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## IMPERIALISM, SOCIAL INEQUALITY, AND THE POTENTIAL DANGERS OF SCIENTIFIC PROGRESS IN WELLS' *MEN LIKE GODS*

Vicky Tchaparian\*

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2516-7424>

Lebanese University, Lebanon

Wells' science fiction novel *Men Like Gods* (1923) explores themes of utopian societies, human nature, and the potential for societal transformation. It comments on issues such as imperialism, social inequality, and the probable dangers of scientific progress. The Utopian world he had created, *The Island*, includes an advanced society where humans live in an idyllic state of equality, peace, and technological sophistication. The inhabitants of *The Island*, known as *Men Like Gods*, have transcended many of the social and political issues that plague the Earth's societies. The novel presents travelers who are transported to a technologically advanced world where the society is balanced and free from the destructive technological influences that exist in our own world.

**Keywords:** imperialism, social inequality, science, dangers, *Earthlings*, *Utopia*.

### Introduction

H.G. Wells, born in Kent, England in 1866, was an English writer, prolific in many genres. He was a journalist, sociologist, and a novelist who was referred to as "Shakespeare of science fiction," by Brian Aldiss (Warren, 2004). Though his non-fiction works are of different literary genres, such as: social commentary, politics, history, popular science, satire, biography, and autobiography, he was best known for his science fiction novels and was called the "father of science fiction" (Williams, 2024). In his Utopian novel *Men Like Gods*, Wells presents a hopeful society that is based on scientific advancement. However, the system's perfection raises questions about the future of human creativity worldwide and the dangers of society's submission to the advocates of technology. They stand for a form of culture that is incredible, pure, and unaffected by any religion or conflict. The aim of this research is

\* vicky.tchaparian@hotmail.com

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to reveal the fact that the earth is not a perfect place for mankind, nor is it technologically well developed. The revelation of Wells's Utopia, where men live like Gods and technology is highly developed, shows how far are the earthlings from perfection. The social systems they have created have endangered their minds to an extent that scientific progress is considered a curse rather than a blessing.

### Methodology

Wells writes *Men Like Gods* in a manner that makes readers consider if scientific breakthroughs, that purify society of ills may also have potential dangers. This fact will be studied in the following research through the division mentioned below:

- A- A general glimpse on H.G. Wells, the novelist and his novel *Men Like Gods*.
- B- Wells' Criticism of the Concept of Imperialism in *Men Like Gods*.
- C- Wells' Criticism of the Concept of Social Inequality in *Men Like Gods*.
- D- Potential Dangers of Scientific Progress in *Men Like Gods*.

### Consequences of scientific progress on earth from Wells' perspective in *Men Like Gods*

#### A- A general glimpse on H.G. Wells, the novelist and his novel *Men Like Gods*.

Quite early in his career, Wells explored different ways to organize a society and wrote a number of Utopian novels. Having more than fifty novels and dozens of short stories in his account, Wells was best known for his Utopian novels. His first Utopian novel was called *A Modern Utopia* (Wells, 1905), which shows a country with "no imports but meteorites, and no exports at all" (Wells, 1923). *Men Like Gods*, which is another utopian novel, offers its readers Wells' vision of a world which he believes is free from social inequities. The novel illustrates how things are in the social system of the protagonist's world, and compares it to the Utopia where he is a visitor. Wells presents his protagonist, Mr. Barnstaple, in a situation, where he's unable to bear things in his family anymore. As he puts it:

*His three sons, who were all growing up, seemed to get leggier and larger every day; they sat down in the chairs he was just going to sit down in; they played him off his own pianola; they filled the house with hoarse, vast laughter at jokes that one couldn't demand to be told ... Their hats were everywhere. They were late for breakfast. They went to bed every night in a storm of uproar:*

*"Haw, Haw, Haw-bump!" and their mother seemed to like it. They all cost money, with a cheerful disregard of the fact that everything had gone up except r. Barnstaple's earning power.*

(Wells, 2017)

Being caught in such a situation in his own home, Mr. Barnstaple decides to go for a vacation, leaving his wife and children behind. However, his intentions are derailed when he and a few other Englishmen are inadvertently transported to a parallel universe that the "Earthlings" call Utopia.

*Utopia* is a perfectly developed Earth that is around 3,000 years ahead of humanity and has a population of 200,000,000 inhabitants. In this community, politics has died away, and advanced scientific research has flourished. Additionally, Utopia operates as a successfully realized anarchy with no global governance. Furthermore, life in Utopia is governed by "the five principles of liberty": privacy, free movement, unlimited knowledge, truthfulness, and free discussion allowing criticism. What is interesting here is the fact that though these travelers have the opportunity to stay in this perfect world, they are still forced to face the dilemma of whether to adapt to this new world or return to their flawed reality.

### **B- Wells' criticism of the concept of imperialism in *Men Like Gods***

According to Cornell Law School, imperialism is a political strategy, practice, state policy, or advocacy that involves expanding power via territory acquisition or by expanding political and economic dominance over other regions ("Imperialism", 2022). Moreover, according to Oxford English Dictionary, imperialism is a policy of extending a country's power and influence through colonization, use of military force, or other means (Brown, 2020). In *Men Like Gods*, Wells criticizes imperialism by comparing the egalitarian and cooperative society of Utopia and the exploitative tendencies of the Earth. For example, when the Earthlings first arrive in Utopia, they immediately adopt an imperialist mentality and strive for supremacy over this highly developed society (Wells, 2017). Using his fictional "journey" as a critique of the flaws of both Western imperialism and the society of his era, Wells introduces the British travelers, representing the imperialist power structure. They initially look at the Island's inhabitants with a sense of superiority, their journey to a foreign land mirroring the imperial attitudes of the time—an outsider perspective that seeks to dominate or "civilize" the unknown. However, the travelers eventually realize that the Island's society is superior to their own and challenges the assumptions of Western superiority thus calling attention to the flaws of imperialism. Accordingly, in the course of his novel, Wells examines the harmful effects of such objectives through the figure of Mr. Barnstaple and portrays Earthlings as a band of thieves and destroyers who have the potential to contaminate the Utopians' peace and return them to the condition of Earth's

deterioration. After staying in this ideal state for a whole month, Mr. Barnstaple asks how he can best serve Utopia. In answer to his question, he is told, “by returning to your own world,” which he regretfully accepts.

This is an outspoken criticism of imperialism for being a driving force behind conflicts and a hindrance to the development of an advanced civilization. Moreover, through Mr. Barnstaple's character, Wells approaches imperialism from moral and human perspectives. The ethical vices of imperialism - dominance rather than cooperation - are stated in his dilemma between supporting his friends' imperialism or rather combine it with utopian ideals (Kumar, 2020). Consequently, Wells reveals to his readers that the utopian society is secure and runs its affairs without the fear of any imperialistic invasion.

#### C- Wells' criticism of the concept of social inequality in *Men Like Gods*

In Wells' utopian society, there are no classes, no property owned by anybody, no wars, and no poverty. Accordingly, it is essential to study different notions of freedom that have been analyzed from the perspective of key figures in the history of modern political thought such as those from Marx and figures in sociology such as Ashley Crossman. For Marx, history is driven by class struggle. He argued that different historical periods are defined by the dominant mode of production and the conflicts between the social classes that control it. In capitalist society, for example, there is a conflict between the bourgeoisie (owners of the means of production) and the proletariat (working class). Marx believed that this class struggle would eventually lead to a revolution, overthrowing capitalism and leading to a classless, communist society. He focused on the material conditions and economic realities of human existence considering history as the result of material contradictions, particularly class struggle (Marx, 1994). He also believed that the goal of history was to create a society free from class divisions and exploitation. Marx believed in dialectical materialism and considered that history progresses through material conditions and class struggles (ibid). On the other hand, the famous sociologist, Ashley Crossman, defines social inequality as the uneven distribution of wealth, privilege, and power among people and groups within a society (Crossman, 2021). As for Wells' utopian society in *Men Like Gods*, there are no social classes, no property owned by anybody, no wars, neither privilege or power, and no poverty. Looking around through the eyes of his protagonist, Wells is revealing the perfection that dwells in the framework of the Utopian society, criticizing the English social structure of the Victorian England of his time which was built on the class system which was characterized with social inequality. Describing the beauty of *The Island*, Wells writes:

*As they approached these mountains, broad stretches of golden corn-land replaced the green of the pastures and then the*

*cultivation became more diversified. He noted unmistakable vineyards on sunny slopes, and the number of workers visible and the habitations multiplied. The little squadron of aero planes flew up a broad valley towards a pass so that Mr. Barnstaple was able to scrutinize the mountain scenery.*

(Wells, 2017)

When Mr. Barnstaple, an Earth journalist, wakes up in Utopia, he is instantly impressed by how different the Utopian social architecture is compared to that of the Earth. His insights highlight the destructiveness and mechanistic character of the Earth's social structures. For instance, the inhabitants of Utopia reject the Earthlings' attempt to rule them according to their hierarchical thinking because Wells' perfect society does not justify such systems. Like other science fiction authors, Wells depicts his ideal society free from tyranny, racism, war, famine, and disorder. He gives himself and everyone else the chance to emphasize that because people are the ones who have control over their lives and the survival of everything, they must establish such a society themselves. Also, if they pool their resources, they may achieve a new level of accomplishment that they have never attained before (Chander & Sharma, 2023). Thus, Wells uses his concept of Utopia's social structure to further illustrate the scope of potential for the progress of human civilizations in case humanity can free themselves from rank and gender biases.

The Utopian social structure is theoretically instructional for a better-organized society because of several reasons, such as: Utopians' framework of individual improvement, collective responsibility, and ban on wealth discrimination. Indeed, *Men Like Gods* offers its readers Wells' vision of a world free from social inequities, while also letting them reflect on their social systems. With reference to society and inequality, the book serves a specific purpose by illustrating the imperfections that existed in England in the Victorian Era contrasted to Utopia which was almost a perfect state for mankind.

#### **D- Potential dangers of scientific progress in *Men Like Gods***

The implications of sustaining a highly technical and scientific progress rate are linked to hazards associated with scientific advancement. Therefore, technological advancements help individuals grow and advance, but they also come with dangers that should be considered. These potential warnings are shown in Wells' novel in a society which is free from hunger, illness, and war because of technological advancements. However, the narrative poses essential questions about the possible effects of such progress. The possibility of adverse outcomes from scientific research is one of the primary risks. For instance, people on earth are transported to Utopia by the novel's accidental inter-universal experiment but these people are accompanied by

bacteria (Croci, 2017). As a result, they are quarantined in a castle on a cliff. This shows that although scientific growth moves human progress forward, inherent risks should be carefully considered. These possible dangers are examined through the creation of a Utopian society that has used technology to end poverty, illness, and war. The story also emphasizes the unforeseen results, repercussions, and ethical dilemmas of scientific advancements.

Another worry is that people with bad intentions may abuse scientific discoveries. An example of this is the fact that some visitors from the Earth consider Utopia's sophisticated technology and tranquil culture as ways for exploitation and invasion. As a first move, the "Earthlings" plan to capture hostages, but they only manage to murder a few Utopians. This connects us to real-world worries that if scientific progress is not controlled, it will be utilized for evil deeds like tyranny or war. Moreover, despite its seeming perfection, this system raises questions about different issues such as: autonomy and self-governance of the society, the dominance of technocrats in the social system, as well as the disregard of any goals or ideals that are not technology related.

As Wells was regarded as an enormously influential figure, the criticism he presented in *Men Like Gods* attracted the attention of German officials because of his criticism of the political situation in Germany. One of the major literary critics of his time, Malcolm Cowley stated, "by the time he was forty, H.G. Wells' influence was wider than any other living English writer" (Malcolm, 1934). On May 10, 1933, his books were burned by the Nazi youth in Berlin and his works were banned from libraries and book stores. Moreover, after World War II, it was discovered that Wells' name was included in the alphabetical list of people selected for immediate arrest. His name was written in "The Black Book" that the SS (schutzstaffle /Nazi security forces) had prepared.

## Conclusion

Conceived in the aftermath of World War I, the novel reflects the failings of human nature but offers hope for the future, when men and women may live like gods. Moreover, the ideal society that *Men Like Gods* depicts provides a forum for addressing current social concerns, including societal inequality, imperialism, and the possible risks of unchecked scientific discovery. Indeed, the author presents a picture of a developed civilization via the protagonist's journey, inspiring readers to consider the potential and shortcomings of their world.

Thus, this essay suggests that Wells' novel, *Men Like Gods*, is a call to consider the hazard regarding the unfavorable results of scientific growth. However, at the same time it shows that Wells' novel offers an enduringly relevant view of an ideal society, since Mr. Barnstaple brings with him a renewed determination to contribute to the effort to make a terrestrial Utopia on Earth. Wells tries to give hope for future societies

by expressing his belief that mankind has the ability to overcome tragedies such as war or starvation. He writes:

*There was no knowledge in this Utopia of which Earth had not the germs, there was no power used here that Earthlings might not use. Here, but for the ignorance and darkness and the spites and malice they permit, ...We could do it.*

(Wells, 2017)

Just as the title suggests, the people who live in Utopia are the masters of their own fate. They have concentrated on their purpose of achieving perfection so much that they have already achieved a god-like status and control all aspects of their world. Wells describes how the Utopian people, after many catastrophes and several wars, lifted themselves to new heights of human development and reached perfection. However, though he envies the perfection to which the Utopian society has reached, he is aware of the potential dangers that such a society may encounter in living such a high-tech life. Accordingly, Wells raises questions about the relationship between technology and human value, suggesting that technological progress, when aligned with humanistic principles, could lead to a better world. Thus, in *Men Like Gods*, the travelers are transported to a world where technology is advanced but the society remains balanced and free from the destructive influences that exist on Earth.

### **Conflict of interests**

The author declares no ethical issues or conflict of interests in this research.

### **Ethical standards**

The author affirms this research does not involve human subjects.

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ԻՄՊԵՐԻԱԼԻԶՄԸ, ՍՈՑԻԱԼԱԿԱՆ ԱՆՀԱՎԱՍԱՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ ԵՎ  
ԳԻՏԱԿԱՆ ԱՌԱՋԸՆԹԱՑԻ ՊՈՏԵՆՑԻԱԼ ՎՏԱՆԳՆԵՐԸ ՈՒԵԼՄԻ  
«ՄԱՐԴԻՔ ԻՆՉՊԵՍ ԱՍՏՎԱԾՆԵՐ» ՎԵՊՈՒՄ

### Վիքի Զափարեան

Ուելսի «Մարդիկ ինչպես աստվածներ» գիտաֆանտաստիկ վեպը (1923) ուսումնասիրում է ուսուպիստական հասարակությունների, մարդկային եռթյան և հասարակության վերափոխման ներուժի թեմաները: Այն մեկնարանում է այնպիսի հարցեր, ինչպիսիք են իմպերիալիզմը, սոցիալական անհավասարությունը և գիտական առաջընթացի հավանական վտանգները: Նրա ստեղծած ուսուպիստական աշխարհը՝ Կղզին, ներկայացնում է զարգացած հասարակություն, որտեղ մարդիկ ապրում են հավասարության, խաղաղության և տեխնոլոգիական կատարելագործված հովվերգության պայմաններում: Կղզու բնակիչները հայտնի են որպես աստվածների նման մարդիկ: Նրանք հաղթահարել են սոցիալական և քաղաքական բազմաթիվ խնդիրներ, որոնք պատուհասել են երկրագնդի հասարակություններին: Վեպում ձանապարհորդներ են, որոնք տեղափոխվում են տեխնոլոգիապես զարգացած մի աշխարհ: Այստեղ հասարակությունը հավասարակշռված է և զերծ մեր աշխարհում գոյություն ունեցող տեխնոլոգիական կործանարար ազդեցություններից:

Բանալի բառեր՝ իմպերիալիզմ, սոցիալական անհավասարություն, զիսություն, վտանգներ, երկրացիներ, ուսուպիստական կատարելագործված հովվերգության պայմաններում: Վեպում ձանապարհորդներ են, որոնք տեղափոխվում են տեխնոլոգիապես զարգացած մի աշխարհ: Այստեղ հասարակությունը հավասարակշռված է և զերծ մեր աշխարհում գոյություն ունեցող տեխնոլոգիական կործանարար ազդեցություններից: