

Utopia: Findings and Fallacies

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There have been many ideological trends that could equally be called Utopian. Though they may seem most different, and even incompatible with each other, they share a number of common features, having the same economic and social roots, which lead them to numerous ideological fallacies—but also to important discoveries and deeds, the value of which should not be underestimated.

Common Features

Among the characteristic features of any Utopian school, one could find the following:

Static world

People tend to believe that the world can be governed by eternal laws, that can be entirely comprehended and used to come to a better way of life. It is pre-supposed that the people's activity cannot change the physical and biological background of their lives, and the best one can do is to adapt as much as possible to the natural laws, taking all what is physically possible, but unable to get more than that.

However, the human ability of comprehending the world is in no way confined by the natural laws, and there is no natural law that cannot be understood and used in the interests of the people. There is no transcendental or mystical world complementary to the only physical world we are living in, and all we want must be sought for in this very physical world.

Embodied ideal

The natural consequence of the static picture of the world is the belief that the development of the humanity must finally come to the best order possible. When all the physical laws and the mechanisms of biological evolution are discovered, they will give the people everything they can get from the Nature at all, thus compelling them to adopt the social organization the most compatible with the laws they have discovered.

So, the humanity's dream of a better world and the ideal way of life can be completely embodied in the objectively existing optimal social and economic system, which is bound to be established, sooner or later, and the only reasonable behavior would be to move to this ideal right now, coming as close to it as possible on the modern level of our knowledge.

The objective existence of the ideal implies an objective distinction between good and evil, the former being identified with the steps toward the ideal organization, while the latter meaning anything hindering the humanity's approaching the ideal.

The medieval controversy of *nominalism* and *realism* comes to the mind, when one regards the Utopian views. Evidently, the Utopians are inclined to support the real existence of the abstract categories advocated by "realism".

Innate morality

Since there must exist an ideal social organization, it is quite logical to suppose that the people are designed to eventually become aware of that final goal of social development. The Utopians conclude that all the people would agree on that destination and thus come to acting in the same direction, to achieve their common goal. This assumes that there can be no principal discrepancies in the people's morality, and their notions of good and evil are principally the same. Consequently, the apparent differences between the moral principles advocated by different people and schools can only be attributed to delusion, which has to be eventually removed after the humanity discovers the principles of the ideal social organization and decides to follow them. If somebody's behavior does not seem good, this indicates the lack of understanding in the person, which could be fixed by mere education.

Inventionism

If there is an objective goal supported by the subjective unanimity, it is enough to just invent a model of an ideal social organization and tell the people about it to make it commonly accepted as a guide for the practical implementation of the idea, which is good enough to speak for itself. There is no need to argue, or fight for the model invented—one has to just explain it. People will follow a really good model just because it is good, and they want it to become a reality.

Also, people are often encouraged to invent their own ideal models, so that the design of the future society would be elaborated in more detail. However, most Utopian teachings explicitly or implicitly limit the people's creativity to what is compatible with their specific model of development.

Rigidity

The Utopians' belief in the efficiency of their economic and social inventions makes them attempt to implement them right away, within the current social organization. They believe that a good example can draw other people to their ideas and encourage them in following the same way. The Utopian colonies are to be organized despite all their incompatibility with the society they have to coexist with, in the hope that the very perfection of the model will make them strong enough to compete.

However, the very necessity to compete implies certain internal structures destined to support the colony's survivability in the hostile environment. This implies a high degree of centralized regulation in the life of the colony, with the interests of the members subdued to the necessity of survival. Thus the discipline becomes the primary demand for an Utopian colony, and the model colonies are quite resembling military camps.

The abstract Utopians who just dream about the ideal society may proclaim the peaceful way to their Utopias—but as soon as one tries to do anything in the real world, one has to use the methods appropriate for this world to achieve anything at all.

The Roots of Utopias

There are both objective and subjective roots of the Utopian way of thought and action.

The *objective roots* lie in the rapid changes produced in the people's cultural environment by industrial development during the periods immediately preceding the society's transition to the next level of socioeconomic development. When the productive forces grow beyond the limits of the current social organization, this latter has to be replaced by a different one, more suited for further development. The popularity of Utopian ideas is one of the first indications to this objective necessity, the specificity of which is still to come to public awareness. The syncretic, Utopian stage precedes the "analytic" stage, when the leading social forces of the new society become consolidated enough to oppose the existing order in an organized way, as a mass movement.

The industrial revolution that led to the formation of capitalism in Europe was a quite characteristic example. The productivity of the first factories was much higher than that of the medieval manufactures, and this was attributed to the new machines used. Two opposite natural reactions resulted from that: one was to blame the machines and ruin them—and the other was to *deify* the machines and associate every kind of well-being with a properly designed social mechanism. The latter trend led to the appearance of the numerous Utopias, as another side of the Cartesian paradigm in philosophy.

The peculiarities of class struggle in different feudal societies were reflected in the specific Utopian ideas. A number of syncretic models appeared in XVI-XVII centuries, with some features far beyond the immediate goal of building capitalism, and even beyond the level of much later communist teachings. When it came to practical action, these Utopias left their popularity giving the way to the ideology of the Enlightenment, advocating the interests of the bourgeoisie. However, the writers of the Enlightenment often used the *form* of Utopia to convey their views, which should be distinguished from the Utopian writings proper.

The difference in the rate of capitalist development in different countries of Europe has produced a discrepancy between the tasks of social revolutions on the boundary of the XVIII and XIX centuries and the Utopian ideas of that time. Two kinds of Utopias were then observed, one reflecting the historical transition from the “natural” capitalism to its higher stage we experience today—and another foreseeing the end of capitalism as a social system; this latter form of Utopias was called the Utopian socialism.

The *subjective roots* of Utopias ascend to the impossibility to actually changing the world in the time when the people first become aware of the necessity of changes. So, one can only dream about the future and build the ideal models of it, without any indication to the real ways of bringing it to life—the imaginary ways designed by the Utopians serve to compensate this deficiency.

The development of public mentality is determined by the development of economy and social system; one cannot expect the general acceptance of a new idea before there are the objective grounds for that. The glimpses of the future can be observed in the works of a few individuals of the time—but they can only explicate what has already intrinsically formed. Hence, one should not expect from the Utopian writings more than they can give, in their social environment.

One can also consider the *cultural roots* of Utopias, noting that the primary forms of awareness get inherited from the present culture, and the new ideas are often expressed in a rather inadequate and cumbersome way. It is much later that the proper ideological forms can be invented, the first attempts inevitably carrying the stamp of the past on them.

This usage of traditional forms prevents Utopians from being clear enough, even to themselves—but it also makes them understandable to their contemporaries.

Utopia: the Negative Sense of the Word

The deficiencies of the Utopian way of thought are closely related to its essential syncretism. Since the mixture of inhomogeneous features they suggest can never be present in a real society, the first fallacy of any Utopian construction is its *unreality*, the impossibility of practical implementation. The natural subjective consequence is the internal *inconsistency* of any Utopian view. In practice, this leads to *voluntarism*, when arbitrary decisions are followed despite all the evidence of their inefficiency.

The principal logical fault inherent to all the Utopian writings is the discrepancy between the objectivity of the world and the absolute subjectivity of social development. While the physical world (including the bodily existence of humans) evolves in an entirely objective way, so that one can discover its laws and use them to achieve a more comfortable living, the minds of the people are operating in a quite independent way, so that one could accept any idea, once it has been formulated by somebody else; no matter how a person lives, everybody can distinguish good ideas from bad deeds, and choose to follow the former and avoid the latter.

However, an adequate idea of objectivity would mean that the ways of thinking and acting that can be observed at any stage of social development are not arbitrary, depending on the material development. Conscious beings are a part of the same world, and their behavior must obey the objective laws, albeit very different from those of the inanimate nature, or biological laws. The forms of economic and social organization are objectively formed in an objective process of development, which implies quite definite stages and levels. The diversity of cultural trends observed on every level of this development is as objective, and one cannot *impose* any commonality on the humanity if this commonality has not been objectively formed yet. In other words, there is no such thing as common human values—since the humanity is still split to nations and classes with antagonistic interests.

Though many people used to at least once dream about a better world, there is no such thing as a consummate dream of the best level of human existence. The notions of a better world will differ in different social layers, and the pictures drawn by different people may be completely incompatible. Thus, a slave-owner would like a world where the slaves would silently obey any instruction without rousing a rebellion, theft or hidden sabotage; on a slave’s side, one could invent a quite different solution, up to slaughtering the master and all his family. However, the general rule is that the

exploited classes can rarely think of anything beyond the current mode of existence, and their ideal is nothing but a refined picture of what the ruling classes have, which may have nothing to do with actual changing the world. Truly Utopian ideas come from the social layers that has not formed into classes yet, and this adds to the syncretism of their thought.

Utopias are different because the interests of the people differ. Under the same economic circumstances, different classes will draw their own pictures of a better world, though there will be some common features in these pictures due to the common opposition of the new classes to the old social organization. Thus, when capitalism formed within the feudal system, the bourgeois and the proletarians could oppose the feudalism together, having quite different views of the new life to come. It should be noted that Utopian ideas appearing before the qualitative change in the mode of production are generally reflecting the ideology of the leading class of the new society, the opposite class sharing much of it; this is an objective consequence of the positions of the classes in the social hierarchy.

If everyone has dreamt of a better world, it does not mean that these dreams can be brought to a common basis, and that there is a common dream of the humanity. The same words can be used to denote quite different things. Thus, for one person, freedom may mean that any antisocial act is allowed, while for another person, freedom is impossible until some people act in an antisocial way. For instance, I cannot feel myself free if there are people who can murder me, or simply let me die from hunger, depriving of a decent income—those who kill the others or exploit them to death would hardly greet banning such their privileges.

Nationality and religion are not artificial differences, they originate from the objective development. One cannot choose one's religion or nationality, or refuse belonging to either of them. The growth and education in a national or ideological environment strongly influences a person, and the traces of those early influences can be found in the later actions consciously destined to quit with one's cultural background. Therefore, one cannot arbitrarily adopt any ideology, one's preferences being determined by the embedding cultural processes. And of course, there is no way to persuade the church to use its wealth for anything but the church's own profit, or try to use the national idea for promoting the international cooperation.

Yes, humans on the Earth have much in common as physical and biological entities. But the common experience of an essentially identical carbon-based life is not enough to ensure the existence of common goals and interests. On the contrary, it is the physical and biological commonality that constitutes the basis of possible social differences: social discrimination can only be observed where there is an awareness of biological sameness. Belonging to the same biological species does not imply the existence of the united humanity.

In this world, everybody works for one's own survival, or for one's family and friends; this results in that the interests of the people are essentially limited by the small group they belong to, and one cannot speak about the unity of goals and ideals. Moreover, the interests of different people are often contrary, and this is defined by the objective economic and social laws rather than by their personal inclinations.

Also, there is no reason to assert that everyone would strive for the best life possible. In a perverted society, the people's psychology is as perverted, and many people feel that they could profit from the world's imperfection. Various swindlers, thieves and tricksters will never agree to such a social change that would make any robbery impossible; a politician would never accept the elimination of any politics; a capitalist would rarely help to annihilate capitalism.

The humanity just cannot *choose* a common goal in a kind of a mental act. Objectively, the interests of different classes, social layers and individuals *are* different, and this in no way depends on their will. It is not individuals who act in history—it is classes and social forces. It is not up to the people how they behave—they just act as the representatives of the class. Hence, one cannot decide to be good, and become good. One cannot even become aware of good and evil but in the sense of one's class.

Since the development of the people's mentality is related to economic and social development, there is no direct link between knowledge and behavior. People may know something quite well—and behave in an entirely opposite way, being often unaware of that contradiction. On the other side, the ruling classes are not interested in supplying any kind of knowledge to everybody, and the society is organized in the way preventing too much spreading of sensitive information. There are different methods of hiding knowledge from the public, from direct bans and commercial secrets to dissolving knowledge in the flood of nonsense, so that it's hard to distinguish an idea from its vulgar interpretations.

On itself, knowledge is not enough to do anything. One cannot cure any illness just knowing how to do it—one has to get the material pre-requisites necessary for that. Knowing how to get food to feed the hungry means nothing while those who are not objectively interested in annihilating hunger are doing all they can to keep the things as they are. Knowledge cannot stop pollution if there is no economic interest in that. Knowledge cannot lead the humanity to the unlimited production capabilities if the ruling classes do not want that.

Knowledge can solve no problem and achieve no result—it only provides a basis for that, but never a motive. The humanity cannot move towards the new life merely accumulating knowledge—though it cannot develop without accumulating sufficient knowledge neither. Utopians are apt to treat knowledge and education in an extremely wide sense, including almost everything in it (like justice, truth, wisdom etc.). In this interpretation, of course, it would be quite easy to explain any failure by the lack of knowledge. However, one should better leave knowledge in its own realm, discriminating it from the other forms of reflection. Thus, the possibility of spreading knowledge in a particular society would depend on its economy and social structure, and the corresponding social institutes can hardly depend on any particular knowledge, save the knowledge of how to make the masses to obey...

The existence of the efficient ways of disseminating information cannot guarantee its actual dissemination. Since the companies and institutions have to act within the market economy, they will never be interested in publishing all the information they have, and no corporation would give money for maintaining a knowledge base, if it does not bring a good profit. For instance, it would be unwise to expect that, say, American Medical Association would create a Web site containing all the knowledge about medicine—this is utterly impossible, even if there were other institutions supporting the idea. No governmental or international consortium is possible to create a publicly available source of information on every field of knowledge. This is not a lack of awareness of all the importance of such a network for the development of the humanity—rather, the economic organization of the capitalist society would not permit that. The maximum what can be done is to collect information about the possible (commercial) sources of information in a kind of online catalog. But one can get little knowledge for free in the present social environment.

Reducing economic and other barriers is impossible under capitalism, which is objectively interested in the existence of numerous social groups confronting each other. However, what cannot be done as a voluntary act, is gradually occurring as a result of economic development, and some groups of activists might think that the changes ought to be written on their credit.

The possibilities of free education are most limited today, though capitalism has to allow people to learn since the current mode of production cannot be maintained without qualified personnel. However, free education will always be very limited in the capitalist society, and most people will not be able to get a good education because they don't have enough money for that. An educational revolution is therefore impossible without a social revolution and economic reorganization.

The capitalist society is oriented on the rich consumer, and it is not interested in funding research and development. It is only when there may be some immediate outcome that can be used to increase the profits, the capitalists (often represented by their governments) may pay for—though much less than it actually costs. It is convenient to have an army of scientists and engineers who are always afraid of losing their job and hence will do everything for just a little sum.

Spirituality is opposite to any commerce, and there can be no funding system for the arts and science that could be good enough. It is in the nature of the market to support spectacular machinations by the expense of really promising research that could drastically change the well-being of the majority of

the humanity. Selecting the directions to fund on a competitive basis can only fund the skillful competitors, but never the real masters; those who can work have too little time and interest for pushing the others by their elbows. A good system would support those who *do not compete*—this is incompatible with the principles of market economy.

The same holds for the system of government and social regulation. The capitalist governments are just the mechanism of balancing the interests of different commercial groups, and no government is interested in increasing its efficiency, which would mean the disappearance of the very necessity in the government. Since the political system of the capitalist society serves the needs of the ruling class only, one cannot expect that it would ever turn to the ordinary people and become interested in their opinions. In the market economy, governmental institutions obey the same laws of the market, and it would be naive to want them act for free, merely for keeping peace and justice.

The fundamental changes in social organization can never be made through any kind of plebiscite. Democracy is just one of the possible modes of government typical for the so called civilization (that is, the three exploitative formations: slavery, feudalism and capitalism). However, no voting can support a decision requiring a non-traditional approach. Common sense is not enough for making decisions in critical situations of any level; the problems are usually too complex to judge by the superficial acquaintance only; the real solutions are not trivial, and they require an intense research far beyond the common sense. In the human history, there have been many examples of how the common sense made severe mistakes—still, there still are people who suggest the common sense as the final criterion of truth and justice.

While many Utopians advocate a peaceful movement to the ideal society through getting knowledge and education, the way of social development cannot be always peaceful, especially when it comes to replacing one social system with another. The old regime would not leave the power to the new one, without a severe fight. The forms of this struggle may be most diverse, and it is always desirable to avoid catastrophic consequences in any revolution. However, one cannot build the future being afraid of the shocks and trying to always preserve smoothness and positivity of action. Actually, there can be no “negative” or “positive” actions, since every actions becomes interpreted within a wider social process, thus being dependent on the following development. The final assessment always comes *a posteriori*, and the opinions of the people making history today may be far from the historical sense of their deeds.

To once mention the unreality of Utopian projects, it should be noted that the very ideals cannot stay outside the general process of development, and there is nothing to become the final goal of the humanity. Abstractions cannot exist in reality, and asymptotic approaching the ideal does not save the situation, as long as the ideal itself remains static.

The Necessity of Utopias

Despite all the fallacies, the Utopian ideas are important for the development of the humanity, and they may significantly influence the minds, forming a new level of public mentality appropriate for a higher level of economic and social organization.

The very appearance of Utopian suggestions indicates the necessity of change. This is the first form of social self-awareness, and its syncretism allows it to reflect the sprouts of the both near and very distant future of the humanity.

Utopian writings stimulate the thought, making people consider the future as a product of their own efforts and design. Hence, people become aware of their significance as the creators of the world, and not mere marionettes.

The attempts of implementing various Utopian projects objectively stimulate development. They provide a kind of social experiment, with the negative and positive results being equally valuable. Even the abstract Utopian dreams have a practical significance, as a mental experiment illustrating specific aspects of social development.

Every attempt to collect knowledge and educate the people is very important. The more bits of knowledge get exposed, the more they undermine the outdated social system in favor of the new one, more suited for the next stage in the development of economy.

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