exists, it remains accessible only through the technology of suspended human life and cosmic travel. This presents a cautionary tale of decline, yet it may also signify the ultimate realization of utopia as it has always been: "no-where" and "no-time." This possibility, too, merits thoughtful consideration.

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