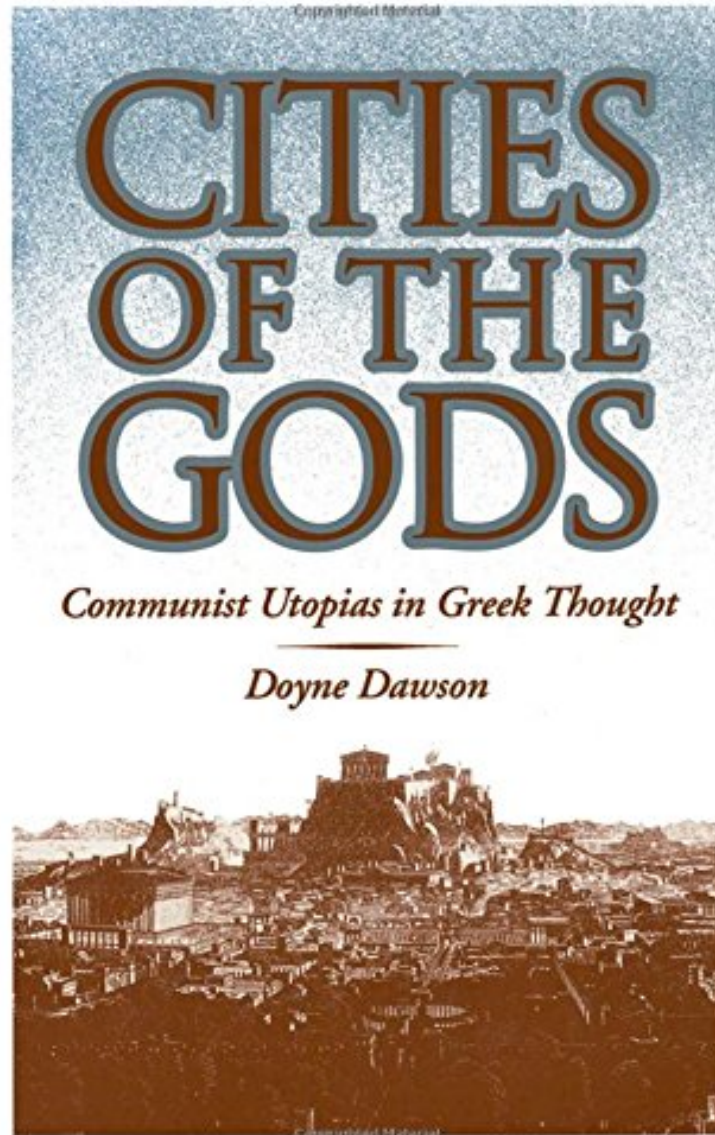


Cities of the Gods: Communist Utopias in Greek Thought

Doyne Dawson

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Doyne Dawson : Cities of the Gods: Communist Utopias in Greek Thought before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Cities of the Gods: Communist Utopias in Greek Thought:

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.

"I tried this book out on a group of students. Not only were they very appreciative of the clarity and cogency of Dawson's writing, and the stimulating ideas the book contains, they also went on to write excellent essays. What more needs to be said? This is a first class book taking a fresh look at an important and interesting subject."--Greece and Rome
"Learned, exhaustive, and cogently argued....Brilliantly carried out."--Choice
"[Dawson's] arguments will be of interest. The breadth of the book is impressive; it should be useful to a wide scholarly audience."--Religious Studies
"The scholar of Greek political thought will regard [Cities of the Gods] an indispensable tool of research."--Ex Libris: The Classical Bulletin
"Dawson's dense and exhaustively argued study is full of challenging assertions and provocative conclusions."--American Historical Association
From the Back Cover
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. In this book, however, Dawson sets Plato in the context of the whole ancient tradition of philosophical utopia. He 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. Dawson outlines a "low" utopianism that arose from the Greek colonizing movement. A comprehensive program for an ideal city-state, conceived as a critique of existing institutions and a model for limited reform, it was intended for literal implementation. A "high" utopianism arose from the practical utopias--a theoretical system with unattainable standards of social reform designed as a thought experiment for exploring the potentialities of human nature and society. This more abstract model looked at institutional change at a much deeper level than was possible in real political reform. The second, higher utopianism, which was based on total communism in property and family, is the focus of Dawson's study. Attempting to reconstruct the lost utopian works of the Stoics, Dawson argues that their ideal state was universal and egalitarian, in deliberate contrast to the hierarchical and militaristic utopia of Plato. He further asserts 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. Finally, he traces the survival of communist ideas in early Christianity. Far from being merely another commentary on Plato's Republic, *Cities of the Gods* is a comprehensive study of the whole ancient tradition of philosophical speculation about ideal societies. Distinguishing two types of Greek utopian literature--the practical and the theoretical--Dawson focuses on the contrast between the authoritarian Platonic utopias and the egalitarian stoic utopias. He traces the history of utopian and communist ideas in pagan and Christian thought to the end of the Roman Empire. This book will be of interest to scholars, as well as general readers, interested in philosophy, political science, classical studies, and religion.
About the Author
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