

Utopia as “Community”

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In the social sciences frequent attempts have been made to define “utopia” in terms of “community”, with some accounts also portraying negative forms of community as “dystopia”.¹ Much of the existing scholarship in this area has concentrated on so-called “intentional communities”, or voluntary settlements, mostly on the land.² This essay focuses instead on theoretical debates within the sociological tradition, with a view to ascertaining what a viable “realistic” account of “everyday” utopia might consist of, but here chiefly in the urban context which this tradition chiefly addresses. Two major themes are examined here: the role of the city in these debates; and the nature of concepts of “friendship” as a key aspect of utopian sociability. The key question which follows is whether this form of sociability is possible in modern cities – that is, can we achieve “community” in a large-scale urban context? This is answered by recourse to a “content-based” definition of utopia in terms of what is here termed “enhanced sociability”. Such a definition, it is argued, permits us to avoid the vagueness of many existing conceptions of “utopia”, and provides a practical way of envisioning “real-world” utopianism of the sort demanded by our present circumstances. But this essay admittedly raises more questions than it provides answers.

Communitarian Sociability and the Sociology of Community: Modernity, Alienation and Mass Society

The search for “community” is a central theme in the history of utopianism. Voluntary groups or intentional communities associating with one another on the basis of mutual need and shared belief have established some of the most enduring egalitarian societies throughout history. At least until the twentieth century, modern utopians have often attempted to retrieve and recreate, albeit in modified forms, what have been understood as the lost forms of the rural village community and the values of autarky, close co-operation, and mutuality they supposedly exemplify. Many seventeenth and eighteenth century communities consisted of religious sectarians seeking toleration. These gradually gave way to more secular groups, mainly socialists, but including some anarchists and individualists. The early nineteenth century Owenite, Fourierist and other socialist groups juxtaposed their ideal “community” to industrial degradation, urbanisation and commercial excess. The latter processes, however, came within decades to define much of European and American, and then global, life. But a tension between the sense of loss and the apparently overwhelming inevitability of modernity marks much of the subsequent period. Once we reach a certain distance from more primitive and rural ways of life, too, these alter from being remembered experience to being a forged concept, often nostalgically-framed, which

1 This essay builds on arguments offered in my *Dystopia: A Natural History* (Oxford University Press, 2016), where the dichotomy of utopia/dystopia is defined largely in terms of a spectrum of societies dominated by friendship and fear, and my *Utopia: The History of an Idea* (Thames & Hudson, 2020). . It is part of a larger project entitled “Utopianism for a Dying Planet”.

2 The classic starting-point here is Rosabeth Moss Kanter. *Commitment and Community. Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective* (Harvard University Press, 1972). An overview is also provided by Philip Selznick. *The Communitarian Persuasion* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002). Surveys of the American experience include Robert P. Sutton. *Communal Utopias and the American Experience Religious Communities 1732–2000* (Praeger, 2003), and Sutton. *Communal Utopias and the American Experience Secular Communities 1824–2000* (Praeger, 2004).

merely serves as a kind of psychological alterity in our heads, the merely imaginary "other", the path not taken, rather than a viable alternative way of life. We like to imagine we could return to it, but secretly realise this is, and must remain, merely a comforting fantasy. The concept of utopia to many fulfils the same function: "nowhere" functions as a critique of everyday life, but we realise we can never achieve it. Its critical function thus becomes central, while as a destination it recedes in importance.

The prehistory of later modern efforts to grapple with the concept of community lies in Renaissance and early modern reflections on the greater virtues of early civilisations like Greece and Rome, in Christian religious sectarianism, and in engagements with non-western indigenous peoples, and attempts to contrast their greater simplicity with the corruption of what was seen as an increasingly degenerate Europe. The eighteenth century celebrated the "noble savage" as a form of alterity to civilisation, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's supposed nostalgia for the primitive became integrated into the spirit of the age. While the conquest of the "new world" and the passion for gold, land and slaves resulted in the destruction of indigenous communities everywhere, a faint sense of regret lingered at the edges of the imperial experience. The nineteenth century took up its own variants on the theme, as in its fantasy about Tahiti from Diderot to Gauguin. But the romantic idea of the primitive never reduced the pace of conquest or mitigated its severity.³

It was largely an internal discussion about the reshaping of modern civilisation in the nineteenth century which provided the foundations of much of the debate over "community" from the 1870s onwards. Most of the now-classic sociological literature dates from the sharp growth in large cities which defined European and North American life in the late nineteenth century, and which reacted to a surge in romantic nostalgia about the loss of a simpler life on the land and the values it supposedly embodied. This was sometimes accompanied by a rejection of and revolt against the more sordid, money-grubbing aspects of bourgeois life, and the uniform, repressive, formal conventionalism which separated the middle classes from the working poor. A critique of the base values of money-grubbing Mammon could come from a religious, moral, artistic, or humanitarian viewpoint. The Rousseauist tradition continued in the revolutionary period, with projected returns to Spartan simplicity in South Sea isles or elsewhere. Others sought an "alternative" lifestyle within cities themselves. In the 1840s "Bohemians" haunted the cafés of the Quartier Latin in Paris in search of creativity, personal style, and emotional fulfilment, and took the life of the artist to be paradigmatic for humanity, or at least for creative geniuses. At least one artist, Maurice Quay, established a communal group "dedicated to vegetarianism, illuminist philosophy, and the rediscovery of the Golden Age."⁴ A later generation of Aesthetes championed the idea of "art for art's sake" and the primacy of beauty. These would be followed by further revolts, including the Simple Life movement, supported by writers like Edward Carpenter, and later still, in the mid twentieth century, the Beat Generation and Hippies. These rejected oppressive work systems, and especially, in the twentieth century, the middle class corporate or "executive" lifestyle and compulsory groupthink antagonism towards unorthodoxy of what William Whyte (who coined the term "groupthink") famously termed the "organization man."⁵ Many gravitated towards the culture, music and condition of the poor, both by necessity and inclination. Most celebrated art and music, poetry and the erotic, the spontaneous over the structured. All rejected as inevitable the norms of society laid down by capitalism, a culture defined by the bourgeois "work ethic" and measured by the standards of machines, and the ideal of the good life as defined by wealth and materialism.

By the early twentieth century it was clear that the staid, formal conventionalism of bourgeois society had many opponents, for whom the primitive became a kind of alter ego. This was less a vaguely remembered sense of original equality in the Saturnalian sense – the Roman festival which recalled the lost Golden Age of equality – than a longing for individual freedom from social constraints, and a rebellion against com-

3 But an anti-imperialist utopianism came to the fore in Comte's Positivism, at least in Britain. See my *Imperial Sceptics: British Critics of Empire, 1850–1920* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

4 As discussed in Neil McWilliam. *Dreams of Happiness. Social Art and the French Left, 1830–1850* (Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 29.

5 William H. Whyte, Jr. *The Organization Man* (Jonathan Cape, 1957). This ethos is a key target in Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953).

plexity and regimentation. It was an almost completely imaginary construct, or myth, in other words, whose utility, like the pastoral in the eighteenth century, lay in its ability to provide a kind of psychological counterpoint of protest against the excesses and rigid conformity of bourgeois society. Its dialectical movement was simple: the further society advanced into complexity, intensity, and frenzied consumption, the more acute was the feeling of loss, to some, of a simpler life, while the more distant and unappealing it was to the majority, who had a much clearer idea of life down on the farm and were not anxious to return to it. It has chiefly been intellectuals who romanticise hard agricultural labour as an alterity. We are minded of Boswell's comment to Johnson: "You are tempted to join Rousseau in preferring the savage state. I am so too at times. When jaded with business, or when tormented with the passions of civilized life, I could fly to the woods".⁶

Throughout this period, and especially after Rousseau, there was a growing sense that the moderns had lost something of fundamental value in leaving the countryside for the crowded and unhealthy industrial cities. A "pastoral impulse" attracted a few to head "back to the land" in search of a simpler and more "authentic" life.⁷ The village or small town, for all its faults, permitted familiarity. Cities were anonymous, restless, rootless, and heartless. Here humanity and sympathy were rare commodities. What had been gained in social mobility, in employment opportunities, and in personal freedom and individuality had been paid for, it seemed, by a loss of trust, of mutual aid, and of a sense of locality and familiarity, or in a word, "community". From the late nineteenth century onwards, accordingly, the concept of "community" was taken up by the emerging academic discipline of sociology to help explain urban modernity's distinctive lack thereof. Emile Durkheim, Ferdinand Tönnies and others described the dramatic disruption of family and kinship bonds, and their replacement by connections defined largely by the market and urban congestion. They pointed to isolation, alienation, or anomie as directly resulting from mass or democratic as well as large-scale urban society. Later sociologists would indicate a direct affinity between the "age of consumption" and the acceleration of this transformation.⁸

The most enduring account of this process was Tönnies' juxtaposition of *Gemeinschaft*, or traditional community, to *Gesellschaft*, or modern society, in *Community and Civil Society* (1887). Tönnies assumed that "in the original or natural state there is a complete unity of human wills" based on kinship and descent. Memory, emotional ties, and habits augmented bonds of blood, which also forged a similarity of character. Communities of blood gave rise to those based on place, and further, in spirit, again rooted in "close proximity". Communities "bound together in an organic fashion by their inclination and common consent" could thus be described in terms of kinship, neighbourhood, and friendship or comradeship. A brotherly spirit in the family was matched by the exercise of paternalistic authority in the village. Religion and communal worship were central to maintaining these bonds. In towns, friendship or comradeship grew through frequent interactions, notably in the workplace. Consensus, a reciprocal binding sentiment or peculiar will of the community, might arise here. The sense of community life derived particularly from "mutual possession and enjoyment, and possession and enjoyment of goods held *in common*". "Common goods" included "common evils; common friends - common enemies". This holistic type of community, rooted in a shared outlook and historical bonds of belonging, owed something to the eighteenth-century Scottish writer Adam Ferguson's republican critique of commercial society, and its erosion of civic virtue and military preparedness. Tönnies (like Marx) greatly admired Ferguson's evident defence of *Gemeinschaft* in face of the relentless onward march of modernity.⁹ He examined group associations based on self-interest and commercial exchange, or the "cash nexus", typically in modern cities. Their underlying principle, "individualism", encouraged people to be "essentially detached" rather than united, "so that everyone resists contact with ot-

6 Quoted in A.O. Lovejoy. *Essays in the History of Ideas* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1948), p. 38.

7 For Britain, see Jan Marsh. *Back to the Land. The Pastoral Impulse in England, from 1880 to 1914* (Quartet Books, 1982), and more generally Raymond Williams. *The Country and the City* (Chatto & Windus, 1973).

8 The classic study is David Riesman. *The Lonely Crowd. A Study of the Changing American Character* (Yale University Press, 1952).

9 See Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767), a text which, amongst other things, evidently offered the first use of the word "civilisation" in English.

hers and excludes them from his own spheres". Selfishness predominates over any sense of common endeavour or outlook, and dependency and subjection result. Capitalism embodied and promoted this disunity. Now all "conventional sociability may be understood as analogous to the exchange of material goods", with each seeking advantage over others. Invariably a backlash against it involved a sense of nostalgia for the lost primitive unity of country and small town life. This conforms with later anthropological ideas of original group unity.¹⁰ Tönnies hinted that renewing religious ties might promote *Gemeinschaft* feelings in modern society. Obviously these were no substitute for kinship association as such. But equally he suggested that big cities threatened much that defined *Gemeinschaft*, including the family. The hint was already present that recreating community in a large-scale urban context was impossible.

A similar contrast was offered by Emile Durkheim, who assessed group solidarity in terms of mechanical or organic association, based upon likeness or interdependence. Max Weber, too, examined cohesion in armies, corporations, religious brotherhood, neighbourhoods, and similar associations. "Communal" relationships, including the family, erotic bonds, religious brotherhoods, military units and the nation, were based on "a subjective feeling of the parties, whether affectual or traditional, that they belong together". "Associative" relations involved "a rationally motivated adjustment of interests or a similarly motivated agreement". Communal relationships did not exclude conflict, "coercion of all sorts" being "a very common thing in even the most intimate of such communal relationships if one party is weaker in character than another."¹¹

Twentieth century sociology and political theory continued to understand "community" in terms of *Gemeinschaft*, while usually lamenting its "death". Efforts to reinvent it within large-scale societies have also been noted. This has often involved creating forms of identity and loyalty which can unite large urban populations. Sociologists like Bernard Bell and David Riesman associate the idea of "mass society" with political populism, or pandering to the worst instincts of the majority.¹² Sometimes the unitary sovereignty of the "general will" is described as extending from politics to culture.¹³ Various sociologists have linked crowd behaviour with religious sectarianism and mass politics, especially fascism. As "mass culture" gained conceptual ground from the mid twentieth century onwards, however, the disparaging associations it possessed for earlier psychologists declined. A threat to the moral philosopher, the mass or "group mind" now became to sociologists and historians a more neutral phenomenon. The Le Bonian tradition now mostly disappears.¹⁴ Crowd behaviour becomes less pathological and more conventional. Crowds are rarely the mob, the herd, the beast beneath unleashed. In politically correct democracies, it is imprudent to taunt them, and diplomatic, indeed profitable, to flatter them. Increasingly, they have not been seen as sinister, at least until the last few years and the revived threat of populism and even of fascism, and a renewed, hard Spartanism.¹⁵ But others adapted Tönnies' analysis to give what the American sociologist Louis Wirth called "urbanism" more positive qualities, noting in particular that while kinship and family bonds decline, a "levelling influence" emerged in city engagements as ways of life converged.¹⁶

Nostalgia dominates no small part of these debates. Community is the ultimate "feel-good" concept, and is almost invariably oriented towards the past. Like the idealised family, the imaginary "home" we have lost – theorised as *Heimat* by Ernst Bloch – holds a peculiar attraction for large numbers. Particularly in North America, both in common parlance and in some scholarly literature, "community" has been consequently often invested with warm, gooey, sweet-tasting, pastel-tinged, Disneylandish,

10 Ferdinand Tönnies. *Community and Civil Society* (1887), ed. José Harris (Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 22–62, 170, 253, 255.

11 Max Weber. *Economy and Society* (University of California Press, 1978), pp. 40–2.

12 See Bernard Iddings Bell. *Crowd Culture. An Examination of the American Way of Life* (Gateway, 1956); Robert Nisbet. *The Quest for Community* (Oxford University Press, 1953); David Riesman. *The Lonely Crowd*.

13 Robert E. Park. *The Crowd and the Public and Other Essays* (University of Chicago Press, 1972), pp. 63–84.

14 A good review of this process is Christian Borch. *The Politics of Crowds. An Alternative History of Sociology* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

15 Erich Goode. *Collective Behavior* (Saunders College Publishing, 1992), pp. 5–17.

16 Louis Wirth. *Louis Wirth on Cities and Social Life* (University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 35.

romantic ideas of belonging, safety, security, and acceptance. These are often associated with small-town American life in the 1950s and 1960s, where, it is assumed, doors were left unlocked, keys in cars, and lost valuables would be returned. Towns were small enough for most people to know their neighbours, often on a first-name basis, and for most to recognise others by face. People were known to one another. Trust, in other words, defines this environment. Such an image contrasts starkly to the cold, alien anonymity, crass individualism and competitiveness of the later modern urban beehive, the great mega-cities where millions pass each other daily, eyes averted, hostility scarcely muted, stepping over the ever-increasing numbers of beggars and rough sleepers.

"Community" comes to embody everything we imagine we have lost in this transition. "Communities" are "closely-knit", and contain much shared experience and the expectation of continued "frequent and intense interaction." The concept "feels good", Zygmunt Bauman writes, despite our peripatetic existence and inability to build the bonds of trust community requires, because it "stands for the kind of world which is not available to us - but which we would dearly like to inhabit and which we hope to repossess".¹⁷ The more intensely competitive the modern world becomes, the more we are prone to romanticise "community", since it offers a binary "other" which contrasts to the inescapable cutthroat competitiveness of our everyday lives. Thus Robert Nisbet's definition of community as encompassing "all forms of relationship which are characterized by a high degree of personal intimacy, emotional depth, moral commitment, social cohesion and continuity in time", in particular, has been criticised as "loaded with positivity" and akin to "an idealized description of marriage, or close friendship".¹⁸ The parallels with how we understand "utopia" are obvious.

The City and Community

So the tantalising mirage of *Gemeinschaft* remains, and any account of utopia must confront it. By the early twenty-first century half of the world's inhabitants lived in great cities, up from a third in 1960, some 16% in 1900 and only 4% in 1500. (The figure will be 70% by 2100.) To be a later modern is to be an urban dweller. The modern city of great expanse and density is as such a great challenge to most traditional concepts of utopia. Its essence does not correspond to those splendid illustrations of sweeping squares and towering palazzos we often associate with the great imaginative architects of the "ideal city" of the Italian Renaissance. It is an uphill battle to find *Gemeinschaft* in the densely-packed streets of the modern city. We should not forget, however, just how liberating the urban experience has been and continues to be. Its essence is stimulation, temptation, variety, entertainment, bustle, anonymity, and luxury - even if only viewed tantalisingly through the shop window. Life in the city is infinitely more exciting than on the land or in the small village. We relish many of the city's most temporary qualities - rapid interchange with people we will never see, the possibility of meeting like-minded others who may be associates for life. It is easier to retreat psychologically in the city. Millions have left the land, the village and small town fleeing petty tyranny, over-proximity, superstition, intolerance, suffocating conformity and downright boredom. In the village everyone sees and knows everything about everyone else. To be "known" is a good thing when we are good but a bad thing when we are bad - unless those who surround us are bad too. Familiarity breeds contempt as well as friendship. Anonymity has abundant advantages, and its appeal to millions is obvious.

So the city has as many friends as enemies - probably more. In it there are a plethora of sub-groups and sub-cultures, which can provide an antidote to alienating forms of anonymity by bringing together like-minded people, who can constitute a critical mass more easily than in small towns or villages. Such groups also permit much greater tolerance for activities like non-standard sexual practices which are often suppressed in smaller communities. A proliferation of new types of specialised sub-groups occurs which some think compensates for the loss of wider trust and "be-

¹⁷ Zygmunt Bauman. *Community* (Polity Press, 2001), pp. 1-2, 48.

¹⁸ Robert Nisbet. *The Sociological Tradition* (Heinemann, 1967), p. 47, criticised by Graham Day. *Community and Everyday Life* (Routledge, 2006), p. 9. On some distinctions between community and intimacy see Lynn Jamieson. *Intimacy. Personal Relationships in Modern Society* (Polity Press, 1988), pp. 80-89.

longingness". Virtual communities function similarly, and in many cases an imaginary virtual community may well be more satisfactory than what is to hand in face-to-face reality, in terms of the freedom we have to express our ideas, and the protection which impersonal contact offers.¹⁹ As the family erodes, and with the decline of both marriage and child-rearing, these and other alternative forms of friendship must come to replace the ties it once offered, to compensate for an otherwise potentially debilitating loneliness. So the normative implications of *Gemeinschaft* remain appealing even if we must adjust its definition to suit our times. These factors must all be reconsidered when we come to confront the possibility of successful utopianism in the coming decades.

Yet the creation of the modern city has involved many steps backward in this process. First the industrial town, then the slum, then the megalopolis, then the dominance of the automobile, then the flight to the suburbs, the developers' destruction of the old and beautiful, the growth of malls and superstores, the drainage of retail trade from town centres, all sequentially did considerable harm to the prospect of a happy urban existence, and most of all in North America, where all of these phenomena have been most intensively studied. Cities began to provide a stark contrast between what Lewis Mumford described as necropolis or utopia.²⁰ The twentieth century, however, recognised many drawbacks in the rapid evolution of urban life, and drew upon the longstanding portrayal of "ideal cities" in utopianism as a means of redressing these deficiencies. The new twentieth century ideal city for many, and especially the technological utopians, was epitomised by the gleaming skyscrapers of Manhattan, whose spaces however often overwhelmed and silenced the individual. This was a spatial, not a sociable, vision, designed to dazzle and overwhelm rather than to warm and humanise us. The profound loss of sociability which the often overwhelming spaces and heights of modern great cities have promoted was not appreciated.

The reaction has usually been to insist on the need for smaller-scale life, but still within a wider urban context. From efforts like Ebenezer Howard's planned "garden cities" which would amalgamate the lost advantages of the countryside with suburban proximity, to the ambitious schemes of Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier and others, a sense of the loss not only of the aesthetic value of rural existence but of the sociability of smaller spaces came often to the fore. By the later twentieth century it was becoming evident that no small part of the city's potential for sociability was being lost to the suburbs, as the wealthy fled inner cities, taking their spending and tax base with them, and often without creating real neighbourhoods. Several generations of critics, from Patrick Geddes and Lewis Mumford to Jane Jacobs, Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey, have resisted this trend, and exemplify a confidence that the city can yet express the higher, humane and life-enhancing aspirations of utopianism. To Lefebvre and Harvey a radical approach to the city involves rethinking a "heterotopian" conception of urban space in a manner very different from Foucault.²¹ Many, like Mumford, have recognised that the key to resolving this issue is acknowledging that the building-block of any such ambition must be the "neighbourhood unit" (a term coined by Clarence Perry). The *quartier* or *arrondissement*, even the medieval walled town, is a space which corresponds to the outer limits of our psychological sense of immediate personal identity, and of the number of faces we can recognise. Besides the solidarity of family and work (where such exists), only such a form of association can provide "so close, so intense, so narrow" a feeling of belonging, by providing both "a civic nuclear to draw people together" (in the form of a civic centre of some kind) and "an outer boundary to give them the sense of belonging together."²² Small must balance large, decentralised the centralised, is the message here. "Belongingness" is the link between the city and utopia, and the means of transcending the fundamental loneliness and estrangement of modern city-dwellers. The challenge of recreating it,

19 See Majid Yar. *The Cultural Imaginary of the Internet: Virtual Utopias and Dystopias* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). Some recent studies show the young would rather interact on-line than person to person. Well, obviously, one might respond: it is much easier.

20 Lewis Mumford. *The City in History* (Secker & Warburg, 1961), p. 3.

21 David Harvey. *Rebel Cities. From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (Verso, 2012), p. xvii. See Henri Lefebvre. *The Urban Revolution* (University of Minnesota Press, 2003), pp. 9-11, 33, 128-31. But to Lefebvre "heterotopia" remains "the other", rather than a specific subset of utopia. See further Nathaniel Coleman. *Lefebvre for Architects* (Routledge, 2015) and *Utopias and Architecture* (Routledge, 2005).

22 Lewis Mumford. *The Urban Prospect* (Secker & Warburg, 1968), pp. 56-78, here 57, 68.

we will see, remains even more compelling today. But what should glue it together? What identity needs to bolster this sense of common space? The answer, we will see, is utopian: it is equality.

Towards a Content-Based Theory of Utopian Community: "Enhanced Sociability"

Utopianism can be understood as the attempt to heighten, extend or enhance the possibilities of human sociability by framing institutions which encourage this process.²³ Utopia is the place, imaginary or otherwise, an idea, a fictional representation, or a real place, where this occurs. It is usually a dramatic improvement over the present; marginal improvements might count as "progress" but do not merit the term "utopia". Sociability – how we relate to and treat one another – is the *content* of what makes utopia "good" or "better". Without it these descriptions of what constitutes the "good place" are meaningless, and merely become a subset of more general theories of progress. This content is contentment. Utopia aims, like other forms of utilitarianism, to maximise social happiness, but by adding flesh to what is often a lifeless account in utilitarian writers.²⁴ The idea of utopia can be exemplified in a single maxim: people are happier when they are kinder to each other. This ethos of sociability demands broad behavioural changes which directly contradict what we have already described as the ethos of the modern city. It is not merely superficial politeness. It does not mean just opening the door for older people or the less able. It means a lot more: opening the door, saying hello, ensuring that even strangers are well off and not sleeping on the streets. Being friendly, in a word, and designing a social system where this is reinforced. The principle, it is argued here, is that simple, though realising it is not. Utopia is organised kindness and empathy. It is public as well as private solidarity or friendship, in all its varied forms. It results from good governance, and our collective decision to make it so. It also results from the personal and psychological choice we make when we realise that such behaviour measurably improves our quality of life. It is "enhanced" because of both the depth and scope of the application of sociability, whose promotion becomes a key goal of societies which aim to maximise happiness.

So we now have a provisional definition of utopianism: it is the attempt to institutionalise enhanced sociability, which is a variant on and extension of the concepts of friendship and solidarity. We begin to see just how tricky this proposition is. Clearly we can be on our "best behaviour", and respectful of others, beyond what society normally demands of us, for short, often formal and ritualistic, periods. We dress up, so to speak, but then return to more comfortable attire. We speak diplomatically, saying what we do not believe, to please others, and are relieved when the effort is over. This form of falsehood is better avoided. The real utopian trick is prolonging what is genuine and mutually pleasing in these episodes, inscribing them in everyday life, and practising them as widely as possible – extending the mutually-supportive feelings and sense of trust which bind together the utopian group, in other words. But we cannot *make* people more sociable: we can only furnish the means by which they choose to engage with others. By definition enhanced sociability is of the voluntary, not the coercive type. But "institutionalise" has faint echoes of the forced sociability, or "compulsory solidarity" (in Leszek Kolakowski's phrase) of totalitarian regimes.²⁵ We cannot demand it or punish its absence. So we need to define more closely what this sociability is, how it works, and what kinds of typologies have been offered to

23 This argument is extended in my "News from Somewhere: Enhanced Sociability and the Composite Definition of Utopia and Dystopia", *History*, 98 (2013), 145–173.

24 The weakness of accounts of sociability in utilitarian writers is notable. Though the utilitarians are not usually classed amongst the modern utopians, some of them should be. See my *Mill and Paternalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2013) and *John Stuart Mill. A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, forthcoming) for the example of Mill.

25 Leszek Kolakowski. *The Death of Utopia Reconsidered* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 237.

explain its flourishing or decay. That it has been understood as a key goal of utopia, however, is undisputed.

We can introduce one example here. To the Danish-American lawyer Laurence Gronlund, the author of *Our Destiny* (1890), friendship was a key reward of the new social system:

when, under Socialism, the chasm now dividing the classes is filled, then we shall have everywhere the sympathy, greater than that with pain, greater than that with pleasure: sympathy with the thoughts and purposes of others – *friendship*. Friendship is the *bouquet* of morality – the distilled flavour of morality; the important link that will make sexual love evolve love for fellow-men. The future moralised society will be constituted of groups of friends, each group formed out of men and women from various callings and departments. We know very little of true friendship now, and it is again the Established Order that is at fault, which is the cause of the fact that we have only cliques. Friendship, being sympathy with thoughts and purposes, of course, demands community of sentiments, but it is equally a law that true friendships are formed out of diversities of character – such diversities as are found in people of various callings. It is this diversity that creates admiration. We should thus expect model friendships between literary men and working-men; but they are at present separated by a yawning chasm. We have therefore now comradeships where the mutual influence is by no means always salutary, while true friendships, with their mutual confidences, always have the moral advantage of conferring personal dignity on the parties.²⁶

Gronlund even imagined that servants would continue under socialism, except that

Under Socialism we undoubtedly shall not be without "helpers" in our private houses – those in the public establishments will, of course, be just as much public functionaries as the guests who have their wants attended to. But the relations of these private attendants to their principals will be very different from what it is now – it will be a sympathetic, not a pecuniary one. These attendants will attach themselves to our persons because attracted by our personal qualities, and on the condition of being incorporated into our families as members thereof – something like the pages of mediaeval households; they will hardly accept such positions on other terms.²⁷

Towards a Theory of Utopian Sociability

Disentangling the various types of sociability will give us a sense of how a "utopian" variation might be understood and constructed. Clearly a spectrum of sociable relations exists from deep, intense, and prolonged to shallow, weak, and temporary bonds. This extends from personal love, the closest bond between people; to kinship and the family; with further affection for the tribe, village, ethnic or religious group, and the nation; to forms of association based chiefly on work, like co-operation and solidarity; to festivals and group celebrations; to more distant relations with strangers; and moving towards hostility and antagonism towards enemies. On this spectrum are various forms of acquaintance, recognition, friendship, and love. All are modified by gender, race, class and other factors. Intense loyalty, devotion and affection can also exist at higher levels, for longer periods, and for larger groups, like the nation. But as a rule our deeper emotional bonds are more confined, and limited by the reservoir of affection we possess.

Where might "utopian" interaction fit on this spectrum? Understanding utopianism as a quest for sociability requires distinguishing in particular between different forms of friendship and solidarity, the chief intermediary relationships between family and stranger. These are both personal relations of mutual support, though much more has been written about friendship. Both however require relative social equality, which is has always been held to be the basis of friendship, since at least Aristotle, who famously asserted that "Friendship implies the recognition by Self of Other as an equal in his humanity".²⁸ Some modern historians, like David Wootton, explicitly link

26 Laurence Gronlund. *Our Destiny* (1890), p. 116.

27 Laurence Gronlund. *Our Destiny*, pp. 110–11.

28 Aristotle. *Nichomachean Ethics*, 1161b.

such ideals of friendship with Thomas More and the origins of the utopian tradition.²⁹ Just how we conceive of the equality which underpins such ideals is a crucial point. It cannot mean rigid uniformity based on what Kolakowski derides as "the aesthetics of impeccable symmetry and ultimate identity", which results in "an order in which all variety, all distinction, all dissatisfaction and therefore all development have been done away with forever."³⁰ But opposition to extreme inequality need not result in this suppression of difference and individuality.

The inspiration for this claim to equality can come from several different sources. Historically, at least until about the eighteenth century, one strategy was to claim that an original, now lost equality, once existed, in a Golden Age or long-lost paradise, which served as a key precedent for imagining current and future equality. (This was the tradition which Rousseau in part drew upon, and which goes at least as far as the Tahitian ideal.) But equality need not be perceived as something lost in the mists of time. It can be understood as inscribed in the process of democratisation – this is how Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill viewed it. It can also be conceived as the artificial construction of a new relationship, like solidarity, which is often rooted in work relations, in class consciousness, and specifically in the antagonism between capital and labour. Important though they were to eighteenth and nineteenth century social theory, it is indeed doubtful whether models of sociability which rely on or advert to primitive simplicity and "original equality" as their reference point have much if any relevance today. So solidarity and friendship alike are better understood today as contrived, created, and artificial, rather than natural and organic, regressive or atavistic. We construct them rather than remembering them, or rediscovering them on South Sea isles. They also become much more rooted in how we work and in our everyday social relations than in what our "original" condition might have been. We are thus more likely to discuss them in terms of "rights" or "dignity" than any original condition of humanity.

Later modern ideas of sociability, dating mostly from the seventeenth and eighteenth century, are thus overwhelmingly urban in orientation. They often rest on ideas of "civil society", and on recognising explicitly non-political forms of association which carry the weight of promoting peace and the mutual satisfaction of interest ("networking"), and a resulting diminution in the more negative and destructive passions. They also acknowledge the dense, heterogeneous, and highly differentiated nature of urban life. (David Hume is a key example here.) In the context of rapidly-expanding commerce this has however implied both greater social inequality and an ever-intensifying competition of appearance and show, especially in clothing and other external forms of wealth. Some (like Hume) even celebrate the apparent artificiality of manners emanating from a densely populated urban context. Side by side, however, there has long been a sense that older bonds were stronger, deeper, and more sincere, rather than casual, ephemeral, formalistic and superficial, a mere show of manners rather than an emanation from the inner self. Hume and Rousseau march forwards into later modernity, if never quite in step.

Conceiving of a specifically utopian form of sociability or friendship requires distinguishing between types or degrees of sociability, and between forms which are appropriate to private life and those which might plausibly be universalised, or at least extended more widely into public life and civil society. We need to explain how a utopian form of *communitas*, friendship, or solidarity, can be grounded, and distinguished from other forms of social association. We can readily concede that such a form of association would be highly desirable for most of us, that loneliness and isolation – sometimes called "negative community" – are pervasive (and growing) dangers in later modern societies, and are highly destructive of our psychic needs.³¹ We see,

29 See David Wootton. "Friendship Portrayed: A New Account of Utopia", *History Workshop Journal*, 45 (1998), 28–47.

30 Leszek Kolakowski. *Modernity on Endless Trial* (University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 140–1. He adds: "The dream of a consistently egalitarian utopia is to abolish everything that could distinguish one person from another; a world in which people live in identical houses, identical towns, identical geographical conditions, wearing identical clothes and sharing, of course, identical ideas is a familiar utopian picture."

31 Philip Rieff. *The Triumph of the Therapeutic. Uses of Faith After Freud* (Chatto & Windus, 1966), p. 32. Rieff contrasts this to a positive community which is "characterized by the fact that it guarantees some kind of salvation to the individual by virtue of his membership and participation in that community (pp. 52–3).

too, that liberal assumptions that we aim always to maximise our personal autonomy, in order to minimise coercion, are thus false, or at least must be greatly modified in favour of appreciating the centrality of sociability to our sense of well-being and psychological balance. And we acknowledge that, just as dystopia is dominated by fear and is hostile to friendship, utopia usually cherishes solidarity, and diminishes fear as far as possible.

Utopia has often presented itself in the form of an artificially contrived group which functions as a substitute for both stronger and weaker social bonds by offering an unconventional form of unity or group identity. Amongst the strongest of these bonds is the family, and one traditional utopian approach to describing its form of association has been through some variation on it. From Plato onwards, utopian societies and intentional communities alike have often been described in terms of a "family" of brothers and sisters, parents and children. But there has always been much ambiguity about the degree to which any form of nuclear, "bourgeois" or "private" family, with its own distinctive loyalties, might detract from devotion to the wider communal group. Many early modern utopias, like Tommaso Campanella's *The City of the Sun*, assumed the family to be the basis of society. But "family" can be construed in many different ways. Some communal groupings have attempted to eliminate the nuclear family as a threat to the wider focus of identity, and to place children under the care of the group – think of John Humphrey Noyes's Oneida commune. In the kibbutz "familistic" attachment was generally scorned, as well as close friendships within peer groups.³² The same was true at various points in the history of the Soviet Union and other similar states. (Neither in the USSR nor the Israeli kibbutz did removal of children for enforced community-centred group education prove particularly advantageous, however.) The most ambitious and universalistic theories of sociability have also demanded a tempering of national loyalty by cosmopolitanism as to emphasise our common essential humanity (think of Marx), and also sometimes an inter-species sense of mutual interest and affection, to promote respect for animals.

Beyond the family, friendship is our most common form of social interaction. The basic value of friendship to our sense of well-being is beyond doubt. As Robert E. Lane stresses, friendships are a proven source of happiness. They offer great benefits for our sense of self-esteem, and demand little by way of consumption or environmental degradation. They may retain an element of competitiveness, at least more so than the family. But they are not defined by a race to surpass others. Market relations are "cold", because they are calculating and commodified; social relations are "warm" because they involve trust, openness, and minimal exploitation.³³ In conditions of extreme duress, in particular, such as imprisonment, despotism, or war, they are all-important. In the USSR under Stalin's dictatorship friendship was "an ultimate value".³⁴ In the close and terrible combat of Pacific battle during World War II, a Marine Private, E. B. Sledge, remembered that "Friendship was the only comfort a man had". He recalled that when veterans returned to the U.S. they sometimes expressed "a feeling of alienation from everyone but their old comrades", realising that "all the good life and luxury didn't seem to take the place of old friendships forged in combat", creating bonds which no-one who had not experienced combat could understand, because here life is reduced solely to the value of these relationships.³⁵

Clearly, however, many ideals of friendship might coincide with utopian aspirations. Though Andrew M. Greeley describes friendship as "a promise to ecstasy, a dream of pleasure and joy, a utopian vision",³⁶ studies of this relationship rarely deal with the utopian dimension, or attempt to conjecture how friendships might be maximised across an entire society, and what might be valuable in attempting to do so. How then can we distinguish between the many degrees of both equality and friendship with a

32 Yonina Talmon. *Family and Community in the Kibbutz* (Harvard University Press, 1972), pp. 12, 154.

33 Robert E. Lane. "The Road Not Taken", in David A. Crocker and Toby Linden, eds. *Ethics of Consumption. The Good Life, Justice, and Global Stewardship* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), pp. 225–9.

34 Oleg Kharkordin. *The Collective and the Individual in Russia: A Study of Practices* (University of California Press, 1999), p. 319.

35 E.B. Sledge. *With the Old Breed. At Peleliu and Okinawa* (Presidio, 1990), pp. 218, 266. And so too James Michener: "The sense of belonging is one of the great gifts men get in battle." (*Tales of the South Pacific*, Fawcett Crest, 1947, p. 352).

36 Andrew M. Greeley. *The Friendship Game* (Doubleday, 1971), p. 31.

view to eliciting which has the greatest utopian potential? John Reisman distinguishes between three main kinds of friendship: those based on reciprocity, on receptivity, and on association. In the former "each friend gives to, takes from, respects, and likes the other". Affection, loyalty and admiration are all reciprocated. Friendships of receptivity are more imbalanced, and include inequality, one perhaps giving more and receiving less affection. In friendships of association, by contrast, little or no affection exists, and promoting mutual interest predominates.³⁷

What are the preconditions for allowing friendships of reciprocity to flourish? Types of group association are clearly central. To Michael A. Hogg, the more cohesive the group is, the more friendships there are within it, and "group cohesiveness is widely treated as equivalent to interpersonal attraction".³⁸ To Horst Hutter, "Feelings of liking, cherishing, or being well-disposed are some of the chief defining characteristics of friendship". Yet here we face another paradox: our friendships may come at the cost of our affection for the whole society as such (which is why private life – Orwell's "ownlife" – is so often condemned in dystopias). Hutter acknowledges that

The more numerous these relationships become, the better it is for societies, but the less satisfying they are to the individual on the assumption that the amount of emotional energy available to an individual is limited. Friendship and love present the lure of deeply-satisfying relationships at the expense of the networks of casual involvements, so needed by society, from which the individual necessarily has to withdraw some power of feeling for the purpose of investing this power in love and friendship.³⁹

What is the distance between familial relationships and those we are now describing in terms of friendship? We may love our family and our friends with an equal depth of affection. But the intimacy of family and other close relations clearly demands a degree of emotional intensity and investment of time which even in principle cannot be extended on a considerably large scale. Both "family" and "friend" are exclusive categories which indicate a willingness to assist and nurture others. But there is simply an emotional limit, a cap on our inner resources, which restricts both the depth and the extent our feeling of "closeness" to others. Zygmunt Bauman notes the difficulty of "loving our neighbour" is almost insurmountable;⁴⁰ Luther insisted that it was impossible "to rule a country, let alone the entire world, by the gospel".⁴¹ This is the limit of the religious or sectarian interpretation of utopia, where such mutual love is often presumed to prevail.

So never mind loving your neighbour: even "liking" them requires a degree of familiarity which is often lacking. You cannot like someone you do not know, and whom you may not have time to get to know. So we must settle for something less morally and emotionally strenuous, like being neighbourly, open, helpful, and respectful. At best we can perhaps associate with others as "friends of friends", who psychologists remind us "are required to treat each other as equals,"⁴² but without the requisite warmth which close friends and family merit (or ought to merit: neither relationship is always rewarding). Yet, paradoxically, when we belong to more cohesive groups we are also more likely to make friends within them, the outer reinforcing the more individual bonds by way of creating a reciprocal solidarity which strengthens both.⁴³ Groups facilitate friendship, because being a member of a group implies the first requirements of trust have already been met. We know we have something in common,

37 John M. Reisman. *Anatomy of Friendship* (Irvington Publishers, 1979), pp. 2, 19, 23.

38 Michael A. Hogg. *The Social Psychology of Group Cohesiveness* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 21, 24.

39 Horst Hutter. *Politics as Friendship. The Origins of Classical Notions of Politics in the Theory and Practice of Friendship* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1978), pp. 5-6.

40 Zygmunt Bauman. *Liquid Love. On the Frailty of Human Bonds* (Polity, 2003), pp. 77-118.

41 Quoted in Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang. *Heaven: A History* (Vintage Books, 1990), p. 151.

42 George McCall et al. *Social Relationships* (Aldine Publishing Co., 1970), p. 97. See generally Jeremy Boissevain. *Friends of Friends. Networks, Manipulators and Coalitions* (Basil Blackwell, 1974).

43 Michael A. Hogg. *The Social Psychology of Group Cohesiveness*, p. 21.

and we know that people we engage with can be held responsible for their actions because we know how and where to find them.

Groups, however, divide as well as unite, and the intensity of our bonds within them may discourage relationships with non-members. The most considerable barrier to any form of sustained trust and intimacy lies in inequality of property, and the sense of class identity it encourages. Class is generally regarded as having a deep impact on our feeling of needing dignity (a form of recognition), by making us feel inferior to those who have more money, power and possessions. But while such inequality is the great enemy of friendship, property enters into friendship at many other levels, if only symbolically. Sharing food and common dining has been a key traditional way of demonstrating hospitality as a form of friendship. Reciprocity of obligation has often been built on exchanging gifts, which binds us by duty rather than proximity, and which forms the original basis for an exchange economy.⁴⁴ In Marcel Mauss's famous account of “exchange courtesies”, the “most important of these spiritual mechanisms is clearly the one which obliges us to make a return gift for a gift received.”⁴⁵ As Marshall Sahlins indicates, a “spectrum of reciprocities” exists originating in mutuality and self-interest and ranging from the most voluntary to the virtually coerced.⁴⁶

Though it is a home-centred ideal of hospitality, the Greek concept of *xenia*, or guest-friendship, extending courtesies to all visitors, is sometimes held out as an ideal here. Some utopians, however, explicitly reject the subversive potential of involving property, and thus inequality, in this relationship. Campanella's *The City of the Sun* (1623) insists that “it is worth the trouble to see that no one can receive gifts from another. Whatever is necessary they have, they receive it from the community, and the magistrate takes care that no one receives more than he deserves.”⁴⁷ Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888) proposes that “People nowadays interchange gifts and favors out of friendship, but buying and selling is considered absolutely inconsistent with the mutual benevolence and disinterestedness which should prevail between citizens and the sense of community of interest which supports our social system.”⁴⁸ But a desire for helpfulness implies that the exchange can be of services as well as goods, and without any expectation of immediate return. The “anarchist prince”, Peter Kropotkin, construed solidarity in terms of a principle of “mutual aid” which could be traced throughout history, identifying its practice with tribal and village communities in particular, and in modern society on mutual assistance amongst the working classes.⁴⁹

An exchange of benefits, then, does not necessarily imply economic values being placed on what is exchanged. Clearly there is an important if invisible line between altruistic assistance and that based on mutual reciprocal obligations or perceived mutual interest. Later commentators like Robert Lane agree that “Solidarity implies a degree of emotion, of warmth; reciprocal favors do not”, and stress that family life and friendship are key components in our subjective sense of well-being.⁵⁰ Amitai Etzioni also insists that community can only be based upon mutuality, “a form of community relationship in which people help each other rather than merely helping those in need”, which is “undermined when treated like an economic exchange of services.”⁵¹ This implies that problems begin when money is used as an intermediary in such exchanges. Here the clearest formulation is that of Georg Simmel: “We then

44 For the example of Greece, see Gabriel Herman. *Ritualised Friendship and the Greek City* (Cambridge University Press, 1987).

45 Marcel Mauss. *The Gift. Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (Cohen & West, 1954), p. 5. For case studies, and an updating of Mauss's arguments, see Natalie Zemon Davis. *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

46 Marshall Sahlins. *Stone-Age Economics* (Tavistock Publications, 1974), p. 193.

47 *The New Atlantis and The City of the Sun. Two Classic Utopias*, ed. G. Claeys (Dover Publications, 2018), p. 51.

48 Edward Bellamy. *Looking Backward 2000–1888* (Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 52. Bellamy wrote an essay on the “Religion of Solidarity” which linked love between individuals with love of the universe and as providing the basis for “unselfishness” and self-sacrifice as “the essence of morality” (Edward Bellamy. *Selected Writings on Religion and Society*, ed. Joseph Schiffman, Liberal Arts Press, 1955, pp. 3–26).

49 Peter Kropotkin. *Mutual Aid* (William Heinemann, 1903), p. 287.

50 Robert E. Lane. *The Loss of Happiness in Market Democracies* (Yale University Press, 2000), p. 112.

51 Amitai Etzioni. *The Third Way to a Good Society* (Demos, 2000), pp. 19–20.

formulate the principle of sociability as the axiom that each individual should offer the maximum of sociable values (of joy, relief, liveliness, etc.) that is compatible with the maximum of values he himself receives." The point is to be found not in the exchange of things or benefits but in the spirit of the occasion, the motive of those who exchange, and the reciprocity of exchanged "personal qualities as amiability, refinement, cordiality, and many other sources of attraction." Yet even here Simmel thought that "the democracy of sociability even among social equals is only something played."⁵²

We can also see this distinction in terms of a contrast between competitive behaviour, defined by Margaret Mead as "the act of seeking or endeavouring to gain what another is endeavouring to gain at the same time", and cooperation, "the act of working together to one end".⁵³ Unfortunately competition – the counter-ideal to what we have been advocating so far here – became the dominant ideal of the modern ethos, legitimated to many by the discoveries of Darwin, ensconced too in Marx's idea of class struggle, but the product chiefly of liberal ideas of market society.⁵⁴ With the strengthening of neoliberal agendas its influence has been increasing across the course of the past two decades. The chief locus of such competition is the workplace, a primary source of identity for many of us. Here the advantages of mutual assistance are also most evident. But too often the workplace embodies the opposite moral qualities from those associated with the home. This is even more the case where working conditions are deteriorating through pay squeezes, short-term or zero hours contracts, and a reduction of benefits, all of which are typical of twenty-first century capitalism.

But as a key political and economic concept, solidarity at work necessarily plays an important role in defining utopian friendship. Originating in analyses of the division of labour and class association within it, and possibly first defined in this context by Pierre Leroux, the term came by the 1840s to be closely linked with the championing of socialism, conceived as a new form of fraternity or brother- (and sometimes sister-) hood.⁵⁵ (In this sense utopianism inherits the third and least developed of the three great modern concepts associated with the French Revolution, liberty, equality and fraternity.) Friedrich Engels, certainly, thought that "the simple feeling of solidarity based on the understanding of the identity of class position suffices to create and to hold together one and the same great party of the proletariat among the workers of all countries and tongues."⁵⁶ The anarchist Michael Bakunin regarded solidarity as "the only basis of all morality".⁵⁷

Outside of the workplace, another way of approaching sociability is to treat it as the reciprocal recognition of dignity. We can easily concede with Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb that dignity "is as compelling a human need as food or sex", and this implies a need for equality.⁵⁸ This was also Ernst Bloch's conclusion.⁵⁹ Without a reciprocal acknowledgement of dignity (we also term this "rights") no ideal of friendship is possible. Our social equality of course will be contingent on the degree of servitude in our society, and in turn of its degradation, as we have seen Gronlund suggested. Any reduction of permanent servitude, of a type suggested by Mill and Marx alike, will answer this end. Schemes for rotating some unpleasant tasks on a jury-duty basis would also assist in breaking down class barriers and assumptions of superiority and inferiority. Forms of national service – not military – which involve tree-planting, ca-

52 Georg Simmel. *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (Free Press, 1950), pp. 45, 48.

53 Margaret Mead (ed). *Cooperation and Competition Among Primitive Peoples* (Beacon Press, 1937), p. 8.

54 On its genesis see my "The Origins and Development of Social Darwinism", in Gregory Claeys, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Nineteenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 165–183.

55 On its meanings, see Kurt Bayertz, ed. *Solidarity* (Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), pp. 3–28, and J.E.S. Hayward. "Solidarity: The Social History of an Idea in Nineteenth-Century France", *International Review of Social History*, 4 (1959), 261–84.

56 Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. *Works*, vol. 26, p. 330.

57 Michael Bakunin. *From Out of the Dustbin. Bakunin's Basic Writings 1869–1871* (Ardis Publishers, 1985), p. 57.

58 Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb. *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 28, 191.

59 Most notably in *Natural Law and Human Dignity* (MIT Press, 1986).

ring for the elderly, and the like might also produce a sense of common endeavour and purpose.

Any attempt to promote increased sociability which involves greater collectivism must meet two obvious objections: firstly, that enforced collectivism or compulsory public sociability of the sort seemingly implied here produced dystopian ends during much of the twentieth century; and secondly, that we rightly regard a sense of growing individuality, uniqueness, and autonomy as one of the key achievements of modernity, even if it is always offset by the demands of social or group forms of identity.⁶⁰ "Casting members as individuals is the trademark of modern society", writes Bauman. This "individualizing process" is not something we should willingly abandon: the trick is to wed it successfully to the need for group or social identities, and not to allow it to undermine the bonds the latter provide.⁶¹ Durkheim captured the problem well in asserting that "The human personality is a sacred thing; one dare not violate it nor infringe its bounds, while at the same time the greatest good is in communion with others."⁶² Theories of sociability which emphasise species-being, or the need for unity with others, as a key human goal, like Marx's, thus tend to miss the need for isolation, solitude, individuality and unique self-development.⁶³

Yet we also readily concede the vices of excessive individualism. At one extreme this process disappears into the self-absorption we usually term narcissism, in which (Richard Sennett suggests) we become overwhelmingly interested only in how "what this person, that event means to me", at the expense of any sense of what goes on outside our emotions, or how we should socially contextualise events.⁶⁴ An all-consuming search for inner self-gratification can in fact act as a negative, "destructive *Gemeinschaft*" which "treats intimate interchanges as a market of self-revelations. You interact with others according to how much you tell them about yourself; the more 'intimate' you become, the more confessions you have made."⁶⁵ (But this of course also reveals our trust in others.) The general tendency seems to be for identities to float ever more freely, and to be seen as a function of choice rather than destiny – increasingly we no longer view even gender as necessarily fixed, for instance, but as potentially transient, at least for those who wish to see it as such.⁶⁶ Individuality is also linked to identifying ourselves with the commodities we have, which means objectifying ourselves and becoming obsessed with what Stuart Ewen calls "beautiful thinghood", an ideal of our self which is so unrealistic that it "stirs painful feelings of inadequacy", particularly as we age, our bodies wither, and we recognise our inevitable shortcomings.⁶⁷ The cult of celebrity can work in much the same way, as our small attempts to mimic our idols fall short of gratification.

This implies that we wish to extend the idea of voluntarily-chosen identities ever further. Thus if we plead that utopian friendship should include respect for individuality, we cannot denigrate a desire for solitude, isolation, or standoffishness when it suits someone. Our goal is – in this area – only to supersede alienated loneliness, not to degrade privacy, the value of interiority, or the desire to be alone. This goal means creating a new sense of group identity or imagined community which welcomes without stifling, which lends support and recognition, but does not demand the sacrifice of individuality or the assertions of what we now usually refer to as identity politics or the creation of subcultures. The identities of self/selves and of these groups need to

60 On groups and social identity theory, see my *Dystopia*, part one.

61 Zygmunt Bauman. *The Individualized Society* (Polity, 2001), p. 45.

62 "The Determination of Moral Facts," in *Sociology and Philosophy*, tr. D. F. Pocock (Cohen & West, 1953), p. 37.

63 See my *Marx and Marxism* (Penguin Books, 2018), esp. pp. 24–34.

64 Richard Sennett. *The Fall of Public Man* (Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 8. See further Christopher Lasch. *The Culture of Narcissism. American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (Warner Books, 1979).

65 Richard Sennett. „Destructive *Gemeinschaft*“, in Norman Birnbaum, ed. *Beyond the Crisis* (Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 181.

66 This trend of course occurs even as our real power over our lives diminishes constantly, as wages decrease, and as fewer people are self-employed, more are employed on precarious contracts, and come merely to be cogs in the corporate machine, and may be directly related to it.

67 Stuart Ewen. *All Consuming Images. The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture* (Basic-Books, 1988), p. 89.

be kept in balance, with neither overwhelming the other. Given the dystopian trends of the present this is an extremely challenging demand.

We need moreover also to consider that friendship changes over time in certain key respects. Measured by all preceding history, the later moderns are a peculiar people. As we move about and live alone ever more frequently, especially among the anonymity of great cities, the constancy of association which provided a basis for trust and intimacy in earlier societies is eroded. Slowly societies sink into a sullen, rushed, sad sense of their lack of empathy and the inadequate sociability it indicates. Anti-social trends and tendencies thus face us everywhere, as levels of anxiety, hostility, and irritation rise inexorably. The economic stresses of the past decade and more have bred increasing distrust, suspicion and hostility. Friendship as such is declining: many factors conspire to undermine it. In 1985, 80% of Americans had more than one close friend. By 2004, only 57% did, although more pallid forms of "virtual kinship" of course increased in this period. As we become more dependent on digital devices to communicate – now driven additionally by pandemics – direct personal interaction is further weakened. Technology now separates us more than ever. It may exacerbate our already weak and clearly declining communication skills. (Bauman writes: "In fact, we grow shy of face to face contacts. We tend to reach for our mobiles...")⁶⁸ We have all seen groups of friends sitting together silently at a table, each passively staring at their phone. But everyone recognises that even Zoom and Teams, where at least we converse with others, are an inferior form of human interaction, and fail to inspire us with the personal energy and motivation which face-to-face contact provides.

Nonetheless a preference for mediated indirect communication – online chatting for example – is evident. Studies show that social media also augment communication in some respects, for example by permitting more frequent interactions (Skype, Snapchat, Facebook, Whatsapp, Twitter, etc), and encouraging the sharing of pictures, experiences and feelings. But the problem remains as to whether Facebook "friendships" equate to "real" friendships, or Twitter "likes" reflect an obsessive sense of the need for self-reinforcement. They do not seem to offer substantial emotional sustenance. And what is the value of friends who can be purchased for 20 cents on uSocial.net?⁶⁹ But while the number of friends we have is declining, women still have more friends than men (4.7 as opposed to 3.2 in 1981).⁷⁰ They are sometimes supposed to possess a greater capacity for making friends in the first place. Female intimacy also certainly needs to be understood in different ways from its male counterpart.⁷¹ Yet loneliness is usually acknowledged as increasing steadily today, and not just because of the rising proportion of people living alone. We are told, too, that we inhabit a more affective, emotional and open epoch. But this only exacerbates loneliness when we feel that we fall short of the minimal number of associations required for this elusive happiness.

We should also note in passing two other relevant forms of friendship, with non-humans. Friendships with animals, especially pets, may surpass in meaning some of those we have with humans, and acknowledge what H. S. Salt called a "creed of kinship" with other species as well as our desire for unconditional loyalty.⁷² We may also soon begin to relate emotionally to some types of machines – some already invite us to do so, though so far – even compared to pets – they are mostly poor conversationalists (try the talking ATM or supermarket checkout machine). Each of these relations implies an exchange of mutual good offices, perhaps the affirmation of mutual dignity (more doubtful for a machine), and the security that we will not be stabbed in the back. A utopian theory of friendship would certainly want to promote more of

68 Zygmunt Bauman. *Wasted Lives. Modernity and Its Outcasts* (Polity, 2004), p. 130.

69 Harry Blatterer, Pauline Johnson and Maria M. Markus, eds. *Modern Privacy. Shifting Boundaries, New Forms* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 94.

70 Robert R. Bell. *Worlds of Friendship* (Sage Publications, 1981), p. 63.

71 See Elizabeth Susan Wahl. *Invisible Relations. Representations of Female Intimacy in the Age of Enlightenment* (Stanford University Press, 1999).

72 H.S. Salt. *The Creed of Kinship* (Constable & Co., 1935).

both. So we can hope that there will be more pets in Utopia, not fewer, as H. G. Wells suggested, in the hope of eliminating diseases spread by them.⁷³

So far, then, we have suggested that casting utopian sociability in terms of a theory of friendship faces substantial challenges in later modernity. Indeed at this point we have more questions than answers. How might such friendships be extended in great cities? How does "enhanced sociability" correspond to these many degrees of intimacy and types of friendship? Are we to imagine the best social ideal to be the "family", as so many utopians have? Or is another relationship better or more suitable? Should "equality", in particular, be sub-defined by age and/or gender? Do the internet and smartphones spell an end to or diminish traditional human interaction? And if we are to prize this relationship as a form of "friendship", it must be capable of defining relations between unequals, too, for complete equality is impossible even if it were desirable. Indeed the concept, as so many dystopias have emphasised, is ridiculous. And we cannot here even begin to examine how sociability and consumerism are related.

From what we have considered so far, however, it is not all that difficult to see what utopia consists in: firstly, enhanced sociability, consisting of strong and rewarding individual relationships, and a supportive social network; and secondly, the infrastructure of good education, employment opportunities and health care; reasonable life expectancy; and a sense of being free, equal, and rewarded for one's labour. It hints at a world, as Theodor Adorno put it, "without hunger and probably without anxiety" where people "could also live as free human beings."⁷⁴ In Amartya Sen's formulation, it requires being able to lead a "life without shame", conceived as a key element of "social flourishing".⁷⁵ It does not consist, except in caricature and science fiction, in expecting to live for ever, or of permanent unceasing immersion in pleasure, or bliss, grace, or perfection of any kind.

So utopia boils down to universalising two factors: meaningful and supportive social relationships, and reasonable creature comforts. Social arrangements and institutions can do a great deal towards providing the latter, but rather less (we generally assume) for the former. But here we need to be more imaginative. In this respect the utopian tradition is dominated by two key themes: upholding sociability, or an ideal of friendship, family, and mutual aid; and suppressing private luxury, which makes an equality of provision impossible. So as the former is the great end of utopian aspiration, it is meaningless without the latter. So: no equality, no friendship. Equality is the means, friendship the end. That is utopia, for the most part. It is, and always has been, essentially a discourse about sociability. Just how it can be made realisable is a challenge to be considered elsewhere.

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⁷³ H.G. Wells. *A Modern Utopia* (Chapman & Hall, 1905), pp. 230–4.

⁷⁴ Quoted in Ernst Bloch. *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature* (MIT Press, 1988), p. 4.

⁷⁵ As discussed in Tim Jackson. *Prosperity without Growth. Economics for a Finite Planet* (Earthscan, 2009), pp. 146–7.