

CHAPTER 1

To Boldly Know Where No One Has Known Before

How Blue Sky Thinking Can Set Us Free

One of my earliest memories is swaying back and forth on the swing set in front of the massive screen of the old drive-in theater on Bella Pacific Row in San Diego in the summer of 1977. My dad had heard about a new movie with the actor Alec Guinness and packed our whole family into the burnt-red Chevy Impala for an evening out. The opening music and scroll of words giving way to the violent boarding of the Rebel ship froze my mouth open in midair. And when Leia first stepped out of the shadows to blast a stormtrooper and then jutted her chin out at Lord Vader to assert that she was “a member of the Imperial Senate on a diplomatic mission to Alderaan,” I felt that sudden swoosh of preadolescent hero worship. I spent the rest of the film lying on the hood of the car, staring up into a distant galaxy where rescued princesses weren’t damsels in distress, but sassy politicians with their own insurgent armies.

My obsession with Princess Leia followed hard upon a fascination with Lynda Carter’s TV portrayal of Wonder Woman. The pilot had aired in November of 1975 when I was five and a half, and for my sixth birthday the next year, they released two more episodes. My mother tells me that I once had a metal Wonder Woman lunch box (with a matching thermos) and wore cotton Wonder Woman Underoos beneath my clothes to elementary school—an Amazon warrior of addition and subtraction.

I thus spent much of my early childhood imagining myself alternatively in an eagle-encrusted bustier with satin tights or in flowing white robes with cinnamon buns attached to either side of my head. Themiscyra (Pontus) was an ancient town on the southern coast of the Black Sea and the supposed capital city of the female warriors called the Amazons in Greek mythology. In the Detective Comics (DC) universe, creator William Moulton Marston reimagined “Themyscira” as an island city-state of independent women, a kind of feminist utopia where the Amazons enjoyed their immortal lives in peace. Queen Hippolyta is mother to Princess Diana (Wonder Woman), who leaves Paradise Island to help fight the Axis powers in World War II.¹ In the galaxy built by George Lucas, Leia Organa inhabited an alternate reality where princesses could be tough and bossy without being bitches. Motivated by her political convictions, rather than being driven by romantic love or a desire to protect her family, Leia believed in a righteous cause and was willing to die for it. Within the power hierarchy of the Rebel Alliance, it seemed perfectly normal that a middle-aged woman (Mon Mothma) would lead the scrappy resistance against the warmongering space Nazis of the Empire.

Young as I was, I understood that Wonder Woman and Princess Leia were allowed to be the heroes of their own stories because *they didn't live in my world*. I grew up in the military-dominated milieu of 1970s San Diego, which still reified traditional gender roles. Ivy League colleges like Harvard and Yale had just started admitting female undergraduates, and Title IX, the federal law that states that “no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance,” had only passed in 1972. Although the Equal Rights Amendment—an amendment to the US Constitution that would have guaranteed equality between all citizens regardless of sex—received congressional approval that same year, it failed to win subsequent ratification. Spunky girls my age had few real-life role models. And so, in my daydreams, my adventures took place in fictional worlds. Armed with my make-believe blaster or bullet-bouncing bracelets, I fantasized my way into an uncertain future.

When faced with bullies, insecurities, fierce family conflicts, or just the basic tediousness of elementary school, I found comfort in my imagination, as so many children do. And then somewhere around mid-adolescence, I watched with curiosity as most of my peers abandoned their make-believe places to concentrate on grades, sports, jobs, college applications, and the dramas of dating. I found myself an outlier among my friends for whom the looming end of high school meant the end of daydreaming. But as a certified Model United Nations dork (I was secretary-general of my club), make-believe was an official extracurricular activity. Rather than embrace the hegemonic realpolitik and greed-lionizing sensibilities of the 1980s, I carried on imagining the possibility of different worlds. I discovered that learning about other political and economic systems opened my mind to the possibility that the reality in which I lived was not the only one available. Once I started thinking about the world not as it was but as it might be, I could more clearly diagnose the problems with my own time and place—and mentally play with possible solutions.

The Upside of Upheaval

I don't think it was a coincidence that my first lessons in utopian thinking came when they did: in the midst of the Cold War and in the aftermath of the turbulent 1960s. Historically, moments of political uncertainty often give birth to utopian dreaming, which is one reason why it is enjoying such a renaissance today. For millennia, new ways of organizing social relations have emerged when philosophers, theologians, reformers, writers, and other visionaries imagine them *elsewhere*, in some idealized world that serves as a mirror to reflect the deficiencies of the accepted state of things. Perhaps the most influential early rendering of an ideal society is Plato's *Republic*, written about 2,350 years before Princess Leia captured my imagination. The *Republic* was produced in the aftermath of the Peloponnesian War, a conflict the historian Thucydides memorialized as "the greatest war of all."² This conflagration had engulfed the entire Greek world and pre-

precipitated the demise of its relatively peaceful and prosperous golden age after the Persian wars. Among the many casualties was Athenian democracy. Plato's childhood coincided with the violent reign of the oligarchic "Thirty Tyrants," who seized power after Athens's catastrophic defeat. He witnessed the economic devastation and plague that ravaged his once prosperous home. Plato published his famous outline for a perfect society following these world-changing events.

Centuries after Plato, the English humanist and statesman Sir Thomas More coined the word "Utopia" for his 1516 treatise: *Libellus vere aureus, nec minus salutaris quam festivus, de optimo rei publicae statu deque nova insula Utopia* (*A Little, True Book, Not Less Beneficial Than Enjoyable, on the Best State of a Republic and on the New Island of Utopia*). The word "Utopia" derives from the Greek roots for "not" and "place," which means that "Utopia" references a "no place" or nowhere, although it is also a homonym for the word "Eutopia," which means "good place." This ambiguity was intentional. More published his book in Latin and it never saw an English translation until after Henry VIII had him executed, probably because More understood that Henry would consider the book's contents subversive and might have beheaded him sooner.

Sir Thomas More wrote *Utopia* within thirty years of the journeys of Christopher Columbus and Amerigo Vespucci. Their "discoveries" filled his contemporaries' minds with dreams of new worlds and provoked profound debates about the supposed universality of institutions once taken for granted. The old world of Europe, with its rigid social customs of squabbling hereditary landowners lording over toiling serfs and the often-corrupt dominance of the Roman Catholic Church, suddenly faced the reality of its own ignorance. If there were entirely unexplored continents to the west, perhaps there were also newer and better ways to organize society to maximize human flourishing.

In the wake of these profound cartographic and theological uncertainties, More conjured a protagonist, a man named Raphael Hythloday, who claims to have traveled with Vespucci on his voyage to what is now Brazil before settling down to live among the Utopians for five years. Hythloday's narrative of life in Utopia challenged educated

men to consider the possibility of a more equitable and just society, not only for different social classes, but also for the “weaker sex.” Although not as proto-feminist as his acknowledged historical inspiration—Plato, who believed men and women were equally capable of becoming ruling warriors and philosophers—Thomas More imagined greater freedoms for women and girls than existed in European societies in the early sixteenth century.



Figure 1.1. A map of Thomas More's Utopia.

The Italian philosopher Tommaso Campanella also wrote his own vision of utopia, *La città del Sole* (*The City of the Sun*), following the stunning revelations of the Polish astronomer Copernicus in his 1543 publication, *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium libri vi* (*Six Books Concerning the Revolutions of the Heavenly Orbs*). After Martin Luther launched the Protestant Reformation, Copernicus dropped the idea of heliocentrism on the Western world like a bomb. Campanella knew and supported one of heliocentrism's greatest defenders, Galileo Galilei. Although Campanella largely rejected the idea that the earth revolved around the sun (because he preferred the cosmology of the Italian natural philosopher Bernardino Telesio), Campanella did pub-



Figure 1.2. Portrait of Thomas More.

lish an exceptionally brave defense of his Italian compatriot (*Apolo-
gia per Galileo*) and was generally a proponent of allowing the truth
of the natural world to reveal itself: an idea for which, among other
charges brought against him by the Inquisition, Campanella would
spend almost twenty-seven years in prison.

Contacts with the Indigenous peoples of the Americas and a new
understanding of the movements of the heavenly bodies helped to fuel
the European Enlightenment. Ossified ideas like the divine right of
kings and the rigid hierarchies of feudalism began to crumble in the
face of reason and science, culminating in the massive convulsion of
the French Revolution. Aristocrats lost their heads while citizens de-



Figure 1.3. Portrait of Tommaso Campanella.

manded liberty, equality, and brotherhood. Not surprisingly, a slew of new utopian writings appeared after the momentous upheaval of 1789. In that plastic moment of rapid social change, where all the old rules seemed negotiable, a Frenchman named Charles Fourier began dreaming up a new theory of “passionate attraction.” His detailed writings contributed to the foundation for what later became known as utopian socialism, which inspired intentional communities around the globe (voluntary residential communities where members organize their lives in accord with a shared social, political, or spiritual intention). These include the Social Palace in Guise, France, an experiment in collective living that lasted for more than a hundred years, and which will be discussed in the next chapter.

The tumultuous events of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries also inspired other thinkers and writers to dream of new ways of organizing production and reproduction, including Fourier’s fellow utopian socialists: Robert Owen and Henri de Saint-Simon. The Peruvian-French Flora Tristan also argued that the emancipation of workers could not be accomplished without the concomitant emancipation of women. She was the first to assert that the domestic relationship between husband and wife mirrored the oppression found in the relationship between the bourgeoisie and the working class. Over in Tsarist Russia, the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 and the onset of new industrial forms of production immediately preceded Nikolai Chernyshevsky’s 1863 *What Is to Be Done?*, a work that profoundly influenced later Russian Bolsheviks, including a young Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (also known as Lenin). In his protagonist Vera Pavlovna’s third dream sequence, Chernyshevsky outlined a utopian vision where women are emancipated and workers would finally enjoy the fruits of their own labor. “Tell everyone that the future will be radiant and beautiful,” Chernyshevsky wrote. “Love it, strive toward it, work for it, bring it nearer, transfer into the present as much as you can from it.”³

By the end of the nineteenth century, socialists, social democrats, nihilists, communists, and anarchists began challenging the social and ideological structures that underpinned early industrial capitalism,

with its grueling fourteen-hour workdays and voracious appetite for cheap child labor. In 1892, the Russian Peter Kropotkin published *The Conquest of Bread*, a foundational treatise that proposed an idealistic decentralized economic system based on the innate human tendencies toward voluntary cooperation and mutual aid. “Struggle so that all may live this rich, overflowing life,” he wrote in 1897. “And be sure that in this struggle you will find a joy greater than anything else can give.”⁴ In 1908, V. I. Lenin’s Bolshevik rival, the physician, philosopher, and science fiction writer Alexander Bogdanov, published *Red Star*, about an advanced society where men and women worked side by side to maintain a utopia on Mars.

On the left side of the Atlantic, the tumultuous events of the late 1960s—student protests, the sexual revolution, the civil rights movement, and widespread anti-Vietnam War activism—also inspired a new generation of explicitly utopian fiction as Americans experimented with alternative ways of living and thinking about the world. In 1974, Ursula K. Le Guin tore a page from Bogdanov’s *Red Star* and published *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia*, about a sexually liberated, anarchist community on a planet called Anarres. In the midst of the Cold War, Le Guin found inspiration in the works of Kropotkin and used the fictional journey of a brilliant physicist, Shevek, back to the mother planet of Urras to reflect on the many deficiencies of both Western capitalism and Eastern Bloc communism. Ernest Callenbach’s 1975 cult novel, *Ecotopia: The Notebooks and Reports of William Weston*, features one of the first environmental utopias. Callenbach imagined a breakaway country formed from the previous U.S. states of Washington, Oregon, and Northern California. This new country prioritized ecological sustainability and the full equality of women and conjured things like public recycling bins and communal bicycles. Callenbach saw the novel as a possible blueprint for the future, inspiring many green activists. This same decade also gave Wonder Woman her own TV show in 1975 and George Lucas a hit film in 1977. Lucas himself admits that the North Vietnamese communists served as an inspiration for his Rebel Alliance.⁵

Dreamers Have Always Had Haters

As a Generation X scholar of global women's movements, I've spent twenty-five years researching, writing, and teaching about different ways of organizing social relations to free women from their traditional roles as unpaid caregivers and to free men from their expected duties as financial providers. Across a wide variety of university courses, I've explored the alternative visions of American transcendentalists and spiritual perfectionists, British and French utopian socialists, and German and East European communists and anarchists. As a mother and a mentor, I've also witnessed the growing frustration of younger generations who feel suffocated by the persistence of sclerotic gender roles and outmoded ideals of living a "successful life."

Back in 2017 and 2018, I wrote a book called *Why Women Have Better Sex Under Socialism: And Other Arguments for Economic Independence*. It surveyed the available empirical evidence to support the idea that various historical experiments with socialism had more successfully improved the material conditions of women's lives than their capitalist counterparts. I focused on work, motherhood, leadership, intimacy, and citizenship and suggested that adopting some socialist policies could more effectively promote women's autonomy and happiness in the twenty-first century. By increasing public support for childcare, education, elder care, health care, and social programs, policies that redistribute the state's resources to expand these social safety nets also improve the quality of life for everyone, including those traditionally expected to fill the role of the private breadwinner.

For many readers, it was the first time they had considered what an alternative to capitalism might look like and how it would impact their personal lives. Young people especially reacted with enthusiasm, and their collective excitement caused that book to find a wider international audience with fifteen foreign editions in languages as diverse as Portuguese, Japanese, Indonesian, Albanian, Polish, and Thai. But I also received a lot of pushback. One of the most common responses to my investigation of socialism in Europe was that any move toward more state social guarantees would lead to breadlines and gulags. In

the conversations I've shared with readers over the last five years, I learned that while many ordinary citizens admit that our current economic system contains serious flaws, they instinctively dismiss alternatives as not feasible "in the real world." I discovered a persistent and profound suspicion of political imagination; readers avoid even thinking about visions labeled or derided as "utopian."

I am, of course, not the first to run into such resistance: skeptics and haters have always scoffed at visions of a better world, especially if they might benefit women. Plato's description of an ideal communal society may have been a response to Aristophanes's earlier derision of such a community in his play, *A Parliament of Women*. In this comedy, written around 391 BCE, the protagonist, a housewife named Praxagora (whose name means something like "public spirited") convinces the women of Athens to seize political power and institute an egalitarian society. "Let everyone have everything there is and share in common," Praxagora explains. "Let everyone enjoy an equal living; no more rich men here, poor men there; no more farmer with a huge extensive farm and some impoverished farmer with absolutely nothing, not even a patch to bury his body in. . . ."6 As the people of Athens prepare to donate their property to the new communal fund, Aristophanes introduces a character called simply "Mean Man" (sometimes translated as "Selfish Man"), who gives nothing but still expects his share of the redistributed wealth, the so-called free rider problem. Today, as in ancient Greece, the fear of moochers and shirkers who refuse to do their "fair share" continues to undermine attempts to do things more communally. The cynical idea that "one bad apple spoils the barrel" goes back thousands of years.

Doubters can mount a stiff resistance, but in every generation from Aristophanes on down, the dreamers persist. "Every daring attempt to make a great change in existing conditions, every lofty vision of new possibilities for the human race, has been labeled Utopian," noted the Russian-American anarchist Emma Goldman in 1911."7 The German sociologist Karl Mannheim argued that utopia was a necessary antidote to what he considered the normative role of "ideology," a term he specifically defined as the unseen but omnipresent social, cultural, and

philosophical structure that upholds a particular “order of things” and protects those who wield political and economic power. “The representatives of a given order will label as utopian all conceptions of existence which *from their point of view* can in principle never be realized,” Mannheim wrote in 1929.⁸ Those who benefit from the way things are have a strong motive for labeling as “utopian” any ideas that threaten the status quo. But even beyond that, those steeped in the ideology of their current existence cannot imagine an alternative to it. And most of us follow along.

We accept the way things are because we’ve never known them to be different. Behavioral economists call this the “status quo bias.” People prefer things to stay the same so they don’t have to take responsibility for decisions that might potentially change things for the worse.⁹ The psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky famously found that people want to avoid feeling regret, and that they are more likely to feel regret about a bad outcome resulting from a decision they made compared to a bad outcome that came from inaction. It’s just so much easier to do nothing. Accepting the status quo—even if we hate it—means the potential for fewer regrets.¹⁰ We might not want to admit it, but many of us are too scared, too tired, or too lazy to dream. Thinking outside the box requires courage.

This is why utopian visions of how to build a different future often follow moments of great social upheaval. Ordinary people find themselves unmoored from the realities they once believed to be fixed and immutable—the “order of things” is disturbed. Certain events—wars, pandemics, natural disasters, scientific breakthroughs—disrupt the smooth functioning of the ideologies that bring coherence to the world in which we live. Like Jim Carrey’s character in *The Truman Show*, who does not realize his whole life is on TV, or Keanu Reeves’s in *The Matrix*, whose initial world is a computer-generated simulation, sudden change forces us to question our perception of reality and consider new possibilities that may have previously seemed unthinkable. “It is so hard to imagine anything fundamentally different from what we have now,” *Ecotopia* author Ernest Callenbach told the *New York Times* in 2008. “But without these alternate visions, we get stuck on dead center.”¹¹

We have to fight against our own deeply ingrained status quo bias and control the normal defense mechanisms of cynicism and apathy because without social dreaming, progress becomes impossible. Before the pandemic, people said that a universal basic income was impossible. “The government can’t just give money away!” But then in 2020, governments around the world did exactly this. “The disappearance of utopia,” Mannheim warns, “brings about a static state of affairs in which man himself becomes no more than a thing . . . a mere creature of impulses.”¹²

And although it cannot be denied that many past utopian experiments have failed, we must remember that such experiments typically faced fierce and continued resistance from mainstream societal forces. Status quo bias is powerful. Those who challenge long-standing traditions often meet with violent opposition, from angry villagers with pitchforks to the Catholic Inquisition. Many of the social dreamers profiled in these pages were ridiculed, humiliated, persecuted, exiled, excommunicated, imprisoned, or murdered. Detractors like to claim that the relative brevity of so many utopian experiments resulted from their internal contradictions, but if these various communities were destined to implode anyway, why have those in power always fought so hard against them?

Rather than endorsing any one particular utopian vision from the past, or championing specific experiments, I want to remind you of their dogged reappearance time and time again. Depending on what is going on in the world, humanity has always looked to utopias for inspiration, and many are still willing to throw themselves into new experiments. No matter the risk, no matter how long the record of disappointment and failure, and no matter the constant refrain warning us that utopianism is “dangerous,” people still keep dreaming of different ways to organize their lives. Given the sudden social upheavals of the pandemic, the destabilizing effects of the climate crisis, and the growing prevalence of isolation and despair in communities across the globe, we are once again at a moment when utopian dreaming feels appropriate. It may even be necessary for our collective survival.

Asteroid Miners and Aspiring Immortals

In the last decade, a growing number of future-positive books have suggested political and economic changes that might seem far-fetched, but are increasingly debated as real possibilities. The French economist Thomas Piketty has called for a progressive supranational wealth tax to combat income inequality.¹³ The Dutch journalist Rutger Bregman has promoted several utopian visions “for realists,” including open borders and a fifteen-hour workweek.¹⁴ In *Abundance: The Future is Better Than You Think*, Greek-American engineer Peter Diamandis (founder of XPRIZE, which rewards inventors for technological developments that benefit humanity) and science journalist Steven Kotler look to the wonders of artificial intelligence and advances in robotics to propose technological solutions to problems like food scarcity, aging populations, and climate change. And in *Fully Automated Luxury Communism*, British author Aaron Bastani argues that technologies like cheap solar energy, asteroid mining, and CRISPR gene-editing will lead us into a world of post-scarcity universal health and leisure.

For me, one of the most interesting aspects of this popular neoutopianism lies in its primary focus on the public sphere. Today’s future-positive writers critique our economies while largely seeming to ignore that anything might be amiss in our private lives. But where we reside, how we raise and educate our children, our personal relationship to things, and the quality of our connections to friends, families, and partners impact us as much as tax policies, the price of energy, or the way we organize formal employment. How can you challenge or change political and economic systems when both are directly dependent on the primary institution in society responsible for the production and care of the next generation? Since political and economic systems accrue and distribute power and wealth among people, those *people* are essential inputs to those systems. For thinkers like Plato, Thomas More, and Charles Fourier, political reforms or revolutions will fail unless they also rethink how we create and sustain our families and communities. In the chapters that follow, I explore

how past utopians believed that changes in our intimate worlds would help us forge stronger and more harmonious societies.

And yet resistance to new ways of thinking may be most extreme when it concerns how we structure our private lives. I've thought a lot about how and why so many people today fear these types of changes. According to the anthropologist Wade Davis, "the world into which you were born does not exist in an absolute sense but is just one model of reality—the consequence of one particular set of intellectual and adaptive choices that your own ancestors made, however successfully, many generations ago."¹⁵ As individuals going about our daily lives, it is often hard to step out of the flow of history and consider how things might have been different if our ancestors had made an alternative set of "intellectual and adaptive choices" and to imagine what those choices might look like in practice. When we lose sight of the past, we lose sight of the idea that there were other pathways forward, other roads not taken. We begin to feel our present reality as static and inflexible. We convince ourselves that things cannot change, and that if they do, they will change for the worse.

At the same time, profit-seeking corporations and think tanks often encourage brainstorming sessions open to all ideas regardless of practical constraints: so-called blue sky thinking. Conjuring up new technologies, products, or marketing slogans to increase profits distinguishes the entrepreneurial mastermind from the mere corporate flunky. We accept that this is a good approach for solving economic issues and scientific problems. Yet at the same time, dreaming of different ways of organizing our lives is dangerous and discouraged.

Apple Computer provides one paradigmatic case. After their runaway success in the 1980s, Apple fell into a rut and brought back its cofounder Steve Jobs to reinvigorate its product line. The return of Jobs coincided with the 1997 to 2002 Apple advertising slogan "Think Different," which epitomized the spirit of blue sky thinking. The now iconic television advertisement included Steve Jobs's own narration over a series of black-and-white images of people like Mahatma Gandhi, Martha Graham, Martin Luther King Jr., Frank Lloyd Wright, Alfred Hitchcock, Maria Callas, and John Lennon

with Yoko Ono. “Here’s to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels, the troublemakers. The round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently,” Jobs tells us, celebrating the idea that those who “have no respect for the status quo” inevitably become the ones who “push the human race forward.” At the end of the ad, Jobs explains, “While some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do.”¹⁶ It was an explicitly optimistic commercial message about the transformative power of utopian thinking. . . . So why limit such thinking to designing better Apple products?

In academia, blue sky thinking underpins the discipline of geoengineering—scientists who hope to hack the earth’s weather systems in order to prevent the deleterious effects of climate change.¹⁷ The Cambridge University Center for Climate Repair suggests ocean greening, recycling CO₂, refreezing the polar ice caps, and spraying aerosols of sulphate particles into the stratosphere to prevent solar radiation from reaching the planet.¹⁸ In Silicon Valley, a new breed of extreme dreamers, such as the Coalition for Radical Life Extension, is experimenting with ways to achieve human immortality.¹⁹ And those who study artificial life (in its hard, soft, and wet forms) push the boundaries of their imaginations to understand how sentience might evolve from complex systems.²⁰ In the technology sector, entrepreneurs reap rewards when they “move fast and break things,” no matter what the costs to society as a whole. We can break democracy as long as we don’t challenge the social and economic systems, which ensure that the billions generated by new innovations accrue to a smaller and smaller handful of people.

To be sure, we need to think critically about which sorts of visions are realistic and which are not. The twentieth century gave us examples of utopian dreams that went badly awry. But the lesson should not be to stop dreaming—to suck it up and get on with the status quo. There are those for whom our present arrangements work out quite nicely: mostly men, mostly white, and all wealthy. These people have every reason to inculcate a collective fear of political blue sky thinking, a fear that immobilizes and prevents us from even consider-

ing new ideas that might lessen the pressures we place on individual households and families. Don't let them. By experimenting with old ideas in new ways—forms of collective living and child-rearing, for instance—we can not only reduce the burdens on women but also build more robust and flourishing communities that benefit everyone.

Unlike my previous book, where I focused specifically on state-sponsored solutions arising from secular projects to build a better economic system, in this book I expand out to include autonomous and community-based experiments inspired by a wide variety of ideological frameworks, including those that are explicitly religious in orientation. By investigating a long history and amazing diversity of utopian traditions regarding the private sphere, I hope to highlight the historical tenacity of these visions. It turns out that pagans, Christians, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, anarchists, pacifists, socialists, feminists, and environmentalists have all shared similar ideas about how we can better organize our homes and communities. The justifications may be different, but the fundamental proscriptions remained the same for two and a half millennia.

Two Very Important P-Words

To make sense of utopian visions for rearranging our domestic lives, it's essential to understand the ruling ideology that many hoped to undo: the institution of patriarchy. A Greek word that means "the rule of the father," patriarchy has long worked to oppress all people who lack the social position or necessary requirements to become patriarchs (such as being a first-born son or having independent means). It shapes our public worlds as workers and consumers and regulates the most intimate details of our private experiences. But the "rule of the father" isn't something just asserted; it depends on specific social customs regarding the shape of our families. Patriarchy is partially rooted in the cultural and legal traditions of patrilineality (paternal descent) and patrilocality (where wives leave their natal kin to join a husband's family). These twin forces still operate in the daily lives

of billions of people and maintain a distinct lingering influence even in contemporary cultures that see themselves as more “enlightened” with regards to the traditional family. We can’t #SmashThePatriarchy without dealing first with these two less familiar P-words.

Patrilineality denotes a set of social customs that confer primacy on the father’s family line. The best example of patrilineality comes from Genesis 5 and 11 in the Old Testament, the “begats” from Adam to Noah and from Shem to Abram, where we learn the names of each father and his firstborn son. Patrilineality is why fathers still “give the bride away” to the bridegroom during the traditional Western wedding ceremony, and it’s why about 70 percent of American women in 2015 and 90 percent of British women in 2016 still took their husband’s name after tying the knot.²¹ It is also why the children of heterosexual couples generally take their father’s name even though it is the mother who gestates them for nine months and labors to bring them into the world. One 2018 survey from the American website BabyCenter, found that only 4 percent of children have their mother’s surname.²² And in Belgium until 2014, a child born to a married couple was legally obligated to have its father’s name.²³ When you receive a holiday card from “the Andersons,” the whole family is identified by the last name of the father, which was his father’s last name, and his grandfather’s last name, and so on.

Historically, patrilineality meant that, upon marriage, rights over a woman’s body were transferred from father to groom. Flora Tristan, for example, lived her life governed by the 1804 Napoleonic Code, a wide-ranging law that stipulated that married women must obey their husbands, reside with their husbands, follow their husbands whenever they changed domiciles, and give over all property and wages for their husbands to administer.²⁴ In 1816, the French state also re-outlawed divorce, further trapping women in indissoluble marriages no matter how abusive or reprehensible the husband. Flora Tristan only escaped her own nuptial chains after her husband repeatedly molested their daughter and then subsequently shot Tristan at point-blank range in broad daylight on the streets of Paris. With her husband imprisoned for life, Tristan became a prominent utopian socialist intellectual who

understood that women's subjugation within the institution of monogamous marriage served to ensure women's fidelity so that they produced only "legitimate" heirs. In postrevolutionary France, the Napoleonic family code facilitated the transfer of private property from fathers to sons among a newly ascendant bourgeois class. Propertied men demanded strict wifely fidelity so that their wealth and privileges did not end up in the hands of some sneaky milkman's son.

Laws establishing a husband's legal rights over his wife can still be found across the globe and were only repealed in Western countries in the last 150 years. In the United Kingdom, the Married Women's Property Act granted wives the right to own, buy, and sell their own property in 1882. In the United States, the 1907 Expatriation Act meant that American women who married immigrant husbands automatically lost their citizenship and had to apply for naturalization when their foreign husbands became eligible.²⁵ The provisions of this act weren't fully repealed until 1940. In West Germany, married women could not work outside the home without their husbands' permission until 1957, and then only if their jobs did not interfere with their domestic responsibilities. This latter provision was not removed until 1977.²⁶

Although American women won the right to vote in 1920, married women were legally obliged to vote under their husband's surname until 1975. Married women also had to fight for the right to maintain driver's licenses and passports in their maiden names if they preferred.²⁷ In Japan in July 2021, the Supreme Court upheld a law that required married couples to have the same surname. Although in theory it could be either spouse's name, in practice 96 percent of Japanese women took their husband's name.²⁸ To counter these pervasive patrilineal customs, countries such as Greece, as well as the province of Quebec in Canada, have rendered it illegal for a woman to take her husband's name after marriage even if she wants to.²⁹ In Canada as a whole, where white settlers once imposed patrilineal naming conventions on matrilineal Indigenous peoples to help "regulate [the] division of property among heirs in a way that conformed with European, not Indigenous, property laws," the 2008 to 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission allowed for the free restoration of Indig-

enous names, including mononyms (the ability not to have a surname at all).³⁰

Patrilocality means that a new bride must leave her family and move into her husband's household, usually with or near his family (think of Elizabeth Bennet moving from Longbourn to Pemberley in *Pride and Prejudice*). In many societies in Asia and Africa, wives are still expected to reside with their in-laws and obey their authority. In Greece, it was only a 1983 Family Law reform that abolished the provision in the Civil Code that automatically established that a married woman's legal residence was that of her husband. Although new families in many industrialized nations prefer to form their own residences (called neolocality), our deeper history of patrilocality means that men are expected to be breadwinners because a patrilocal culture assumes that the father must be the head of the new household and therefore primarily responsible for its provisioning. A 2017 study found that 72 percent of American men and 71 percent of American women agreed that a man must be able to financially provide for his family in order to be considered a "good husband or partner."³¹ This puts a lot of pressure on men, especially in weak economies with labor markets transformed by outsourcing and automation. Although the percentage of female breadwinners has grown in the last decades, about 71 percent of husbands still outearn their wives in households of heterosexual couples where both spouses work.³²

Patrilocal traditions also explain why only in exceptional cases do men uproot their lives to relocate for the new job of a wife or girlfriend. In my own field of academia, for example, one 2008 study of 9,043 full-time faculty at thirteen leading American research universities found that 36 percent of faculty had a partner also employed in academia and another 36 percent had a partner working in a different industry—but women disproportionately felt the limiting effects of being in a dual-career couple. In contrast to men who prioritize their professional ambitions, the study noted that: "Women in academic couples report that their partner's employment status and opportunities are important to their own career decisions," with the number one reason women academics gave for refusing an external offer of em-

ployment being that their male partners “were not offered appropriate employment at the new location.”³³ The availability of a job for their partners outweighed other key considerations such as salary, benefits, research funds, or opportunities for promotion. And since getting a decent raise in academia usually requires moving to a new university, women’s relative immobility exacerbates the gender pay gap.

Whether it is in academia, in the military, or within the corporate world, women are more likely to follow their partners to a new city or country. When a couple needs to decide whether or not to take a job in a new place, it makes sense to invest in the career prospects of the partner with the higher salary. And because on average women more frequently leave their jobs to follow their partners than men do, employers may consider all women less reliable workers in the aggregate and pay them less than “more reliable” men. Finally, following a partner to a new city or country often separates women from their support networks: family, friends, and perhaps their pre-existing childcare arrangements. The resultant isolation makes it more difficult to restart careers in the new location.

Too many women, with higher degrees and years of work experience, simply give up because it is so hard to “have it all.” Of those parents who did not work outside of the home in the United States in 2016, 78 percent of mothers reported they didn’t work because they were taking care of their home and family.³⁴ For women, who generally earn less than men and who societies expect to provide more unpaid care work, it makes rational sense in economies with few social safety nets to embrace what social scientists call “hypergamy,” or the desire to marry up and find a partner who can and will support them. This practice reinforces the traditions of patrilineality and patrilocality because the man remains the “head of household.” And even in couples where wives outearn their husbands, women still bear a disproportionately larger share of household tasks, which is why so many pine for new domestic arrangements.³⁵

Patrilocality is only one way of organizing domestic relations and human societies once displayed a diversity of traditions. But after centuries of Western colonialism that dispersed patriarchal family forms

across the globe, fewer than thirty human societies remain matrilo- cal today. One community of Tibetan Buddhists called the Mosuo provides a fascinating example of a matrilo- cal society where neither spouse is expected to relocate. Among the Mosuo, grandmothers pre- side over large multigenerational families. Women own and inherit property through the maternal line and live with their mother's ex- tended family. Men live in their maternal grandmother's household and practice a form of "walking marriage," whereby they visit their partner only at night. Both men and women can have as many com- panions as they desire, without stigma, and women often do not know who has fathered their children. The concept of "father" barely exists, and men have few paternal responsibilities. Being a good uncle is far more important, as men help raise the children of their sisters. Since there is no formal marriage, the only reason men and women form pairs is because they are attracted to each other or enjoy each other's company. When the attraction fades, romantic ties can be dissolved without negative financial consequences or social impacts on the chil- dren. How very radical the Mosuo family structure seems to many of us today highlights just how deeply ingrained our own patrilo- cal and patrilineal traditions remain.

The Political Is Always Personal

The twin traditions of patrilineality and patrilocality uphold certain customs about social relations that assume that women and children are part of a man's property. The economic considerations of the private, patriarchal family inspired even the earliest utopian thinkers to imagine different ways of organizing our domestic lives. The ancient philosopher Plato rejected the slaveholding nuclear family of ancient Greece and described the evils his elite Guardians of the Republic might avoid by having a large communal family where children were raised in common by specialized nurses. In his ideal state, the Guard- ians could escape "the perplexities and sufferings involved in bring- ing up children; the need to make the money necessary to feed the

household—the borrowings, the defaults, and all the things people are compelled to do to provide an income to hand over to their wives and slaves to spend on housekeeping.”³⁶

Plato well understood that private family life would make the Guardians less concerned with working for the public good of Kallipolis, the beautiful city of his ideal Republic. He proposed that rethinking the structure of the Greek family would free his Guardians “from the sort of faction that the possession of property, children and families causes among people. . . .” He writes: “[I]f these people are going to be real guardians, they should not have private houses, land, or any other possession, but should receive their upkeep from the other citizens as a wage for their guardianship, and should all eat communally. . . . [This would] prevent them from tearing the city apart by applying the term ‘mine.’ . . .”³⁷

Much closer to our own era, the physicist and mathematician Freeman Dyson—who once imagined genetically engineered trees that could grow on comets and star-encompassing biospheres able to support extraterrestrial life—struggled with the specific demands of the patriarchal family. In response to an undergraduate student who asked him in 2012 about the nonscientific issues he had grappled with during his life, Dyson replied, “[A]dapting my socialist principles to a capitalist society,” after he moved from Great Britain to the United States. “In England during World War Two,” Dyson explained:

I lived in a socialist society that functioned well. . . . Money did not matter. Everyone got the same rations of food and clothes and soap and other necessities. The rationed stuff was cheap, and there was nothing else to buy. Cars were not allowed any gasoline except for official business. It was a wonderful time to be a socialist, so long as the war lasted. . . . When I started to raise a family, I discovered that my socialist principles gave way to my responsibilities as a father. As a father, I needed money to take care of my wife and kids, and the more money the better. The theoretical idea of equality faded, as the kids needed a good home in a good neighborhood with good schools.³⁸

Social dreamers have long understood that building a more harmonious society depends on undermining the structures that persist in viewing the family as a private economic unit where men provide resources for their own wives and children to the exclusion of others. More important, political and economic elites can more easily divide ordinary people if key resources like housing, health care, and education are rendered scarce by a lack of public support for them. With everyone exhausted by the hustle needed to meet their basic needs, people tend to view others as potential competitors and refuse opportunities for cooperation that could make the system work better for everyone. By keeping our attentions focused on our private families, we also ignore the possibilities of public programs that would improve life for both ourselves and our children.

Although Plato's ideas about property and the family may still shock many people today, we must understand that this kind of utopian thinking provides an invaluable intellectual tool. Even if dreams don't come true, they do expand our imagination of what is possible and thereby reshape the landscape of what we can practically achieve (the so-called Overton window). The ideas of blue sky thinkers have often inspired social progress that would not have gone as far had there not been an even further point imagined. For example, Plato's works inspired later dreamers whom I will discuss in the coming chapters, people like Charles Fourier in France, John Humphrey Noyes in the United States, Clara Zetkin in Germany, and the kibbutzniks in Israel, who all advocated for some form of collective child-rearing. Although the most extreme programs for raising children in common failed, they did open minds to the idea that children could be cared for in collectively funded public kindergartens during the day. Similarly, blue sky thinkers have long imagined alternatives to traditional forms of marriage. The institution survives but it is no longer the irrevocable union that once bound husbands and wives to each other for life. The idea of no-fault divorce once seemed as utopian as the concept of asteroid mining.

Recent global realities have begun to shake people. Our innate tendency toward inertia and the lazy comforts of the status quo no longer

feel viable. Younger generations have begun to challenge the way we organize our private lives, which implicitly means also challenging the long-held traditions of patrilineality and patrilocality. In addition to the growing acceptance of queer relationships, polyamory, and passionate friendships, some youth are reimagining housing, education, and kinship relations in ways that loosen the grip that patriarchy holds on our social relations.³⁹ Even without radical politics, coliving buildings, coworking spaces, and the rise of remote work fuel trends that undermine the old ways of marking the transition to adulthood and redefine the traditional roles of the “head of household” or the “boss.” Some gravitate toward planned communal living while others avoid marriage and single-family home ownership altogether, both trends which have the effect of lessening the burdens of care work that women often bear in the private sphere.

Environmental concerns have also precipitated a BirthStrike among twenty- and thirtysomethings who feel it ecologically irresponsible to bring babies into the world.⁴⁰ And the social psychologist Eli Finkel challenges the idea of the “all-or-nothing marriage,” highlighting the importance of having “other significant others” in our lives.⁴¹ Some states now allow for three legal parents and new technologies of ectogenesis promise to revolutionize the way we bring children into this world. According to some scientists, viable artificial wombs are less than a decade away.⁴² As our societies evolve and change, we must be ever mindful of the social and cultural beliefs which perpetuate patriarchal power and how they manifest themselves in our daily lives. The traditions that many of us think of as “natural” have been shaped by millennia of patrilocal and patrilineal practices which reinforce the power of a small group of (usually male) authority figures over the rest of society. It’s time to change this.

In this book I will explore alternative ways of building our homes, raising our children, educating our youth, sharing our property, and defining what counts as family. Undermining the beliefs and practices that reinscribe patrilocality and patrilineality can liberate people from outdated and oppressive stereotypes about femininity and masculinity. It can also open up new possibilities for building happier and more

democratic societies, ones that don't scale up to the state level the supposedly "natural" relations of authority and domination found in the traditional family. It will mean less hustle, more friends, and happier families.

I'll also discuss the persistence of dystopian fears and try to make a case for militant optimism in the face of the many challenges the future will bring. I realize that, these days, cynical apathy is more fashionable than what many might consider naive optimism. Wearing black turtlenecks and passively ruminating on the coming climate apocalypse is just hipper than trying to convince others that the world can and should be changed. But historically speaking, real social progress often begins with hopefulness, extreme dreaming, and crazy ideas. "To hope is to give yourself to the future," explains the feminist historian Rebecca Solnit, "and that commitment to the future is what makes the present inhabitable."⁴³ Reviewing the history of previous utopian thinkers and examining the cultures and communities experimenting with their ideas today provide a necessary first step in unshackling our collective political imaginations from the all-pervasive ideologies that try to convince us that change is dangerous. The concept of utopia helps us forge paths forward, giving us the courage, curiosity, and conviction to experiment with new and better ways of organizing our private lives.

Why Martin Luther King Jr. Loved Star Trek

I was born in 1970, a moment of sudden and unexpected challenges to the prevailing status quo. Wonder Woman's creator introduced the Princess of Paradise Island during World War II, but it's no coincidence that the image of the Amazon warrior also appeared on the very first issue of the explicitly feminist *Ms.* magazine in 1972 under the headline: "Wonder Woman for President." Eleven years later, I watched my other screen heroine, forced to wear a now-iconic metal bikini, free herself from the tongue-wagging and blubbery Jabba the Hutt by strangling him with the very chain he had used to bind her

to him. The University of Pennsylvania only fully integrated female undergraduate students into its School of Arts and Sciences in 1974, and yet today I teach there as a full professor and serve as the chair of my department. In some ways, both Wonder Woman and Princess Leia helped me to deal with the sexism I often encountered in my own life because I could imagine worlds where sexism didn't hold women back. They were just fictional characters, but they made a difference.

Although I am too young to have seen the original series while it was airing, another science fiction show has the distinction of being the longest lasting and most influential utopian vision that ever entered popular culture. When *Star Trek* began broadcasting in 1966, its creator, Gene Roddenberry, crafted a positive view of the future where humanity had overcome all of its conflicts and lived in a sort of galactic Pax Romana within something called the United Federation of Planets, "an interstellar union of different worlds and species with shared principles of universal liberty, rights, and equality."⁴⁴ In a 2011 interview, the late actress Nichelle Nichols (who played the African communications officer, Uhura, on the original starship *Enterprise*) recounted a story of her first meeting with the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. at a banquet. King told Nichols that he was a huge fan of the show and that it was the only thing he and his wife allowed their children to stay up late to watch. At the time, Nichols intended to leave the show to pursue a career in the theater, but King insisted she had to stay.

Nichols recalled: "He said I had the first nonstereotypical role, I had a role with honor, dignity and intelligence. He said, 'You simply cannot abdicate, this is an important role. This is why we are marching. We never thought we'd see this on TV.'"⁴⁵ For the first generation of Black Trekkies, Nichols's portrayal as an officer on the bridge of the interracial starship *Enterprise* helped them envision the possibility of equality. "When I was a little girl," explained the actress Whoopi Goldberg in 2014, "it was like, 'Oh, we [Black people] are in the future.' Uhura did that for me."⁴⁶

"Imagination is more important than knowledge," said Albert Einstein in 1931. "For knowledge is limited, whereas imagination embraces the entire world, stimulating progress, giving birth to evolu-

tion.”⁴⁷ We stand on the cusp of a new age, with many of us striving toward a more positive vision of the future like the one Roddenberry once provided, where human beings find a way to build a better world for subsequent generations of humanity. Our old ideas about patrilineality and patrilocality are no longer fit for that purpose. We need new ideas, new dreams, and the courage to imagine alternative futures. Now is the moment to “think different.” If we can imagine them first in a galaxy far, far away, it’s only a matter of time before we boldly go and begin figuring out how to translate these inspired visions into our own everyday utopias.