Humanity's place in Utopia is Nowhere

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Abstract

Utopia, the perfect society, is a concept linked with the perfect human being. These concepts are the focus of Arthur C. Clarke's *The City and the Stars,* and this essay will examine how the text challenges ideas of humanity and utopia. The two utopias are presented in *The City and the Stars*, with one branch of genetically engineered humans on Earth in each utopia. Their differences in approaches to challenges sets them apart. While examining the text literary and philosophical concepts of utopia and humanity will be used to better understand the text. The text shows us the significance of facing challenges. Moreover, that utopia, while desirable, is not for humankind as humanity's potential will not be reached when it resides in a utopia. Humanity is defined by complex emotions that are hard to allow to exist in utopias.

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Introduction

"The men who built this city, and designed the society that went with it, were lords of mind as well as matter. They put everything the human race would ever need inside these walls - and they made sure that we would never leave them." (Clarke 30)

Utopia has been depicted in literature since its birth in Thomas More's novel from 1517 of the same name which coined the term and established the literary genre (Jameson 1). In his novel More describes a perfect society: a society where all citizens can live in harmony without worrying about health, money or labour (Jameson 12). More's idea of utopia has survived to this day, both in literature and outside literature as societies in our world are described as being or aspiring to become perfect utopias. While all literary utopias differ, there are some similarities between them; utopias are stable, perfect societies with minimal suffering for its inhabitants. To create this perfect society, the root of all evil has to be removed. (Jameson 12).

Arthur C. Clarke has imagined two utopian societies in his novel *The City and the Stars* from 1956 where the root of all evil, curiosity and death, has been removed from humanity. Billions of years in the future, after the fall of a galactic empire, there are only two societies left on Earth. These two societies are separated from each other. We are first introduced to the city of Diaspar. In Diaspar the inhabitants are made immortal by genetic engineering and technology. It is an extremely stable society that has not changed since its birth billions of years ago. The inhabitants of Diaspar do "not merely believe in stability" in fact they "could conceive of nothing else" (Clarke 30). Diaspar is a technological wonderland, a city where its citizens can conjure anything they desire through technology. For the inhabitants "Diaspar was all that existed, all that they needed, all that they could imagine" (Clarke 9), and they are perfectly content to live their lives in the city. This is fitting for the citizens of Diaspar cannot leave their city. There are no exits, and even if there was some way for them to leave the city of Diaspar they would be psychologically unable to do so due to a fear of space that has been genetically inserted into them. Diaspar is oblivious to the existence of Earths only other society's existence, Lys. But Lys knows that Diaspar exists and works to keep them separated from each other. The novel's main character, Alvin, is from Diaspar. But he is a *unique,* a man that is born without the fear of space and who is inquisitive. Alvin is one of the first humans in Diaspar's history who

wants to leave the city.

Alvin eventually finds a way to leave Diaspar and finds his way to the second utopia of the novel, Lys. Lys is not a great city like Diaspar, instead it is a connection of rural villages. Their society differs from Diaspar in many ways. They are not as dependant on technology as the people of Diaspar are, as they are still farmers with crops and animals. The greatest differences between the people of Lys and the people of Diaspar are that the people of Lys are mortal and that they are telepathic. They can communicate with each other over long distances, and this serves as a great tool for their council as leaders from different villages can communicate and discuss matters in their decentralised society. The citizens of Lys are born naturally, which is of great interest and intrigue to the main character, Alvin, who is puzzled by the "curious small hollow in the pit of [His friends] stomach" and "By the time that [His friend] had made the function of the navel quite clear, he had uttered many thousands of words and drawn half a dozen diagrams" (Clarke 117). After reuniting the two societies on Earth, Alvin and his newfound friend from Lys, Hilvar, leave earth on an ancient spaceship they found. They find the remains of the galactic empire and its ancient research. By the end of the novel Alvin has opened up the two societies to each other and the galaxy at large and humanity is open to once again explore the galaxies.

The two utopias in the novel are initially described as positive achievements by humanity, but as we learn more about them the utopias appear less and less desirable. Even Lys which is the more positive utopia is in the end abandoned as it is lacking the inquisitive nature of humanity. Diaspar is stagnant and lacks change, the inhabitants have literally lived the same lives for billions of years without any change to their societies. Lys is a livelier society than Diaspar, yet it is still a stagnant society without advancement. Is this lack of change a result of the creation of the perfect society that neglects the need for improvement and change? Or are the inhabitants content with their lot because they have been genetically engineered to be so, implying that humanity will have to be changed to fit in utopia.

All utopias directly and indirectly raise questions about how the human body and mind might be altered, without changing what is essential to humanity. Despite having the appearance of humans there are some major differences between the people in Clarke's novel and the human concept today. The humans in Clarke's future are more than what we are today; they have overcome many of humanity's weaknesses, removing disease, perfecting the body and mind and

even making the inhabitants of Diaspar immortal through genetic engineering. The people of Lys have refused the most final modification, immortality, but they have retained the other alterations to the body and mind. Perhaps the largest difference between humans today and the humans in Diaspar is that the inhabitants of Diaspar have a fear of space and are not inquisitive in nature. Their fear is explained by the Jester, a member of Diaspar introduced to challenge the stability of Diaspar in minor ways, as he asks Alvin if he could walk on a plank between two towers high up in the air. Alvin is obviously uncertain and the Jester explains that it is his fear that limits him: "We couldn't, because we have a fear of heights. It may be irrational, but it's too powerful to be ignored. It is built in to us; we are born with it. In the same way, we have a fear of space" (Clarke 59). Fear of space limits the humans of Diaspar, they are afraid to leave the city. Their lack of curiosity limits them from doing anything that differs from the norms and patterns in their city.

My reading of humanity forefronts our emotions. When altering the human body there is a possibility that the subject loses its humanity, as her experiences are altered. Therefore it is important that the human aspects of emotions and empathy remain during humanity's changes. The ability to make irrational choices based on emotions instead of rational thought is considered to be fundamentally human, once this capability is lost humanity is lost. Our physical state does not define us, and it is possible to retain humanity in altered human bodies, but there is always the risk that humanity is lost when our experiences are changed. Humankind in *The City and the Stars* has changed emotionally as bodies are altered, especially the people in Diaspar whose emotions are lessened with their immortality.

The remains of humanity in Clarke's novel do not respond well to challenges. They lack initiative. Both Diaspar and Lys avoid challenges, the people of Lys use their telepathy to erase the minds of those in Diaspar who might know of their existence to avoid a confrontation with Diaspar. When the inhabitants of Diaspar are faced by a challenge their response is to flee, as can be seen by characters in the novel deciding to flee into the future instead of trying to solve the problem. The citizens of Diaspar "had been unable to face the responsibilities and problems now confronting them, and had followed the path Khedron [A man who helped Alvin, but could not handle the changes that were brought by Alvin's actions] had already taken. It was, thought Jeserac, proof that Diaspar had failed if so many of its citizens were unable to face their first real challenge in millions of years. Many thousands of them had already fled into the brief oblivion

of the memory banks, hoping that when they awoke the crisis would be past and Diaspar would be its familiar self again" (Clarke 221). This is a similar response to what the humans who built Diaspar had. Instead of leaving the galaxy for the unknown they did not rise to the challenge, instead they stayed on Earth. By avoiding challenges humanity in Clarke's novel has lost another quality that defines them as humans. They are afraid and lack the courage to face the issues that face them, namely change. The text creates ambivalence, Clarke encourages human advancement and perfectibility through technology yet at the same time he sees the dangers of losing what is essential to humanity after genetic alterations.

Clarke creates two utopias in his fiction in order to present how technological developments might challenge basic ideas of what is human and how humanity should respond to challenges. The two utopias thus present two different kinds of challenges to what constitutes the human and human society. [1]

Clarke and previous criticism

Sir Arthur C. Clarke, 1917-2008, was a British science fiction writer most famous for being the co-writer of the screenplay for *2001: A Space Odyssey*, as well as the author of the novel of the same name. In total Clarke has written over 100 books, in addition to hundreds of articles that has received several prestigious awards. A common theme throughout Clarke's works is optimism that humanity can improve life with technology and science. Clarke was convinced that humanity's destiny was to leave Earth to venture to other planets and solar systems, and that humanity only can improve from space exploration, which is reflected in his novels. Clarke was a scientist as well as a science fiction writer, contributing to the development of radar during World War II as well as the satellite network enabling global communication. Realising that he never would venture into space, Clarke settled for exploring the depths of Earth, moving to Sri Lanka where he became an avid scuba diver exploring the oceans. After his death Clarke finally achieved space travel as a lock of his hair was launched into space, allowing Clarke to share his DNA with the universe (Pelton and Logsdon 189).

Not much has been written on Clarke's novel *The City and the Stars*, but the one article

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[1] In the novel the people of Lys and Diaspar are constantly referred to as mankind or humanity by Clarke, and it appears that Clarke still considers them to be humans, despite the alterations made to them and lack of emotions. Partially this can be due to the concept of posthuman not existing at the time when Clarke wrote his novel. But the name does not grant them humanity, but is rather a term used due to its familiarity to the readers.

about the novel is written by Tom Moylan. Moylan is critical of Clarke, claiming Clarke is anti-communist and urging the USA to "carry on the white man's burden" in space, establishing a galactic empire in his novels in general as well as in *The City and the Stars* (152). Furthermore, Moylan links Clarke's novel *The City and the Stars* to cold war ideology, the two societies in the novel representing the Western societies and the Soviet Union respectively. Moylan argues that the novel socializes young readers into capitalist norms and society (151). The main character of the novel, Alvin, finds his place in capitalist society and reforms it so that humanity once again can be on its way towards galactic colonization and empire building. Moylan argues that Clarke allows Alvin to critique the problems of western society, but at the same time diverts potential rebels into socially useful roles as Alvin in the end settles as a technocrat in a reformed society. Post-war capitalism is not to be overthrown, instead it is to be changed and reinvigorated, as Alvin reinvigorates Diaspar. Technology has improved life in Diaspar, but it is not enough. Life and growth must exist as well, and according to Moylan, Clarke implies that life and growth come through capitalism and the new markets that are opened now that Alvin has opened Diaspar for new possibilities (153). In Moylan's view, Lys is a communist utopia, a decentralized society with non-alienated labour. A perfect society according to Moylan, but as it is a communist utopia "it does not fulfil the needs of capitalist-imperialist political economy" and is abandoned at the end of the novel (154). Moylan argues that Alvin's friend, Hilvar, should be the protagonist of the novel. He is superior to Alvin in many ways as Hilvar is intelligent, wise, kind and responsible. But as Alvin is a child of capitalism he must be the protagonist, even though he is individualistic, manipulative and crass (154). When Alvin enters space he encounters another youth, a mental being developed by the galactic empire billions of years ago. Both Alvin and this mental entity are drafted into the empire, while Hilvar remains a Marxist outsider (155-156). Moylan agrees that Clarke is an optimistic writer, but that he is also a capitalist writer. Science and capitalism together can solve any problems. Lys, the communist society, is forever a distant utopia. It is always in the background in the text, no matter how attractive it may be, for the novel favours capitalism and Diaspar. The novel may appear to criticize the bourgeois world of the 1950's, but in the end it reinforces it. (156)

In Clarke's reply to Moylan's article he disagrees with Moylan on the point that the tension between Lys and Diaspar is a product of cold war ideology. Clarke even compares Moylan's methods of argumentation to those of Joseph Goebbels. Clarke strongly argues that it

is not cold war ideology at all in *The City and the Stars*, and that he in fact started writing the novel in the 30's. The inspiration was taken from his own life instead, as he moved from rural Somerset to urban London and the conflict between the rural and the urban has haunted him ever since. Clarke did agree on some points of Moylan's, though he did not specify what these were. He claimed, "I don't have time to dig them out" (Clarke 88-89).

Another response to Moylan's article is from a writer signed RDM. He writes that the only difference between Lys and Diaspar, two societies that have solved technological, social and economic problems, is how they solved the remaining problem: boredom. The difference between the two societies is trivial according to RDM, and certainly there is no cold war tension between them. Furthermore RDM insists that growing vegetables and being born naturally and maturing over the years is no more socialist than eating technologically produced food and being born an adult through technological means. These are merely trivial differences. In the end the novel is about challenge and response, this author claims. (RDM 305-306).

While I agree with RDM that neither Lys nor Diaspar is more Marxist or capitalist, I disagree with RDM on making the difference between Lys and Diaspar trivial. The novel is indeed about challenge and response and how the response affects humanity, but there is definitely a major difference between Lys and Diaspar, a difference that is of importance to the novel. The differences in the lives between those living in Diaspar and those living in Lys is of great importance as it dictates how they live their lives. An immortal person does not make the same decisions as a mortal person would make. In the same way our emotions are effected if there are no children. The way they live their lives shape their experiences, and consequently their personalities and emotions. In a safe utopia where technology serves all inhabitants there is no need for exploration.

Theoretical Framework: Utopia and Humanity

For this essay utopian theory and theories about humanity will be used. The novel covers two utopian societies and their inhabitants, and a greater insight into the literary genre of utopia is needed to fully understand and analyse Clarke's vision of different utopias in his novel. The different aspects of utopian literature are used to determine if the two societies in fact are utopias, and if the concept utopia is beneficial for the inhabitants in *The City and the Stars*. The relationship between creating a perfect society and a perfect species to inhibit such a society is a

recurring theme in utopian literature. What humanity's role in society is, and in fact if humanity can survive in a utopia is explored in the novel, and can be further understood with knowledge of the concepts. For this reason a definition of humanity is necessary in this essay to examine how Clarke tests the limits of humanity and utopia by creating the societies and their inhabitants.

Utopia

There are two types of utopia: trying to achieve utopias in real life through political practices and ideologies, and utopias in literature. It is the latter form of utopia that will be used in this essay. A basic definition of the concept utopia is necessary before continuing to the different aspects of utopias and utopian literature. Utopia is the "perfect society" desired by humanity. It is a society where all social problems have been solved and nothing plagues humanity any more (Jameson 1-3). Utopia, meaning "no-where" or "no-place", perhaps implying that social perfection is not achievable (Franko 207).

Four different types of utopias in literature have been distinguished by Raymond Williams. The first type is the paradise, a utopia that already exists and is discovered by humanity. The second type of utopia occurs after natural events alter the world, thus creating the utopia for humanity. The third type of utopia is created by human effort, it is a utopia created with a specific goal in mind. This type of utopia is the most common type in literature, as it showcases humanity's wish for creating the perfect society. The fourth and last type of utopia is brought by technological advancement, but it is the unexpected transformation of society after the introduction of a new technology and not a utopia created by intention. It is similar to the third type of utopia, but there is a clear difference as the third type is created with a purpose in mind (Williams 203-204). There is a small but significant difference between the third and fourth type of utopian literature. They both concern the human transformation of society. In both utopias transformation can be initiated or made available by technological advancement, but it can also be that other forms of technology transform society; namely social machinery. Social machinery can be new laws or new relations within the society that fundamentally changes society. This further blends the difference between the third and fourth type of utopia, making them almost interchangeable. But it is still the intention behind the changes that determine what type it is, if it is largely unintended creation of utopia it falls under the fourth category while if it was intended change with the new technology it fall under the third type of utopian literature

(Williams 208). Transformation into the third type of utopia, the willed transformation, is usually inspired by scientific spirit, as rational thought and action or in combination with scientific discoveries. It can also be political or social transformations (Williams 204).

According to Fredric Jameson, utopias are created as a solution to a problem. The creation of utopia must have its start somewhere, and the initial spark comes from a fundamental problem that exists in a society that utopia deems itself to be able to solve. Even if there are several problems plaguing a society, they all have, or seem to have, the same cause. Thus removal of the root of all evil will result in the disappearance of the lesser problems as well. The solution is usually accepted (or forced upon) the whole of society. This is a prerequisite because the solution should be so simple and obvious that society cannot do other than accept it. Historically these problems in society have been materialistic in nature. Problems range from money and property in More's *Utopia* (Jameson 11-12) to class and centralised state in Marxism and once the problem is removed utopia is created (Mohan 10).

Ralf Dahrendorf has summarised the structural requisites that all utopias must have. First of all, Utopias are isolated in time. While regular societies are affected by time, changing and affected by time, utopias are not. They are stationary societies, settled in their own pocket of time, and thus distancing themselves from the movements of time and the changes that are brought with it. In most literature utopias do not have a vibrant past. The past they do have is a past that is clouded by the passing of time making it uncertain what is real, and what is part of the fictional past. Utopias are simply just there one day. Nor do Utopias have a future, as they are an unmoving island in the river of time, never changing (Ed. Kateb 104). Another factor that makes utopias stable is the uniformity that exists in them. All decisions within utopias are made with consensus, or at least what would appear to be consensus. As all decisions are made with universal consensus there are no quarrels or oppositions in utopias. Universal consensus is just one of several factors leading to the stability of utopian societies. The society is perfect, and there is no reason to quarrel. It is not uncommon in utopian fiction that there is a character who is different, someone who does not conform to the norms of the utopian society. These characters are outsiders, because a perfect society would not be able to produce a non-conformist person, and they are often given a specific reason for their different ways. Winston Smith from Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four* is an example of an outsiders, or Alvin from *The City and the Stars* (Ed. Kateb 105-106). Social harmony within the utopian society is another factor that leads to

stability (Ed. Kateb 105). Despite the stability and uniformity in utopian societies they are not dead. Activities and other events do take place, but the events are all planned and follow recurring patterns. Any event that takes place within a utopia is designed to reinforce the status quo of the utopian society. Reproduction of humans and of ideas are controlled by the state to control the society (Ed. Kateb 106). Furthermore utopias are not only isolated in time, they are also isolated in space. What this means is that citizens of a utopia usually are unable to leave their city. If they are allowed to leave their city the reports from travellers are designed to sustain the isolation and not to build bridges with other communities (Ed. Kateb 106). In order for Utopias to remain harmonious and stable outside influence is not to be allowed, as this could change the utopian society, and since utopias are perfect any change would be for the worse. It is therefore essential that utopias are kept isolated from the outside world (Ed. Kateb 8). However, some argue that change in utopia can be for the better as new discoveries are made previous ills can be removed, resulting in improved life for the individual and society (Ed. Kateb 10, 11). The staleness and stability of utopias not only create a boring society, but can also deprive humanity of possibilities of advancement as "utopia does not allow for the heights and depths of human possibility to be reached" (Ed. Kateb 16). Society would indeed be stagnant because only planned events happen. Any chance for discoveries to be made would be destroyed before it was allowed to happen as anything breaking the pattern is not allowed. Nor is humanity's adventurous and questing nature accommodated in utopias (Ed. Kateb 16-17).

Another plausible definition of utopia is the elimination of suffering and the development of a society without suffering, where only happiness exists. It is disputed though if happiness can exist without its opposite, suffering. Some argue that pleasure would lose its meaning if pleasure is all we experience as there is nothing we can compare it to. Humanity needs contrast in order to truly appreciate the good things in life, and an elimination of suffering can therefore be said to be an elimination of pleasure (Kateb 3-4). But elimination of suffering can have several different meanings, it could be the removal of all suffering that could happen to humans and humanity. Another view is that the removal of suffering means only the removal of the greater evils that plague humanity. Inequality, poverty, famine, discrimination, war and alienated labour. Man can live without fear and in comfort. According to this definition man can still experience some suffering in utopia, but of the smaller kinds: thus utopia would still be pleasurable for man. (Kateb 4-5). Humanity can live with sufferings that are more 'humane' and acceptable,

improving humanity's lives while suffering still exists, allowing humanity to enjoy the pleasures of life (Kateb 6).

Carol S. Franko discusses how utopian literature should be analysed in her article "Disappearances of Utopia" and concludes that utopian literature has shifted from sociological discourse to purely fiction. Her article is heavily based on the works of Peter Firchow. Firchow has updated the definition of utopian fiction. Where utopia in fiction previously was defined as a depiction of a perfect society outside of time and space, Firchow's updated definition is more complex than this. Utopian fiction now concerns "believable characters confronted with the problem of how to create and live in an often ironically "ideal" society while still retaining their humanity" (qtd in Franko 210). Authors now seek to create ideal societies, or as ideal as possible, that humans can live in without being altered or having to adapt to alien conditions (Franko 210). Firchow specifies three characteristics of utopian fiction; its hybridity, experimental quality and paradoxically a suspicion of positive utopia. In literature utopia is a hybrid concept as the intersection between literary imagination and sociological (Political) imagination. Firchow does not consider there to be a unique genre of utopian literature, instead utopian fiction can easily fit into any genre (Franko 208). Lately, though, utopia has seemed to merge with science fiction to create many of the utopian works we know of today (Franko 214). Indeed, Darko Suvin considers utopian fiction to be a socio-political subgenre of science fiction (Ratiu 51). According to Firchow the experimental nature of all utopian literature concerns the same two questions: What constitutes the good life? What is human nature really like? Positive utopias usually emphasise the happiness and well-being of the community as the good life according to Firchow, whereas negative utopias emphasise individuality and quality of experience. Furthermore, according to Firchow citizens of positive utopias may not be humans (by our definition) anymore as they have been altered into stable beings that fit into the depicted society's definition of human/good behaviour. Firchow's last characteristic concerns humanity's perceived approach by the enemy to utopias on earth during the cold war. By writing utopias authors demonstrated how the "real" utopias had failed. Soviet Union and other communist societies had tried social control in order to create a utopia, but had failed (Franko 209). Indeed, many utopia fiction are used to criticize current political events or societies through their satirical fictional utopias (Kateb 82).

Humanity

What is human is an elastic concept, a definition that changes over time as new knowledge has forced the reformation of the definition several times, and probably will do so in the future (Seaman 250). Generally speaking, the posthuman is described as a deliberately engineered human being, mainly through technology and genetic manipulation (Seaman 247). This essay will work with the general definition of the posthuman as a new and better human form, where humanity's lifespan has been increased and its weaknesses been removed (Seaman 247).

Medieval historian Caroline Bynum's work *Metamorphosis and Identity* will be used in defining humanity. In her book she is discussing the human identity today by comparing it to medieval identity. Bynum's definition of identity will be used to define humanity. While her definition mainly concerns humanity in individuals I argue that it can be used as a general definition for humanity as a species (Bynum 163). Bynum ask the question, what makes us human? Is it our physical state that defines us, our genes and bodies, unaltered except by nature? Is it the case that any changes to our body or altering of the genes would thus alter what is human? Or is it our mind that defines us? Is our emotions and feelings, our ability to love irrationally and make seemingly irrational decisions which is the defining characteristic for humans? Are we defined by our experiences and memories, the way we are raised by a culture that defines us as humans? Based upon our experiences and notions of what is right and wrong we act in a human way, because we are raised to do so and because we know it from our experiences. How much can be altered in any of these categories before our identity is changed from human to something else? (Bynum 164-165). Perhaps the human is nothing special at all, just a sum of different body parts that can be altered and changed to increase its capacity. The body is considered a machine that can be enhanced to its best possible form. In its current form it is a flawed machine, but science has the power to make it perfect by removing inefficiencies like illness, addiction and ultimately death with the goal of perfecting the species (Seaman 260). There is also the question of who can determine one's humanity, if society has to grant humanity to an individual or if one self can do it (Seaman 265).

The definition of posthuman that will be used in this essay is by Myra J. Seaman in her article "Becoming more (than) Human". This definition concerns both the physical and psychological aspects of what it means to be human. What constitutes humanity has changed over the years. During the Enlightenment, what was considered essential to humanity, and what

differentiated us from other beings, was our capacity for reason. In recent years, however, emotion, sympathy and feelings have become the focus for what is and what makes us human (Seaman 262). Reason and rational thought are becoming less human, as these attributes can be decreed to other beings, especially lately to artificial life. Humans who act rationally, yet without emotions, can be considered to have lost their humanity as they became capable of making decisions that humans would not make (Seaman 264). Generally it is thought a mixture of emotion and reason that makes us human (Seaman 268).

The human body has many "faults". It is comparatively weak, has physical limits and the body is mortal. Changes made to the human body to improve its capabilities, as well as to increase the lifespan or even to become immortal are, and have always been, of interest to humanity. Altering the human body does not necessarily change the identity of humanity, though. In fact these alterations to the body can serve to reinforce the concept of identity and humanity as it is an investment in what is human, with humanity more likely to survive hardships with an improved body and mind (Seaman 248-249). However altering the body definitely challenges our perception of our identity. By removing disease, injury and even death from the human experience there are certain to be implications on the mind. The human identity is not necessarily the same when fears of disease, injury and death are removed. Expectations and identity changes with the body, our fears of death and diseases define us, as well as the actual diseases define us (Seamen 249).

It is maintained though that while alterations to the body and mind can be made, it is ultimately our experiences and emotions that create and maintain our identity. Emotion is the only feature that remains constant as our bodies change, defining and distinguishing us as human beings (Seaman 249-251). It is important to point out that our physical state does not define ourselves, we are more than what our bodies are. Examples can be seen in medieval werewolf stories where werewolves retain their human nature despite changing physically (Seaman 251). It can be risky to improve the human body, our emotional core can be lost and with it the hybridity of the posthuman body. Transforming the human body too much will result in an alteration of the self and of humanity. Obvious examples are seen in Darth Vader and Robocop. These two individuals were human, but through injury became more machine than man. But these examples are of individuals, and not of the whole species, yet they still showcase what can happen if humanity is altered without any heed for the human core (Seaman 258-259). Humanity does not

necessarily change into a different species after improvements are being made to the body, instead it is the same species but enhanced. The best qualities of humanity will remain will hopefully remain in the new body. In the end human behaviour, and its nature, is rooted in feeling and emotions and this is what determines what is human (Seaman 262).

When initially determining one's humanity both appearance and behaviour are important characteristics. Appearance is the initial determiner of what and who is human, as we like to think that we can easily determine who is human just by who looks like us. But behaviour is also an important factor in determining who is human. Frankenstein's monster for example is alien, and while he does look human his origins are different and clearly not human in nature. But his emotions and feelings are human, and therefore this creation has been considered human (Hull 67). The same can be said for other characters with human traits, as is the case of C3P0 from Star Wars or Spock from Star Trek. These characters are not human, but through their actions and emotions they are considered to be human by the audience, which grants legitimacy to their humanity (Hull 71). Emotion and sympathy are great factors in determining humanity, what touches us as humans is considered to be human by us. We feel sympathy with certain humanoid creatures, granting them humanity (Hull 66).

Analysis

Clarke creates two utopias in his fiction in order to present how technological developments might challenge basic ideas of what is human and how humanity should respond to challenges. The two utopias thus present two different kinds of challenges to what constitutes the human and human society.

Humanity in *The City and the Stars*

With a greater knowledge on the concept of humanity it will be possible to attempt to answer the thesis question: How does *The City and the Stars* challenge our ideas of what is human? To answer the question about humanity in Clarke's novel one must first be clear of the division. There are the immortal inhabitants of Diaspar, whose body and mind have been engineered to be "perfect" at the same time as a fear of space and curiosity has been inserted. Then there is the telepathic people of Lys, genetically engineered in the same way as those in Diaspar, except that their minds have not been inserted with fears.

The inhabitants of Diaspar are perhaps the most unlike modern humans in the novel.

Their bodies have been genetically engineered to be perfect. They have not achieved superhuman strength or other superhuman feats, but their bodies have been streamlined to be "perfect", any unnecessary parts or habits have been removed. Teeth, nails, body hair, external genitals and the necessity of sleep are concepts of the past (Clarke 117). As sleep has been made unnecessary to the people of Diaspar, Alvin's tutor has slept only twice in his almost thousand year life, arguing that "A well designed body should have no need for such rest periods; we did away with them millions of years ago" (116). Their bodies are resistant to disease and sickness due to genetic engineering (Clarke 204). Furthermore the minds of the people of Diaspar have been improved, granting all inhabitants what would be considered a genius level of intellect today. Their improved minds allow them to store any information they want, they are in fact able to remember the first words and sights they ever experience (14). Not only do they remember everything from their current life, they remember their earlier lives as well. Being immortal in Diaspar does not have the same implications it usually has. The citizens of Diaspar live for roughly a millennium before they "die". With death their minds are stored in memory banks, allowing their minds to be inserted in new, fully grown bodies once it is their time to be born again. Hence, they are not born naturally but have bodies engineered for them (20-22). The largest change to the citizens of Diaspar has not happened on the outside of the body, which is fairly similar to our own, but on the inside. Their minds have been altered in other ways than merely granting them higher intellect. The human spirit has been redesigned, the fiercer passions has been removed, among them ambition, curiosity, and adventurous spirit, to create a stable species that would be able to live in utopian Diaspar. A fear of space has also been inserted into the minds of the people of Diaspar, limiting them to the confinements of Diaspar as they all are afraid and therefore unable to leave the city (246).

The people of Lys are also genetically engineered. Many of the alterations made in Diaspar have been made to those in Lys as well. The main differences are that they are not immortal, nor do they have a fear of space and curiosity and are telepathic. At one point in time the people in Lys were immortal, but they gave up their immortality. They argue that immortality might bring contentment to the individual, but society and the species will suffer from stagnation. A world that banish death must also banish birth[2] and that is why they abandoned immortality in favour of mortal, but meaningful, lives so their species and society would survive

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[2] The importance of children is continuously brought up in *The City and the Stars*, and this is but one mention of it.

(Clarke 142). Not being immortal they are still born naturally, and look more or less like modern humans with teeth, nails, navel, body hair and external genitals unlike those in Diaspar (Clarke 117). Sleep in Lys does not appear to be as important as it is for modern humans, but still they sleep regularly to refresh body and mind (Clarke 116). Telepathy, also brought by genetic engineering, allows the citizens of Lys to communicate with each other over great distances both in private conversations and in larger groups.

Seaman's definition of humanity will be used to better understand the two branches of humanity in *The City and the Stars*. Clarke challenges the definition of humanity as he imagines two branches of humanity who are posthuman. Improved bodies, minds, telepathy and immortality has granted them bodies that are enhanced beyond what is human. The humanity of the people in Clarke's text is unclear though. Clarke wrote the characters as human beings, but using the definition by Seaman their humanity is questioned (Seaman 247-249).On the surface both branches are capable of rational thought, and they have emotions. Thus they are human in the broadest term of the definition (Seaman 262). But many emotions in Diaspar are lessened, especially love. The inhabitants of Diaspar are definitely not heartless; they do care for each other. But their emotions are never as strong as they could have been. The novel explains the lack of strength in emotions as a result of their eternal nature. Emotions gain strength and depth in their brevity. The inhabitants of Diaspar are immortal, thus their immortal love loses some of its meaning. Most people in Diaspar are in centuries long relationships, which would suggest strong emotional feelings, in contrast to what the novel implies (Seaman 268). The people in Lys are mortal, and their emotions are stronger because of this. Alvin, upon entering Lys realises that "Diaspar had forgotten many things, and among them were the true meaning of love. In [Lys] he had watched the mothers dandling the children on their knees, and had himself felt that protective tenderness for all small and helpless creatures that is love's unselfish twin. Yet now there was no woman in Diaspar who knew or cared for what had once been the final aim of love" (Clarke 152). Love, according to the novel, is not merely between two individuals. It is at its strongest when its original goal is alive: reproduction and children. In Diaspar there is no natural reproduction, so love and intercourse are only for pleasure and no deeper connections are made between the individuals involved.

Children grant another aspect to love, namely tenderness, "love's twin" (Clarke 152). The protective tenderness for children spreads to feeling sympathy for other creatures and humans.

When born in Diaspar each "child" is allotted two parents, but as they are born adults in Diaspar, their parents need not care for their "children", for they are functioning members of society at birth. In fact, Alvin's parents "had devoted no more than a third of their time to Alvin's upbringing, and they had done all that was expected of them" (Clarke 50). All that was expected of them was merely to explain the purpose and functions of the city to their "child". Thus sympathy is foreign to Alvin. Alvin may use his friends as tools to reach his goal, but it is because he never learned or understood sympathy. His whole life has consisted of playing different games with his friends and lovers. It is first when Alvin enters Lys that he learns empathy and tenderness. Fascinated by the children in Lys he walks among them, and:

> when – which was not often, but sometimes happened – they burst into tears of frustration or despair, their tiny disappointments seemed to him more tragic than Man's long retreat after the loss of his galactic empire. That was something too huge and remote for comprehension, but the weeping of a child could pierce one to the heart. Alvin had met love in Diaspar, but now he was learning something equally precious, and without which love itself could never reach its highest fulfilment but must remain forever incomplete. He was learning tenderness. (Clarke 106)

The people in Lys have retained their strong emotions, because they are still mortal, and because their love is true. Children exist to reaffirm and strengthen love between partners in Lys, as well as strengthening society in general. Children gives depth to love, simultaneously "teaching" sympathy to parents and adults in society in general, by caring for children. Being mortal, and prone to disease and death, the people of Lys live relatively brief lives of two hundred years. Their emotions grow stronger because of their brief lives, and they have a strong emotional core. In fact, the alterations made to the people in Lys may have made them more human. Telepathy is used as a tool to deepen the connections with other human beings in Lys, strengthening their emotional bonds with people. In fact, all relationships start with mental contact, opening their minds to each other. The honesty creates love based on unselfishness and is vastly superior to the shallow love between partners without telepathy. In Diaspar they do not have the deep, unselfish love that they have attained in Lys. *The City and the Stars* considers enhancement of the human body as something positive in some aspects. Telepathy can truly

deepen love in its creation of love grown from unselfishness.

Clarke clearly emphasises the importance of children in a society, and the loss humanity would incur were children to disappear.[3] In losing the depth of their emotions the inhabitants of Diaspar have lost a human quality. The novel implies that a great part of our humanity lies in our children, that they grant us deeper emotions as well as additional emotions and by losing the children the people of Diaspar lost a part of their humanity.

In the text the loss of the human is problematized, birth in Diaspar has gone from the biological to becoming technological by cultural and political motives. It is thought that by designing humans, and creating them technologically, they can be designed in ways so they function within the utopia Diaspar. But biological birth is not necessarily a requisite for humanity, although when all citizens are birthed by technology, moulded into the parts they should play their humanity is questioned. Alvin is different, although born technologically he is not designed in the same ways as the other inhabitants. Alvin is alienated by society, and his alienation functions as a mechanism for him eventually leaving Diaspar. He is alienated because he is not designed like the other inhabitants are. He is not able to live the life he wants to live within Diaspar, the only way for him to acquire humanity is to leave the society which has alienated him

An addition Clarke adds to Seaman's definition of humanity is curiosity and response to challenge. It can be argued that curiosity as an emotion is already in her definition, but in my opinion Seaman's definition relies heavily on love. Curiosity and ambition are characteristics of great importance to humanity according to the novel, describing curiosity as "Man's greatest gift" (Clarke 57). It was curiosity and the fiercer passions that led to the availability of creating Diaspar and enhancing the human race. Having their fiercer passions removed, the inhabitants in Diaspar are content living their lives as they are in stagnant Diaspar. But in Diaspar they never achieve anything, nothing has changed to their society in billions of years because they are not curious. They are not interested in changing their situation, nor to learn what happened to humankind during the fall of the galactic empire. Alvin is one of only 15 individuals during Diaspar's long history to question his place, and the first one to actually leave Earth. Alvin is in many ways the perfect human. His body is improved, but he has retained curiosity and the fiercer

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[3] The emphasis on children and reproduction in *The City and the Stars* could be interpreted as valuing the heterosexual norm. I chose to interpret it as valuing children and their contribution to humanity, the way they are conceived is not of importance but rather how they are raised and the effects of children in humanity.

passions. He is constantly curious and wants to explore the world. But Alvin is also a proud man, he wants to boast. After finally reaching Lys he wants to continue to explore Lys and learn its secrets, but he also wants to be able to go back to Diaspar "so that he could prove to his friends that he had been no idle dreamer" (Clarke 98). Pride is a fierce emotion that has been lessened in Diaspar as well. They do take some pride in their art, but it is not something that motivates them. They do not want to make art to be famous, nor do they take too much pride in their art if it is accepted by the populace as "great art", they simply work with their art because they enjoy it. Alvin is motivated by his pride and his curiosity. His fiercer passions enables him to reach his potential. The people in Lys are, like Alvin, still curious. They have learned how their technology works, and when faced with the possibility of learning new information about their history from Vanamonde, a mental entity created by the galactic empire before the birth of Diaspar, they question Vanamonde to learn from it instead of fleeing from the opportunity as Diaspar would have. But there is a limit to their curiosity, as they have not left Earth. They are still inferior to Alvin because their fear limits their curiosity.

The peoples of Diaspar first response to challenges is to flee. When confronted with the first challenge in billions of years, the opening of Diaspar to the outside world, many in Diaspar decide to flee into the future through the memory banks. The people in Diaspar give up immediately, too afraid to face the change that they are confronted with. By avoiding challenges the people of Diaspar have lost another quality that defines them as human. By not facing challenges the people in Diaspar are ruled by their fears and by never challenging their fear they lose their humanity. They let their fears of space and the unknown define them, and in Clarke's view by not challenging their fear they lose their humanity. Although fear is a human emotion, actually leading to the inhabitants of Diaspar into making irrational decisions and thus would have been human by Bynum's definition (Bynum 164-165). But it is a fear that dictates their lives. Their fears have led them to stay in Diaspar, never improving the human experience or cultivating new knowledge. Clarke presents the fact that the humans who lived in the galactic empire before Diaspar continuously challenged themselves despite their fears as very important. They conquered the galaxy, creating planetary systems, suns, and mental life forms because they challenged their fears. In *The City and the Stars* they have engineered a society without fear

In Lys they do not flee from challenges, but they are still ruled by their fears. Lys has distanced itself from Diaspar, believing that Diaspar would affect Lys in negative ways so

whenever there is a chance of Lys being discovered by Diaspar the inhabitants use their telepathy to remove any memories of Lys in the minds of those who discovered Lys. Moreover, they still believe the myths about the invaders in Lys. In billions of years they have never challenged their fear of the invaders, instead decided to live life on earth for fear of the repercussions were they to leave the planet. Their decision to not leave Lys might not be solely on the reason of fear. If utopia was achieved in Lys it would explain their decision not to venture outside their borders.

In conclusion, it would seem that the people in Diaspar have lost their humanity. Their emotions are lessened, they are ruled by their fears and the fiercer passions has been removed from them. The inhabitants in Lys have retained most of the human qualities, most importantly love and curiosity, but even they have not entirely conquered their fears. I argue that they have retained enough of the human qualities to still be considered human. The people of Diaspar have perhaps lost too much of their humanity in the process of making the human race safe, whereas in Lys they have achieved a balance of improving the human body but still retaining their humanity. Instead of the improvements being to humanity acting as an investment in humanity, it has resulted in humankind losing their humanity in Diaspar (Seaman 249-251).

Utopia in *The City and the Stars*

With a clearer view on what utopian literature encompasses it is possible to answer the thesis question: what challenges has utopia presented to humanity in Clarke's novel? In Clarke's novel *the City and the Stars* there are two utopias. Diaspar, the technological utopia where its citizens can get anything they need or desire, and Lys, the rural utopia using technology in harmony with nature to achieve their utopia.

Before taking on the challenges faced in utopia an attempt to define the two utopias will be made, answering Firchow's question on what constitutes the good life according to *The City and the Stars*. In Diaspar the inhabitants do not perform any labour of any kind. Food, and anything else they would require, is free and instantly granted them in thanks to their advanced technology. Since the inhabitants do not have any jobs they are free to spend their days in leisure, many of the younger inhabitants appear to play different games while the older inhabitants dedicate their lives to either art or theoretical science. The focus appears to be on the individual, to maximise pleasure for him or her, and otherwise they are quite disconnected from other individuals. Lys is similar in some ways. Food appears to be freely available to the

inhabitants and there appears to be plenty of time for leisure. But the inhabitants have jobs, working as farmers or technicians. It is non-alienated labour, though, and the citizens appear to be quite content. The people of Lys cannot get their food from technology in the same degree as those in Diaspar, thus they are dependent on farming and each other. Furthermore, their telepathy deepens the connection they have with each other. Both utopias appear to be desirable and successful.

Yet, Lys is the real utopia of the novel and Diaspar is a failed utopia. Using Dahrendorf's structural requisites for utopias both Lys and Diaspar fulfil them. Diaspar is a timeless utopia stuck in time. It has literally been the same for billions of years, kept distant from any changes brought by time or outside forces. Their past is nebulous, a myth is created about invaders to discourage them from ever leaving the city but none truly knows what happened. The city has no future either, as change is non-existent. Even the people in Diaspar are always the same, with the same population continuously being reborn, as they are immortal. Lys is isolated in time as well. Their society has not changed since their parting with Diaspar during the end of the empire. Lys shares the same past and fears as Diaspar, of the alien invaders. Their fear keeps them confined to Earth, but their society is more open to change and the future. Although change does not seem to occur too often in Lys (Kateb 104). Both utopias are uniform. In Diaspar all decisions are made by the central computer, but as their society appears to be perfect none of the citizens object to any decision being made. They simply cannot fathom anything different than what exists. In fact, the central computer merely keeps society stable, never altering society merely keeping society stagnant. In Lys they make all their decision through a council made up of the heads from the different villages, but it appears all members of society can participate in the decision making due to their telepathic abilities. In Diaspar Alvin is the only outsider, not being a product of society. He is a *unique,* his existence is only due to the makers of the city having a failsafe in case they wanted to end their isolation. That is the reason why Alvin is different than everyone else. Other than Alvin, Diaspar is socially uniform. Lys, as well, is content with their lot in their utopia (Kateb 105-106). Both urban Diaspar and rural Lys are isolated in space. Its citizens can't leave their confinements. In Lys they can't leave due to the desert surrounding them, whereas in Diaspar they can't leave because of the fear of space in the minds of the inhabitants. Both societies believe that the only safe place is their respective city (Kateb 106). It is thus impossible for them to build bridges or be affected by outside societies. Lys is aware of

Diaspar's existence, but decides to isolate themselves from them, arguing that Diaspar would change Lys in ways that would be fatal to their society (Kateb 8).

The differences between the societies may seem trivial, and both may indeed appear to be similar utopias. Diaspar as a utopia is completely fabricated. When Diaspar was designed by the builders they made sure to genetically alter the human mind to be able to live content in Diaspar, humanity was "as perfectly fitted to their environment as it was to them - for both had been designed together" (Clarke 9). Without the restrictions made to humankind they would surely have left Diaspar millions of years ago because Diaspar lacks certain elements, it is a stable and boring society. Diaspar is a stagnant city, because its citizens cannot imagine anything else (Kateb 17-17), Diaspar was "all that existed, all that they needed, all that they could imagine" (Clarke 9) and they stayed in the city. Lys is different though, it was never designed to be a utopia. Lys is a real utopia because the circumstances for it happened to be right. There is no change in Lys because humanity cannot fathom to change anything, but rather because they are content in their society and need no change. Society in Lys is harmonious not because they are forced to be so, but it is harmonious because they have brought it to themselves through discussions. They are truly happy in Lys, their happiness is not superficial like the happiness in Diaspar is, but there actually is depth to their emotions. Suffering in Lys is not completely removed, but the greater sufferings are. Alienated labour, war, discrimination and disease are long gone. But there are still some smaller evils alive in Lys, the more "humane" evils have survived. Death and disease still exists in Lys, but it is a death that is welcomed as the inhabitants die in content after a long life. The smaller evils works as opposition to pleasure and happiness, granting happiness meaning. In Diaspar on the other hand there are no smaller evils, there is only bliss. But that means there is nothing to compare the happiness with, thus their happiness and love never really gains depth in Diaspar (Kateb 3-6). Perhaps implying that Utopia is better brought by chance rather than determined creation of a utopia. As people have different views on what is utopia it is difficult to create. Praising depth of emotions and well-being of community at the same time Clarke mixes what is usually associated with only dystopian fiction with that associated with utopian fiction (Frank 209). The only negative factor in Lys that they are limited to stay in Lys because of their fear of the invaders. But it can be argued that Lys does not feel the need to leave their society because they are truly content there, they have known of Diaspar since its creation and have decided remain distant, afraid that Diaspar will influence

them in negative ways and bring change their society.

Yet, despite Lys being a true utopia where the community is in focus the novel still praises individuality and quality of experience in the form of Alvin. Clarke imagines Lys as a true utopia, but a utopia humanity should not live in. Humankind in utopia does not work because they are too content with their lives to every challenge themselves. There is no need for any exploration. Both utopias, true and false, have stayed the same for billions of years, and humanity has never challenged themselves. Humanity needs to constantly challenge itself, not merely to improve the human situation but to reach its potential (Kateb 16). Lys never challenged themselves, thus they never reached their potential. Alvin, the hero of the novel, is the first one to challenge himself to try to explore and gain knowledge. It is only because of Alvin's actions that humankind once again can explore the stars and its possibilities.

Williams described four different utopias, and it is quite obvious what type of utopia Diaspar is. Diaspar was brought by willed transformation, it was consciously constructed and designed to be a utopia for its citizens, but that was not enough (Williams 203-204). The citizens of Diaspar were changed as well and "They were as perfectly fitted to their environment at it was to them – for both had been designed together" (Clarke 9). Lys, on the other hand, was not designed by master builders. The origins for Lys are not clear, but it appears to be people who neglected the immortality offered in Diaspar, and preferring a different lifestyle settled in Lys to create their society. Depending on how much credit one wants to give to their telepathy in the success of their society, one could consider Lys to be an unintentional utopia brought by technology. The people in Lys have been genetically engineered in the same ways as those in Diaspar, rejecting immortality and retaining telepathy. With telepathy they were able to better cooperate with each other to create their harmonious society, as all citizens truly can participate in decision making and democracy (Williams 203-204).

The two utopias created in the text are both are left behind by the characters. The text enters a dialogue with the underlying ideology. Alvin leaves a society which he never belonged to, a society that alienated him, Diaspar. Diaspar which could be considered to be a capitalist utopia as Moylan does in his article due to its colonial past and future (153). The characters also leave Lys, a society which can be argued to be built on Marxist ideals being a decentralised society with non-alienated labour, Clarke has thus created two instances of alienation, societies that the characters have left. It can be interpreted that alienation does not only exist in Capitalist

societies, Diaspar, but also Marxist societies, Lys. Neither capitalist or Marxist utopia is good for humanity, as both alienate its inhabitants. Neither are they desirable as the inhabitants cannot reach their full potential (Moylan 154).

An interesting question is why Diaspar was thought to have been the perfect utopia by those who built it. The answer can be found in its creation, and the root of evil. The builders creating Diaspar did it for reasonable reasons. They had seen the destruction brought to the universe after the galactic empires failed experiments, and they wanted no further part in it. It was a fear of death and a fear of space that led to the creation of Diaspar. The master builders constructing Diaspar "were a sick people and wanted no further part in the universe – so [they] pretended it did not exist" (Clarke 246). When construction Diaspar the builders redesigned the human spirit, removing the fiercer passions, curiosity and ambition, to prevent any further damage brought to them. Once free from the fiercer passions humanity would be content and safe in their utopia. When redesigning the human spirit a fear of space was added, to keep humanity contained in Diaspar. If humanity ever left Diaspar, despite their lack of curiosity and ambition, there was a risk that they would encounter damage somewhere in the universe. Lys was ruled by the same fears as Diaspar, and even though their spirits were not altered they were kept stagnant in their utopia because of their fear of the invaders. Contrary to earlier utopias the root of all evil in *The City and the Stars* is not materialistic, rather it is human nature (Jameson 11-12).

Conclusion

In conclusion, Diaspar is not a real utopia. Its inhabitants have been genetically altered to be content in their city, instead of actuality living there because they are content. Lys is the real utopia of the novel, it is where they are truly content. But despite being a true utopia, Lys is not perfect. Alvin shows that humankind should explore and constantly challenge itself, it is not enough for humanity to live contently in a utopia for humanity must reach its potential.

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