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Cities of the Gods: Communist Utopias in Greek Thought

Doyne Dawson

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Cities of the Gods: Communist Utopias in Greek Thought Doyne Dawson
Modern studies of classical utopian thought are usually restricted to the *Republic* and *Laws* of Plato, producing the impression that Greek speculation about ideal states was invariably authoritarian and hierarchical. This book, however, sets Plato in the context of the whole ancient tradition of philosophical utopia. It distinguishes two types of Greek utopia, relating both to the social and the political background of Greece between the fifth and third centuries B.C. There was a lower utopianism, meant for literal implementation, which arose from the Greek colonizing movement, and a higher theoretical form which arose from the practical utopias. Dawson focuses on the higher utopianism, whose main theme was total communism in property and family. He attempts to reconstruct the lost utopian works of the Stoics, arguing that their ideal state was universal and egalitarian, in deliberate contrast to the hierarchical and militaristic utopia of Plato; and that both theories were intended to bring about long-range social reform, though neither was meant for direct implementation. Dawson offers an explanation for the disappearance of the utopian tradition in the later Hellenistic age. A final chapter traces the survival of communistic ideas in early Christianity.

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