

# Utopianism

As a child, I believed Utopia was possible. Despite George Bernard Shaw's ditty (that you have a heart when you're young and a head when you're old), I still believe it. No. I know it. All that's preventing it is our unwillingness to become members of the club that has access to Utopia. The mistake we all make is to think that Utopia is a place on Terra Firma. It's an affair of the mind. And mind is where we fail most spectacularly. We all grow up refining a cynical approach to others in the human tribe while at the same time harbouring a secret but unrealistic desire to live in some sort of Utopian paradise. Generally, that paradise consists of people who all think the same way we do and share our prejudices and bigotry to such an extent that they're prepared to cooperate with us and live peaceably. Sir Thomas More started the rot in 1516 with his book *Utopia*, about the perfect society. From then on, men strove to realize Heaven here on Earth, without ever really asking whether it was feasible.

All the practical experiments set up—like those of Owen, Fourier, Comte and Marx—were well-intentioned gambles based on little knowledge of the nature of the difficulties involved. Most of them were based on socialist principles that proved elusive when put into practical

experiments. America itself was an experiment in Utopianism that went bung like the others. Marx's theory, when tested by Lenin and his Bolscheviks, likewise came a giant cropper only a few years after it was established. The failure, according to Gorbachev, was due to the chronic lack of genuine Communists in the Soviet Union. For seventy years, it provided a glimpse of anti-Utopia, a bleak, pessimistic rebuttal of the hope of Utopia if ever there was one.

To my mind, the only intelligent light applied to the problem came from Sartre and his Existentialist colleagues, who maintained that such happy solutions were impossible so long as men lived lives that were inauthentic. As Lenin discovered to his chagrin, the peasants weren't prepared to hand over a third of their produce for the common good. It amounted in effect to thieves withholding from even bigger thieves until Lenin ordered in the machine guns to resolve the impasse. Capitalism doesn't press the question of what might or not be so long as the profits flow and those stolen from don't get too vocal or strident about their loss. Religion evades the question even more proficiently to side with the wealthy minority.

With so many of us living inauthentic lives, there would be little agreement on critical matters of cooperation and peaceful so-existence. The Quakers all share a certain cosmic view of their place in Creation, so they have little difficulty making a decent fist of a worldly Utopia, albeit with compromise to cope with the frayed

edges of their communities. Out where I live, the creatures in suburbia and the boondocks range (as Disraeli noted) from ape to angel. Democracy is impossible for these types, so their minders make every effort to make it look as though we have one with a few meaningless rituals organized every few years. Until the majority of men achieve self-government, Utopia is out of the question—as is democracy and justice and all the other things we aspire to as a 'civilization'. We're like barbarians demanding instant civilization having done nothing to achieve it. The sorry procedure reflects that of Christianity where sinners hold out hope for salvation based on a confessed inauthentic life. Too many of us regard the idea of actually investing in an authentic life as unnecessary. God's Grace will see us through.

My own contribution to the debate consists in suggesting that the world isn't a place to fix so that we can all get on together unchanged. It's a place that has 'defects' designed to make us change so that we might all get on together. As long as the emphasis is on reform of things outside us—things of 'the world'—we're going to fail, big time. Gandhi said it best with: we are the change that has to occur. Modern society places no responsibility on us to make that change. On the contrary, our whole way of life is busy making it impossible for such change to occur. If I had my way, I'd close down the high school and university systems and set up a new regime of education that turned everything on its head, focussed on personal evolution, not the nonsense they deliver and the rot they perpetuate.