9.1. A Typology of Utopian Knowledge

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Abstract

To translate utopian theory into transformative education, a clearer understanding of utopian knowledge is essential. The typology of utopian knowledge introduced in this essay summarizes various utopists' understandings of utopian knowledge. It both embraces the fleeting, diverse character of utopia and elaborates on more specific aspects of utopian knowledge. Four dimensions and four modes of utopian knowledge are presented to provide insights into the variety of aspects that should be considered in the construction of utopian knowledge. This illustrates particularities of knowing and un-knowing connected to utopian knowledge. Finally, we offer a glimpse at the complex interrelations between education and utopian knowledge. Applying the typology of utopian knowledge in educational settings should support educators and learners to get to know utopian possibilities more thoroughly.

Key words: utopian knowledge, typology, utopian education, education of desire, constructivism

Transformative paths towards utopia often rely on a specific kind of education; for example, the education of desire (Abensour, 1999; Levitas, 2010), educated hope (Levitas, 1990: 20; Papastephanou, 2009: 103), utopian pedagogy (Webb, 2017) or processes of "becoming utopian" (Moylan 2021: 13). From a practical educational perspective, however, it remains unclear what it is that we have to learn for utopia.

The following typology of utopian knowledge results from utopian thinkers' analyses of how and what we can know in a utopian way. At first glance, it might seem counterintuitive to view utopian knowledge as so structured and ordered. After all, the main benefit of utopian knowledge can be described as its openness, diversity, inclusiveness and difference from how we mostly or usually know things. Nevertheless, in order to use utopian knowledge as a framework, it is crucial to get a clearer picture of what utopian knowledge might and might

not include. It will not always be possible to differentiate between utopian and non-utopian knowledge. But when reflecting on the knowledge we construct or co-construct with others, the typology can help identify blind spots of utopian ideas as well as anti-utopian knowledge. Sometimes, we might only think in one of the modes of the typology of utopian knowledge. Through actively engaging with the knowledge we are dealing with, it can be broadened and combined with other knowledge forms.

Via the typology of utopian knowledge (Figure 1), it is proposed that many aspects considered relevant to knowing the world in a utopian way can be structured along two axes. The first axis builds on the distinction of denunciation and annunciation, originated by Paulo Freire (1978) and further developed by utopists such as Tom Moylan (2021) and Marianna Papastephanou (2016). Denunciatory utopian knowledge is looking at existing persons, lives and worlds. In utopian studies, this kind of knowledge tends to be not only a depiction of the present but is often connected to critical reflection(s). Papastephanou emphasizes the often-overlooked importance of denunciation. This is especially important for learners as they should not only imagine becoming a citizen of utopia but also building knowledge from a denunciating stance as a citizen of dystopia (Papastephanou, 2016: 47).

Figure 1. Typology of utopian knowledge.
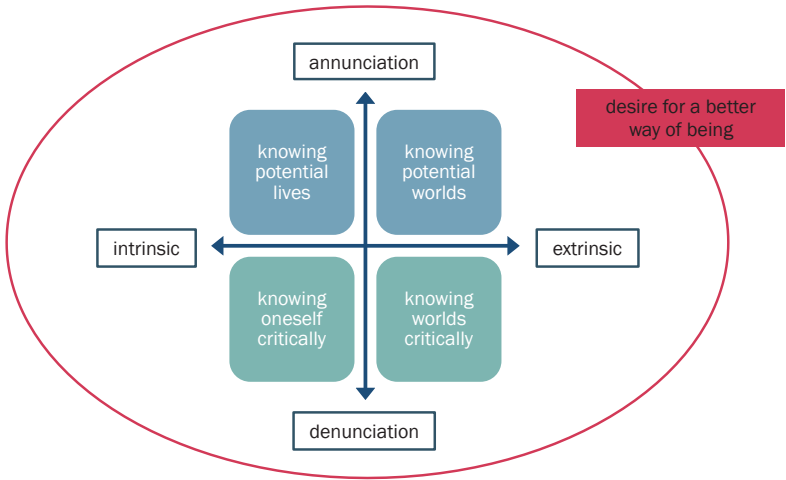
Knowing the world in the way of utopian denunciation entails an inextricable link of grasping and criticizing it at the same time. This builds on the utopian assessment of reality as an unfinished place in which utopia may be located (Levitas, 1990: 19). Critique and desire are two sides of the preliminarity of the word that is crucial for utopianism as a space of possibility. This space shaped by the dialectical relationship of denunciation and annunciation is what Moylan calls the "continuum of lived, embodied, space for building a new society" (2021: 202). Thereby, denunciation is tied to and can lead to annunciatory utopian knowledge; entailing images, feelings, shapes and experiences of utopia (Fitting, 1998: 14–15).

Annunciation, or anticipation, means looking at emerging aspects of utopia. Literary utopias might be the most common manifestation of the anticipatory utopia. As we can explore imagined utopias or create our own imaginary utopias, we adopt and construct this form of utopian knowledge. Getting to know ourselves and the world in an annunciatory utopian manner, we explore how our lives could be different or better. Moylan frames this as the "cognitive encounter with what might be and with what might be done to get there" (Moylan, 2021: 107–8). Contrary to the widespread separation of knowledge and action, utopianism is not prepending pure knowledge but building knowledge in, through and in preparation of action. It this sense, it might not be applicable to separate knowledge and action as is often attempted in educational settings or studies. Instead, knowing utopia becomes part of acting utopian and vice versa.

Intrinsic and extrinsic knowledge form the second axis of the typology of utopian knowledge. The location of certain knowledge on this axis indicates its perspective. We can construct utopian knowledge from an intrinsic, individual perspective but also from an extrinsic, societal perspective. Characteristics of the resulting utopian thoughts and ideas will vary significantly as they are influenced by different backgrounds and fulfilling different aims. Strengthening the extrinsic aspect of utopian knowledge may enable others not only to re-envision the world but also explore possible changes (Moylan, 2021: 107). Knowing the world differently will in this sense also strengthen dreaming of the world differently. In this regard, extrinsic utopian knowledge is explicitly not a simple summary of facts describing the world. Darren Webb refers to this specificity of utopian knowledge as a "cognitive-emotional orientation … which enables one to decipher and transform the world" (2012: 598). In accordance with studies on the insufficiency of factual knowledge, utopian knowledge thereby sheds new light on the many possible aspects of knowing the world, including feelings, dreams and hopes.

However, the intrinsic modes of knowing utopia are essential for paths towards utopia, too. For example, they may be emphasized by utopian reflections of individual processes, self-awareness and critical understanding (Moylan, 2021: 193). Even if we understand utopia as a different world or system, it is dreamed of and experienced by individuals. Knowing utopia on a personal,

intrinsic level reconnects individual lives with radical utopia. Notwithstanding the danger of blurring the radicality and originality of utopianism, the importance of utopian practice has gained ever more relevance, especially in the course of the intensifying climate crisis. The construction of this knowledge takes place in appreciation of situated, embedded, embodied and personal experience without, however, reducing utopia to this area.

These four dimensions of annunciation and denunciation, intrinsic and extrinsic knowledge are not sufficient to fully represent the characteristics and manifestations of utopian knowledge. They are grounded in and bound to the broad definition and understanding of utopia as the "desire for a better way of being" (Levitas, 2010: 221). This utopian desire grounds the attempts to construct utopian knowledge and offers guidance in this process. Getting to know the world in a utopian way, learners not only gain the certainty that everything could be different but construct their own knowledge of what a better way of being might look like. This education of desire was first described by Miguel Abensour in his analysis of Morrissian utopia: Morris' assessment that we cannot know the future led him to the elaboration of the education of desire (Abensour, 1999: 145). Hence, this desire is the result of the simultaneous negation of definitive knowledge of the future and the endorsement of knowing utopias in diverse ways. Knowing utopias is both the result and further incentive of the desire for a better way of being.

Modes of Utopian Knowledge

Neither of the extremes of the two axes of the typology occurs in a pure form when constructing utopian knowledge. In the following, we present four modes of utopian knowledge and elaborate on their characteristics. The four modes are knowing oneself critically, knowing worlds critically, knowing potential lives and knowing potential worlds.

Knowing oneself critically summarizes the knowledge we can construct on our individual experience of life, critically looking at what exists within ourselves and our world. The content of this knowledge cannot be imparted to others since it is a personal knowledge which is different for everyone and therefore has to be constructed individually. This process not only reflects the individual independently of others. Starting from one person, connections and surroundings might be considered as well. Here, the continuous axis between intrinsic and extrinsic knowledge can be identified, which refers to countless manifestations somewhere in between.

Knowing worlds critically operates with the same critical stance towards the existing but with a much broader perspective. It refers to the common experiences and shared systems of groups of people. The acquisition of this kind of utopian knowledge enables us to better understand our world(s). If we understand utopia as a detailed depiction of an alternative society, utopian knowledge has to include knowledge of society and its fundamental processes. At this point, the continuum between denunciation and annunciation should be emphasized. To get to know the existing world(s) in a profoundly utopian way, the confrontation with different potential utopias will be equally necessary.

Knowing potential worlds also depends to a certain degree on the experiences of world(s) that we collected and the knowledge we constructed thereof. This mode of utopian knowledge might be the one most often associated with utopia: the ideas and examples of different possible worlds and systems. Knowledge of multiple and diverse potential worlds is crucial here, as it is different from potentially authoritarian attempts to know "the one utopia". Utopian books, movies and games contribute to the widespread knowledge of potential worlds. Tendencies to limit utopian knowledge to this mode contributes to the association of utopia with a story of an unrealistic world. In order to construct utopian knowledge in this mode it might not be sufficient to hear of or get to know utopian examples. It might be critical to construct one's own knowledge of utopian worlds. Utopian education that supports learners to initiate this kind of process is critical.

Knowing potential lives reflects utopian anticipation on the more intrinsic level. Utopias can only be fully known via these personal ways of knowing potential lives. This entails feeling and experiencing them in some way in our imaginations, in works of art, in the stories we tell. People leading diverse kinds of lives might inspire learners to (re-)construct their knowledge of their potential lives. Ultimately, they might, however, have to explore the potentialities for themselves, from their point of view. Since the majority of potential lives might not yet be manifested in reality, the construction of this knowledge relies on creativity, imagination and desire.

Utopian Knowing and Un-Knowing

Students of utopia have to acknowledge that utopia can never fully be known. Attempts to compile a collection of utopian knowledge would dangerously limit the scope of their thoughts. Reducing utopian knowledge in this way would undermine utopian potentialities and functions. Learning about

utopia is rather about constructing and encountering one's own utopian knowledge. Hence, the typology of utopian knowledge tries to include various aspects that together form utopian knowledge rather than limiting it to one dimension or mode. The construction of utopian knowledge should always include all four modes of utopian knowledge. Interrelating those modes enables us to recognize the variety of utopianism. Knowing in a utopian way connects denunciatory and annunciatory, intrinsic and extrinsic knowledge to fundamentally new understandings. Despite the emphasized openness and irreducibility of utopian knowledge, the evolvement of this kind of knowledge also relies on profound processes of un-knowing. Belief systems stressing the lack of alternatives or the inescapability of certain things interfere with utopian knowledge construction, and therefore have to be radically scrutinized or un-known. This un-knowing can be led by "defamiliarising the familiar, familiarising the strange, liberating the imagination from the constraints of common sense" (Webb, 2016: 442). Thereby, learners can confront and begin to accept a certain kind of plurality of knowledge and potentialities.

Getting to Know Utopia through Education

Education for knowing utopia can be neither a pure transfer of knowledge, nor the pure empowerment of students to acquire their own utopian knowledge. It will be partly taught, co-created and constructed individually or collectively. Educators have to provide some utopian ideas to create a sense of utopia and to enable learners to develop their utopian knowledge. The equally important inclusion of learners' experiences is described by Freire as "returning to them, in an organized form, what they have themselves offered in a disorganized form" (1978: 24–5). Apart from educators supporting this process, learners should acquire and construct their personal utopian knowledge. While knowledge is often selected, prepared and imparted by educators, utopian knowledge comes mainly from the learners but has to be made visible and has to be organized. As a result, "learners themselves emerge as dreamers of utopia" (Webb, 2012: 604). Knowing, dreaming and acting utopian are in this way closely interlinked and interdependent.

Concrete translations of the typology of utopian knowledge into educational programmes are beyond the scope of this essay but should be considered in further studies. Applying this typology is helpful to get a clearer picture of facets and critical factors of utopian knowledge. Thereby, educational goals can be scrutinized regarding their affinity to utopianism. Although this might not be equally relevant in every educational setting, those dealing with

current societal and ecological challenges could take advantage of educators' considerations and applications of modes of utopian knowledge. Overall, creating further places and spaces that prompt new utopian knowledge is crucial in the process of utopian education and utopia *per se.*

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