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Utopias of Work: Historical Perspectives Program and Book of Abstracts

Thursday, 22 October, 2026 – Friday 23 October, 2026

Recent changes in the world of work – changes such as growing precarity in people's access to the goods of work, the rise of platform work, the resurgent popularity of the ideal of productive self-sufficiency, and the unequal impact of automation and AI – have renewed interest in how work might be valued, compensated, and organized differently. The moral issues raised by these changes are not new, however, and we would benefit from revisiting the long history of thinking about ideals of work and its place in the good life. This conference turns to the history of philosophy and political economy for utopian and radical perspectives on work. We will explore how philosophers and political economists from Plato to Gandhi saw the rational or democratic organization of firms, unions, and labor markets as means of advancing justice, freedom, and virtue at work. In particular, we are interested in insights from these figures that might help to address today's injustices surrounding work. The conference will conclude with a panel on the overall relevance of returning to utopian and revolutionary thinkers from our past. What (if anything) can we learn from them for the 21st century?

This event is part of the Ammodo project "The political philosophy of work - expanding our vision" and is organized by Lisa M. Herzog and Tyler C. Re at the University of Groningen, Faculty of Philosophy. For more information about the project, please visit <https://www.rug.nl/staff/l.m.herzog/project-description.pdf>.

Participants can [REGISTER HERE](#) (deadline: 9 October 2026)

Contact

Conference Organizers

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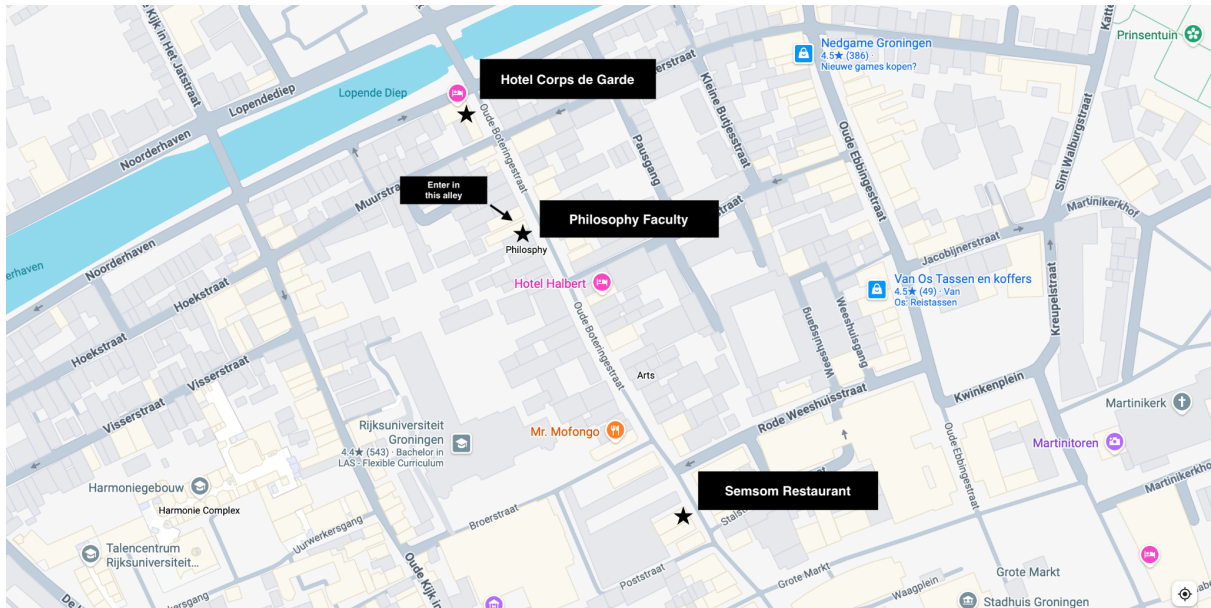
Tyler C. Re (t.c.re@rug.nl; +19196165638)

Location

Room Omega (ground floor)

Philosophy Faculty, University of Groningen

Oude Boteringestraat 52, 9712 GL Groningen ([Google Maps](#))



Helpful Links and Destinations

- [Semsom Restaurant](#) (dinner for speakers Thursday night)
- Coffee near the faculty building: [Black and Bloom](#) and [Koffiestation](#)
- University of Groningen [Academy Building](#) (main university building) and [library](#)
- [The Forum](#) ([Google Maps](#)), a public cultural center with library, study desks, theater, and museum exhibits located in the center of the city

Please email Tyler (contact details above) with any questions about the city.

Schedule

Thursday, 22 October 2026

All talks and breaks in room Omega.

9:30 - 10:00	Welcome and Coffee
10:00 - 11:30	Keynote David Leopold (University of Oxford) - Utopian Work: Lessons from the Nineteenth-Century
11:30 - 12:30	Özhan Öztürk (Eötvös Loránd University) - Reversing the Division of Labor: Badiou's Utopian Challenge to Plato Lisa Herzog (University of Groningen) - Care for the working class: Flora Tristan on the political economy of care work
12:30 - 13:30	Lunch
13:30 - 14:30	Michael Eigner (University of Groningen) - The Workplace after the Revolution: A Conceptualization of a New Kind of Group Agent Natalia Danilkina (Independent Researcher) - Labor Transformations on the Way to Self-regulating Machines in A. Bogdanov's Thought
14:30-14:45	Coffee break
14:45 - 15:45	Tyler Colby Re (University of Groningen) - Utopia in Fichte's Closed Commercial State TBD
15:45 - 16:00	Coffee break
16:00 - 17:00	Gregorio Demarchi (Independent Researcher, Volkshochschule Zürich) and Leo Grob (University of Fribourg) - Utopias of Autonomia? Autoriduzione and Autovalorizzazione against Work Sophie Cardin (University of Oxford) - The Medem Sanatorium (1926-1942): Work in a Socialist 'Children's Republic'
17:00 -	Drinks and dinner. Details t.b.c.

Friday, 23 October 2026

All talks and breaks in room Omega.

9:30 - 10:00	Welcome and Coffee
10:00 - 11:30	Keynote Laurence Davis (University College Cork) - <u>The Dialectic of Labour in the Political Thought of William Morris</u>
11:30 - 12:30	Alexandre Carvalho (CEPS and University of Barcelona) - <u>Unmasking the Fetishism of Technical Decisions</u> Claudia Roesch (University of Konstanz) - <u>Utopian Engineering: Imaginations of New Forms of Labour in the Age of Machinery</u>
12:30 - 13:30	Lunch
13:30 - 14:30	Sean Irving (University of Essex) - <u>Neither Boss nor Bureaucrat: Constitutionalism and Real Utopias of Work in Economic Republicanism</u> Joshua Graf (University of Osnabruck) - <u>Marx, Engels, The Socialist Tradition and the Communist Day</u>
14:30 - 14:45	Break
14:45 - 15:45	Manuela Peitz (Freie Universität Berlin) - <u>Utopia and Labor: The Changing Role of Fourier's Utopian Thinking</u> Emmanuel Chaput (Université Laval) - <u>States of Solidarity: Célestin Bouglé's Political Thought Between Léon Bourgeois and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon</u>
15:45 - 17:15	Keynote Michelle C. Smith (Clemson University) - <u>Time, Tradwives, and Utopia: The Temporality of Women's Work in Mid-19th Century American Communities</u>
17:15 - 17:30	Concluding remarks

Abstracts

Keynote Addresses

David Leopold - Utopian Work: Lessons from the Nineteenth-Century

The concept of 'utopia' often feels in need of defence. My own efforts in this direction, within the discipline of political philosophy, have had two main threads: offering criticism of anti-utopian arguments (especially from within Marxism); and defending the methodological utility of utopian plans and blueprints (especially beyond their constructive ambitions). However, in this paper I say more about the utopian contribution to the discussion of substantive topics; drawing on the writings of various nineteenth-century enthusiasts for utopia – including Charles Fourier, Robert Owen, and William Morris – in order to illuminate the pleasures and pains of work. In particular, I explore some possible 'utopian' motivations to engage in productive activity in the absence of the familiar incentives of 'greed and fear'.

Laurence Davis - The Dialectic of Labour in the Political Thought of William Morris

In the course of his life (1834-1896) William Morris was by turns one of the leading poets and prose writers of his day; a pioneering craftsperson; a translator of Norse sagas; a businessperson; and one of the most important printers the world has known. He was also a democratic socialist who articulated a powerful, original, and compelling critique of capitalist society that is still of urgent relevance today. A key and politically, economically, and culturally enduring element of this critique, I will argue, is Morris's practical utopian vision of a society in which obstacles to pleasurable labour distinctive to capitalist society have been removed, and work re-united with art.

The reason for focusing on this particular aspect of Morris's political thought is evident if one considers the tremendous importance he attached to both art and work, and the experience-driven frustration and anger he felt at the socioeconomic conditions that seemed to drive a wedge between the two. For Morris, whose chosen self-identity was fundamentally that of an artisan, the harshest cut came from the way the organization of social activities through profit markets of various kinds made it impossible for those who lived in such societies reasonably to gauge the limitations of the significance of the economic. When he saw how craftsmanship, and the rich and multifaceted social and cultural values that he association with such a way of life, all had to give way before the imperative of cheap production, he was moved to some of his most passionate, withering, and politically telling indictments of the market-engulfed society. By far the most carefully considered and argued of these indictments is his contention that capitalism promotes the treatment of labor as a commodity, and hence closes off opportunities opened up by the invention of machinery for more pleasant and creative forms of work.

In this paper I propose to reconstruct and analyze Morris's 'art and labor' critique of capitalist society, and his accompanying utopian vision of an egalitarian, democratic, and ecologically sustainable socialist society in which everyone might be an 'artist' in the broadest sense of the word. Against his many critics, I argue that Morris's craft utopian vision retains the potential to stimulate a democratic dialogue about the relationship between art, work, nature, and society that is of urgent relevance today. I will also argue that there is a particular affinity between Morris's ideas and those of contemporary degrowth activists protesting against ecological destruction and the globalization of capitalism.

Michelle C. Smith - Time, Tradwives, and Utopia: The Temporality of Women's Work in Mid-19th Century American Communities

This talk considers the nature and status of women's work in three mid-nineteenth century utopian communities that confronted the context of U.S. industrialization by developing their own systems of labor. Among other aims, Brook Farm, the Oneida Community, and the Harmony Society attempted to redress inequalities in men's and women's work through innovations ranging from compensation for housework, contraception and communal child-rearing, and women's participation in for-profit businesses.

Drawing on feminist critiques of productivism and the reification of work (Weeks), I explore the communities' ambivalent participation in the larger work ethic of their time, one shaped by the Protestant Reformation as well as a specifically American "bootstraps" logic of self-reliance and self-improvement through work. While some women's work aligns more easily with this work ethic—and its promise of empowerment through wage work—domestic labor proves intransigent. I explore the effects and implications of these communal experiments with particular attention to the temporality of women's work at a historical moment when the now-commonplace understanding of time-as-commodity was taking hold. Women in these communities grappled with the dominant temporality of the American work ethic by managing time (pursuing domestic self-management), buying time (hiring domestic workers), employing time (prioritizing productive rather than "wasteful" uses of time), and, on occasion, freeing time (enjoying hobbies, writing, and other "pastimes").

Throughout, I draw parallels to contemporary discourses of and around "tradwives" ("traditional wives"), social media influencers that profess a romantic, nostalgic vision of preindustrial women's work. These historical and contemporary discourses and enactments of women's work illuminate time as a sticking point for neoliberal feminism's attempt to incorporate women's work into the American work ethic. In the end, I ask whether these communities failed to rehabilitate gendered ideologies of work, or whether their faith in work as a site of empowerment and self-definition failed them?

Conference Papers

Özhan Öztürk - Reversing the Division of Labor: Badiou's Utopian Challenge to Plato

This paper examines the structural role of the division of labor in Plato's Republic through the lens of Alain Badiou's hypertranslation. While Plato presents the specialization of tasks as a requirement for doing one's own business, this economic efficiency is actually the foundational myth used to naturalize class hierarchy, along with Phoenician myth. In *The Republic*, the division of labor is not merely an economic principle but the ontological bedrock of the state. By insisting that each individual possesses a singular nature suited to one task, Plato justifies a rigid social structure. This functionalist harmony underpins the entire educational system, effectively gatekeeping philosophy for a specific class while relegating producers to a state of political silence.

Alain Badiou's contemporary reimagining strips away the Noble Lie used to justify these differences. Badiou identifies the division of labor as the primary obstacle to true justice. He reverses Plato's text by suggesting that the event of justice requires the rejection of specialization. In Badiou's reading, the ideal state is not one where everyone stays in their place, but one where the capacity for thought and political action is universal, breaking the link between social function and intellectual potential. Finally, the paper evaluates the radicalism of Badiou's stance in our current era of over-specialization. In a global economy that demands hyper-niche expertise, Badiou's rejection of the division of labor serves as a utopian provocation. Therefore, together with Badiou's anachronistic interventions in his *Plato's Republic*, the dissolution of the division of labor remains highly questionable. However, whether division of labor is incompatible with any kind of specialisation is worth discussing.

Lisa Herzog - Care for the working class: Flora Tristan on the political economy of care work

Flora Tristan, the first European writer to connect socialism and feminism, has long been neglected as a systematic thinker. This paper reads her *The Workers' Union* and other writings through the lens of a utopian political economy of care. It argues that Tristan takes the need for care work in the family seriously, while also calling for institutional care for the young, sick, and elderly. While her gendered views from the early 19th century assume that much of this care work, especially in families, would be done by women, the systematic core of her arguments can be separated from these historical layers. Ultimately, Tristan provides a political economy perspective in which economic and political rights are closely interwoven, but in which unpaid care work, in the family and beyond, is always part of the picture.

Gregorio Demarchi and Leo Grob - Utopias of Autonomia? Autoriduzione and Autovalorizzazione against Work

This paper, jointly presented by the philosopher Gregorio Demarchi and the historian Leo Grob, examines utopian imaginaries of work through the lens of revolutionary practice in 1970s Italy. Drawing on Massimiliano Tomba's notion of "Theory in Action" it explores how militant practices in the milieu of Autonomia Operaia produced actual theory.

At the center of the analysis stands the Milan-based journal *Rosso* (1973–1979), a key publication and organizational node of Autonomia. Edited and written by figures such as Antonio Negri and Giovanni Arrighi, *Rosso* functioned as both an analytical platform and a strategic laboratory. It sought to interpret ongoing struggles while simultaneously projecting possible futures beyond capitalist wage labor.

The paper first reconstructs Negri's exploration of utopian counter-models to wage labor. Central to his thought was the concept of *autovalorizzazione*, through which he identified emergent forms of autonomous self-activity within working-class struggles. Rather than positing utopia as an abstract ideal, Negri grounded it in practices already unfolding within capitalist societies, reading them as anticipations of – and desires for – a post-capitalist society.

Secondly, the paper analyzes how *Rosso* documented and theorized practices such as *autoriduzione*. Initially developed within factories as a collective reduction of labor intensity and speed against Taylorist discipline, this practice evolved into broader social forms: workers, precarious subjects, housewives, and youth collectively reduced the cost of essential goods and services, from electricity to cultural events. *Rosso* interpreted these practices as direct expressions of proletarian autonomy and as intents to immediately reach the "realm of freedom," as conceptualized by Karl Marx.

By situating these dynamics between the possible and the impossible, the paper argues that *Rosso*'s "searching" methodology offers a distinctive contribution to the study of utopias of work – one rooted in lived struggle and transformative praxis. This methodology can be reintroduced as a productive anachronism into the present.

Sophie Cardin - The Medem Sanatorium (1926-1942): Work in a Socialist 'Children's Republic'

In 1926, Yiddish-speaking socialists founded a sanatorium for Jewish children from the workers' slums in Polish cities. On paper, the 'Medem Sanatorium' was a healthcare facility aimed at preventing tuberculosis in at-risk children. In practice, the sanatorium was a concrete utopia that modelled a vision of work for the future socialist society on a child-sized scale. Hailed as the diamond of the Central Yiddish School Organisation (TSYSHO) and as an exemplar of socialist education, the sanatorium was visited by progressive pedagogues and socialist revolutionaries

who praised the ‘children’s republic’ in twenty-odd languages. After sixteen years, the sanatorium shut in 1942 when its remaining inhabitants were deported to Treblinka.

In this paper, I consider how the organisation of work in the sanatorium made manifest the political theories of Yiddish-speaking Marxists, who saw work as central to human flourishing. I reconstruct the way work was organised in the children’s utopia, using children’s literature written for the sanatorium, a fundraising film depicting life in the sanatorium, memoirs written by children and staff, and oral history interviews with Chana Szlang Gonshor and Itzhak Luden, who lived in the sanatorium as children.

Drawing on the theoretical works of Esther Frumkin, Gina Medem, Vladimir Medem, and Shloyme Gilinsky, I argue that the organisation of work in the Medem Sanatorium served three important political functions. First, to develop class consciousness and agency by realizing a substantial degree of child-worker control over daily life. Second, to balance the demands of equality and freedom with the necessity for care work and reproductive labour by reframing care work and reproductive labour as forms of *khavershaft* (comradeship). Third, to overcome alienation and to facilitate flourishing by fulfilling the child’s ‘deep and prevailing life interests’ through ‘spiritual work’ in addition to fulfilling their material ‘practical life needs’ through socially necessary labour.

Michael Eigner - The Workplace after the Revolution: A Conceptualization of a New Kind of Group Agent

In this talk I revisit Peter Kropotkin’s anarchist communist vision of work as articulated in several of his books and articles and reconstruct its implications for contemporary debates in social ontology. While Kropotkin is typically read as a critic of industrial capitalism and the division of labour, I argue that his account implicitly advances a distinctive model of collective agency that challenges the dominance of the modern corporation as the optimal economic agent. Drawing on the framework of guidance control developed by John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza, I examine how different forms of group organization enable or undermine the conditions for collective moral agency.

Furthermore, I argue that Kropotkin’s critique of specialization and centralized production is not merely economic but ontological: it targets forms of organization that restrict agency and disconnect individuals from meaningful participation in collective action. He calls for new way of societal organization, based on a new kind of economics, which he refers to as “[t]he Study of the Needs of Humanity, and of the Economic Means to satisfy them.”

His proposal for decentralized, integrated communities, which combine agriculture and industry, can be either interpreted as a novel type of group agent or as a radical reinterpretation of current group agents. This new form of collective exhibits a more distributed form of guidance control,

in which members retain a robust capacity to shape shared outcomes, thereby supporting conditions for collective moral responsibility better than existing group agents.

By comparing such collectives with corporate agents, it becomes clear that the former better sustain the alignment between individual self-fulfilment and collective action. This suggests that Kropotkin's vision is not only normatively attractive but also conceptually rich: it reveals overlooked possibilities for organizing work in ways that allow for collective moral agency.

Natalia Danilkina - Labor Transformations on the Way to Self-regulating Machines in A. Bogdanov's Thought

Over a hundred years ago, Alexander Bogdanov began developing a general organizational science ("tektology"). He pushes forward a universal concept of system organization that does not presume that a system can ever be organized "ideally". Instead, the concept presupposes various degrees and types of organization, and also reveals a close connection between a system and its "normal" environment.

Among many themes underlying the emergence of Bogdanov's new science, one concerns the changing nature of labor as it evolves toward the involvement of self-regulating machines in the future. Presently, technology improves and becomes more complex, approaching the type of automatic, self-acting (not yet self-regulating) mechanism, and the scientist is already able to spot changes in the essential shift of labor to "live control, proactive intervention, and constantly active attention" (Bogdanov, 1989). According to Bogdanov, a significant shift in the worker's role occurs – the unification of organizer and executor in one person. Thus, the labor system becomes less fragmented. (Bogdanov does not ignore the fact that combining the functions places a dual demand on the worker: technical awareness, intelligence, and initiative, on the one hand; and dexterity, speed, and skillful movement, on the other). Furthermore, at a later stage, the negative societal consequences of technical specialization in industrial society are expected to be overcome. Industries use their particular technology, but specialization ceases to be "a network of barriers between people, ceases to narrow their horizons and limit their communication, their mutual understanding" (Bogdanov & Stepanov, 1923).

Eventually, Bogdanov describes a path to a higher degree of organization of global society. In his argument, the "course of events" (including the World War I) "posed organizational challenges for humanity on a global scale... Humanity needs a fundamentally new point of view, a new way of thinking. But they appear in history only when either a new organization of society as a whole develops or a new social class emerges" (Bogdanov, 1989). In this quote, one should note the presence of two alternatives, the latter of which the author elaborates in some detail. In my analysis, I will consider the principles and ideas of Bogdanov's organizational science with regard to both alternatives.

Bogdanov A. A. Tectology: General Organizational Science. Vol. 1. Moscow, 1989. [In Russian, Berlin, 1922; Leningrad – Moscow, 1925; 1st edition 1913].

Bogdanov A. A., Stepanov I. I. Collectivistic System. In: Course of Political Economy. Vol. 2, Issue 4. Prague – Moscow, 1923. [In Russian].

Tyler Re - Utopia in Fichte's *Closed Commercial State*

With few exceptions, German Idealist Johann Gottlieb Fichte is rarely interpreted as a utopian thinker. Fichte scholars typically place his work either within the liberal-egalitarian political tradition, given his affinities with Kant, or alongside early socialists, such as Proudhon and Marx. Moreover, any similarities with traditional utopian thinkers that scholars do point to are often based not on their principles and methods, but on the similarity of their concrete recommendations (e.g., a command economy). In this talk, I argue that we should see Fichte's *Closed Commercial State* as a utopian text through and through.

In the first part of the talk, I show that the *Closed Commercial State* has many features that are distinctive of utopian writing. First, Fichte proposes organizing social and economic life in ways that are radically different from the status quo. His presentation of this alternative is meant, he says in his introduction, to portray defenders of the status-quo as the truly (pejoratively) utopian thinkers, since they unrealistically expect an ordered society to follow from disordered principles and institutions. In addition, Fichte's text includes a number of concrete proposals for how to transition to his radical alternative, which I argue distinguishes the *Closed Commercial State* from simply being a work of "ideal theory." These features place Fichte in the "concrete," "critical," or "real" utopian tradition of writers like More, Bloch, and Erik Olin Wright.

In the second part of the talk, I look specifically at how Fichte organizes labor in his ideal economy. The central principle of this economy is that all should be able to live from their labor. This ideal is institutionalized in two ways. The first is a joint job-guarantee/work-requirement through which citizens produce all socially-necessary goods. The second is a system of trade and price controls that ensure that all are able to afford those necessary goods with the income they earn from their labor. I connect Fichte's vision of the ideal economy to other prominent utopian figures, in particular Saint-Simon.

Alexandre Carvalho - Unmasking the Fetishism of Technical Decisions

Recent transformations in the organization of work — algorithmic management, automation, AI — are routinely framed as matters of technical necessity rather than socially structured power relations. This paper challenges that framing by developing Marx's concept of the fetishization of technical decisions: organizational choices that appear neutral and inevitable are in fact socially determined and politically loaded.

Drawing on Marx's critique of alienated labour (*Grundrisse*, *Capital*) and the insistence of utopian socialists such as Robert Owen and Charles Fourier that the organization of production is always open to democratic redesign, the paper argues that these "technical" decisions reflect underlying relations of exploitation while obscuring them. Crucially, this fetishism does not disappear even in alternative institutional settings. Even in contexts of workplace democracy — the genuinely utopian demand that refuses to treat technical necessity as given — ostensibly technical decisions continue to shape options, preconfigure outcomes, and can mask social conflicts. Engaging directly with Marx and Engels' well-known scepticism toward detailed utopian blueprints, the paper claims that what we can learn from these historical traditions for the 21st century is not how to design ideal models of work, but how to critically interrogate and politicize the status of technical decisions within any institutional form. A critical theory of labour justice must therefore expose and politicize what capitalism presents as merely technical, rather than assuming that institutional redesign alone — however democratic — resolves the underlying dynamics of power.

Claudia Roesch - Utopian Engineering: Imaginations of New Forms of Labour in the Age of Machinery

In 1833, while living in the religious cooperative commune Economy, Pennsylvania, the German-American engineer John Adolphus Etzler wrote the pamphlet *The Paradise within the Reach of All Men, without Labor, by Powers of Nature and Machinery*. In it, he suggested using machines like his „satellite“ – a kind of wind-powered plough – to reduce human labour to a minimum, to form a cooperative joint-stock company, and to share the profits among community members. The machines that he patented were powered by wind, water, and solar energy. Workers would gain free time for education and recreation, while their investment in the communal scheme would enable them to provide for their families.

Etzler's inventions were embedded in the transatlantic reform movement of the early 19th century. He and his business partner Conrad Friedrich Stollmeyer found inspiration in the writings of French early socialist Charles Fourier, while British reformer Robert Owen became an ardent supporter, who promoted their plans for a settlement project in Venezuela in his newspapers.

My research project *Utopian Engineering* investigates how 19th century reformers phrased social problems as questions to be solved with mathematics and science. It considers engineers like Etzler as utopian in that sense that they were able to imagine a future that fundamentally different from the past and present that they knew. In my paper, I first want to investigate how Etzler's pamphlets envisioned a solution to the labour question in Europe by mechanizing the plantation economy in the Americas. Second, I discuss how his promise to reduce working hours related to the quest of finding alternative energy sources to human labour. Third, I address the gender question inherent in Etzler's plan, arguing that it was at the

same time meant to overcome the constraints of the traditional family and to restore working-class masculinity by enabling working-class investors to provide for their families.

Manuela Peitz - Utopia and Labor – The Changing Role of Fourier’s Utopian Thinking

In my paper I examine the relationship between utopia and labor in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by reconstructing Fourier as a mediating figure between Marx and early Critical Theory. It challenges the common view that Marx rejected utopian thinking, arguing instead that his critique of the early socialists—especially Fourier—is marked by productive ambivalence. While Marx dismisses their projects as idealist insofar as they derive social reality from subjective imagination, he also recognizes their critical and enlightening function. Fourier’s visions of a better society expose social contradictions and suffering, thereby providing “valuable material for the enlightenment of workers.”

This tension is tied to Marx’s concept of labor as praxis, which—following Hegel’s master–slave dialectic—can be understood as the mediation between subject and object. Labor is a dialectical activity through which humans reproduce themselves and their world. Against utopian schemes that assume reality can be produced by thought alone, Marx insists on the “priority of the object” (Adorno): reality cannot be fully identified with subjective imagination. Accordingly, utopia is not a positive blueprint but a form of critique—an articulation of contradiction to be overcome through organized praxis. Social transformation thus appears not as speculative or deterministic, but as the result of political praxis and organization; utopia contributes by fostering the insight that social relations are historically produced and changeable. Because labor (praxis) itself contains a utopian moment: it can potentially (re)produce a more rational society. As a historically mediated metabolism with nature, it harbors emancipatory potential by mediating subject and object, though this potential must be produced through enlightenment.

The second part of the paper traces how this constellation is transformed in early Critical Theory through Adorno’s engagement with Fourier, particularly in the 1966 German translation co edited with Elisabeth Lenk. Fourier’s imagination marks a critical distance from both idealism and positivism, showing that utopian thought remains productive only in the tension between imagination and negation. This signals a shift in the function of utopia: whereas Marx emphasizes the scientific grounding of socialism Adorno and Lenk insists on the utopian impulse as negative critique of both a “distorted world” and of dogmatic conceptions of science. Yet its critical, enlightening role remains central, as only this form of enlightenment can produce emancipatory praxis and a rational organization of the world.

Emmanuel Chaput - States of Solidarity: Célestin Bouglé’s Political Thought Between Léon Bourgeois and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon

A member of Durkheim's school of sociology, specialist of the caste system in India, critique of Lapouge's racial theory, close to Horkheimer and central to the integration of the Frankfurt School's relocation in France after 1933, Célestin Bouglé (1870-1940) was also a renowned specialist of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's thought and a proponent of Léon Bourgeois' Solidarism, a political movement situated between socialism and liberalism, typical of France's Third Republic. In this paper, I argue that this double influence of Proudhon and Bourgeois gives Bouglé's political thought its specific character. Economic democracy, which, under the influence of Proudhon, marked French anarcho-syndicalism at the time is as necessary to the progress of Republican ideas as Bourgeois's political views revolving around the notion of solidarity and education. Yet economic democracy cannot exist by itself without political democracy and vice versa. To a revolutionary conception of the union movement that conceives it as a mean to the overthrow of the State altogether, Bouglé opposes a reformist conception in which the union movement and a democratic Republican State are complementary to each other. This conception of the Social or Welfare State *avant la lettre*, with its articulation between unions or corporations and the State, is, I argue, not dissimilar to certain republican readings of Hegel's political thought. My aim is thus to present Bouglé's political thought as an original contribution in relation to Bourgeois' solidarism, to show how this originality is grounded in its appreciation of Proudhon and his participation in the union movement and finally how this picture, which seeks to reconcile the social dynamics of civic society with the rational or universal imperative of a republican State, can be aligned with recent (K. Westphal for instance) and past (E. Gans, B. Bauer, A. Ruge) attempts to frame Hegel's political thought in republican terms.

Sean Irving - Neither Boss nor Bureaucrat: Constitutionalism and Real Utopias of Work in Economic Republicanism

Establishing a regime of popular power over work was the overriding goal of nineteenth-century economic republicans. Figures such as the Chartist John Francis Bray, the mutualist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and the feminist proto-syndicalist Jeanne Deroin developed utopian and revolutionary schemes to democratise the organisation of work.

What unites these figures is a shared determination that economic power should be held by neither boss nor bureaucrat: that it should not rest with either public or private masters, but remain in popular hands, exercised by worker-citizens.

I argue that their distinctive contribution lies in turning to the constitution as a device for structuring and limiting power within work. While early modern republicans used constitutions to tame public domination (*imperium*), the division between public and private spheres meant that this project did not extend to the world of work, where private domination (*dominium*) remained largely unchecked. Bray, Deroin, and Proudhon sought to extend this project by republicanising work through codified constitutional forms, specifying institutional arrangements governing ownership, authority in production, and institutions of economic coordination. These

were “real utopias”: grounded in existing economic relations and articulated as practicable models for reorganising work, with identifiable pathways to their realisation. They aimed to transcend the public/private divide and to ensure that power could not be ceded to either private owners or administrative agents.

At a moment when questions about the organisation of work, its governance, distribution, and future, have returned to the centre of political debate, these proposals offer more than historical curiosity. By treating work as a domain requiring constitutional ordering, they provide resources for rethinking how power might be organised to secure forms of democratic control today.

Joshua Graf - Marx, Engels, The Socialist Tradition and the “Communist Day”

Marx and Engels are widely known for their stalwart rejection of anything they denounced as “utopian”. With a closer examination, however it becomes clear, that their reservation against “Utopianism” must be studied more precisely. Not only did they acknowledge the historically progressive role of the so called “Utopian Socialists”, but one of their most influential works, the so called “German Ideology” contains a famously controversial passage about a “Communist day”, echoing a famous section from Saint-Simon. Drawing on Michele Bee’s widely ignored interpretation of this quotation, as an illustration for the historically grown potential of mankind to widely liberate itself from the “realm of necessity”, I want to show, how utopian elements and historical materialist analyses are not necessarily unbridgeable contradictions. Contrary, I argue that Marx’s and Engels’ approach towards Communism, is characterized by an implementation of elements of the so called “utopian socialists” especially in regards of the progressive role of the upcoming industrial society and historico-philosophical overtones.

Therefore I want to point out, how a wide understanding of “utopianism”, which focuses on the liberating ideals of utopian thinking could also be applied to Marx’s and Engels’ thinking insofar, as they were harsh opponents of a “thoughtless and raw” Communism. Core ideas of utopian socialists in regard of the role of self-realization in the production progress remain central to Marx even in his mature economic works. It is a central pillar of Marxist dialectics, that the objective possibility of a more rational and overall “better” society, is created by bourgeois society. Following those principal thoughts, I seek to make an argument for a rational Marxist standpoint towards the historically controversial relation to “utopian thinking”. I want to point out, how a Materialist perspective can underpin a utopian, but still scientific approach.