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**Crítica****The Greeks and the utopia: an overview through Ancient Greek literature, by****Rosanna Lauriola** ([lauriola@uidaho.edu](mailto:lauriola@uidaho.edu))**By:** José Provetti Junior<sup>61</sup>  
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The text that I make comment, in that number, was published in the journal “Academic Space” (2009), and it is a translation by Eva P. Bueno of an essay about of Lauriola about utopias and utopian thinking in Ancient Greek literature from Hommer to Plato, focusing on comedy by Aristófanés.

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The Lauriola teacher began her reflection by establishing the concept of “ideal life” as “(...) a perfect life, characterized by the harmony between men and nature, separate from evil and disease, immune to old age and to the death, as perfect world that does't exist and could not finally be come true. (...)”

Lauriola says that when you have a harsher reality than bearable, it is common to design a better world as a kind of hope where to navigate the heart and the human mind, in its attempt to survive.

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She states that this projection usually settles at a time and/ or place different from today. With regard to time, usually in the early designs of human existence. As for the place, just some distant and unfamiliar area on even totally fictional.

The author states, also, that in both cases, it turns the specificity of the “non-existence”. Therefore, the devise that time-space idyllic cut its issuer and its receptors space-time everyday and transports them to this dimension of existence delineated as superior and better. What characterizes itself, the Greek word “utopia” which as Lauriola (2009, p. 92), “(...) means 'nowhere'.”

Lauriola (2009, p. 93) indicates that the term “utopia” wasn't used by the Ancient Greeks, with evidence, failing that, that probably the ancients were ignorant of its meaning. However, Lauriola claims that since the highest antiquity identifies traces of utopian thought in what she calls “utopian literature” and gives as an example “The republic” by Plato.

In support of her thesis, Lauriola (2009, p. 93) reports that there are indications of thought and utopian motifs in “Works and days”, of Hesiod, and “Odyssey”, by Homer. In the first text, as Lauriola calls “time”, referring to the myth of the races and in the second case, concerning the place in the city of Faécios.

It is curious, however, that Lauriola (2009, p. 94) said, after identifying her thesis traits, that is, that utopian thinking had its clues from Homer, among the Ancient Greeks, that: “(...) While it is clear these idealized images of Homer and Hesiod, both poets, had no awareness of the utopian nature of her ideas, that is, had no utopian intention behind his pictures”.

So, to Lauriola, the Hellenics of the Dark Ages, that is, in the ninth century B. C. and the Archaic periods, Hesiod in the eighth century B. C. no “were



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aware” of his utopian production. What, to the author, complicates the classification of the aforementioned works as a utopian.

Then, Lauriola try up a classification of literary works of utopian nature , the period between VIII-VII B. C. Centuries. Reaffirms the absence of utopian literature of the Ancient Greeks, in what she calls “strict sense” and asserts the difficult “disconcerting” ideas on the subject in the field of scholars of utopian literature, implying thereby the difficult in handle it in Hellenic Antiquity.

Lauriola (2009, p. 94) states that the greatest difficulty means defining utopia, insofar as “(...) The dynamic relationship between the vision and the reality is often a problem in defining utopia (...)” generating disagreement among scholars.

Reasons Lauriola (2009, p. 94-95):

If the vision is the creation of a mental image, that is, an image, that exists only in our mind, your starting point is, however, the reality, whether this is an abstraction or an escape from reality. The abstraction or escape can give different characteristics of utopia and, somehow determine the different purposes of utopia. The abstraction implies a process of distillation, as it were, which is taken from something else at the same time with putting the inevitable to replace the removed parts.

Thus, Lauriola reported on the existence of a classification of utopias into two groups: the first, called “escape utopia” and the second, “reconstruction utopia”. The first is a flight movement of reality as unbearable as it happens; the second, would be something purposeful, “in trying to escape condition of reality in the future” (LAURIOLA, 2009, p. 95).

Then, the author explains the two utopian terms.

To what she called the “reconstruction of utopia”, Lauriola of the example of Plato, in her “The republic”. Identifies this work as being locatable in



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decay time, in that Athens had lost the Peloponnesian War and democracy, the political system adopted by this city-state gave power to the people, that Plato considered disqualified from the exercise of power.

In the case of “scape utopias”, says Lauriola (2009, p. 96-97) that this kind of utopia arises, Greece, from the fourth century B. C., during the decline of the leagues of Delos and Peloponnese, due to the war of the same name, and after, Macedonian rule, carried out by Alexander Great, who brought the *polis* decisive structural degradation to its continuity.

Arises during this period, stories of islands in the world ends and wonderful countries, described by travelers who knew them. As an exemple, Lauriola (2009, p. 97), inaugurate a new utopia style, based on fantasy literature and provides the identification of the intent of the authors to provide an scape to reality in which they lived.

Lauriola (2009, p. 97) Stops carried out line of reasoning and introduces the topic of the comedy of the fifth century B. C., as a development element of the utopian genre. For the author, the comedy, the modalities of Bakhtin's analysis of the Carnival, that is, the “Land of Plenty”, and “The words upside down” would be present in the ancient Hellenic comedian and would they represent a “utopian rupture” of reality.

The author goes on the examine some the comedies of Aristophanes, defending the thesis that they are utopian exemples of escape, such as “Birds”, “Lysistrata” and “Women in Parliament”.

It is interesting to note that Lauriola (2009, p. 104) always refers the Golden Age of Hesiod. In the myth of the races as a model that would have inspired the utopian genre in the comedy of Aristophanes.



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After consideration of the comedies of Aristophanes, where Lauriola strives to demonstrate the utopian aspects of the work of Athenian comedy writer, goes to the final considerations, which has within it, just a review of what had the reflected so far without any advance in the utopian thesis in Hellenic Antiquity.

Now, in considering the above noted, the text of Lauriola, issues that deserve critical evaluation, to better contribute to the field.

Initially, her text assumes that it is possible to identify pre-archaic texts, namely: “The Odyssey” and “The Works and Days” of Hesiod, the utopian literary genre elements, as it was considered the genre under the utopian displacement areas of space, the kindown of Phaeacians, in the “Odyssey”; and time, in “The Works and Days” of Hesiod.

If we consider the texts themselves, in a somewhat superficial approach and contemporary, in fact, it can be said that the poets described above, to some extent, adhere to the utopian genre.

However, under the methodology of Psychological History of Ideas and mentalities, it must be considered that Lauriola approach something committed to an anachronistic and extemporaneous vision work and culture Hellenic in these periods.

Although the author herself mention following the impossibility of “The Odyssey” and “The works and days” qualify, specifically the utopian genre, by noting that lack the poets consciousness and intentionality that abstraction of reality, without which no there utopia.

As the author takes different directions of the initial proposal about those poets, starting the analysis of “The republic” of Plato and tragic and comedyan Aristophanes works as works already something intentionally linked to



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that conscious intentionally of the very process of abstraction utopia realizes herself, at once, a gap that is up to critical reflect and develop.

How is possible Homer and Hesiod to do and simultaneously not part of the utopian genre, since it considers his works as basic education texts of Ancient Greek man and on which, essentially, the rationalist philosophy and critical revisionist Tales, Anaximander, Anaximenes of Miletus, Xenophanes of Colophon and Heraclitus of Ephesus started the rational discursive and Lauriola, thinkers like Plato, tragic and comedyographer departed this pre archaic and archaic reference for the composition of their utopias?

We believe that Lauriola even mentioned the interpretive key to this question, but did not stop for more robust reflection that would enable a referral of the issue.

When she mentions the absence of intentional consciousness of Homer and Hesiod in producing a utopia, here is the key to what was mentioned above.

The Greeks of the Dark Age and the Archaic period were unaware of the subjectivity and its role in the cognitive process of elaboration of reality, using as a criterion of truth, the conceivability while epistemological reference.

In this sense, all that was conceivable was real and, as I opened the forces of the cosmos *phýsis* man didn't elaborate in itself a conscious self-examination. It constituted as an individual, in and by society, and by the look on the other that their actions as in deep sense of natural harmony, under the ideal of the influx of *sophrosyne*, i.e., “just-made, fair-half, harmony, rhythm” was consolidating it and the social process.

To that extent, it lacked the Homer, Hesiod and his contemporaries to apperception of self and of reality as something other than itself and the self-



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perception of himself as a kind of viewer's existential process which to some extent was himself and in him all the existing, i.e., the cosmos is one.

Even with regard to Plato, the tragic and comedians of the Classical period is unlikely if you assume an intentional awareness of some abstraction of its reality, since as evidenced in Rodolfo Mondolfo (1970), even under the effect of the catastrophe language, carried out by the sophist movement, Socrates and the Socratics, including here across Aristotle, as a product of Plato's Academy, they not stepped into reflections that delimit the self, the inner and actions properly inherent subjectivity while conscious process.

In this sense, in the words of Lauriola (2009), only one could identify the utopian genre in that the abstraction of reality be characterized by intentionality, whether rationalist criticism, tragic or comic. This implies to say that the attempts of scholars in the field approach of the Archaic and Classical texts without the above caveat lead to interpretative mistake to which Lauriola even pointed but not developed because to do so would preclude the development of its thesis, namely, that there would be a line of continuity in the utopian genre from pre Archaic period to Contemporary.

Therefore, it is believed that the reflection of Lauriola (2009) on the utopian genre characteristics are very relevant in their specifics, however, does not apply without restrictions to the works of the Ancient Greeks, are the Archaic period as the Classic and, to the extent, it shows up a new investigative line in order to understand what was at stake in Homer and Hesiod's texts.

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