The Search for Perfection:
Atlantic Dimensions

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I

IT IS AN HONOUR to address the Academy, especially in any association with Isaiah Berlin. I knew him only slightly, but recall vividly my first encounter with him. Students at Harvard in the late 1940s had been exposed to some remarkable lecturers from abroad: Joseph Schumpeter, Hans Kohn, Erwin Panofsky. But none of them prepared me for the experience of Isaiah Berlin's lectures. I do not have to describe to you how words, ideas, references, allusions came in floods. It was overwhelming. But I quickly realised, as I listened, that, while I was intensely interested in his announced subject, I had no idea what he was talking about—and would have none, until I drove my own intensity level to somewhere within his range. We listened to this Paganini of the platform, as Michael Oakeshott called him, and observed him, with awe.[1]

But at the same time, Berlin was listening to us and observing us, with something quite a bit less than awe. And upon his return to England he wrote a three-part commentary on his experiences at Harvard, and through Harvard with the American university world in general.

He liked the students, he said. They were 'more intellectually curious, more responsive to every influence, more deeply and immediately

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[1] Michael A. Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin: A Life* (London, 1998), p. 205.

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charmed by everything new . . . and above all, endowed with a quality of moral vitality unlike any I had found anywhere else'. But he had also to say that 'many of these excellent young people could not, as a general rule, either read or write, as these activities are understood in our best universities. That is to say, their thoughts came higglety-pigglety out of the big, buzzing, booming confusion of their minds, too many pouring out chaotically in the same instant.'

But there was a deeper problem. Harvard was an academic community, he wrote, 'painfully aware of the social and economic miseries of their society':

> A student or professor in this condition wonders whether it can be right for him to absorb himself in the study of, let us say, the early Greek epic at Harvard, while the poor of south Boston go hungry and unshod and negroes are denied fundamental rights.

He had suggested to his students that intellectual curiosity was not necessarily a form of sin, and that it was valid to pursue some branch of knowledge simply because one was interested in it. But that, they seemed to think, was a European point of view, rather exotic and perhaps slightly sinister. He had pondered all this and concluded that 'this naïve, sincere and touching morality, according to which . . . the primary duty of everyone is to help others . . . with no indication of what it is to help others to be or do' was leading to a view of the world as 'an enormous hospital of which all men are inmates, with the obligation of acting as nurses and physicians to one another'. How, in such a world, he asked, could disinterested study flourish and the potentialities of mind and sensibility unfold?[2]

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[2] Isaiah Berlin, 'Notes on the Way', *Time and Tide* (12, 19, 26 Nov. 1949), quotations at 1133, 1157, 1158, 1188. Berlin's Harvard experience remained vivid in his memory. Thirty-five years later he recalled 'that when I was at Harvard—it was exhausting, but it obliged one to think more than anything at Oxford or Cambridge has in my day'. American students at Harvard and elsewhere, he wrote in 1987,

> believed that objective truth was discoverable; that the professor may well have possessed it; that with enough pressure he might reveal it; not much was understood of selective and critical reading. But I used to recommend bibliographies—and students used to ask which chapters, or even sections, of these books they were to read, as they read every word, without skipping, without the slightest sense of what was important and what was not. Their search for the truth, their belief that anything new, or even true, was worth earnest endeavours to extract from the professor, was touching—and for the professor often rather moving and flattering, after the biases of English students. But in the end it turned out to be a little too naïve—the graduates were sometimes very good at Harvard, the undergraduates seldom.

Berlin to Andrzej Walicki, 22 April 1985; 21 April 1987, *Dialogue and Universalism*, 9–10 (2005), 151, 155.

This was, and has been, the central paradox and energising dynamic of higher education and scholarship in America. Analysing the early Greek epic while attempting to improve the lives of the poor in south Boston—this duality of purpose has lain at the heart of the institutions of higher education in America from the beginning—from that critical, bitterly contested passage in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries when Harvard College's self-governing Fellows, modelled on their counterparts in Trinity, Christ's, or Emmanuel, were transformed from an internal self-directing body of scholars and teachers to an external board of laymen whose charge it was to see that the College lived up to its public—social—responsibilities.[3] We were then, as institutions, and still are, devoted to both the welfare of the poor of south Boston and the subtleties of the early Greek epic: the duality arises from sources deep within American society—its pragmatism, its pluralism, its constant re-invention. It is a theme that echoes through three centuries of American history.

II

There are other themes of similar importance and antiquity in American history, some clearly recognised by other foreign observers—Tocqueville, James Bryce, Max Weber. Among them was a strange, though peculiarly perceptive, visitor, Charles Joseph Latrobe, who toured the United States in 1832–3 en route to his post as superintendent of the southern district of New South Wales. A curious amateur of science and music (he decided that the locusts and other insects in North America sing in the key of C sharp) Latrobe was the least provincial of British proconsuls, and his comments reflect his broad perspective.

Though the American people, he wrote, are separated from the Old World by a vast ocean,

> they are not without the influence of the vortex; every thing, their language, literature, necessities . . . all render them intimately connected with us. We whirl, they whirl too. Do we feel the revolution which is taking place in every thing—politics, religion, opinion, science—so must they. [But] there may be this difference, that as yet they have more room, the sweep is a wider one than ours, but they still obey the same law as ourselves.[4]

[3] Bernard Bailyn *et al.*, *Glimpses of the Harvard Past* (Cambridge, MA, 1986), pp. 13–18.
[4] Charles J. Latrobe, *The Rambler in North America: MDCCCXXXII–MDCCCXXXIII* (London, 1835), 2. 96, 70. Latrobe's perceptions, at times strange, were often prescient: America,

A century and a half later this observation might stand as an epigraph to the burgeoning scholarship on Atlantic history.

This emerging perspective on aspects of early modern history has in recent years broadened the vision of historians writing on innumerable special subjects, spawned international seminars and conferences of exploration and elaboration, and reshaped aspects of university instruction. As the study of the common, interactive, and comparative experiences of the people in the lands surrounding the Atlantic basin, Atlantic history developed rapidly after the Second World War, stimulated in part by historians' awareness of, if not involvement in, the geo-politics of the Cold War, but propelled mainly by forces within scholarship itself—by the proliferation of monographic studies, by the vast increase in available documentation, by the continuous broadening of the units of inquiry (the Mediterranean world, the British archipelago, the Orient as opposed to the West), by the explanatory power of comparative analysis, and by the multiplying exchanges and increased mobility of scholars, especially the relocation of British historians in the major American research universities. As post-war historical scholarship fructified, important connections among distant places, people, and ideas could be seen, once obscure filiations traced, and latent structures revealed.[5] The Atlantic region could be seen as a distinctive historical entity, in the sense, David Eltis, a leading historian of the Atlantic slave trade, has written, that the values of the people within it were reshaped in some way by others living in different parts of the region. It was not a matter, the historical geographer D.W. Meinig noted, of the Old World impinging on the New but a 'sudden and harsh encounter between two old worlds that transformed both and integrated them into a single New World'.[6]

The early modern Atlantic world was immeasurably complex in its racial, political, economic, and cultural differences, and it was splintered by local, regional, and national conflicts. But there were centripetal forces as well, parallel developments and common themes which were neither

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he wrote, was a land 'which no man can pass over from east to west, and from the north to the south, without bringing away the impression, that if on any part of His earthly creation, the finger of God has drawn characters which would seem to indicate the seat of empire,—surely it is there!' p. 71.

[5] On the origins and early history of the concept of Atlantic history: Bailyn, *Atlantic History, Concept and Contours* (Cambridge, MA, 2005), pp. 24–9.

[6] David Eltis, 'Atlantic History in Global Perspective', *Itinerario*, 23, no. 2 (1999), 141; D. W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History* I, *Atlantic America, 1492–1800* (New Haven, CT, 1986), p. 65.

wholly European, nor wholly African, nor wholly American.[7] Impulses that stirred in the heart of Europe found expression in the trans-oceanic West, and none more constantly and significantly than the search for perfection.

III

This was a subject of great interest to Isaiah Berlin, for it went to the core of his defence of 'the liberal anticommunist position in the midst of the Cold War'.[8] His comments on the dangers of perfectionism had begun with his discussion of positive liberty in his famous inaugural lecture, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', at Oxford in 1958. While at times, he then wrote, it might be justifiable 'to coerce men in the name of some goal (let us say, justice or public health) which they would, if they were more enlightened, themselves pursue', once one claims that one knows what others need better than they know it themselves, one is

> in a position to ignore the actual wishes of men or societies, to bully, oppress, torture them in the name, and on behalf, of their 'real' selves . . . albeit often submerged and inarticulate.

It was a theme he came back to again and again, elaborately in 'The Decline of Utopian Ideas in the West' in 1978, eloquently in 'The Pursuit of the Ideal' in 1988. The pursuit of perfection, he then wrote—thirty years after 'Two Concepts'—was 'a recipe for bloodshed, no better even if it is demanded by the sincerest of idealists, the purest of heart'.[9] The implications of this position were immense, and he was challenged from the ideological right and left, as well as from the philosophical centre. But the majority of informed opinion supported him in denouncing utopianism as the ideological source of modern totalitarianism and in describing the horrors that perfectionists of various kinds have wrought.[10]

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[7] John Elliott traces key differences and parallels between Britain's and Spain's Atlantic empires in his *Empires of the Atlantic World* (New Haven, CT, 2006), which came to hand after these pages were written.

[8] Leo Strauss, *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, ed. Thomas L. Pangle (Chicago, 1989), pp. xxviii, 16.

[9] 'Two Concepts of Liberty' [1958] in *Four Essays on Liberty* (London, 1969), pp. 132–3, xliv, xlvii; 'The Decline of Utopian Ideas in the West' [1978], in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* (New York, 1991), pp. 20–48, esp. pp. 45–7; 'The Pursuit of the Ideal', ibid., pp. 18–19.

[10] Ignatieff, *Berlin*, pp. 234–6, 246–7, 253; Aurel Kolnai, *The Utopian Mind and Other Papers*, ed. Francis Dunlop (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1995), esp. pp. 39–46, 69–86; Judith N. Shklar, 'The

As he reached back through Western history to trace the origins and different formulations of the idea of perfection that had culminated in the crushing tyrannies of the twentieth century, Berlin thought, as always, in terms of formal discourses—texts worthy of logical analysis. For he was, in this as in all his major historical writing, a historian of ideas as only a philosopher, however non-practising, could be. It was the structure of ideas, their genealogies, and their implications and ramifications that chiefly interested him, not the details of historical circumstance. It was the master thinkers among the perfectionists who mattered, their cogent, fully developed texts that deserved analysis, not the often muddled and always eclectic derivatives that were part of everyday culture.

Yet it is perfectionism at that lower level—unoriginal, derivative, sometimes confused, often passionate, muddling together ostensibly compatible notions and attitudes to compose guides for action—that I wish to discuss, and to suggest that at that more colloquial level there lies an earlier history of perfectionism that reveals not sources of human devastation in the search for perfection, but hope and heightened aspirations— a pre-modern era in which, as Quentin Skinner wrote in the first of these lectures, positive liberty was 'a dream, not a nightmare'.[11] And further, I wish to suggest that the profound strain of perfectionism that runs through the culture of early modern Europe has a peculiar relationship to Atlantic history.

For it was in the seemingly unconstrained amplitudes of the Western Hemisphere where, as Latrobe observed, there was more room, the sweep was wider, the inhibitions fewer, the possibilities greater, and not in Europe's tightly meshed social environment where establishments ancient and modern forced the expression of such yearnings into narrow interstices, that the search for perfection could find practical fulfilment in shaping the lives of ordinary people. It was there that perfectionist

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Political Theory of Utopia, from Melancholy to Nostalgia' and 'What is the Use of Utopia?' in Stanley Hoffmann (ed.), *Political Thought and Political Thinkers* (Chicago, 1998); George Kateb, comp., *Utopia* (New York, 1971); Melissa Lane, 'Plato, Popper, Strauss, and Utopianism', *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 16 (1999), 119–42; essays in *Daedalus*, 94 (1965), No. 2 ('Utopia'). Ian Harris lists the voluminous criticisms of and commentaries on the full range of Berlin's ideas in 'Berlin and His Critics', Isaiah Berlin, *Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy (Oxford, 2002), pp. [349]–366.

[11] Quentin Skinner, 'A Third Concept of Liberty', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 117 (2002), 264.

aspirations could fully dilate, and expanded visions projected into what Keith Thomas has called 'action-oriented' utopias.[12]

IV

Perfectionist thinking is a subject of some complexity if only because it has taken so many forms. It includes humanistic literary utopianism, prophetic millenarianism, and mystical hermeticism. They are complex in themselves, and they are not wholly distinct. Nothing important in the culture of Christian Europe and America was solely secular. More's *Utopia* was fresh in most literate minds in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but so too were the prophecies of Daniel and the dark complexities of the Book of Revelation. Keith Thomas lists eight forms of utopianism in seventeenth-century England but finds that they cannot be distinguished from the millenarian impulse 'which relied on divine intervention and envisaged a miraculous transformation of both man and nature . . . it was precisely when the millenarian current was running most strongly', he writes, 'that the utopian faith in human effort was most buoyant'. Seventeenth-century millenarianism and seventeenth-century utopianism, he concludes, 'were twins'.[13]

And so they were throughout the whole of early modern Europe, impelled by the great tectonic shifts of the Reformation and its Catholic response, and the vast efflorescence of knowledge in the Renaissance and beyond. Both created soaring hopes for the transcendence of life as it was

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[12] Keith Thomas, 'The Utopian Impulse in Seventeenth-Century England', in Dominic Baker-Smith and C. C. Barfoot (eds.), *Between Dream and Nature: Essays on Utopia and Dystopia* (Amsterdam, 1987), pp. 43, 24.

Frank and Fritzi Manuel in their massive *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Cambridge, MA, 1979), pp. 14–15, rule out any consideration of utopian ideas in the Americas because they were 'derivative', mere 'extensions of European idea systems', 'the pabulum of an age, the chewed cud of previous epochs'. Only in Europe, they write, were there 'significant innovations', 'new departures', 'the major constellations of utopian thought'. In what follows I concentrate on precisely the two aspects of Utopianism they dismiss: perfectionism in the Americas, including Spanish America, and the 'chewed cud' of derivative ideas. My purpose is to trace the implementation of some of these ideas in the real and uniquely favourable conditions of colonial America and to consider some of the consequences. On the feverish utopianism of England, 1640–60, ibid., ch. xiii, esp. p. 334.

[13] Ibid., 'Introduction: The Utopian Propensity'; Thomas, 'Utopian Impulse', pp. 24, 31, 32. J. C. Davis, in *Utopia and The Ideal Society . . . 1516–1700* (Cambridge, 1981), ch. i, distinguishes utopian societies from four other types of ideal communities.

known, ultimately for the possibility, if not of reaching perfection, then of approaching ideal goals.

England in the crisis years of the mid-seventeenth century was especially alight with projects for both mobilising secular knowledge in learned and benevolent societies, often in collaboration with the most imaginative scholars and scientists of Europe, and for advancing apocalyptic hopes. 'Virtually every sect', the Manuels write in their history of Utopian thought in Europe,

> carried its own utopia, and individuals moved easily from one circle into another, punctuating their advent and departure with an appropriate religious revelation. Men dropped in and out of groups, recanting previous errors, writing confessions and testimonials [as one radical sect sought] to distinguish itself from the teeming mass, and much energy was expended on touting the superiority of one future society over its rivals.

Some utopian designs were lofty abstractions, theoretical models of the ideal by which to measure the evils of the world and speculations on radical reform in all spheres of life. But others seemed to be within the reach of possibility. Most of these, on the Continent as in England, were the work of sects determined to recover a lost Christian perfection by drawing apart to live more perfect lives in some approximation to the assumed ways of the apostles.

Often the radical sectarians found the social atmosphere of their immediate localities too dense, the weight of traditional institutions and social controls too heavy to allow for local withdrawal. So they looked for refuge beyond their immediate horizons, some to distant trans-oceanic places, and in this they shared the visions of the humanist utopian theorists for whom imagined distances from the real world had always been a logical necessity, often involving fanciful ocean voyages to reach the perfectly imagined regime.[14]

For both, America's attraction was powerful. Not only would its limitless spaces and apparent lack of restrictive social pressures provide the ideal environment for the pursuit of perfectionist lives, but the existence of its vast population of pagans, descendants no doubt of the lost tribes of Israel, now Satan's captives, would provide the ultimate challenge for those who understood the stages of apocalyptic fulfilment. And so the perfectionist invasion began—by Catholics, regular and secular, by dissenting Anglicans, by German pietists, and by a range of radical

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[14] Manuel, *Utopian Thought*, pp. 334, 21–3.

Protestants, from self-absorbed seekers to those wildly impatient Fifth Monarchy militants, led by a murderous New England 'fanatique', who stormed through Restoration London crying '*Live King Jesus*!' until rounded up and hanged.[15]

Utopian and perfectionist aspirations were an elemental part of the European invasion of the America. The conquest—by the British, Dutch, French, and Portuguese as well as by the Spanish—was barbarous for the conquerors, and for the natives catastrophic. Yet amid all the racist brutality, the loss of civility, and the remorseless, often bloody struggles to create new economic and social regimes, the search for perfection and for the fulfilment of apocalyptic prophecies—impulses that flowed from Europe's heartland—persisted. Certain passages in this complex multi-cultural history are particularly revealing. They exemplify something of the inner landscape of the European imagination and America's peculiar place within it.

<div align="center">V</div>

For the early Franciscans, led by the ascetic Toribio Motolinía, who was convinced that America could be nothing less than the prime site of the millennial kingdom of Christ, the task was to help the natives recover the simplicity and innocence he believed they had lost in the Aztecs' conquest. Once, in earlier, pre-Aztec times, they had been free of luxury, greed, and the struggle for 'rank and honors'. If that pristine world could be revived, the Indians, in their innocence, would occupy 'a primordial, privileged role at the center itself of the future of humanity'. Motolinía lectured Charles V on the urgent need to 'hasten the hour of the Final Judgment', not by imposing modern Hispanic culture on the natives, as Las Casas and the crown counsellors urged, but by protecting them from all outside influences except Christian preaching, which could rightly be imposed by force. In his mind's eye there would be a world, a continent, of simple people, no longer corrupted, isolated in their own peculiar

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[15] John L. Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World . . .* (Berkeley, CA, 1956), p. 73; Richard H. Popkin, 'Hartlib, Dury, and the Jews', in M. Greengrass, *et al.* (eds.), *Samuel Hartlib and Universal Reformation* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 124–30; Champlin Burrage, 'The Fifth Monarchy Insurrections', *English Historical Review*, 25 (1910), 739–47 ('Fanatique' was Pepys's term); Philip F. Gura, *A Glimpse of Sion's Glory: Puritan Radicalism in New England, 1620–1660* (Middletown, CT, 1984), pp. 136–44.

Christian-Indian state, free, as once they had been, of property, guile, and the struggle for status, ready to receive the approaching dispensation.[16]

Though he wrote at length and with passion, Motolinía failed to convince the crown to protect the Indians' autochthonous cultures. So the aggressive Hispanisation proceeded, in innumerable missions, churches, and schools throughout the vice-royalties, creating in the process an auspicious background for specific utopian designs.

They appeared in different forms at different places. Some were newly invented, others drawn from classic sources. More's *Utopia*, published just before the major conquests of Mexico and Peru, was understood in humanist circles to be a learned, imaginative, and challenging commentary on Europe's ills; but in America it had practical consequences. For the *audiencia* judge and later bishop, Vasco de Quiroga, it provided a detailed model for the organisational structure and social discipline of the *pueblo*-hospitals he founded near Mexico City in the early 1530s. The specific provisions for these benevolent, perfectionist communities, built to shelter and care for the poor, vagrant, and dispossessed Indians, could not have been closer to the details of More's imaginative design. Property was owned in common, the basic social unit was the *familia*, urban and rural life alternated, work was limited to six hours a day, goods were distributed according to need, luxury and useless offices were eliminated, and judges were elected by families. Quiroga even considered a dress code based on *Utopia*, including clothes of fabrics specified by More. The organisation of More's *Utopia*, Quiroga wrote, should be the basis not only of his hospitals but of all Indian communities in America. But such was the all-absorbing power of millenarian aspirations that Quiroga conflated More's design with what he imagined the primitive church to have been. The barefooted, bareheaded, long haired natives went about, he believed, 'as [did] the Apostles'—appropriately for what he foresaw as 'the new primitive and reborn Church of the New World'.

More's utopian model had organised Quiroga's thoughts as he sought ways of bringing the pagan population towards Christian redemption, a stage in the universal ascent to the millennium. In the process a literary text had become 'a political program circulated across the Atlantic from a radical colonist to a monarch and used to initiate a social practice'.[17]

[16] Georges Baudot, *Utopia and History in Mexico . . .(1520–1569)*, trans. Bernard R. and Thelma Ortiz de Montellano (Niwot, CO, 1995), chs. v, vi; quotations at pp. 87, xv, 310–13.
[17] Silvio Zavala, *Sir Thomas More in New Spain: A Utopian Adventure of the Renaissance* (*Diamante*, 3, London, 1955), p. 12; Zavala, 'The American Utopia of the Sixteenth Century',

For others, equally committed to ideal goals, there were no models, literary or other, and pragmatic solutions had to be found. So the Spanish Jesuits devised 'reductions' of the natives, in Paraguay most famously but elsewhere as well. They too were millenarian/utopian creations: gatherings of nomadic natives into disciplined urban communities where Christianity, hence civilisation, could be inculcated in people who would thereafter become productive members of the labour force and foot soldiers in the wars of imperial expansion.

Though few in number the Jesuits were driven by intense zeal to control the lives of the Indians who were drawn into their 'villages of perfect godliness'. And in many matters essential to their mission they succeeded, transforming these Tupi-Guarani-speaking peoples deep in the Amazon forests into Catholics living in perfected communities groomed for the coming of the Lord.

Yet the Guarani, and even more the Maranhese Indians the Portuguese Jesuits faced in Brazil and the Iroquois and Hurons the French Jesuits faced in New France, could not be forced, in Berlin's phrase, 'into neat uniforms demanded by the dogmatically believed-in schemes'. The indigenous cultures were too vibrant to be easily uprooted and the power of the invaders was too weak to force the natives into an ideal mould shaped by perfectionist visions. The Jesuits' wards, whether in New Spain, New France, or Brazil, never fully abandoned their native cultures. They absorbed the new regimes selectively, forcing their rulers, if only for the sake of stability, to accept major aspects of the indigenous organisations.[18]

The search for perfection in these forms, on the background of millenarian hopes for the redemption of the Western world, was an Atlantic phenomenon—a trans-oceanic projection of the apocalyptic prophecies

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Huntington Library Quarterly, 4 (1947), 341, 344–7; Fintan B. Warren, *Vasco de Quiroga and his Pueblo-Hospitals of Santa Fe* (Washington, DC, 1963), pp. 4–5, 29, 32–5, 116–17. On Quiroga's larger scheme for congregating all Amerindians into *repúblicas de indios*, and the details of the regulations in his hospital-*pueblos*: Bernardino Verástique, *Muchoacán and Eden: Vasco de Quiroga and the Evangelization of Western Mexico* (Austin, TX, 2000), pp. 120–40; James Holstun, *A Rational Millennium: Puritan Utopias of Seventeenth-Century England and America* (New York, 1987), p. 14.

[18] Allan Greer and Kenneth Mills, 'A Catholic Atlantic', in Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra and Erik R. Seeman (eds.), *The Atlantic in Global History* (Upper Saddle River, NJ, 2006), p. 10. Barbara Ganson, *The Guaraní under Spanish Rule in the Rio de la Plata* (Stanford, CA, 2003), chs. ii, iii; José Gabriel Martínez-Serna, 'Instruments of Empire: Jesuit-Indian Encounters in the New World Borderlands' (Working Paper, Atlantic History Seminar, Harvard Univ., 2004), pp. 8–29; Philip Caraman, *The Lost Paradise: An Account of the Jesuits in Paraguay, 1607–1768* (London, 1975).

that gripped the European imagination and the associated yearnings for a return to the simplicity of the primitive church. As such it was not confined to the Iberian world and its empires abroad. In variant forms it was as much English, French, Dutch, and German as it was Spanish and Portuguese. These worlds too were inspired by apocalyptic prophecies and the longing for the simple purity of the apostles' church; and they too found the realisation of their vision in the transoceanic west.

There is no better illustration of the Atlantic dimensions of the search for perfection than the fortunes of the Puritans who, fleeing from ecclesiastical oppression at home, sought to establish in America a model of perfected Christianity. Everything seemed to favour their success. They had sufficient numbers and funds, administrative experience, and some of England's finest scholars and theologians who shared a passionate belief that they were building in Massachusetts God's 'new Jerusalem', laying 'one stone in the foundacion of this new Syon'. Those 'great persons', wrote Cotton Mather (the Puritans' over-learned encomiast), who like Guillaume Budé had 'mistook Sir Thomas Moor's UTOPIA for a country really existent, and stirr'd up some divines charitably to undertake a voyage thither, might now have certainly found a truth in their mistake; New England was a true Utopia'.[19]

But however utopian in aspiration, the Puritans did not have a unified belief in what the perfected church and society should be, and so, immediately upon landing, their community, boiling with perfectionist ambitions, exploded, 'hurling itself outward to its ultimate limits'. Perfectionist groups left and right fought for domination. Antinomians denounced the unconverted clergy as 'dead dogs' and tore the colony apart with their repudiation of ascetic discipline as they moved towards mystical union with God. Rationalist Socinians settled in villages a hundred miles inland declared that the Trinity, atonement, and the divinity of Christ were delusions and argued for religious toleration. And Anabaptists, scattered everywhere, insisted that infant baptism was a deadly corruption, to which conservatives replied by invoking memories of Münster where, a century earlier, zealous Anabaptists had been

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[19] Theodore D. Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives . . .* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1988), ch. iii; W. Clark Gilpin, *The Millenarian Piety of Roger Williams* (Chicago, 1979), p. 14; Cotton Mather, *The Wonders of the Invisible World . . .* (Boston, 1692) p. 6. Mather was referring to, and misreading, Budé's letter to Thomas Lupset which first appeared as a Preface to More's *Utopia* in 1517.

slaughtered by the thousands by those, including Luther, who feared anarchic upheavals.[20]

But New England was no Münster. Its open spaces, social and geographical, invited the free, limitless expression of the many perfectionist impulses that lurked in the heart of Puritanism—not only antinomianism, socinianism, and anabaptism but familism, spiritism, and those nameless ecstatic urges that would become notorious and deadly when proclaimed by Ranters in London but that in Rhode Island, a colony the mainstream Puritans denounced as 'a cesspool of vile heresies and irreligion', found free institutional form. There, each of the various perfectionist villages, led by its own self-styled 'professor of the mysteries of Christ', was convinced of its purity and condemned its errant neighbours. All felt an irresistible pressure to press on through deepening stages to reach some ultimate, uncompromised, perfect resolution—a state of being that Roger Williams alone, finally, attained.[21]

Williams, the purest of Puritan perfectionists, began his career as a spiritual guide to Cromwell's aunt, the melancholic Lady Joan Barrington, whom he so berated for the unsatisfactory state of her soul that she banished him from her sight. The same 'unlambelike . . . stiffnesse' led him to join the migration to Boston, and then to quit Boston after denouncing the Puritans' failure to separate fully from the corrupt Church of England, their union of church and state, the '*Soule-rape*' of their 'forcing of the *conscience* of any person', and their immoral seizing of Indian lands. Narrowly escaping deportation to England, he fled to the woods near Narragansett Bay where, with a small troop of followers, he formed his more perfect village.[22]

But not perfect enough. There was no stopping in his fiercely logical pursuit of the ultimate form of apostolic purity. Convinced that there could be no 'true Church until Christ himself reinstituted it at the end of time', he swept through and discarded layer after layer of recognised

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[20] Edmund S. Morgan, *Roger Williams: The Church and the State* (New York, 1967), p. 4; Theodore D. Bozeman, *The Precisionist Strain . . .* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004), ch. ix, Part III. The most complete account of the great explosion of radical groups in early New England is Gura, *Sion's Glory*: on Münster and the Anabaptists, as 'incendiaries of commonwealths', pp. 93, 115, 128, 256. On the Antinomian turmoil: Michael P. Winship, *Making Heretics: Militant Protestantism and Free Grace in Massachusetts, 1636–1641* (Princeton, NJ, 2002).

[21] Sydney V. James, *Colonial Rhode Island: a History* (New York, 1975), p. 37.

[22] William Hunt, *The Puritan Moment: The Coming of the Revolution in an English County* (Cambridge, MA, 1983), pp. 222–3; John Cotton, *A Reply to Mr. Williams . . .* in *The Bloudy Tenent, Washed and Made White . . .* (London, 1647), p. 5; Arthur Searle, '"Overmuch Liberty": Roger Williams in Essex', *The Essex Journal*, 3 (1968), 85–92; Gura, *Sion's Glory*, p. 190.

doctrines until nothing was left but his own elemental convictions based on his millenarian view of Christian history. Since no post-apostolic church was true, no church should be joined, and so in the end Williams became a church unto himself, worshipping alone, or with his wife, in what he took to be the only true approximation of apostolic form, and sending back to England, from his Bay-side refuge, bulletins of his beliefs and blistering attacks on his enemies' and the world's corruptions.[23]

For Williams as for most of the Puritan divines, the search for perfection was part of the same apocalyptic design that dominated the minds of the Jesuits and Franciscans in Latin America. The precise interpretations differed, but the need to prepare for the approaching end by converting the American Indians and installing them in sanctified communities was as widely accepted by radical Puritans as by Tridentine Catholics.

The parallels between Motolinía's and Quiroga's efforts and those of the Puritans' chief apostle to the Indians, the Revd John Eliot, are striking. But it was Eliot, of all the millenarian missionaries, who drew the most radically utopian and elaborate prescriptions from the common, pan-European eschatological sources; it was Eliot who sought most efficiently to relate the conversion of the natives to the future of all mankind.

Eliot, not the most learned of the Puritan preachers, though he was said to have arrived in America with twenty-three barrels of books, had begun in the 1640s to reach out to the Indians to urge them to lead Christian lives and eventually to find true faith. Then two events coincided to elevate his mission to cosmic heights and to enclose within a single vision the perfectionist destinies of the Indians and the fulfilment of the millenarian prophecies.

In a series of lectures in the 1640s Boston's leading theologian, John Cotton, discoursed vividly on the twenty-two chapters of the Book of Revelation, leaving a searing impression on Eliot that the predestined end of history was approaching and that the entire drama of Christ's deliverance would soon be enacted, with all its momentous transformations. Then came the execution of Charles I, which could only be seen as the unmistakable first step in the prophesied destruction of all earthly monarchies and the presage of the rule of Christ. A new, millenarian polity was now required, and it would be extrapolated from the small-

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[23] Gura, *Sion's Glory*, p. 217; Richard S. Dunn, *et al.* (eds.), *The Journal of John Winthrop 1630–1649* (Cambridge, MA, 1996), p. 300; on the maturing of Williams's beliefs and his 'obsession with personal and ecclesiastical purity', see Gilpin, *Millenarian Piety*, pp. 50 ff., and Morgan, *Williams*.

scale model that he, Eliot, would create among the Indians in New England. The Algonquians, like the Jesuits' Guaranis, would be 'reduced' to civility by being gathered from their wanderings into settled towns. There, governed by elected rulers of tens, of fifties, of hundreds, and of thousands as prescribed in Exodus 18, they would be able to lead perfected Christian lives within covenanted churches, in preparation for Christ's deliverance.[24]

For Eliot the praying Indian towns, of which fourteen were established by 1675, bore heavily on the destiny of mankind. 'I doubt not', he wrote to Cromwell, 'but it will be some comfort to your heart, to see the kingdom of Christ rising up in these western parts of the world, a blessed kingdom that will in time "fill all the earth"'. In his *Christian Commonwealth, or the Civil Polity of the Rising Kingdom of Jesus Christ*, written in 1651 at the height of his apocalyptic fervour, Eliot laid out the full vision of the 'Comenian pansophist project among the Indians' that gripped his imagination. With the praying towns epitomes of what could prevail in England—a nation, he believed, that was destined to be one of the two inaugural locations of the millennium (the other being New England)—and given the likelihood that the Indians, 'ripe for utopian molding', were descendants of the lost tribes of Israel, their conversion, followed by that of all gentiles would indicate that the kingdom of Christ was nigh.[25]

Everything pointed in that direction, not least the possibility that study of the Indians' speech would reveal elements of the 'universal language', which, as Comenius had made clear, expressed the inner, mystical nature of divinity. No effort could be spared. Eliot worked diligently with a bilingual Indian and an imported English printer to publish the entire Bible and several religious tracts in Algonquian translations, and to compose as well a grammar of that apparently Hebraic language,

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[24] Richard W. Cogley, *John Eliot's Mission to the Indians before King Philip's War* (hereafter: *Eliot's Mission*) (Cambridge, MA, 1999), pp. 46, 251–2 (Cotton's lectures on Revelation); J. F. Maclear, 'New England and the Fifth Monarchy: The Quest for the Millennium in Early American Puritanism', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 32 (1975), 225, 231–4, 255; James Holstun, 'John Eliot's Empirical Millenarianism', *Representations*, 4 (1983), 143, 145–6; Holstun, *Rational Millennium,* pp. 104–9, 113–14.

[25] Cogley, *Eliot's Mission*, pp. 92–3, 79–81, 88, 90; Maclear, 'New England and the Fifth Monarchy', pp. 254–5, 229, 244–7; Holstun, *Rational Millennium*, pp. 132, 115, 111–13 (on the relations of Eliot's utopianism to the classic utopias from Plato to Bacon and Comenius, pp. 132–3, 157–8). On the belief that the American Indians were Jews from the lost tribes, and its significance on the millenarian thought of the Hartlib circle in England, see Richard Popkin's essay in Greengrass *et al.* (eds.), *Hartlib and Universal Reformation*, ch. v.

which must have derived from the pristine era before the confusion of Babel.[26]

The whole programme was in its essence pan-Atlantic. Eliot sought to realise in utopian communities in America ideas drawn from common themes in European culture—both rationalist and millennialist—and then to transfer their embodied form back across the Atlantic to serve as templates for the radical transformation of England. But his message and the reports of his praying towns reached an England in turmoil over the proper form of republican government. His urgent advice was taken to mean that England should give up ransacking law, history, and constitutional theory to find proper forms of government and draw on scripture alone, for, he wrote, 'Christ is your King and Soveraign Lawgiver', 'the only right heir to the crown of England'. England's constitution should, like the Indians', consist of elected rulers of tens, fifties, hundreds, and thousands, with suffrage for all self-sufficient males. This, he wrote, is the form of government, infinitely expandable, 'by which Christ meaneth to rule all the nations on earth according to Scriptures'.[27]

It was a perfect scheme for a perfect Christian regime, but the world was not prepared for his perfection. Eliot's praying Indian towns were wiped out in the savage Indian war of 1675–6, their 1100 inhabitants exiled to a harbour island where many starved or died of disease. And his prophetic book, delayed in publication until the year before the Restoration, proved to be a deadly embarrassment to the Massachusetts authorities, promoting as it did Fifth Monarchy views that would surely bring down on the colony the wrath of the restored royal government. They forthwith collected and destroyed every copy of the book they could lay their hands on and forced Eliot to recant everything in it.[28]

As in some bewilderment he did so, perfectionist impulses were evolving elsewhere—in Holland and the scattered German states. One of the most fully developed schemes designed to begin the world's reformation emerged from Amsterdam, and specifically from the heated atmosphere of the poets and free thinkers who gathered at that city's Sweet Rest Tavern. It too would run its course through Atlantic networks.

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[26] Sarah Rivett, 'Christian Translations: Indian Grammar and the Quest for a Universal Language in the British Atlantic World' (Working Paper, Atlantic History Seminar, Harvard University, 2006).

[27] Holstun, *Rational Millennium*, pp. 104, 131, 158; Holstun, 'Eliot's Empirical Millenarianism', pp. 131, 144, 147; Cogley, *Eliot's Mission*, p. 79.

[28] Ibid., pp. 165, 256–8, 114–16; Holstun, *Rational Millennium*, p. 159.

The designer and spiritual leader of this utopian programme was a visionary Dutchman, Pieter Cornelisz Plockhoy, who had been touched as a child in Zeeland by the fierce Biblicism and spirituality of the Mennonites and Anabaptists and as a young man had found inspiration among the Quaker-like 'Collegiant' philosophers in Amsterdam, devoted to absolute religious freedom and social justice. There he had begun his search for 'the ideal Christian commonwealth of love, equality, and freedom'. By the mid-1650s he had made contact with the famous German-Polish virtuoso of radical reform, Samuel Hartlib, then in London, and through him with the circle of erudite pansophists seeking to mobilise and employ all human knowledge to reform everything—from politics to agriculture, from employment to 'the spirits of men', and from commerce and poverty to law and the arts.[29]

For Plockhoy, the Hartlib circle, devoted to recovering 'man's lost dominion over nature' and to transforming life as it was known, was irresistible. Abandoning family and home, he joined Hartlib, and with his help gained access to Cromwell. The great man, Plockhoy said, listened 'several times with patience' to his ideas and proposals, which by then had taken elaborate form.[30]

Plockhoy knew exactly what the perfect world should be. It would have 'freedom of speech, absolute toleration, and a universal Christianity'. There would be no clergy, no ties of church to state, no tithes, and above all, no 'lording over consciences'. The thralldom brought on by malevolent governors, greedy merchants, and lazy ministers would be eliminated. Life's work would be shared in clear divisions of labour; specialisation would bring interdependence and mutual respect. There would be absolute equality of status; property would be held in common until divided by lot into private parcels. Above all it would be a full-employment welfare society in which the health and well-being of all people would be provided for. As to the controversial issue of equality, 'nobody will be so naïve', he wrote, 'much less malevolent, as to think . . . that we are attempting to remove all differences among people'. The effect of the common rules would be to eliminate not natural human differences nor

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[29] Leland Harder and Marvin Harder, *Plockhoy from Zurik-zee* (Newton, KS, 1952), ch. ii; Davis, *Utopia*, pp. 313–14, derived from Charles Webster's magisterial study of Hartlib and the world of utopian reform in all fields of learning, *The Great Instauration: Science, Medicine, and Reform 1626–1660* (London, 1975).

[30] Davis, *Utopia and the Ideal Society . . .1516–1700*, p. 313; Harder, *Plockhoy*, p. 28; Plockhoy to Cromwell, [1659?], ibid., pp. 120–30. Cf. Plockhoy to Cromwell, 4 June 1657, Hartlib Papers (Sheffield University Library), 54/23A–26B.

rewards for personal accomplishments but the differences created and maintained by force and intimidation, by the dead hand of custom, and by the coercive mandates of the princes of the church.[31]

Such was the programme Plockhoy presented to Cromwell, and after his death to the new Protector and to Parliament. Its aim, he said, was the true reformation of England as the first step in the rebirth of mankind. If in England complete religious freedom were created, he assured Cromwell, 'Holland, Denmark, Sweden, France and other kingdoms . . . will easily be brought to a firm bond of unity'. Notables were informed of his perfectionist plan: John Milton, some of whose views were not dissimilar to Plockhoy's; John Beale, scientist, theologian, and Christian humanist, a member of Hartlib's circle; and John Worthington, Master of Jesus College and prominent Platonist, with whom Hartlib discussed the similarities of Plockhoy's plans to those of the Hutterites.[32]

But while his proposals stirred up some writing and much talk there was little action. Plockhoy's thinking began to shift. In England, he wrote, it was becoming clear that he and his adherents might well prove to be 'insufferable to the world', and at the same time the world might be 'incorrigible or unbetterable as to us'. Therefore he and his people would have to establish their solidarity 'in such places as are separate from other men, where we may with less impediment or hindrance love one another and mind the wonders of God, eating the bread we shall earn with our own hands'.[33]

But where could such a refuge be found? The authorities in his native Holland turned him away, and he had no confidence in what he heard of a nobleman's sanctuary near Cologne. In the end, well aware that the Hartlib circle had talked of creating an ideal society ('Antilia', 'Macaria') in Virginia or Bermuda, he decided that his perfect society would only be safe, and fulfilled, in America. He knew about that distant land through his brother who had served the Dutch West India Company in New Netherland and from a member of the Parnassan Club who had lived

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[31] Plockhoy, *Way to Peace* and his *A Way Propounded to Make the Poor . . . Happy . . .* (London, 1659), in Harder, *Plockhoy*, pp. 108 ff. and ch. vi.

[32] Plockhoy to Cromwell [1659] in Harder, *Plockhoy*, p. 124; Hartlib to John Worthington, 20 July 1659, in James Crossley, *et al.* (eds.), *Diary and Correspondence of James Worthington* (Manchester, 1847–86), 1. 156; Harder, *Plockhoy*, pp. 37–41.

[33] Ibid., pp. 31–2; Davis, *Utopia*, pp. 316, 338; Hartlib to Worthington, 20 July 1659, *Diary and Correspondence*, p. 156.

there for a decade and who celebrated its wonders in rhapsodic poems which he declaimed at length to his friends in the Sweet Rest Tavern.[34]

For this removal to their under-populated colony the Dutch West India Company and the Amsterdam authorities were happy to provide support. So on 28 July 1663 Plockhoy and forty-one adherents disembarked at an abandoned clearing on the Delaware River, to usher in a new era in human history.

What happened within Plockhoy's perfect world in the months that followed, how fully and in what detail he was able finally, on that distant shore, to realise his so carefully defined state of perfected being, is not known. What is known is that it ended swiftly. In August 1664 an overwhelming English force seized the Dutch colony and swept across Plockhoy's settlement like a whirlwind, stripping it bare and plundering it down 'to a very nail'. Plockhoy died in the attack or soon thereafter and his utopian flock scattered among the Finnish, Swedish, German, and English frontiersmen living in primitive settlements alongside the Lenape Indians. Only his blind son is known to have survived into the next century, the last remnant of the utopia that had once stirred the minds of aspiring intellectuals in Holland and learned pansophists in England and the German states.[35]

But if one utopian mission born in the heated atmosphere of European perfectionism failed on the banks of the Delaware River, others drawn from different sources in Continental Europe appeared nearby.

William Penn's private colony, founded in 1681 as a refuge for harassed Quakers committed to their own militant struggle for perfection, was open to people of all nations and (Protestant) creeds. It was quickly peopled not only by Welsh and English sectarians but also by German Protestants from the Rhineland and the Palatinate. Victims of

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[34] Hartlib to Worthington, 15 Oct. 1660, ibid., p. 211; Harder, *Plockhoy*, pp. 36, 48; Davis, *Utopia*, pp. 313–14; Webster, *Instauration*, pp. 98, 368. References to Virginia as a possible site for a utopian settlement abound in the Hartlib Papers; cf. Catherine Armstrong, 'Antilia Revisited: Hartlib's Utopian Vision of America in Light of Recent Scholarship' (paper delivered at Birkbeck College conference, 'New Worlds Reflected: Representations of Utopia, the New World and Other Worlds (1500–1800)', Dec. 2005). Cf. Donald R. Dickson, *The Tessera of Antilia* (Leiden, 1998), pp. 118–25, 223–35, 251–6. The texts of Steendam's poems about New Netherland are in Henry C. Murphy, trans., *An Anthology of New Netherland . . .* (New York, 1865), pp. [37]–75. On Plockhoy's brother Harmen: Peter S. Craig, '1671 Census of the Delaware', *Pennsylvania Genealogical Magazine*, 40 (1998), 358–9.

[35] E. B. O'Callaghan, *et al.* (eds.), *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New-York* (Albany, NY, 1856–87), 2. 176; 3. 346.

the ravages of war and of religious persecution, most were members of established Lutheran and Reformed churches. But among them were small groups of radical perfectionists with different aims, disciples of the major figures in German Pietism: Spener, Boehme, and Francke. One such group, who called themselves the Chapter of Perfection, put together a programme drawn from cabbalist, Rosicrucian, and biblical sources that had allowed them to predict the arrival of Christ and the start of the millennium precisely in 1694. Confident of the accuracy of their textual analyses, their mathematical calculations, and the meaning of the revelations they had received, they were properly disposed, according to their androgynous theology, to accept in ecstasy the embrace of the Bridegroom when he arrived.[36]

So the Chapter of Perfection, under the leadership of Johannes Kelpius, both a Rosicrucian magus and a *magister* of the University of Altdorf, set out for Pennsylvania to prepare for the coming of the Lord and to seek that state of personal perfection that was free of all sensuous temptations and beyond all rational understanding. Quickly upon their arrival they built a log-walled monastery of perfect proportions: forty feet by forty feet. It had a common room for communal worship and also cells where the celibate brethren could search for personal perfection by contemplating their magic numbers and their esoteric symbols. In a primitive laboratory they conducted alchemical and pharmaceutical experiments aimed at eliminating disease and prolonging life indefinitely. And on the roof they placed a telescope, which they manned from dusk till dawn, so that in case the Bridegroom came in the middle of the night they would be prepared to receive him. But the heart of Kelpius's sect lay not in the common room, not in the cells, and not in the laboratory, but in a cave which the magus found in a nearby hillside and in which he spent most of the rest of his life pondering truths concealed to ordinary souls but revealed to him by signs, by symbols, by numbers, and by pure contemplation. Everything confirmed that it was here, in the Chapter of Perfection, that the 'dear Lord Jesus' would reveal himself and that all true Christians, while vigorously pursuing their own perfection, should await him and prepare for the heavenly feast.

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[36] Elizabeth W. Fisher, ' "Prophecies and Revelations": German Cabbalists in Early Pennsylvania', *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 109 (1985), 299–333, and more generally Jon Butler, 'Magic, Astrology, and the Early American Religious Heritage, 1600–1760', *American Historical Review*, 84 (1979), 317–46. Julius F. Sachse's antiquarian, anecdotal, rather chaotic *German Pietists of Provincial Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1895), contains essential information.

When the year passed and the Bridegroom failed to appear, calculations were renewed, the contemplation of numbers and symbols was intensified, and trance-like states were repeated. But gradually the brethren's discipline weakened, their energy dissipated, and temptation drew them from their celibate state. Some defected to established churches, but others went off to more recent perfectionist sects that were multiplying across Penn's province. Few could tolerate the fierce self-mortifying discipline required in Johann Beissel's nearby Ephrata cloister, whose emaciated monks and nuns sought, through the demanding rites of the Rosicrucians, to achieve a higher, more perfect state of being.[37] More genial were the followers of Matthias Baumann, an ignorant labourer from Lambsheim, in the Palatinate, who believed that in the delirium of an illness he had been transported to heaven where, newborn, purged of all sin, he had attained perfection, and needed thereafter no intervention of church, sacraments, or any other means of grace. He was convinced that God dwelt in him as in Christ ('we are brothers', he said) and that he had become like Adam before the fall, incapable of sin—conditions he extended to his followers and which he urged the unregenerate to achieve. When some questioned the truth of his doctrine of perfection, he proposed to demonstrate his exalted state by walking across the surface of the Delaware River. And there was an array of semi-communistic Moravian settlements, fugitive groups of the Czech-Saxon *Unitas Fratrum*, which spawned dozens of obscure, short-lived utopias deep in Indian territory.[38]

VI

For two centuries perfectionist projects, plants of European origins, had blossomed in the open atmosphere of the Americas, had reached for the sun, and had faded and died. But they were not without lasting effect. Their creative influence can be found deep in the cultures of later times.

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[37] Fisher, '"Prophecies and Revelations"', pp. 319–24; Ernst L. Lashlee, 'Johannes Kelpius and His Woman in the Wilderness', Gerhard Mueller and Winfried Zeller (eds.), *Glaube, Geist, Geschichte: Festschrift für Ernst Benz* (Leiden, 1967), pp. 327–31; Bernard Bailyn, *The Peopling of British North America* (New York, 1985), pp. 123–7.

[38] Julius F. Sachse, *The German Sectarians of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1899–1900), 1. 73–7; Philip C. Croll, *Annals of the Oley Valley . . .* (Reading, PA, 1926), ch. iii; Don Yoder (ed.), *Rhineland Emigrants* (Baltimore, MD, 1981), pp. 99; Gillian L. Gollin, *Moravians in Two Worlds* (New York, 1967).

How long Vasco de Quiroga's utopian *pueblo*-hospitals survived as model communities is not clear. But a century after their founding a visitor recorded that 'the Indians there were, up to a certain point, imitating the monks . . . and devoting themselves to prayer and the pursuit of a more perfect life'. When in time Quiroga's perfectionist glow dimmed, an image, and a tradition, remained that would prove in later years to be as consistent with Marxist ideology as with Scholastic theology and that some would associate with social reform in modern Mexico. The Jesuits would be banished from America, but 'the Hispanic-Guarani-baroque towns in the subtropical forest' they created survived as 'unique syncretic societies', continuously changing and adapting as circumstances shifted. And the Jesuits' annual reports would survive as perceptive ethnographic studies, primary sources for social anthropologists.

New England Puritanism's once explosive radicalism was compromised into a sere orthodoxy, but Roger Williams's uncompromised perfectionism, feared and despised by his contemporaries, proved in the twentieth century to be an inspiration for advocates of religious freedom, human rights, and enlightened democracy. Eliot's passions were stifled and his efforts to convert and educate the natives and to modernise their way of life led to cultural deracination, but his translation of the Bible into Algonquian, 'the first printed in a non-European tongue, and the first printed for which an entire phonetic writing system was devised', together with his tracts in the natives' language and his *Indian Grammar*, contributed significantly to the development of Indian linguistics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[39] Plockhoy's communal utopia was wiped out, but his ideas were not. Adopted by the Quaker political economist John Bellers later in the century, they were transmitted through him to Robert Owen, whose utopian hopes and radical social programmes they profoundly influenced; they were thereafter incorporated into Marx's labour theory of value, cited at length by Eduard Bernstein in his revisionist writings on social democracy, endorsed by the reformer Joshua Rowntree, and studied by modern full-employment economists. In 1968 all of Plockhoy's publications, Dutch and English, were translated into

[39] Zavala, *More in New Spain*, p. 19; Warren, *Quiroga*, pp. 118, 120–1; Ganson, *Guaraní Under Spanish Rule*, p. 84; Martínez-Serna, 'Jesuit-Indian Encounters', p. 8; Samuel H. Brockunier, *The Irrepressible Democrat, Roger Williams* (New York, 1940), pp. 283–9; Rivett, 'Christian Transformations', p. 11; Edward G. Gray, *New World Babel: Languages and Nations in Early America* (Princeton, NJ, 1999), ch. iii; Kenneth L. Miner, 'John Eliot of Massachusetts and the Beginnings of American Linguistics', *Historiographia Linguistica,* 1 (1974), 169–83; Stephen A. Guice, 'The Linguistic Work of John Eliot' (Ph.D. Diss., Michigan State University, 1990).

French as appendices to a treatise on Plockhoy's co-operative utopianism and Christian ecumenism published by the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes.[40] And if Kelpius' Chapter of Perfection quickly disappeared, the spirit of German pietism did not, and produced enduring communities of Mennonites, Amish, Dunkards, and Schwenkfelders. Even Matthias Baumann's hallucinatory perfectionism had important consequences: it helped inspire the many 'holiness revivals' of the nineteenth century in both Europe and America and left traces in modern American evangelicalism.[41]

The search for perfection, generated in Europe's vortex, when played out in the spatial amplitudes of the West, was the source not of monstrous tyrannies but of spiritual and moral striving. It did not become the 'recipe for bloodshed' that Berlin so feared because everywhere it lacked the ultimate power to coerce. Utopianism, secular or religious, becomes a 'road to inhumanity' when it is enforced by a monopoly of power—ultimate, unconstrained power in whatever form it might appear: the repressive power of the Soviet state, the annihilatory power of the Nazi regime, the mind-blinding power of Maoist gangs, the suffocating power of Islamic fundamentalism, each of which emerged through distinctive historical circumstances, to seek by violence what could not be achieved by persuasion.

Did Berlin not know this? In some sense of course he did. 'Two Concepts' was formally cast as a discourse on the permissible limits of coercion; 'force' and 'constraint' are repeatedly referred to, and Berlin denied that all historical conflicts are reducible to conflicts of ideas. But

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[40] Davis, *Utopia*, pp. 334–8; 'P.B.', ed., *Industry Brings Plenty. John Bellers' Scheme for a Colledge of Industry* (London, 1916); Tim Hitchcock, 'John Bellers', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004); Robert Owen, *The Life of Robert Owen . . .* (London, 1857), p. 240; idem, *A Supplementary Appendix . . .* (London, 1858) reprints Bellers' *Colledge of Industry* and writes of Bellers: 'Whatever merit can be due to an individual for the original discovery of a plan that, in its consequences, is calculated to effect more substantial and permanent benefit to mankind than any ever yet perhaps contemplated by the human mind, it all belongs exclusively to John Bellers'; Eduard Bernstein, *Cromwell and Communism: Socialism and Democracy in the Great English Revolution* ([1895] trans. H. J. Stenning, London, 1930), ch. xv; Joshua Rowntree, *Social Service: Its Place in the Society of Friends* (London, 1913), pp. 48–54; J. K. Fuz, *Welfare Economics in English Utopias . . .* (The Hague, 1952), pp. 55–62; Jean Séguy, *Utopie Coopérative et Oecuménisme: Pieter Cornelisz Plockhoy van Zurick-Zee, 1620–1700* (Paris, La Haye, 1968).

[41] C. Lee Hopple, 'Spatial Development of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Plain Dutch . . .', *Pennsylvania Folklife*, 21 (1971–2), 18–20, 30–40; Yoder (ed.), *Rhineland Emigrants*, p. 99; Melvin E. Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century* (Metuchen, NJ, 1980).

political concepts, he believed, when not subjected to rational criticism can 'acquire an unchecked momentum and an irresistible power over multitudes'.[42] From his embattled position in the defence of a liberal alternative to totalitarianism the enemy was ideological perfectionism, the passionate pursuit of which he took to be the driving force behind the twentieth century's tyrannies. No one knew better than Berlin or expressed more brilliantly the genealogy and structure of perfectionist ideas. But their threat to civilisation, in the most general terms, lay not in their intrinsic malevolence but in the brutality of those who implacably imposed them: the populist thugs, the fanatical monopolists of power—beings utterly alien to Berlin's sensibilities, incomprehensible to his humanely inquiring mind.

[42] Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty', pp. 119–21, 132.