‘A map of the world that does not include Utopia’, said Oscar Wilde memorably, ‘is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which humanity is always landing.’ Wilde was not using the word utopia in its classical sense; dreams of a classical utopia had ceased to exercise imaginations long before. Classical utopia had represented, in Judith Schklar’s words, an ‘expression of the craftsman’s desire for perfection and permanence’ and was not so much emblematic of faith in the future as of contempt for the present. For St Thomas More, for example, the utopian enterprise was concerned to contrast the crudeness and dissolution of contemporary Europe with the unity and virtue of classical antiquity. To heighten the contrast between the indicative and the normative, More gave no indication of how utopia was to be arrived at. Classical utopia, inspired by a belief in a universal, rational morality, failed to survive the age of reason ushered in by the French revolution. Thereafter classical utopia gave way to progress and science, and political philosophers who wanted to change the world instead of only writing about it eschewed classical utopianism. Marx and Engels, for example, believed that they understood fully the course of history and could predict future developments with scientific accuracy: what need did they have of utopia? ‘It was ideology’, Schklar noted, ‘that undid utopia after the French Revolution.’

Yet if nineteenth- and twentieth-century socialist writers were not utopian in the classical sense, they did paint pictures of the kind of society they hoped to achieve, and they intended these pictures to be understood both as criticisms of contemporary society and as inspiration for reformers and revolutionaries. ‘The Golden Age lies before us and not behind’, said the scientific socialist Edward Bellamy, ‘and it is not far away.’ Like their classical predecessors, too, socialist ‘utopians’
took for granted a faith in man’s capacity for justice and rationality. As Walsh wrote: ‘the hope of an earthly utopia can exist … only because the dreamer assumes that he and his neighbours are good enough and rational enough to sit down and plan a better world. Not merely plan it, but build it.’ So the new ‘utopians’ did more than paint a picture of what their new worlds would be like; they told us how to get there.

The task of providing a picture of a future society that is worth striving after is a crucial one and so merits our detailed consideration. So far in this work we have sought to establish and sustain a distinction between ethical and scientific socialists and will continue to do so, despite the acknowledged variety of utopian visions, in the discussion that follows. We shall consider one example each of ‘ethical’ and ‘scientific’ utopias, those painted by William Morris and H.G. Wells. At the end of each we shall consider works of imaginative literature which offer a comment on and critique of ethical and scientific utopias, those of Aldous Huxley and George Orwell.

**The utopia of the individual**

William Morris believed men to be ‘artists’ by nature, by which he meant that their most basic instincts were creative and not, for example, political, in the Aristotelian sense. The most fulfilling thing a person could do was to create, and the job of society was to maximise the opportunities for creativity. In many respects this is as fundamental a statement of ethical socialism as we are likely to meet. Morris himself resorted to politics chiefly because he believed that bourgeois society was structured in such a way as to restrain these creative instincts and thus prevent man from becoming whole. Morris was persuaded to become a socialist precisely because the men he saw about him were stunted and incomplete – alienated (in the Rousseauian sense) – and in no way comparable to his vision of the full man. ‘In the times when art was abundant and healthy’, he wrote, ‘all men were more or less artists; that is to say, the instinct for beauty which is inborn in every complete man had such force that the whole body of craftsmen habitually and without conscious effort made beautiful things … and the audience was nothing short of the whole people.’ Potentially we are all artists. But what exactly is art?

‘Art’, says Morris, echoing Ruskin, ‘is man’s expression of his joy in labour.’ Morris identifies art not as a specific category of human activity but as a frame of mind in which most activities may be undertaken. If one takes pleasure in doing a particular task it becomes art. Our pleasure should be twofold: pleasure in the making and pleasure in the