

Utopian Totalitarianism in Theory and Practice

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Abstract: The proposition that a central planner could order economic production so as to simultaneously maximize the desires of the people and also satisfy them in a social and metaphysical sense—and that in fact this ordering would allow for a “true freedom” that the free market cannot facilitate—I call here *utopian totalitarianism*. I argue that it is based upon a concept of collective will that is closely related to a metaphysical notion of collective consciousness, and enlightenment or “transcendence of the self.”

This utopian vision is also related to an understanding of free living, which can be experienced with a very simple and bare lifestyle, in which each member of society receives only the bare necessities of life. In this *subsistence utopian totalitarianism*, desires are understood in different terms, and “maximization” of desires is not necessary.

The economic critique of the Austrian school points to certain problems that undercut an *abundant utopian totalitarianism*, but do not necessarily undercut a bare subsistence one. This distinction may help to shed light on the reasons that many socialist systems have not lived up to their ideal, and have produced a dark *dystopian totalitarianism* instead; but it may also indicate why the hope for a utopian system lives on. It also points to a possible solution: a *feasible utopian totalitarianism*.

1. The Utopian Vision and The Collective Will

The utopian totalitarian vision is founded upon collective ownership. In a society based upon common ownership the individual would receive the full product of his labor (to each according to his work) until the time when the full utopian totalitarian vision, communism, arrived. Then he would receive according only to his needs. As Nikolai Bukharin (1920) described it, in simple terms, “common work for the common pot.” An individual would put in what he produced, and would take out what he needed, from the common pot.

A society based on common property would allow a new man to emerge, because the transcendence of private property and individualism would offer new freedom. Marx argued that human nature (and hence economic law) was shaped by the social and historical conditions prevailing, especially the ownership of the means of production. For example Marx (1959 [1844a]) said: “a new mode of production and a new object of production” create “a new manifestation of the forces of human nature and a new enrichment of human nature.” How would this come about? Marx (1970 [1875]) explains:

In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labor, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labor, has vanished; after labor has become not only a means of life but life’s prime want; after the productive forces

have also increased with the all-around development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly—only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!

Marx (1959 [1844b]) argued that man was a social being, but that property alienated man. Common ownership would erase the antagonism between individuals, so that the people might live in harmony, without aggression, inequality, and suffering. Communism would allow man to transcend human estrangement and hence would resolve the dichotomy of the division of self and other:

Communism as the positive transcendence of private property as *human self-estrangement*, and therefore as the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man; communism therefore as the complete return of man to himself as a social (i.e., human) being - a return accomplished consciously and embracing the entire wealth of previous development. This communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the genuine resolution of the conflict *between man and nature and between man and man* - the true resolution of the strife between existence and essence, between objectification and self-confirmation, between freedom and necessity, *between the individual and the species*. Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution. (emphasis added)

For Marxists, this was not just idle theory – those who worked to bring about the socialist ideal worked toward these ends. The transcendence of self and other was an actual goal of the Communist Party in Russia. “[T]he feeling of a collective bond between people is one of the principal traits of socialism,” Bukharin (1977 [1935]) said. Lenin's wife (Krupskaya, 1962 [1932]), in a letter to Maxim Gorky in 1932, wrote:

To build socialism means not only building gigantic factories and flour mills. This is essential but not enough for building socialism. People must grow in mind and heart. And on the basis of this individual growth of each in our conditions a new type of mighty socialist collective will in the long run be formed, *where “I” and “we” will merge into one inseparable whole*. Such a collective can only develop on the basis of profound ideological solidarity and an equally profound emotional rapprochement, mutual understanding.

... [Marx wrote that] the collective gives birth to a new force. It is not just the sum-total of people, the sum-total of their forces, *but a completely new, much more powerful, force*. In his chapter on co-operation Marx writes about the new material force. But when, on its basis, *unity of consciousness and will springs up*, it becomes an indomitable force. (emphas-

is added)

In this vision, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, and hence the collective will is a greater good that can guide the individual. If each individual follows this guide, it strengthens the will of this collective consciousness. The collective consciousness becomes a collective will as all of society works together and thinks and acts as one. Poems of the revolutionary period envisioned the new man, strengthened by this collective will, and described the bond between men found in socialism. For example (Kirillov 1918):

There he is—the savior, the lord of the earth.
The master of titanic forces--
In the roar of countless steel machines
In the radiance of electric suns.

... To the world he brings a new sun,
He destroys the thrones and prisons,
He calls the people to eternal fraternity,
and wipes out the boundaries between them.

From the unity between the individual and the collective, the transcendence of self, also comes a new ethic – one in which the individual is subordinate to the group. Altruism, the subordination to the collective, is the greatest good. It is an offering to the future perfect society. Earnest Belford Bax (1893) wrote,

At last with the dawn of a new economic era, the era of social production for social uses, we shall have also the dawn of a new Ethic, an Ethic whose ideal is neither personal holiness nor personal interest, but social happiness—for which the perfect individual will ever be subordinate to the perfect society.

This was the new ethic of the socialist societies in practice as well. The perfect society could only come about once all individuals subordinated their personal will and self-interest to the new social order. Morality was the active fulfillment of the social good, and eradication of anti-social self-interested behavior. In practice this meant the stamping out of the petty-bourgeois and capitalist elements. Lenin (1965 [1920]) put it this way:

Communist morality is that which serves this struggle and unites the working people against all exploitation, against all petty private property; for petty property puts into the hands of one person that which has been created by the labour of the whole of society. ... Morality serves the purpose of helping human society rise to a higher level and rid itself of the exploitation of labour.

Yet, this need not mean that every action must be altruistic: Not if the collective will is the enlightened will of the individual. The truly moral and good individual would realize that he is free to act just as he wishes because these wishes will perfectly coincide with the collective will. Bax (1904) explains that,

Acts that are in the interest of the community as much as of the individual, and of the individual as much as of the community, cannot be described either as selfish or as unselfish. They are both and neither. In proportion as the organisation of society of itself abolishes the antagonism of interest between the individual man and his fellows, by so much will the opposition between selfishness and unselfishness dwindle into insignificance.

For society to be so organized that the individual and the collective will are perfectly united, the plan must represent the *optimal social allocation*. In such a case, the individual would do worse to take any action other than those actions contained in the plan because fulfillment of the common goal will increase social welfare in the society so much that it will also be optimal for each individual. This is why any individual who is made aware of this fact, even if selfish, would want to follow the plan guidelines.

The *utopian* vision of communism is based upon the uniting of the people toward a common goal. The collective will unites all people in a common vision of the future. Cultural differences may remain, but otherwise the people are as one. This collective will is also all-encompassing: it is *totalitarian*, in the sense that it envelopes all of society, all property, and all social relations. The collective vision of a better future unites the people as they work toward a common goal. The power of this united vision was described in the Russian novel, *The Sisters* (Veresaev, 1975 [1931]: 228):

The Negro sang in English, the Czecho-Slovakian in his own tongue. It sounded remarkably powerful just because each sang in his own language, while the thoughts expressed by the different words were the same, and all were united by the music. Lelka's heart was stirred to its depths by the mighty triumphant brass sounds, the familiar songs and the brotherly chorus singing in different tongues. Yes in Russia, in Russia alone truth unites all peoples. ...

The orchestra thundered. The long, clear penetrating brass high notes streamed in broad bands to the ceiling, while the brass trumpets hooted lustily and twice as fast, beneath.

“With the International

The human race will rise again...”

In this vision, working toward a common goal creates a common will. All actions of the disparate individuals aim toward the same ends. The goal represents the ends aimed at by society; because it is a conscious goal, and the people work consciously to create it, it also determines the production plan – the means to attain the goal. Once a plan is decided

upon, this ensures the collective will shall be carried out: *the collective will is the party line, and is encoded in the plan.*

Being part of this collective will may be reassuring. Everything that is good – the moral duty of each member of society – is there to read and know. There is no doubt about right and wrong. This is described in detail in *The Sisters*. One sister writes in her diary (Veresaev, 1975 [1931]: 8):

I often wonder how I could live, how I could find any satisfaction in life if I were not a member of the Komsomol. I can't imagine myself as “non-party.” What is it that's so good in the Komsomol? Every moment of a member's life is accounted for. He or she must look at everything with a firm Marxist eye. In the Komsomol everything is rational, material, and therefor absolutely true. And before the Komsomolist lies the broad, straight, brightly sunlit path laid out by our leaders, Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, and Ilitch [Lenin].

Although having a clear path to follow may be reassuring and joyous, the individual might still slip off the righteous path, and this would undermine the collective will and the fulfillment of its goal. The duty to fulfill one's part in the plan must be part of everything an individual does. The joy of this duty must be instilled in every action, must be part of each decision she makes. Then the individual will not only herself act in accordance with the collective will, she will also affect others around herself, helping them to act rightly.

The constant reminder of this duty took the forms of banners, posters, newspaper articles, speeches and rallies in both the Soviet Union and China. Quotations of Chairman Mao (the Little Red Book) also played a prominent role in China. The Little Red Book reminded the individual that she must not only tap into the collective needs and desires of the people, but also hear the ideas of the people, understand them and carry them out. He must also be part of creating the plan - ensuring that it represents the will of the people. This is the democratic, utopian vision. Mao (1967 [1943a]) said,

Take the ideas of the masses and concentrate them, then go to the masses, persevere in the ideas and carry them through, so as to form correct ideas of leadership - such is the basic method of leadership.

The party represented the vanguard, the leaders on the path to enlightened thinking. They had the duty to *discern* the will of the people, and then *lead* the people to fulfill that collective will. In order not to cause conflict, they were only to lead the people in fulfilling their will when, and to the extent that, the people were ready to do so. Mao (1967 [1943b]) spoke of this:

If we tried to go on the offensive when the masses are not yet awakened, that would be adventurism. If we insisted on leading the masses to do

anything against their will, we would certainly fail. If we did not advance when the masses demand advance, that would be Right opportunism.

Mao (1967 [1944]) distinguished the true needs – the true collective will – from the base wants and desires that the people may express before they had tapped into the true collective will. Again, to avoid conflict and ensure the harmony of the individual and the collective, Mao did not sanction *acting on* the enlightened needs of the whole people (which the vanguard may know) before the masses were aware of them.

To link oneself with the masses, one must act in accordance with the needs and wishes of the masses. All work done for the masses must start from their needs and not from the desire of any individual, however well-intentioned. It often happens that objectively the masses need a certain change, but subjectively they are not yet conscious of the need, not yet willing or determined to make the change. In such cases, we should wait patiently. We should not make the change until, through our work, *most of the masses have become conscious of the need and are willing and determined to carry it out*. Otherwise we shall isolate ourselves from the masses. Unless they are conscious and willing, any kind of work that requires their participation will turn out to be a mere formality and will fail.... There are two principles here: one is the actual needs of the masses rather than what we fancy they need, and the other is the wishes of the masses, who must make up their own minds instead of our making up their minds for them. (emphasis added)

In the utopian vision, the party acts as vanguard and taps into the collective will of the people; it does not force them to do *its* bidding. Even though the party may guide the people in their actions in order to enact the enlightened will of the people, *the people might still be free*. Freedom would be maintained so long as the *enlightened will of the individual was united with the enlightened common will*. The individual would not lose his free will because his desires would be identical to the party's desires. In addition, he would gain immense positive liberty because his free will would be joined with the resources of the whole society.

The true union of the individual will and the common will offers the answer to the problem of resource allocation: resource allocation is only a problem if there is a disagreement of ends in an environment of scarcity. The *utopian totalitarian* vision is one of union of will: the will of the individual is the will of society. This is arguably a vision of a higher consciousness. Einstein (Bulletin, 1981: 52) described this higher consciousness like this:

A human being is part of the whole called by us universe, a part limited in time and space. We experience ourselves, our thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest. A kind of optical delusion of consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from the prison by widening our circle of

compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

The individualistic morality of caring only for oneself and a few family and friends should give way to a more enlightened sense of empathy for all humanity and all of nature.¹ Einstein's ethical beliefs mostly likely contributed to his sympathy for socialist programs. His description of the "optical delusion of consciousness" and the ethics of compassion for all creatures, rather than a small circle of loved ones, is typical of *utopian totalitarianism*. In 1984 (Orwell 1992 [1949]: 278-279), O'Brien described this to Winston:

"Outside man there is nothing" he said. Winston thought to himself "The belief that nothing exists outside your mind—surely there must be some way of demonstrating this as false? Had it not been long ago exposed as a fallacy?"

O'Brien replied to Winston's thoughts in the following manner:

'I told you, Winston,' he said, 'that metaphysics is not your strong point. The word you are trying to think of is solipsism. But you are mistaken. This is not solipsism. Collective solipsism, if you like. But this is a different thing: in fact, the opposite thing.'

The *utopian totalitarian* theory is that the separation between self and other is a delusion, but it is not solipsism – an individual reality – but a collective reality, external and objective. Nikolai Bukharin wrote about the fallacy of solipsism, and the truth of collective consciousness in his book *Philosophical Arabesques*, which he wrote while awaiting his trial and execution by Stalin. He described (Bukharin 2005 [1937]: 254) the collective will and the relationship of the individual to it:

Under socialism *society itself is transformed into a deliberate subject*. Society itself becomes a teleological entity, a situation that is expressed succinctly in Stalin's formula: "The plan? We are the plan!" ... Here the isolated subject simultaneously and to the greatest possible degree becomes immersed in the collective (since here we find *the unity of the collectively organized will*) and enriches his or her individuality to the maximum degree (since there is complete freedom of development in general, and freedom for the development of his or her special individual qualities, inclinations, bents, and talents in particular). Here, consequently, we find a dialectical interaction between the real general and the individual, *the essence of the general in the individual and the individual in the general*. Such is the historically highest subject of the mastering of the world, mastering both nature and society.

This was not merely theory for Bukharin. Theory must be carried out in practice, according to Marxist thinking, and it was *carried out through the plan* (Bukharin 2005 [1937]: 376):

[While Lenin was alive] Society had not yet been transformed into a teleological unity, in which necessity passed over directly into teleology. The preconditions for this, however, had already been established. ... All of the major vital functions have [now] been synthesized in the victorious completion of the great Stalinist five-year plans; theory has been combined with practice on an entire, gigantic social scale, and in every cell of the social organism.

The people unite to enact the collective will, and become one. The individual is expendable, in this vision. The new ethics called upon each individual to put the collective above any individual, including himself. The society would do the same: an individual may be sacrificed for the common good. This sacrifice was described in 1984 (Orwell 1992 [1949]: 276):

'You are thinking,' he said, 'that my face is old and tired. You are thinking that I talk of power, and yet I am not even able to prevent the decay of my own body. Can you not understand, Winston, that the individual is only a cell? The weariness of the cell is the vigour of the organism. Do you die when you cut your fingernails?'

The sacrifice of self, as the Buddhist enlightenment recommends in the form of overcoming ego, must come in material form if the society comes together to experience transcendence in a social form existing outside an individual mind. *utopian totalitarianism* is metaphysics played out in social sphere: the transcendence of personal ego must come in the form of submission to society, and the ultimate sacrifice must be physical. The willingness of the individual to sacrifice himself must be a willingness to submit his material form, not just his mental ego, to the greater good and the collective will.

2. Calculation and the Collective Will

In order for the masses to unite into one collective consciousness and will, they must come together to pursue their common goal represented by the production plan, just as described by Mao, Bukharin, and the novel *The Sisters*. First, the enlightened needs and wants of the people must be tapped into, and a plan created. Then as the people enact the plan they transcend their selfish individualism, become enlightened and become a united whole. Marx describes this as the lower and higher levels of communism – Lenin called the lower level socialism and the higher level communism.

Yet, this presumes that it will be possible to tap into some enlightened common will and devise a plan that will satisfy it. The utopian view of common ownership envisions the

people freely reaching in and taking from the "common pot." However, it is one thing to change the law to give all the people the *right* to take of the common pot; it is another entirely to ensure that there is *something in the pot* to take. Not only must there be *something* in the common pot; in order to organize a modern economy, and maintain a reasonable standard of living for all individuals, production must be highly coordinated.

Karl Marx, Ernest Belford Bax, and Charles Fourier must be counted among those in the "abundance" school of utopian totalitarianism. For them, collective ownership could coincide with great prosperity. Common ownership would bring prosperity, and the production of the goods that the collective—the whole of society—desired would lead the people to a new freedom. In other words, planners would *bring* the utopian society by successfully fulfilling the desires of the people—maximizing utility. Hence, the abundant utopian vision rested upon *the ability of planners to successfully do this*.

For the abundant utopian totalitarianism, the specific resources needed to produce the many products and services desired must exist in the amounts required for their production. Some economists have argued that planning would allow for a closer approximation to this goal than the market system. For example, Barbara Wootton (1935: 172) once argued that "if the planners honestly desire to act in the interests of the people at large, and so to order economic production and distribution that the available resources of the country may give the maximum satisfaction to the people who have to work them...then they are likely, humanly speaking, to get nearer to it than is a society in which decisions are made by contracts between parties of whom one is often under much greater necessity of coming to immediate terms than is the other."

Although economists on occasion have assumed that this would be possible, it is fairly well accepted now that there are enough problems with calculation in a system of common ownership (as analyzed by e.g., Mises (1920) and Hayek (1945)), that this would prove difficult (see e.g., Gaus 2003). Even if the will of the people was well known and understood by one common body, this body would still have difficulty creating a production plan for the society to enact this will. For the abundant utopian totalitarian vision, the collective will would have to be known intimately, the plan perfectly represent it, and the enactment of this plan must come naturally to all individuals, as if it were their own free choice. This seems an incredibly high bar. As Henry George put it in 1898, "[I]gnoring the inevitable tendency to tyranny and oppression," (George 1932 [1898]: 301),

[S]imply consider, even if the very wisest and best of men were selected for such purposes, the task that would be put upon them in the ordering of the when, where, how and by whom that would be involved in the intelligent direction and supervision of the almost infinitely complex and constantly changing relations and adjustments involved in such division of labor as goes on in a civilized community. The task transcends the power of human intelligence at its very highest.

Of course, it may be possible one day that problems inherent in coordination within a complex economy, such as price setting, could be surmounted *by a collective consciousness* guiding the individuals to serve the collective will even as they serve their own. The power in such a united single will or consciousness has been studied by eminent physicists (Jahn et al, 1997), as well as many world religions, for hundreds of years. For example, the Global Consciousness Project at Princeton University studies how the collective consciousness might affect random phenomena.² For now, this remains a religious question. Yet, this would be the reverse: if a collective consciousness could be tapped *prior* to arranging production, it might succeed. Short of this, the calculation problem in a society of social ownership seems likely to always prevent planners from *creating the abundance* necessary for a utopian version of abundant utopian totalitarianism.

Calculation in systems of collective ownership has proven to be a serious problem in existing utopian totalitarian experiments (there are many sources, for example Nove, 1986; Nell, 2010a; Nell, 2010b). Many of these societies have initially become poorer, and thereafter struggled to grow, after implementing a system which was intended to be an abundant utopian totalitarian society.

2.1 Big Brother and Enlightened Preferences

If a planner truly had the omniscience to determine how to plan an economy to fulfill the preferences of all its members, then any disagreement between an individual within the society and the plan could be seen as a mistake on the individual's part due to his limited knowledge. In other words, the plan would represent the individual's "enlightened preferences."³ The individual would then know that planner had greater knowledge of her own situation; she would also see that the planner could take into account the whole of society. For example, an individual might at first believe that a bit of pollution or excess risk taking is alright, but if a benevolent and omniscient planner told her that it was not, the individual would see that the planner was able to take the whole of society into account, weigh the consequences of allowing actions that introduce such externalities, and make an informed determination. The individual's enlightened preference results from this sort of knowledge, so the individual should be willing to submit to the wisdom of the planner on such questions.

If each individual was willing to submit to this guidance, the enlightened preferences of society would be realized. In fact, because each individual is but a reflection of the society in which he lives, his own preferences will be molded by the preferences of others and hence as each submits to the will of the planner, the new enlightened preferences may be re-enforced and the will of the individual unite with the will of the planner—the will of society. If the individual does not submit to the wisdom of the planner, then his personal, individualistic, preferences will enter into the plan. Barbara Wootton mentioned this well known issue during the Soviet experiment (Wootton, 1935: 322):

The peculiarities of the peasant mentality are not the whole explanation of this difference. The factory labour of to-day is recruited from the peasant

of yesterday, and is still peasant under its skin. The vital element of difference is that in agriculture both the hen and the golden eggs that it lays, both the cow and the golden milk that it yields, and, if not the earth, yet still the golden grain that it bears, are the property of the persons (and even in collective farms of groups of persons) who are directly interested in the sale of these products. The cooperation of these persons can indeed be won on certain terms, but the price of its winning is that *the sectional interests of these persons should make their mark on the very content of the plan itself.*

All utopian totalitarian visions see the collective will as the perfect embodiment of the enlightened preferences of the individual, so that the individual *need not* fight it. Once the vision is realized, there would be *no conflict*. This is the crux of the utopian aspect of utopian totalitarianism, and is what separates a utopian vision from a dystopian one. Hence, the core question for those inspired by the utopian vision is whether this is in fact possible.

One thing that may prevent this utopian vision from being realized is if the planner cannot keep up with changes over time (“the almost infinitely complex and constantly changing relations and adjustments”). For example, imagine the planner has omniscience at the moment of preparing the plan. The planner can compile a perfect plan to realize the preferences of everyone in society, and reconcile all the preferences in the best way for society. The whole population may sign onto it with pleasure. Still, if preferences begin to change the moment the plan is signed into law, the planner would need even greater powers to continually locate divergence from demand and newly reconcile alterations. It is one thing to determine society's preferences once and coordinate a workable plan, it is a far different thing to constantly track the changes in preference and changes in circumstance across all society, modifying the plan to account for them.

The problem of time was addressed in George Orwell's *1984* (Orwell 1992 [1949]). Planners modified evidence about the past in order to address the inability of planners to predict the future (such as future demand, and level of resources). In *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley (2005 [1932]) addresses the problem another way: individuals are hypnotized, so that their demands fit into the plan. Of course these cynical solutions are dystopian, but they do make the planner's job much easier. The planner can adjust knowledge of the past rather than know the future, or modify demand to fit supply rather than ensure that productions fits demand.

Modifying knowledge of the past, to some limited degree at least, has been a tool of existing totalitarian regimes as well. For example, the most basic modification of history is the coloring of the prior regime. A visitor to communist China (Michael, 1978: 344) described their use of this tool:

On the basis of Communist propoganda and some Western testimony, conditions prior to "liberation" are generally believed to have been miserable, so that whatever one might say about Communist ruthlessness,

at least the brutality and the bloodletting were compensated by the fact that the living standard of the common people had greatly improved since the Communist takeover. In comparing the present with the past, I found—somewhat to my surprise—that this claim of an improvement in the lot of the common people, both in the cities and in the villages, was a myth. Indeed, in my view the prevalent lifestyle, in both cities and rural areas, had in fact declined in comparison with the past.

More complex modifications of time occur in Orwell's *1984*, as planners are made to look omniscient and powerful by modifying documents that show error. Arguably, Soviet planners did something like this when they modified the plan documentation along the way (Kornai, 1992) so that whatever output finally emerged was listed as having been the planned output.

Planners may face even harder problems than time, however. Time only becomes a factor if the plan in the first instance could meet the needs of the whole society. If society's needs cannot be met by a plan, then it hardly matters if those needs change along the way. One question for utopian ideology is whether there *even exists* an optimal production plan that could “give the maximum satisfaction to the people.”

Some questions arise. Are there likely to be several possible plans that can do this, or just one that is best? Are the preferences of each person in society weighted equally (can one do inter-personal utility comparisons)? How does the planner know the time-preferences of the people in addition to their utility functions and productive capacities? Can there possibly be a right answer—a plan that properly weights all the utility functions of the individuals and furthermore weights all the preferences of the agents by urgency?

These questions have been addressed by Soviet planners in discussions on optimal planning (Ellman, 1968), but they are also reminiscent of debates on social welfare functions and collective choice. Democracy of the plan would require the collective choice of all the agents in society. If it is difficult to get several hundred members of a parliament or congress to vote rationally on their preferences, because voting becomes intransitive (Arrow, 1963), how can millions of individuals find a plan that can fulfill their desires best? If the plan does not fulfill the desires of the people, authoritarian enforcement may become necessary, exacerbating the dystopian outcome.

2.2 Consciousness and Bureaucracy

One way that socialists hoped to achieve a united collective will, without the oppression of the enforcement of a plan through hierarchical bureaucratic government agencies, was through a decentralization of decision making within the centralized system of hierarchical planning—this paradoxical strategy was based on the dialectical transformation⁴ of the dictatorship of the proletariat into the new communist society—and was called “democratic centralism.”

The economic and political systems were centralized in form, but were supposed to allow complete democratic control by the people. The people were to apply pressure from below, and the more they took part in the decision making in the system, the more this would guide the system toward its complete transformation into communism. Once all the people took part in economic and political decisions, took governance over production, and knew the system as their own, then the day of communism would come and the state would wither away.

Marx's vision of the transition from socialism to communism involved a raising of awareness, or consciousness, not only among the proletariat but across all society—this would allow the people to take the reigns of production, and would bring abundance, an end to crime, and the dissolution of the then-unnecessary state.⁵ The state – which was still an institution of bureaucracy but no longer one of exploitation – needed to be fought, and enlightenment of the people was the way to fight it. The dictatorship of the proletariat might be necessary in the short run, but combating bureaucracy would bring communism and the withering away of the state sooner.

In this Marxist *utopian totalitarian* vision, the combating of bureaucracy and the transformation to a truly proletarian mindset were one in the same. To fight bureaucracy, and to bring the truly proletarian mindset, the people must be engaged in their new role as the owners of the means of production. They must learn to manage production, learn to care for common property as their own, and learn to run both the state and the economy until the day when management and governance ceased to be necessary. In the workforce, the way to bring this about was through democratization, right or proletarian thinking, and the ending of the division of labor – to help transform labor into “life's prime want.”

Chinese factories under Mao and until the reintroduction of market in China were based on the same socialist theories described above. In fact, China may have gone further than the Soviet Union in some of their experiments to end the division of labor and alienation that Marx criticized. For example, Lovbr[ae]k (1976) writes,

De-alienation is promoted in China by mobility in the production process. This is most systematically done in the textile industry, where workers go out and work in the people's communes that supply the particular factory with cotton, and also work in the department stores that sell products from their factory. As a result of this they are able to grasp the whole of the production process and the product cycle, to increase their technical skills, and to get a better understanding of the functioning of the economic sphere as a whole. The same system is now being introduced in other sectors of industry, but not yet as systematically as in the textile industry. This is of course partly because the product cycle for textiles is relatively simple.

The fight against bureaucracy took place not only in the workforce, but also in the worker-control of government. Lenin (1919) said, “We can fight bureaucracy to the bitter

end, to a complete victory, only when the whole population participates in the work of government.” The mindset of the proletariat was essential to this fight, and hence the fight against bureaucracy was tied to the fight against bourgeois elements. Lenin (cited by Stalin (1954 [1928])) argued: “We must realise that the fight against bureaucracy is an *absolutely essential* one, and that it is just as complicated as the fight against the petty-bourgeois elemental forces. Bureaucracy in our state system has become a malady of such gravity that it is spoken of in our Party programme, and that is because *it is connected with these petty-bourgeois elemental forces and their wide dispersion.*”

There was a retreat from planning, and hence from fight against these elements during the New Economic Policy period. Hence the next push for planning in 1928 brought about a new chance to combat bureaucracy and usher in the new man. Stalin argued (Stalin, 1954 [1928]) that year that, “With all the more persistence must we rouse the vast masses of the workers and peasants to the task of criticism *from below*, of control *from below*, as the principal antidote to bureaucracy.”

Criticism was widely used in the Soviet Union to combat the bourgeois mindset and bureaucracy, but it was even more famously used in China, especially during the Cultural Revolution. One visitor to China (Mitch, 1972), a member of a committee of scholars, wrote a profile of a communist factory in which he described the chosen approach to combating the bureaucracy of the planned economy. First, he described (Mitch 1972: 723) the problem of bureaucracy within the single (very large) factory before the Cultural Revolution. Some workers had asked for “enamel washbasins” to develop film and their request had been denied. Subsequently, they re-submitted the request, asking for a container “sufficient for developing and printing film,” and the request was granted. The paper explains that:

The story of the washbasins is but one of a number illustrating the hangups and irrationalities of overdeveloped administrative apparatus separated from productive processes and divorced from the workers. The Cultural Revolution has resulted in both a new spirit and new structures to deal with this problem

The bureaucratic problem here may be seen as inherent in the centralization of the factory decision-making. More administrators and procedures are required if the whole factory, of many thousands, is under one system of hierarchical management – and even more bureaucracy may result if that factory is itself within a hierarchy, getting its own production plans from above. However, the socialist view was that it was *not* inherent. Instead, it was a solvable problem. Perhaps in this case the higher level administrator had been hurried or had assumed that the purchase was not necessary, yet a more enlightened individual in a more enlightened system would not have made this mistake.

Greater participation, fuller ownership over the entire production process, and sharing of decisions would bring this enlightened system. It would ensure that workers took ownership over the common resources and means of production, and administrators managed the firm and production based on worker input. Worker control would also

mean that workers would care for the commonly owned resources. The paper explains that the workers had only to learn the cost of resources, for example the gloves that the workers used to protect their hands in the factory, and then they would care for them more and throw them out less often. In short, the paper (Mitch 1972: 724) explains:

The democratizing value of workers' participation by no means carries the implication of a more "casual" attitude toward the work. It rather combats the bureaucratism at the top - irresponsibility at the bottom attitude. Freeing the workers from more rigid top-down constraints should at the same time direct them to a more conscientious and disciplined role.

The socialist theory is that the "tragedy of the commons" problem need not plague production under common ownership. It could be combated so long as the workers were made to feel ownership over the common property, and that in turn they were given true democratic control. The democracy and equality granted the people would help to foster this feeling of control. The Cultural Revolution taught the lesson that the workers were in control of production even if the management took the day to day decisions. The two roles were symbiotic, and neither was superior. Recognition of this would pave the way for the new enlightened system. The profile recounts the way that the old capitalist social hierarchy was combated in the factory, to help give workers that sense of equality, ownership and participation (Mitch 1972: 724):

Tseng and several other colleagues from outside government organizations retired to a car to eat. The workers were eating fish and rolls of steamed wheat flour. Tseng and his companions dined on vegetables and coarser corn cakes.

Later, one worker complained, "Here we are, sitting outside eating plain bread and fish, and you are off in a car having pure, fancy, steamed wheat buns and meat!" Tseng continued his reminiscence, "Of course they were wrong about our food - we were not eating fine bread, or meat - but coarse bread and vegetables. In fact, their food was better than ours. So I simply rejected their criticisms - I couldn't accept them at all."

The PLA comrade went to Tseng and urged him to improve his relations with the masses. But Tseng was adamant, "I will not accept criticism that runs contrary to fact!"

Finally, the army representative persuaded him to go back to the workers for criticism. He went back, and was hit hard: " You should criticize yourself more readily." "Anyway, you ate separately in the car." "Also, why don't you eat the same as us?" In a coda to this account, Tseng stated, "Finally I criticized myself and brought about a change in my style of work."

The way to combat bureaucracy was to bring all people into the process, all levels of production from the top to the bottom without any being 'superior' to any other, and encourage all the people toward enlightened thinking. Self-criticism was used to correct deviations from this enlightened position. Deviations could be “in either direction” and criticism could help to reveal the error and correct it. For example, although the management had eaten worse, not better, than the workers it was still wrong for them to eat different food—the article explains (Mitch 1972: 724) why:

But we questioners were still baffled. We could understand the point of criticism about eating separately, but wasn't he in fact right to be indignant at the workers' easy assumption that he was eating better food? Perhaps he was going overboard in adopting a self-righteous, martyr's posture? No, this really was not the point. Indeed it is true that Mao states that a cadre should take hardships on himself - this is not a bad idea. But in this case, the problem was that there was not enough food to go around - Tseng, or others under his direction, had failed to make sure that the food supply task was carried out carefully. Generally speaking, it is not a question of leaders making up personally for mistakes. Preferably, they should do a better job of providing for the livelihood of everyone, including themselves. So the synthesis of the various criticisms concerned a point of administrative failure. It was not an essentially antagonistic situation.

By finding the administrative failure through criticisms the bureaucracy could be combated. However, what if the supply failure was not the fault of management? What if there was a shortage of fish across the whole region? What if bureaucracy and plan failure are not things that can be overcome through willpower and right thinking?

Furthermore, for a society with collective ownership, the “enlightened” thinking brought about by self-criticism must be a collective thinking so that the group can make collective choices over production. Although an enlightened mindset might allow criticism of a worker's effort or an administrator's style of management, it could only do so when they deviated from the party line—from the collective action being pursued. This is a way to perfect a task already set out beforehand, but what about discovering new tasks and styles? This kind of criticism could not be used to question the hierarchical nature of planning, the content of production plans, or the propagandistic nature of newspapers. These are part of the system which criticism can perfect and protect. Criticism is used to strengthen the existing system, perfect a unified vision and the action to bring it about according to a prearranged plan.

In practice, criticism which questioned the plan or the Party's vision was considered destructive. As Stalin (1928) said, “A strict distinction must be drawn between this “self-criticism,” which is *alien* to us, destructive and anti-Bolshevik, and *our*, Bolshevik self-criticism, the object of which is to *promote* the Party spirit, to *consolidate* the Soviet regime, to *improve* our constructive work, to *strengthen* our economic cadres, to *arm* the working class.”

Hence, this kind of self-criticism is much like the "crime-stop" of *1984*. Criticism of others who deviate from the party line is the natural complement to self-criticism: each member of the collective must keep his brother, as he keeps himself, in line. If Big Brother does have each individual's best interest at heart, and the collective choice is the individual's enlightened preferences, then such criticism and self-criticism may be bothersome but may also be for the best. If the individual wants what Big Brother wants and wants to think like Big Brother because his thinking is right, then he will appreciate the chance to discipline himself (just as many people appreciate smoking bans if they are trying to quit smoking).

However, if individuals' preferences do not coincide with the collective will, then the individual is prevented from having any thoughts of his own, and is regimented by another into thinking or pretending to think along party lines—as someone else wishes. The utopian totalitarian vision is that the people cannot resist their own will: if the plan is their enlightened preference, then quashing any resistance is only helping each individual attain that which he truly desires. If every individual's will does not coincide with the plan, one cannot make this argument - then quashing resistance is only oppression, and is dystopian.

"We should not make the change until, through our work, most of the masses have become conscious of the need and are willing and determined to carry it out" Mao said. *Most* - not all. Implied in his statement is the assumption that even if only "most" of the masses have become aware of their needs, the others will soon come to realize these enlightened preferences. If in fact only a majority (if that) actually agrees with the production plan, then the enforcement of the plan may be experienced as brutal - it may become a *dystopian totalitarianism*.

Orwell's *1984* depicts the informer-state, the result of using criticism to combat deviation from the collective will, which was also experienced in many existing utopian totalitarian societies. Another kind of oppression which may emerge is forced labor. Again, if the individual will does not coincide with the collective will, it may become necessary to brutally enforce the collective will upon the individual. Janusz Bardach (1998) described his experience in the Soviet Gulag. His description is both terrifying and enlightening—it portrays the epitome of the dystopian totalitarian society.

The intense labor combined with the harsh conditions and treacherous monotony forced Bardach to empty his mind of thoughts, as if meditating continuously (Bardach 1998: 208):

The only way to fend off despair was not to think. I learned to shut out everything, to escape into the safety of my own space. Thoughts crawled into my mind like serpents, but I learned to sever them with the thrust of a shovel or pickax. I broke time down into hours, so that I only had to exercise my will for short periods—from waking up until noon, from noon until the evening meal, from the evening roll call until bedtime.

Friendships were also stripped to the core element of trust, because prisoners had to share and live so closely under such brutal conditions. As Bardach (1998: 208) explains: “Camp friendships were about one thing: trust. You wanted to know who slept next to you and who ate from the same plate. You wanted to know on whom you could rely during the inevitable daily crisis.”

Although dystopian conditions can offer some of the same core elements as utopian totalitarianism envisages, they could not break down all of the walls (in fact, many became paranoid of others as they struggled for survival), nor offer a “new man” or a new sense of freedom, and they came at the greatest imaginable cost—that of terrible suffering.

3. Utopian Poverty and Welfare

Problems of calculation under collective ownership prevent an abundant utopian totalitarian society, the attempt to combat the problems encountered and bring all individuals in line with the perceived collective will, combat bureaucracy and strengthen collective action, result in a dystopian totalitarianism. However, the experience of being poor, even being extremely poor and living at the edge of subsistence, can actually help individuals to form close bonds - to "wipe out the boundaries between them." Living at the edge of subsistence may sharpen the sense of living, and help to put priorities in place. When the individual is told what he must do - has his life set out before him ("every moment of a member's life is accounted for") - and every individual is paid the same bare subsistence pay, then all he is left to do is experience life. It strips life to its barest elements, and hence puts priorities in clear focus.

This is where the dystopian and utopian visions of totalitarianism collide. If the collective bond is more important than the level of individual prosperity, then even a poor society may be utopian, rather than dystopian. “What does one really need for a good life?” the utopian totalitarian might say. “Food and drink, perhaps including alcohol; musical instruments and writing and printing materials; and friends, family, and the leisure time to spend with them, are the key components of a good life.” Yet these named goods, and the few other necessities such as clothing and housing, compose only a small fraction of the production of a modern economy. Hence, even if output is significantly lower in a utopian totalitarian society, this may not produce a dystopian outcome. In particular, the leisure time that may be afforded, given a less materially-driven economy, and one in which self-reliance and individual productivity are less valued, may be of greater value to some than a higher level of material wealth.

In fact, even a certain level of authoritarianism, loss of negative freedom, bureaucracy, and uniformity, in addition to poverty, may be acceptable within a still-utopian totalitarian society, especially if these factors actually contribute to the nurturing of the collective bond, and so long as members still retain significant leisure time that allows for a level of freedom in daily activities. This may be why some remember Soviet socialism fondly. A well known example of this is the close bond between soldiers - the “band of brothers.”⁶

When the collective will is unable to produce a high level of abundance, the result *may* be ghettos, the run down Soviet city, rife with poverty and alcoholism, or even the Gulag system, with starvation and nightmarish physical labor. Yet, these are frequently the *unintended result of policy aimed at abundant utopian totalitarianism not the result of policy deliberately aimed at a subsistence utopian totalitarianism*. If the low level of output possible is well known when creating the society, it may be possible to achieve a less dystopian outcome, for example a rural agrarian society, like a “hippie commune.”

If the society was voluntary, individuals could consciously choose to live in a society with a low standard of living, but in which the walls between people have fallen, and the moral code is less individualistic, and centered around responsibility and productivity. The profit and loss system forces firms to serve their customers, to be productive and contribute. Yet, this is not all it does. It also forces the individual to work and pay her own way (or if the custom is so to marry and raise children as her contribution). Forcing the individual to produce and contribute in this way may lead to higher output in the society, but there must be some trade-off.

A 1990 issue of *Critical Review* focused on the ethical questions surrounding the welfare state. Nathan Glazier discusses various definitions of happiness in his review essay, "Is Welfare A Legitimate Government Goal?," in which he discusses Charles Murray's critique of the welfare state. Murray defines happiness as "Lasting and justified happiness with one's life as a whole." Glazier (1990: 483) comments, in respect of this definition, that "drug addicts are not to be considered happy, no matter what they say." Happiness is defined as self-respect, according to Murray, and is clearly tied to the "dignity" of a responsible self-sufficient life.

Glazier then quotes a thought experiment (Glazier 484-5), from Murray, in which the reader is asked to consider, if her child had become an orphan, which kind of family she would want to adopt the child. Would she want a poor family in which the child is taught responsibility, or a rich one in which the parent "have never worked, are indifferent to your child's education, who think that integrity and responsibility ... are meaningless words."

Murray believes that most readers would choose the poor family, and makes the case that the "poverty" problem in wealthy countries is perhaps overstated, because many of those studying the problem have never experienced poverty and do not realize that it is not income level per se, but what we see correlated with poverty, such as drugs, crime and broken families, that are really the issue. This then forms the foundation of an argument that the welfare system itself has caused these ills by undermining responsibility.

However, Murray's thought experiment, along with the definition of happiness, is firmly situated in a market context. In a market society, given the way that many individuals were raised, having seen friends and loved ones succeed, and having seen that others fail, many parents would indeed choose a poor family with a work ethic to raise their child, and would hold responsibility as a high virtue. They may agree with the definition of

happiness given. However, there are many other possible reactions. Those who hold "nobility" as a high virtue might prefer the rich family. Those who hold religion above all else might ask which family is more religious, and not care at all about the other factors. In an egalitarian agrarian society the thought experiment may not even make sense. Even the idea of self-respect hinging on responsibility and self-sufficiency is arguably market-contingent.

Collective property rights have frequently led to a deterioration of responsibility: this is true not only among welfare recipients, and "the commons," but among bureaucrats, the managers of public firms, and anywhere that collective property rights have been enforced. This issue, combined with the inability to calculate or make rational choices without market prices, leads one to conclude that for a large and complex economy to have any hope of a decent standard of living private property must dominate. However, within a superstructure of a private property economy, arguably communities could be created in which responsibility and self-sufficiency are not held as the highest ideals.

The believer in utopian totalitarianism might ask: do you really want to live in a world where everyone is *and must be* responsible at all times; where everyone is expected to work hard and long hours, raise children in a nice home with a white picket fence, with material comforts but not a sense of communal sharing or life close to nature; where parents take care of their own children only, and leave others to take care of their own, respectively? In such a society, each family becomes its own little world - the "nuclear family," cut off from each other family. Arguably, each individual is also cut off from each other individual. As Marx put it, property creates "human self-estrangement." Private property relations create a division between people, like walls separating or alienating each of us from the other.

If each person is ultimately responsible for her own survival, this already creates a wall; if the society enforces the right and responsibility of each to work and produce for her self alone, then arguably society is building and maintaining these walls between people. In contrast, in a utopian totalitarian society of collective ownership, individuals would depend upon the society to nourish, comfort, and sustain life, leaving the individual free to learn and grow in a more communal fashion. There would be no white picket fences, as there would be no fences at all. If property relations put the walls up, then eliminating property would break these walls down. This is why communism would "wipe out the boundaries between them."

The nuclear family and the virtue of self-sufficiency is valued so highly in the market economy that to Murray it seemed obvious that this must be part of the definition of happiness. However, one can reply with a different thought experiment: imagine two brothers. Both were involved in student productions in high school and college, and enjoy acting and writing plays. At the age of 22, their father sits them both down and explains how a responsible and good man must earn a decent living in order to raise a family well. Both should consider law school, as their education has prepared them well, and they are both well suited to such a career. One brother follows his father's advice, while the other upsets his father by deciding to become an artist instead.

Highly educated, creative, thoughtful and passionate, this brother becomes a playwrite, and lives at the edge of subsistence. This is because, although the plays are very well received by the loyal customers, they somewhat cater to a niche audience, the theater does not want to charge very much, and the productions are frequently costly to produce. Now, here is the thought experiment: does Murray's definition of happiness allow for the fact that this playwrite may be far more satisfied with his life - actually far more happy - than his brother who has become a lawyer? The personal life goal and life experiences involved may have little to do with "responsibility" yet still offer value to society - to others and to himself. Creating plays, exploring ideas, engaging with others by acting in productions, are all valuable and contribute to happiness, even if they may not pay the bills.

Many who appreciate the virtues of markets have blamed government policy for creating ghettos and even multiplying the homeless. Yet these market advocates only consider the pure market system or the system of government provision of housing. No other option is discussed. In a pure market system every individual must either be responsible and self-sufficient or he must go to family or charitable organizations, made up of individuals who have had to be responsible and self-sufficient and may expect the same from others.

In a predominantly market-based society, when government provides relief the individuals receiving benefits are seen as immoral, or at the very least likely irresponsible, which is almost the same. If government provides the aid in-kind, then these demoralized individuals are packed together in public housing and schools, where low self-esteem may be reinforced. They also may be punished with criminal sentences for "irresponsible" behavior such as drug taking or drug selling if this has been outlawed. Prison terms may expose the individuals to violence and crime, and frequently may reduce future opportunities for gainful employment. If instead of government provision, individuals who did not fit into the market structure could join cooperative or collective living arrangements these consequences may not occur.

Although few individuals in the United States would choose to live in many of the housing projects offered to those on welfare, in countries with more generous public assistance and alternative housing arrangements there may be a significant portion of the population who enjoy a lower standard of living accompanied by greater leisure time. There are housing cooperatives in London in which members have a single room of their own and share the rest of the housing space communally. In some of these cooperatives, members contribute to collaborative projects, including landscaping and construction, gardening, and theater and music festivals. Much of this is made possible by public assistance that releases the members from the need for full time work – assistance which provides only a subsistence-level income. These individuals have chosen a far lower living standard in exchange for leisure and communal living.

They may be looked down upon (as “parasites” and irresponsible) by those, like Murray or Ayn Rand (e.g., as “moochers” in Rand, 1996 [1957]), who see responsibility as an

important virtue, and who resent the taxpayer funding of these individuals' lifestyles. However, given their willingness to accept a subsistence-level living standard, and their appreciation of the communal way of life, those who currently choose the housing cooperative lifestyle might be good candidates for a private utopian totalitarian society.

3.1 Feasible Utopian Totalitarianism

Although the complexity of a modern economy precludes efficient use of planning to reach an abundant utopian totalitarian outcome at the national level, a simpler economy might offer a different utopian solution. Ernest Belford Bax and William Morris together wrote the *Manifesto of the Socialist League* in 1885 (Morris and Bax, 1885). Although their belief in utopian totalitarianism was shared, they differed on the precise vision of the new society.

Bax believed that the market system had corrupted morality, making people selfish. A new society built upon social ownership would help the people transcend this, and a modern economy could be built upon collective ownership and production. In contrast, Morris did not believe that a modern economy could be built upon collective ownership without a hierarchical enforcement system – a *dystopian totalitarianism*. He therefore argued that man must return to his primitive roots in local agrarian communities. In a review of Joseph Bellamy's book, *Looking Backward*, Morris (1889) argued that individuals would be too remote from the state in a vast centralized form of socialism and would not feel responsible for its property:

[I]t is necessary to point out that there are some Socialists who do not think that the problem of the organisation of life and necessary labour can be dealt with by a huge national centralisation, working by a kind of magic for which no one feels himself responsible; that on the contrary it will be necessary for the unit of administration to be small enough for every citizen to feel himself responsible for its details, and be interested in them; that individual men cannot shuffle off the business of life on to the shoulders of an abstraction called the State, but must deal with it in conscious association with each other.

Whether considering calculation, brutal enforcement made necessary by the commons problem, or bureaucratic administration, arguably a small social unit or group with shared ownership would not face the same difficulties. Keeping the issues raised in this paper in mind, there may still be a way to achieve the utopian totalitarian vision of communal ownership, and rights to use of shared property and of a basic living standard, without coercive or forceful (dystopian) treatment, authoritarianism, or wasteful production. The solution is straightforward: the utopian totalitarian society must be voluntary and must exist within a larger private property based system.

If the utopian totalitarian society is voluntary, it cannot rely upon authoritarian dictates backed by force in order to ensure the collective will is done; this will prevent a slide

toward brutality. Similarly, if the plan, or a spontaneous collective production drive, or whatever collective action is taken, becomes unmanageable as the society grows larger, voluntary exit will release those least enthusiastic. In general, only those whose will *does* align with the collective will make up the collective – because the rest may leave. Modern countries that have attempted utopian totalitarian experiments have had to forcefully prevent members from leaving with passports and walls; these were large societies with complex economies and membership was never voluntary.

The voluntary utopian totalitarian system would likely be much smaller, made up only of those who share its vision; the smaller scale and voluntary nature, which ensures a coinciding of wills, would aid the plan creation and fulfillment, and continually “purge” the collective of poisonous influences *without any coercion or force*. Probably even more importantly, the society need not be self-contained. Within the larger superstructure of a private property economy, any resources or production that the utopian totalitarian society cannot produce, or determines that it needs only at the last moment, or that would require either coercion or “economic injustice” to produce, could be obtained from outside the society. In fact, the society could obtain all production and consumption goods from outside the society and simply produce for export. This, combined with its small size, may allow the society to transcend the worst of the calculation problem.

Bureaucracy should pose less of a problem in a small society than in a large one. Furthermore, if utopian totalitarians have argued that bureaucracy can be overcome through democratic administration, the feeling of ownership over resources, and self-criticism and criticism of the deviation of others, this should be all the more possible in small voluntary system. Democratic centralism and the combating of bureaucracy could not perfect the implementation of the collective will across the Soviet Union in part because that will was not known (and arguably did not exist across such a massive population). Yet, in a small and voluntary society perhaps there would be a discernable will, and democratic implementation of it could produce the union of self and other imagined by utopian theorists. Mao’s ideas, and the attempts of the Cultural Revolution to perfect the implementation of the collective will through criticism, arguably led to dystopian tyranny due to a natural disagreement between individuals across China. In a small voluntary society those who disagree can exit – hence Mao’s ideas may offer a workable solution.

Examples of successful utopian totalitarian societies within private property societies include the Kibbutz, and other rural communes in many countries. Advocates of utopian totalitarian societies sometimes argue that the private property society surrounding these voluntary communal societies make it more difficult for them to survive. For example, communitarian socialists argue that a commune, collective or worker cooperative that produces to sell in the market and must compete with private companies will be at a disadvantage because individually-owned companies may choose to pay workers less and therefore may have more funds to buy equipment and expand, and undercut the commune or cooperative. In order to compete, the commune or cooperative would have to “exploit” the workers in a similar fashion (see, e.g., Lawler, 1997). These theorists conclude that

the superstructure ought to enforce rules for collective ownership, or at least worker management, at each firm, in order to give the collectives a fighting chance.

The enforcement of such rules for a large and complex economy would introduce the problems outlined earlier to the extent that these rules enforce collective ownership. If the enforcement is only of worker management the calculation problems will be far fewer, but the society may still produce at a less efficient level, reducing the available trade for the utopian totalitarian unit, so it is not obvious that it would be a net benefit. Such a legal superstructure would provide a competitive advantage to the unit by preventing more efficient production, and hence would reduce productivity across the economy. It would also introducing coercion and limit the variety of utopian totalitarian units by mandating one particular form.

Instead, if the society is a private property based one, the utopian totalitarian unit can offer members anything from a worker managed firm to a complete self-contained society, which depends only on trade with the private property superstructure. For example, a unit could offer communal housing, a production cooperative, cooperative shops and social provision of goods and services. One can imagine rural commune, or a town or even a city built on this model. Membership would be voluntary, and members would be given a membership contract (or constitution) upon joining.

Because this utopian totalitarian society could trade with the private property based superstructure, members would be able to work and produce based upon their (or the unit's) comparative advantage, rather than having to do whatever work is required for subsistence in an entirely self-sustainable small-scale economy. This would lead to a wealthier, as well as a freer, utopian totalitarian society. Free entry and exit, based only upon agreeing to membership rules, would ensure a tolerable administration of justice (see e.g., Beito, Gordon and Tabarrok, 2002) and the most reasonable living standard possible given membership rules – the institutions of the society.

For example, imagine that a city of about 50,000 to 80,000 persons was organized as a utopian totalitarian society within a broader private property economy: imagine that Santa Fe New Mexico organized as a voluntary Santa Fe Artistic Commune (SFAC). In such a scenario, SFAC would have a contract or constitution which individuals could voluntarily enter into if they chose to live and work in the community.

SFAC could be organized along pure utopian totalitarian lines. The commune could have a communal production “storehouse” where paintings, music, crafts, films, and other artistic output were gathered and inventoried before being sold “by the community” to customers in the external private property society (services would simply be inventoried). This would act as a monopoly on exports, similar to the departments of foreign trade in socialist societies. Revenue from these sales,⁷ along with donations from those who appreciate SFAC (including former members, and patrons of the arts), would be gathered by an import office in a similar way.

The budget could then be used to fund communal housing, cafeterias or food banks (shops that provide food without charge), free services such as day care, health care, and all other necessities. In this voluntary communal society, money could be banned or simply serve no purpose (as there may be nothing to purchase for money, and all goods and services may be offered free of charge).

Just as the housing cooperatives in London interview members before allowing them to join and live in a communal house, and as production cooperatives and consumer cooperatives have binding contracts, SFAC could interview potential members to ensure that the individual's will coincides with the collective will of the society, and that the individual would have something to offer to the community. In this case, potential members would share their skills and talents, and the member committee or government would determine whether the individual is a good fit for the commune. Once the individual is considered to be a good fit for SFAC, the individual may then have to interview at communal houses and production communes within the broader commune.

There might be several ways for an individual to join: those who already have buyers in the private property superstructure, or whose output is already known to be in demand there, might join the commune with an independent production "visa," sort of similar to the Tier 1 work visa in the United Kingdom.⁸ These individuals could produce independently, or create a new production commune within SFAC, and their output would be deposited in the communal production "storehouse." Other individuals might be skilled but need to work with others to produce a saleable product. Similar to a Tier 2 visa for the UK,⁹ these individuals could join the commune if they successfully interview with an existing production commune within SFAC.

The utopian totalitarian vision embodied in SFAC is one of shared ownership, but of rules and contributions. Each member is expected to be productive. Many utopian totalitarian visions share this aspect – the duty to work was the cornerstone of the communist vision. However, the border between the dystopian and the utopian subsistence totalitarianism in some cases may be the duty to work. Arguably, this was a significant part of the dystopian outcome in the Soviet Union – and those who remember it fondly might recall the leisure time they had if they experienced "unemployment on the job" (Kornai, 1992). The Gulag was especially horrible because of the duty to work given the barely subsistence (and sometimes below-subsistence) standard of living.

Prisoners in the Gulags were forced to work long and brutal hours in horrific conditions because of the failure of the utopian totalitarian experiment, and its transformation into dystopian totalitarianism. In contrast, some of the subsistence communal living arrangements are arguably successfully positioned on the utopian side of the boundary. For example, the London housing cooperative, or even the run down Soviet city, may offer a sense of "community" difficult to find in private property society, which relies on responsibility and self reliance. They allow for more leisure time, including time to form close bonds with many others rather than only with family. Common property helps to "wipe out the boundaries," and communal projects help to build new bonds. One of the aspects of such a community that fosters the utopian totalitarian "community" is the lack

of a duty to work. Instead of working long hours, members work on communal projects at their own leisure and discretion, and share long days full of leisure with each other.

Without a duty to work, and without the self-sufficiency doctrine, such a community offers a freedom to *simply exist*. This freedom could also allow the individual to “find himself” and to stumble upon some work which is a joy for the person to do. Just as society respects the long childhood, the chance to not work, and to become educated, for many years during which he *could* perform useful labor, a utopian totalitarian society could respect a much longer period of non-work, especially if members are willing to trade prosperity for leisure (in a sense, to spend much of their income *buying* leisure). A society could be built with a great respect for the opportunity for all adults to be able to *simply exist*, and also perhaps, given sufficient time to explore options, to find something that they *love* to do that they can then offer society as productive work – when, and as often as, they are ready. This would fulfill upon Marx’s concept of labor as “life’s prime want,” rather than as toil.

Although ending the division of labor, or allowing labor to be voluntary while providing for even just the most basic needs of all the people, is likely impossible in a large scale socialist economy, it might be possible in a small voluntary utopian totalitarian community. Given that some in modern wealthy societies have already expressed their willingness to accept a subsistence-level living standard in exchange for leisure and communal living, it seems possible that such a society would be workable.

Conclusion

The Austrian school arguments regarding calculation without private property explain why the utopian ideal that a central planner could order economic production in such a way as to maximize the desires of the people, or even to produce a generous amount of output, is unlikely to even be fulfilled. It is even less possible that a planner could produce both a high level of output and do so in such a way as to allow for a “true freedom” that the free market cannot facilitate.

However, while the economic critique of the Austrian school points to problems that undercut the abundant utopian vision, it does not necessarily undercut a bare subsistence vision of *utopian totalitarianism*. Furthermore, within a broader abundant private property society a utopian totalitarian collective could potentially function well, especially if funded with both charitable and profit-induced exchange.

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¹ Of course, one might ask, what is love without the ability to hold some above others in esteem or personal significance?

² “The project builds on excellent experiments conducted over the past 35 years at a number of laboratories, demonstrating that human consciousness interacts with random event generators (REGs), apparently "causing" them to produce non-random patterns. ...

The experimental results clearly show that a broader examination of this phenomenon is warranted. In recent work, prior to the Global Consciousness Project, an array of REG devices in Europe and the US showed non-random activity during widely shared experiences of deeply engaging events. For example, the funeral ceremonies for Princess Diana, and the international Winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan, created shared emotions and a coherence of consciousness that appeared to be correlated with structure in the otherwise random data. In the fully developed project, a world-spanning array of labile REG detectors is connected to computers running software to collect data and send it to a central server via the Internet. This network is designed to document and display any subtle, but direct effects of our collective consciousness reacting to global events.”

³ Today, the idea of enlightened preferences is often used by those advocating a “new paternalism” or “libertarian paternalism.” The idea is that certain limitations of knowledge and will power prevent individuals from pursuing their best interests, and the state has the vantage point and resources to “nudge” the individual to pursue them. (See e.g., Thaler and Sunstein (2003)). Some of the Hayekian economic arguments made here have recently been made against this new paternalism by Mario Rizzo (Rizzo, 2009).

⁴ State capitalism dialectically transforms into communism, this transition happens through the dictatorship of the proletariat which is a transitional form—socialism--on the way to communism.

⁵ There are many sources for this. See Lenin’s analysis in *The State and Revolution*, in particular the chapter *The Economic Basis of the Withering Away of the State* (Lenin 1917).

The conclusion that even basic laws preventing crime would not be necessary in the communist society is implied in all the writings on the withering away of the state and explicitly mentioned in a fair number of them. See Schlesinger (1945).

⁶ Fighting a common enemy may be part of what helps to form the close bond. Of course, in a utopian/dystopian totalitarian society, those who deviate from the party line - the bourgeoisie, the counter-revolutionaries - can become this enemy. This, of course, pushes the society more toward the dystopian side of the borderline.

⁷ Although it may seem unlikely that (especially voluntary) production within a collectivist society could raise much revenue, there are at least two things to consider. One is that the market superstructure in this scenario might be highly wealthy and therefore able to afford specialized luxury products if many of those who would otherwise rely on the state, and tax-funded programs, joined voluntary societies. There may be even some individuals in the market superstructure willing to contribute charitably, including wealthy artists who may visit the commune at intervals. The society could use innovative tools and concepts, including internet-based ones to locate various kinds of customer and donor. The second thing to bear in mind is that the society could be a subsistence society, as described below.

⁸ The Tier 1 work visa allows those with higher education and work experience to migrate to the UK and work there without already having a job offer in hand. Information about the Tier 1 “highly skilled worker” visa can be found here: <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/workingintheuk/tier1/general/> (last accessed June 22, 2010)

⁹ The Tier 2 work visa “is for people coming to the UK with a skilled job offer to fill a gap in the workforce that cannot be filled by a settled worker,” according to the UK Border agency. <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/workingintheuk/tier2/general/> (last accessed June 22, 2010)