

Prelude to the 'Great Conversation'

Utopianism is unhip, discredited and worse 'boring' yet there is a long tradition of it in the world, stretching from Plato's Republic, via Utopia, News from Nowhere up to contemporary communes. Here's a pretty good list, stolen from Wikipedia:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_utopian_literature

There's also a substantial British tradition here, the Diggers, Erewhon, Godwin, Margaret Cavendish for example.

The arguments against are that we can 'never' live like this, human nature will prevent it, we are wasting our time, we are naïve and 'it' (a great variety of different ideas and aspirations, incidentally all lumped together) is impractical. Of course, as pure epistemology and logic, that's nonsense. Yet.

My argument is that we need to think about utopia(s) in order to be clearer about:

- how we want to live, now (Paradise now, Diggers all!)
- what kind of future we would like for our children
- what kind of relationship we want with the earth
- what makes us happy/what does not

We need to examine these ideas, unfettered by:

- media, advertising and other influences that tell us what we 'want'
- political manifestos/parties that put everything into self-serving boxes
- classical and neo-classical economics that tell us that everything is 'scarce'
- finance and money that is not serving us or serving the earth

We need not **attain utopia** or even (for a moment) head towards a utopian society in order for the framework to be very useful.

The Great Departure

Currently it looks as though we are committed to **some kind of separation between the UK (or maybe just England and Wales) and the EU**. This is not a binary, there are degrees of separation and non-separation, the consequences will clearly be different but are not known, currently. But why wait and see?

The Great Conversation

Attributed to Abraham Lincoln and more recently Alan Kay: 'The best way to predict your future is to create it'

So, my suggestion is that the time is now ripe (it is always ripe, but now 'especially ripe') **to have a prolonged, nationwide, right/left/centre inclusive discussion about how we want to live and how we want our children (and future generations etc. etc.) to live.** I believe that this discussion must be unfettered, utopian and somewhat impractical, on the basis that we are **imagining the best**, not the 'least worst'. We may never get there, but the journey will be fun and fulfilling.

Fun is important too, consider Emma Goldman: 'If I can't dance to it, it's not my revolution.' indeed my view is that every government should have a Ministry of Agreeable Surprises, birthday presents for lonely people and out of season fairy lights.

Doing this, on a large scale is a keystone to political legitimacy, as discussed by Wolff in https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/In_Defense_of_Anarchism Effectively, **there is no political legitimacy**, there are just varying degrees of alignment and misalignment between the government and the populace. Of course, if the populace consumes a great deal of toxic media, the result may well be toxic populism, another reason for this utopian thought experiment.

Finally, in this part, Wolff, who wrote in the 1970s did discuss broad plebiscite based 'vote on everything' democracy (as a path to improved legitimacy), via attaching something to the television. We now have the web, built on top of the internet, so the discussion, at least, is within our grasp.

I'm not positing this as a mode of government, by the way, just pointing out that times and techniques have changed.

What Should We Discuss?

In a word, everything. Maybe we need to rename or recalculate the months as the French revolutionaries did? Personally, that's not a priority for me, but someone could try and persuade me.

There are two immediate consequences:

- fragmentation of the discussion and single issue emphasis
- classification and ontology, what goes where

For the first, just live with it, this is fine, accept that this is a messy, bottom up exercise that 'may' result in important universal themes and preoccupations that emerge. It is true and clear that these need to fit into a workable societal framework or a 'plan' that would necessarily be as vague as possible, but as responsive as possible.

For the second, we can live (better) with folksonomy: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folksonomy> rather than (for example) orienting the discussion rigidly around existing civil service or government structures and strictures. Think of this as the first small step away from 'principle agent problem government': https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Principal%E2%80%93agent_problem to truly representative government and failing that, revolution.

How Should We Discuss It?

Not on Facebook anyway. There are a variety of modern, scalable discussion tools including:

<https://www.discourse.org/> as an example, but see:

<http://hellboundbloggers.com/2010/05/free-open-source-forums-6892/> for a list of tools. It's important that it be, open source and away from Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and, in general, the usual suspects. Both the platform and the discussion created data should be community owned, see, for example:

<https://medium.com/@trebors/platform-cooperativism-vs-the-sharing-economy-2ea737f1b5ad> a discussion about the (faux) sharing economy.

Of course there will be trolling, disinformation, abuse and general 'weapons of mass distraction', but the discussion will just have to learn how to deal this aspect, as a useful part of growing into real cooperation as opposed to (my phrase) 'spectacular cooperation' (Facebook, the Twittersphere) in the Debordian sense: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spectacle_%28critical_theory%29

When Should We Start Discussing?

Probably about 30 odd years ago, when the neo-liberal and financial economy began to separate seriously and visibly from the human economy. Or about 60, when serious and sustained environmental damage became visible. Or. **But, right now will 'do'.**

Where Should We Start?

In no particular order, here are some ideas and concepts:

Urban and interstitial agriculture

Platform cooperatism

New building techniques and materials

Health as benefit rather than illness as industry

Social policy incentives and bonds

Parallel structures as resilience

Alternative currencies and financial systems

Small pieces loosely joined (qv)

Hyperlocalism and federation

Human scale architecture

Maslow style fulfillment

Actual equality (as opposed to financial and deontological)

But I'm sure there are many, many more. To quote (the fictional, read the book) Sacchetti:

<http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/493610-much-that-is-terrible-we-do-not-know-much-that> said:

Much that is terrible we do not know. Much that is beautiful we shall still discover. Let's sail till we come to the edge.

