THE UTOPIAN SOCIALISTS

I. Purpose and Overview of lecture
   A. To explore in more depth one of the categories discussed last time—socialism in the early nineteenth century
      1. The Utopian Socialists, as they have come to be called, are a particularly interesting category of the “response to industrialism”
      2. They have some rich visions of how industrialization and modernization could have occurred other than the way it did
   B. To examine how these critics were ever more inclined to accept industrialism, rather than say that it was simply and wholly evil
      1. This trend culminates in the “scientific” socialism of Marx and Engels

II. Basic traits of the Utopians
   A. The Utopian Socialists are a quite diverse group, with important differences, one from the other
   B. Yet, some common traits may be distinguished
      1. All of them lived in approximately the same period
         a) All are alive between 1770 and 1825 and do most of their writing in the early years of the 19th century
      2. All developed fundamental criticisms of the society that was emerging around them
         a) And they quite specifically attacked the liberal ideologists (Smith, Ricardo, Malthus) who were gaining attention and popularity
         b) They rejected the notions of the homo economicus, of laissez-faire—a rejection that is generally based on a conviction that these are the ideologies of the capitalist class, not of the poor—or of those with a social conscience
      3. They attempt, in various ways, to preserve or retain the premodern sense of community but still combine it with the modern sense of liberation
      4. All believed that their “utopian” ideals were possible in their own lifetime, not in some distant future
a) This belief forms a clear contrast to Sir Thomas More, and many earlier “utopians”, for whom an idealized society was merely a literary device to criticize existing society, not something they believed could actually exist.

5. All had a “romantic” and impractical aura to them.
   a) Especially Fourier.

6. However, they all thought of themselves as “scientists” of the social world, “Newton” of their age (they did not call themselves utopians).

7. All tended to be elitist or paternalistic in their approach.
   a) They were out to help the poor rather than organized the masses to help themselves.

8. And all are failures, even if notable, interesting failures, or failures who nevertheless helped others to learn important lessons.
   a) That they failed is part of the reason that they have been dismissed as “utopian”.
   b) “Utopian” was not their own word for themselves—It was a term used often by their opponents, most influentially Marx and Engels.

9. The subsequent, “realistic” generation would see their failure as due to their paternalism, romanticism.
   a) In particular their reticence to resort to force, to organizing the people.
   b) They were “utopian,” thus, in their belief that they could persuade people through reason.
   c) Or, they believed at least that some wealthy benefactor would be persuaded by reason; he set up the utopian colonies, and then their ideas would catch on everywhere.

III. Fourier

A. He is considered first because he seems the most “utopian”.
   1. Specifically in the sense that he was least inclined to accept the actual technology of industrialization, the factory system.

B. Rather, he believed that a utopia could be achieved with existing technologies.
C. The basic issue, as he saw it, was one of organization, not technology—not machines, techniques of production, etc.

D. He held definite beliefs about the human psyche, its needs, the possibility of satisfying them.

E. Human needs, cravings, fantasies can all be satisfied and should be satisfied, he believed, since they are instilled in man by God.
   1. Thus, the traditional, Christian assumptions about the evil in human instincts are all wrong.

F. Even the liberal axioms about what might happen if the individual were “free” were not acceptable to him.
   1. The liberal-individualist vision entailed, to his mind, mere egoism.
      a) Human beings would not find happiness in that kind of atomistic freedom and ruthless competition.
      b) Human beings were happy when they felt “community” rather than destructively competitive liberal “society”.

G. Put in the language of the 1960s Fourier believed in the possibility of a “non-repressive society”.
   1. All of the “thou shalt nots” could be abandoned, or at least transformed radically.
   2. Rather than being at war with one another, people could live in harmony.
   3. Human interaction, rather than being difficult and fraught with danger and strife, could be made to give pleasure.
      a) Guilt in things like sexual pleasure would be ended as a lamentable relic of the unenlightened past.

H. But the key was in organization, in recognizing what human nature really is, and organizing society so that human nature was respected, not repressed or ignored.

I. Fourier’s solution: the phalanstère.
   1. The term is one of his many neologisms: ostensibly derived from the Greek term “phalanx”.
      a) The choice of the word is suggestive, in that the phalanx was based on human solidarity, linking of men together in combat.
   2. Fourier’s ideal would have exactly 1620 people.
3. It would be a self-contained community, with a myriad of sub-divisions, each designed to encourage a dynamic interplay of emotions or “passions”

J. Fourier distinguished a number of different kinds of passions, all under the sway of the Law of Attraction
1. Sensual (taste, sight, etc.)
2. Those of the soul (sympathy, sociability)
3. The “Distributive” passion
   a) Obscure but apparently the most important in his eyes
4. La papillone (need for variety in work as in play)
5. La cabaliste (delight in certain kinds of competition)
6. La composite (dynamic mixing of sensual, social, etc.)

K. Fourier: simply a madman?
1. Much in his writings is extremely odd, seemingly on the edge of sanity
2. He sometimes writes like someone on an LSD trip
   a) Oceans of lemonade, six moons circling the earth, planets copulating
3. Yet mixed into such ravings are some genuinely interesting remarks—that fascinated and influenced his contemporaries
4. Even subsequent generations have found some perceptive or otherwise interesting things in his writings
   a) He was a radical feminist, for example
   b) He argued tenaciously for social and economic equality for women, and denounced their present oppression
   c) He called for an end to the bourgeois family, which he termed a prison
   d) It not only enslaved women to their children and household chores but also turned all of its members inward rather than outward
   e) In other words, people should turn to society at large and not primarily to the private family circle
5. He was sexual liberationist
   a) He asserted that nothing in sexual relations is
wrong unless it hurts another person against his or her will

6. The vision that most captivated his contemporaries was that of a psychically united and self-sufficient community
   a) Where individual passions found fulfillment in social interaction
   b) Where guilt was banished, real “freedom” unleashed
   c) Where there would be a reconciliation of the principle of freedom and the principle of fraternity or human solidarity

L. Fourier and modernism
   1. This is a key point to comprehend
   2. Although he thought of himself as wholly modern, he did not accept the factory system or industrialization more generally
      a) It was contrary to human nature, he believed, a realm of repression, exploitation, and monotony
   3. In fact, the whole idea of increasing production by repetitious tasks did not much appeal to him
      a) He thought it was better to live simply than in material abundance
      b) above all if material abundance came at the expense of unpleasant, arduous labor
   4. He very much wanted a rationalization of production
      a) but only if it could be done pleasantly, or if in itself contributed to human pleasure
      b) Some of his ideas: common kitchens, cooperative farming, children as garbage collectors

IV. Robert Owen
   A. He provides a revealing contrast to Fourier, both in assumptions and proposals
   B. He fully accepted the factory system, specialized labor, etc.
      1. He was a successful businessman himself, while Fourier was an unsuccessful traveling salesman for much of his life
   C. Overall, Owen comes across as practical and down-to-earth as
compared to Fourier

D. Other significant contrasts to Fourier:
1. Owen believed that human nature was malleable (rather than fixed)
2. People could be “formed”
   a) compare Fourier: The environment must be changed to fit a fixed human nature

E. Both agreed, however, in rejecting traditional Christian morality as leading to unhappiness and a perverted human character

F. Owen also agreed that the factory system was ruining humanity
1. And he was determined to do something about it

G. The reforms of New Lanark
1. His textile factory there become famous throughout Europe
2. The reforms were not strictly speaking “socialist”
   a) Rather, they were simply measures of a humanitarian reformer, a philanthropist
   b) They all depend upon him, not initiative from the workers
3. But they did work: He made a profit and workers were happy and grateful

H. *New View of Society* (1813)
1. In this book he recommended “a plain, simple, practical plan which would not contain the least danger to any individual, or any part of society”
2. Here, too, is expressed the belief that society’s leaders could form the personalities of the masses

I. Owen’s move to more explicitly socialist perspectives:
1. He hoped to establish “Villages of Cooperation” in England
   a) These were to be self-contained agricultural communities that would absorb the unemployed of the day
   b) He naively believed that the rich, or the government, would support them
   c) But those hopes soon proved ill-founded
d) Even working-class leaders were suspicious

J. New Harmony and the experiment in isolated socialist communities (1824-1830):

1. Owen’s disappointments over the failure of the Villages of Cooperation led him in new directions
2. In fact, even his model in New Lanark was not widely copied—and it was not relevant to much of modern industry
3. In early 1820s he decided to leave Europe, to prove his ideas in the New World
4. He established New Harmony, in Indiana
   a) >From 1825 to 1829 some sixteen Owenite communities are established in America and Britain
5. In initial conception, New Harmony was certainly “full socialism,” in a way that New Lanark was not
   a) There was a sharing of goods and property, work in common, democratic participation and control
6. Reasons for its failure:
   a) In general, the charge of “utopianism” was justified
   b) Owen and his followers had little sense of the practical difficulties they would encounter
   c) Differing backgrounds of colonists: The selfless and idealistic were joined by the selfish and lazy, and they soon broke down into factions and cliques
   d) Lack of agricultural skills: The arduous labor of making a farm work was not something most were up to—especially not the predominantly middle-class people who first arrived

K. Owen and working-class movements

1. After a few years, the failures in America nearly bankrupted Owen
2. However, he quickly moved on to the next stage, attempting to give leadership to a movement of workers themselves
   a) This was, really, a different chapter
   b) That is, he moved from sponsoring isolated “utopias” to joining political movements, with active participation of the workers, hoping to change
society as a whole in that way

3. This is, then, part of the next chapter of the socialist movement (moving into the 1840s)

V. Saint-Simon

A. Rigorously defined, “socialist” is not the proper word for his ideas

B. More appropriate: “elitist prophet of modernism”

C. Yet, “socialist” in one sense does fit

1. He was a critic of liberalism, of the factory system, of bourgeois society more generally

2. He could not accept the notion that the poor deserved to be poor

3. More to the point, he believed that the elite of society had an obligation to the lower orders

4. Similarly, he argued that society needed to be thought of as an organic unit, as bound together—not as an collection of self-seeking individuals—and it could be usefully directed by the state

5. In another, quite different way, he was like most later socialists:

   a) He believed in progress through industrialization and other measures of modernization

D. However, his key assertions may be said to stand outside either socialism or the liberalism of his day

E. That is, he believed society should be organized according to principles of efficiency

1. These entailed not equality but a hierarchy and rule by an elite of industrialists, scientists, artists—the able and creative rather than the privileged

2. He did not believe that the common people could ever be expected to rule themselves, to understand what was needed

F. For such reasons, some have seen Saint-Simon as the most genuinely prophetic thinker of the day

1. For such was the kind of society that both the communists and the capitalists ruled over, whatever their official rhetoric
2. Indeed, with the demise of communism, it seems ever more, in the form of “welfare capitalism,” that Saint-Simon’s was the voice of the future