

Is Utopia Inevitable?

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This article is to do with the sort of social control which people justify on the grounds that it ensures that which a social scientific understanding has revealed to be inevitable, actually occurs. Such control might be best regarded as the coercion of individuals so as to make their behaviour accord with the specifications of a particular fatalistic perspective. It can be contrasted with a state of laissez-faire in which the social order evolves spontaneously on the basis of the activities performed by those persons who make up the society in question. The crucial issue is the extent to which events are permitted to run their course, and the degree to which steps are taken to shape the course of events by persons who profess to have discerned inherent 'laws' of social evolution which guarantee the inevitability of Utopia as they define it.

Freedom has its dangers. We all can appreciate that some may choose to use their own independence to curtail that of others by means of intimidation and domination. The result would be terror and serfdom. Law represents, therefore, a medium by which freedom might be maintained. This can be framed so as to inhibit any person from using his own freedom to violate the freedom of any other. Ideally, the law should function as something intolerable for those who choose to coerce others. There should, in short, be freedom from coercion for any who do not, themselves, coerce. To liberals, the ideal is a legal system which guarantees maximum, sustainable freedom.

Spontaneous v Controlled Conduct

This is the sort of Utopian sentiment voiced by such as Immanuel Kant. It has the advantage over most Utopian visions in that it conceives of the end of history as being something which develops spontaneously on the basis of the contractual compromises evolved by diverse persons in day to day interaction so as to make such interaction

possible. Thus, the way to maximum, sustainable freedom is not signposted. There are no directives as to how it shall be attained, save that it shall emerge as a consequence of the debates and the resolutions accompanying freedom of ideas and belief. (1)

More usually, the emergence of Utopia depends upon serious attempts to control social conduct and, thereby, to cultivate and induce the sort of end state defined in a particular, Utopian vision. This is because it is not possible to see the future with anything approximating to scientific certainty. Social events are too dependent upon individual persons living their lives as they believe best for there to be a basis to the argument that society is some sort of mechanism locked on course for a final, benign destination. Though there are indeed patterns of social conduct, and, though we can make some sort of educated guess on the basis of such regularities, we can never predict with anything like total confidence. The future almost always fails to take the course expected of it by those who see themselves as expert in such matters. Thus, whether the 'inevitable' Utopia in question involves white racial supremacy, Marxian socialism or the ascendancy of some particular elite, its birth shall not occur unless induced by the coercive midwifery of social engineering.

Is Socialism Inevitable?

Marx said that the advent of socialism was inevitable. Socialism was not simply one more means by which to organise production and distribution, it was, he contended, the only efficient means by which to do so. But, the manifest good sense of socialism would suffice to ensure its passage from theory to reality. This dogma that socialism was a Utopian end-state of history which was, at once, final, inevitable and perfect was reiterated by way of justification for the political despotism of Lenin and his heirs, the chief beneficiaries of the Marxist estate. In Marx's writings, the grosser crimes of the bourgeois state are listed as being the arbitrary manner in which it permitted the ruling middle class to follow its business interests, and the manner in which it

facilitated the mystification, by means of ideology, of the exploitative nature of production and distribution under capitalism. How true any of this was of the nineteenth century industrial state is open to question. What cannot be questioned is the adequacy with which they account for the essential aspects of the state established by Lenin in 1917.

The Soviet Union executes such policies as are drawn up by a ruling party of Marxist 'scientific' socialists. Marx derided the Ricardians and Owenites of nineteenth century Britain as 'Utopians' because they lacked his own, social scientific pretensions. Marx was no less Utopian. He differed from those whom he dismissed as Utopians only because he, unlike they, attempted to make a case for his Utopia as one shown to be scientifically inevitable. This is why Marxists espouse Marx's historical materialism, and why Khrushchev could threaten that since Communism lay at the end of every road, we non-Communists would, in the end, be buried. It is in the interests of the theoretical integrity of the ruling social scientists of the USSR that all manner of rough justice is dealt out, and much of the reality of economic production is kept secret within the Soviet State. In this way, the Utopia deemed to be inevitable by socialists of scientific vision and insight is maintained.

Are 'Needs' Static?

I said above that society was not a mechanism but, rather, was simply a matter of individual people living their lives in the manner which they believed best. People have personal needs and they fulfil these as best they can. Such needs are diverse, as are the means by which they are fulfilled. This is why, I believe, we shall never arrive at some Utopian end of history without there being instituted first the coercive means by which to overrule such diversity. The vast array of personal needs which exist in a liberal society would have to be replaced by a single, common need, the fulfilment of which would be the basis for society's directives. If one takes Utopia to mean both an era of social harmony and superabundance, then only tyranny will facilitate the dawn of such an epoch.

Economic superabundance, for example, requires that there be sufficient bulk of consumer goods to satisfy all human needs. But how could any level of production meet all human needs in perpetuity? Needs are not all static. They change from day to day. People change and, what's more, the nature of things produced changes also. 25 years ago, everyone in the United Kingdom would have been satisfied with a black and white television. Today, even a colour set is not enough. Many now own, or want to own, a video recorder and soon, many will want cable facilities and satellite dishes. As children, we are often told to be satisfied with that which we have and that there are many so unfortunate in the world that they would be glad of a tenth of what we have. But it is clearly the desire for more and better that is the basis for progress. Humanity evolves through the sophistication of needs and the desire to have the means with which to meet them.

Long live Social Disharmony!

This brings me to the question of social harmony. Many there are that desire a world of social harmony and an end to any sort of conflict. Is that really feasible? I doubt it very much. It seems to me unlikely that the beliefs upon which people base their lives could ever be made much less diverse, and that it is this diversity which is the basis for social disharmony. In a free society, people meet all manner of personal needs. The need for scripture is met as easily as is the need for strip clubs and pornography. Christians, Muslims and atheists can avail themselves of whatever means the media has on offer for the promotion of their different lifestyles. The market supplies *haute cuisine* just as readily as it supplies hamburgers. Clearly, those whose needs are so different could never exist for long in any state of social harmony. Disagreement and debate characterise the Open Society. Disharmony is a consequence of diversity. It is a fact of life under Liberalism.

There is nothing that is inevitable about the onset of Utopia. People will continue to live their lives as they believe to be for the best and will try to attain those things which they consider to be worth having. The freedom to believe and to own as one pleases has the

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consequence of engendering social diversity and disharmony. Given such freedom, there shall be no Utopia of harmony and abundance. Need and desire and innovation shall outstrip any existing stock of goods whilst those who add to, or draw upon, the supply of religious propaganda shall thrive upon the disharmony of debate with those who desire atheism and irreligiosity. The spontaneity of a liberal society is anathema to the schemes of Utopians. Utopia of whatever sort shall not emerge of itself but will, rather, require, the assistance of coercive manufacture.

(1) This relationship between law and liberty is well stated by Brendan Clifford in his essay 'Socialism and Law', *Problems of Communism*, Nos 27-28.

Free Life