

The Need for Utopia–And What Utopia Needs (First Draft December 2017)

A Contribution to the Future of Critical Theory
Dedicated to Herbert Marcuse

by
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I. INTRODUCTION

There is no future for critical theory without a utopian vision. And the utopian vision has been moribund since the end of the nineteenth century.

This situation may represent a temporary failure of imagination that is capable of being repaired. And yet, since the period of failure now stretches across more than a century, and counting, it is perhaps past time to confront the matter head-on and ask: Is any effective repair still conceivable? If the answer is yes, how is it to be done? If no, then where does that fact leave the critical theory of society?

First, in Section II, I shall offer a brief account of the essentials of modern utopian thought as I understand it, as it had developed—primarily in England and France—from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. I ask readers to provide critical comments here, so that this account may be gradually improved, until it may be allowed to stand as a generally-accepted statement about what the traditional utopian vision represented, in terms of its goals for a better human society. In Section III, I offer a highly-condensed account of the actual socialist, anarchist, and communist movements in the nineteenth-century. Neither of these two sections pretends to offer original material or interpretations; my objective is to create a platform that is broadly representative of current opinion and thus acceptable to my readers as a basis for the critical evaluation that follows.

In Sections IV and V, I ask: *What happened then?* What happened during the first two decades of the twentieth century that, in effect, destroyed all the hopes of the 19th-century founders of utopian socialism and communism? How could it have come to pass that the bitter struggles and sacrifices of the workers' movements for the previous three-quarters of a century had led to naught? How could it have come to pass that a popular movement, led by deeply humane and progressive thinkers and activists, could have been so badly perverted in its ultimate outcomes? These questions must be posed and answered before one can legitimately say that the utopian vision still holds promise for the future. Finally, in Sections VI – IX I shall argue as follows:

- 1) That there is still a need for a utopian vision;
- 2) That the failure of imagination can be repaired;
- 3) That the most necessary repair involves a very specific aspect of social relations that was never adequately addressed in the utopian tradition, and for the most part never addressed at all;
- 4) That repairing this specific defect is *long past due* for any consideration of what we mean by a better society;
- 5) That there are future scenarios in which a revived utopian vision can contribute to the further progress of civilization.

I dedicate this effort to my teacher and friend Herbert Marcuse, who virtually alone among his colleagues in the Frankfurt School circle made the idea of utopia an important part of his work throughout his long life and career. (His colleagues confined their contributions to brief and cryptic remarks.) The two editors of the volume *The Essential Marcuse* (2007: pp. xxiii-xxx) argued that the idea of utopia was a core ingredient in critical theory, and that Marcuse in particular never lost sight of this idea—for example, in an important chapter in his *Eros and Civilization* (1955) entitled “Fantasy and Utopia,” and in his later speech, “The End of Utopia” (1967).

Notes to the Reader:

If you are already familiar with the historical background materials that follow, in Sections II and III, please just skip or skim them and proceed to Section IV.

If you wish to skip to the main theme of this essay, the empowerment of women, please go to Page 16, at the section entitled “A Modest Proposal,” to start reading.

II. THE UTOPIAN VISION IN THE MODERN WEST

Overview.

There are a number of general themes that recur across the development of the utopian vision from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries. For the most recent general treatment, replete with many fine full-color illustrations, see Geoffrey Claey's, *Searching for Utopia: The History of an Idea* (2011). Two anthologies are: G. Claey's & L. T. Sargent, *The Utopia Reader* (1999), and F. E. Manuel & F. P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (1979).

There are three points to be made at the outset. First: Many utopias were actually backward-looking, for example, those inspired by a combination of Plato's *Republic* or the assumed lifestyles of the early followers of Jesus at the origins of Christianity. More popular still was the "Arcadian" theme, taken from the name of a Greek province and used to refer to a long-lost Golden Age, or simply the Garden of Eden, an ideal condition no longer attainable for humans. (It was applied by the explorer Giovanni da Verrazzano to the entire East Coast of North America, eventually mutating into *Acadie*). It became a major theme in both prose and poetry, and especially in painting, such as for France's Nicolas Poussin in the seventeenth century (*Et in Arcadia ego* or *The Arcadian Shepherds*, 1638, now in the Louvre) and for the Englishman Thomas Cole, painter of *An Evening in Arcadia* (1843) and this one:



Figure 1 Thomas Cole, *The Arcadian or Pastoral State*, 1834

Second: There is a strong pastoralist element in utopia, obvious in the Arcadian examples, but more generally in the belief—which characterizes utopian thought from the beginning to the end—that the better society would be made up of smaller, rural groupings, employing skilled artisanal labor, and not large cities full of unskilled workers. And third: The overseas “voyages of discovery” had a huge impact on the European imagination. The New World, “America,” gave rise to vivid thoughts of an ideal society, and the typical utopian fantasy was located on an island somewhere close to America. When in the nineteenth century many small communities devoted to utopian ideals sprang up, almost all of them were founded in the United States.

The Sixteenth Century.

Utopian thought in the modern West was given both its name and its single most important text by Thomas More in 1516, in a book first published in Latin (the first English translation appeared after his death, in 1551). The title, *Utopia*—actually, that was the last word in More’s very long original title—was taken from the Greek, meaning simply “nowhere” or “no place.” But More himself added an important twist, when he remarked in an addendum, where he adds the phonetic construction, *eu-topia*: “*Wherfore not Utopie, but rather rightly my name is Eutopie, a place of felicitie.*”

Thus, Thomas More had already spiced the tradition to follow with the nice allusion to a form of society that did not ever exist, before or currently, anywhere on earth, but, if it were to come into existence, sometime, somewhere, would be a “good place” or a “happy place,” better in many respects than what had come before. Its most radical proposition was that all goods produced for the satisfaction of needs should be held in common.

Among the many puzzles generated by this book is the fact that it argues for virtues such as religious toleration that its author most certainly did not respect or practice in his role as Lord Chancellor of England under Henry VIII. His Catholicism brought him to grief when Henry had him executed for refusing to sanction Henry’s divorce from Catherine of Aragon and his assumption of the leadership of the Church of England. But it made him a martyr, and as of 1935 a saint. His communism also made him a kind of secular saint to many nineteenth-century revolutionaries, such as Marx and Engels, and garnered him public recognition on a stele near the Kremlin erected on Lenin’s orders in 1918.

Thereafter Luther’s successful revolt against the Catholic Church, beginning in 1517, opened the floodgates of Christian “enthusiasm,” quickly producing many different radical offshoots such as the Anabaptists, whose followers were ruthlessly harassed by the dominant authorities and whose leaders, such as Thomas Müntzer and Jacob Hutter, were tortured and killed. Müntzer had taken Protestantism in the direction of radical social reform: He was a leader of the disaffected rural poor in the German Peasants’ War in 1525, and in his confession made under torture and before his execution, he argued that “all things should be held in common” and that goods should be distributed “according to need.”

Jacob Hutter (1500-1536) had become a leader of Anabaptist congregations in Moravia and Tyrol, all persecuted and expelled from various places, who introduced the doctrine of community of goods to his followers. Hutterite farming communities, communalists and pacifists, flourish in rural areas down to the present day, especially in Canada. Other offshoots of the Anabaptists, especially Old Order Amish, known for their resistance against new technologies, do not hold property in common, but still seek to live apart from the larger society in the United States and Canada.

The Seventeenth & Eighteenth Centuries.

There was no direct link between Thomas More's book and the social revolutionaries that arose very early in the Protestant Reformation (for one thing, More's book was at first available only in Latin). But sometime later, at the turn of the seventeenth century, *Utopia* began its long and influential journey among comparable works. Tommaso Campanella was a Dominican monk who produced his *City of the Sun* (in Italian) in 1602, a work even more radical than More's in its communism and devotion to equality, where neither servants nor slaves are allowed. Alas, for this and other heresies he spent 27 years in prison and was repeatedly and severely tortured. Johannes Andreae, a German Protestant theologian influenced by Campanella, published his version of a religiously-oriented communist utopia, *Christianopolis*, in 1619.

The political movement known as the Levellers, which arose during the English Civil Wars in the 1640s, embodied many of the ideas of earlier utopians, although not including common property; later an offshoot group, calling itself "True Levellers"—better known as "Diggers"—revived the common-property theme. But English political thought in the 17th century was largely preoccupied with the political struggle between parliamentarianism and royalism, and the social themes were muted. (For a good overview see J. C. Davis [1983], *Utopia & The Ideal Society: A Study of English Utopian Writing, 1516-1700*.)

According to the historian of ideas Frank E. Manuel, modern utopian thought really only comes into its own in France, starting in the late 18th century. Influential writings by Gabriel Bonnot de Mably (1709-1785) advocated the abolition of private property and combined the themes of communism and republicanism; he influenced Rousseau and the actors in the French Revolution. Similar themes are found in the works of Étienne-Gabriel Morelly (1717-1778) and François-Noël Babeuf (1760-1797). Jacques Turgot's *Discourse on the Historical Progress of the Human Mind* (1750) provided the first strong statement of the idea of continuing progress. His contemporary, Nicolas de Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet (1743-1794), an important mathematician and advocate of women's rights, free public education, and racial equality, summed up the idea of the "perfectibility" of human society in his great book, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Spirit*; it was published posthumously after he died in prison, having been hunted down by agents of the Terror.

The Nineteenth Century.

A subsequent generation of French thinkers brought these ideas into the era when the factory system and industrialization were beginning to emerge. The writings of Henri de Saint-Simon (1760-1825), which were labeled by others as “utopian socialism,” inspired followers who took his name—the Saint-Simonians—and began to establish colonies. The most radical and influential of all was Charles Fourier (1772-1837), a strong advocate of women’s rights, who proposed setting up work cooperatives and allocating productive tasks to individuals according to their differing psychological makeups. His ideas of “attractive labor” and the relation between work and play were seen by the later critical theorists Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno, and Marcuse as (in the latter’s phrase) grounding freedom in “non-repressive sublimation.” For detailed discussion see:

Frank E. Manuel, *The Prophets of Paris* (1962)

Frank E. Manuel, *The New World of Henri Saint-Simon* (1963)

F. E. Manuel and F. P. Manuel, *French Utopias: An Anthology of Ideal Societies* (1966)



Figure 2 New Harmony as envisioned by Robert Owen (engraving by F. Bate, 1838)

The Englishman Robert Owen, a Welsh textile manufacturer of the same period (1771-1858), was an equally important figure, supporting cooperatives, the union movement, the eight-hour working day, child labor laws, and public education. But the mention of Owen also brings us to one of the most remarkable features of 19th-century utopianism, namely, the founding more than a hundred new communities, mostly in some

two dozen different states across the USA, based on various ideas for a better society. (There were also a few in Britain.) Among the best-known were Owen's New Harmony, Indiana, one of over a dozen inspired by him; the Oneida community in New York; Brook Farm in Massachusetts; the six Icarian communities, inspired by the Frenchman Étienne Cabet; and half-a-dozen Fourier Society groups. Most, including New Harmony, lasted only a few years; but two, Amana in Iowa (1850-1932) and Hebus Valley in Pennsylvania (1824-1906), endured for far longer.

The utopian tradition in the modern West closes at the end of the 19th century with three English-language tracts. The first, the American Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888), was almost at once enormously popular; it proposed the nationalization of all industry and the equal sharing of goods among all citizens. Although clearly inspired by earlier utopian theorists and the example of utopian communities, Bellamy's book differs in one important respect, namely, the role he assigns to the national government to manage the socialized economy, to guarantee education for all, and to ensure the fair distribution of resources.

The second is *News from Nowhere* (1890) by William Morris, a notable English artist and designer as well as author. The strongest elements in his vision have to do with the pleasures of skilled craft labor among small communities set in a quasi-rural setting. In one sense Morris's utopian ideal is a reassertion of some of the dominant themes—pastoralism, craft labor, communal ownership of the means of production—in that tradition, as against the more socialist-industrialist vision of Bellamy (Morris reviewed and criticized Bellamy's book shortly before he wrote his own). This reaffirmation of "traditional" utopian values extends to the gender-based division of labor: For Morris women are still primarily occupied with the household and the raising of children. Although skilled craft labor requires mechanical aids, large-scale machinery is anathema to Morris, as is formal education, which he appears to think is just unnecessary.

The third and final, *A Traveler from Altruria* (1894) by William Dean Howells, is a minor contribution to the genre: in Altruria altruism rules, money is abolished, everyone works at some craft (but only three hours a day), goods are held in common and are distributed according to need. It is in a way a summing-up of the utopian tradition, for in its dialogues there are explicit references to the most famous works, from Campanella right down to Bellamy and Morris.

The nineteenth century is also, of course, known for the rise of powerful social movements based on the demand for the overthrow of capitalism and the instauration of some form of socialism, anarchism, or communism. These movements form the bridge to the twentieth century and are treated in the following section.

III: SOCIALISM, ANARCHISM, COMMUNISM

The coming of industrialism, power-driven machinery, and the factory system, opening a heretofore undreamed-of future promise of material prosperity, was nothing less than a social and environmental catastrophe for the working classes of the time. It was marked by 84-hour work weeks, with a single day of rest; frequent and horrific industrial accidents, with no medical care or pensions for the crippled; brutal repression of attempts to organize unions; dangerous and life-threatening child labor for those as young as four years of age, especially in the coal mines; ill-paid and exhausting labor for women in the textile mills; poor housing conditions and poverty-level wages; and in the urban environment, shocking levels of air and water pollution that were an additional risk to health and longevity. Much of this was summed up by Engels in his first book, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (in German in 1845, first English translation only in 1887), which much impressed Marx, and in a famous chapter, "The Working Day," in Volume 1 of Marx's *Capital*.

Bitter and protracted struggles over many decades by workers, against the army and police as well as against strikebreakers protected by the armed minions of the capitalists, were needed in order to win the rights to unionize and bargain collectively on wages and working conditions. Most of these struggles took place at the local and regional levels, of course. But the international reach of capitalist enterprise soon prompted the leaders of working-class movements to seek to unify oppositional forces at the transnational level.

Three different but related movements had emerged by the middle of the nineteenth century: socialism, anarchism, and communism. In broad-brush terms, socialism envisaged a gradual overcoming of capitalism and the concentration of the means of production in the hands of government, but with the management of industrial enterprises under the day-to-day control of democratically-elected workers' councils. Anarchism, on the other hand (where the key figures are Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Mikhail Bakunin), advocated for a kind of "libertarian" socialism which sought to eliminate dependence on a centralized state and to vest ownership of economic enterprises directly in the hands of their workers.

Finally, Marx and Engels in particular, in *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), sought to portray socialism as a way-station or transitional state to a "higher" phase of social organization where productive resources are controlled collectively (as under socialism) but are distributed according to one's "need" rather than to one's contribution (a theme that extends back as far as More's *Utopia*). They argued that the proletariat needed to seize control of the state, rather than try to undermine it from within, but in their notion that the state would gradually "wither away" under communism, they appeared to be making common cause with the anarchists. (The two groups would end up killing each other during the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s.)

All of these strands, together with trade-unionists, liberals, and nationalists, sought to come together in the International Workingmen's Association (IWA, also known as the First International), founded in London in 1864 and holding its first congress in Geneva in 1866. Marx was a delegate. But by 1872 the organization was split between two factions, the anarchists led by Bakunin and the rest, led by Marx. When the Second International was

founded in 1889, with delegates from twenty countries, Marx's group kept the anarchists out.

At the same time, socialist and social-democratic political parties had been forming at the national level. The most powerful was Germany's Social Democratic Party (known by the acronym SPD), founded in 1875, although its predecessor, known as the General German Workers' Association, goes back to 1863. The Socialist Party of France was founded only in 1902, its formation delayed by the decades of repression following the Paris Commune of 1871. The Social Democratic Workers' Party of Austria was founded in 1889, and a similar party emerged in Sweden in that same year.

By 1912 the SPD was the largest party in Germany's Reichstag, and would remain so for the next two decades, but it was also extremely active in society, with a large educational and cultural apparatus, sports clubs, and a counseling service that helped individuals with their legal rights and social security and unemployment entitlements. The SPD was equally active on the regional level in a number of the German states, as well as in municipal and district councils. The SPD in those days was, in short, a hugely successful, progressive social movement as well as a political party. It is entirely possible to imagine that, sometime in the decade of the 1910s, the Prussian monarchy would have collapsed under the weight of its own anachronistic existence, and that, had World War I not intervened, the SPD would have formed a democratic socialist government under far more favorable conditions than those which actually existed in 1918.

Instead, the first of two disasters struck: World War I. The SPD supported the granting of war credits to the Kaiser, with only a single member, Karl Liebknecht, voting against; in 1917, the party expelled those opposed to the war, including Liebknecht, Clara Zetkin, and Rosa Luxemburg. Thus ended at one stroke the nearly fifty-year effort to create solidarity among the working peoples of the European nations.

In August 1914 the Munich photographer Heinrich Hoffman snapped a picture of a crowd in Munich's Odeonsplatz, wildly cheering the declaration of war with Russia. (He was later the court photographer of the SS state; he retouched the picture with a circular enlargement showing the future Führer, and may have retouched Hitler's image as well, although Hitler was in Munich at that time and it is entirely plausible that he was in the crowd for that event.) Without a doubt, Adolf Hitler was the chief beneficiary of that first disaster.

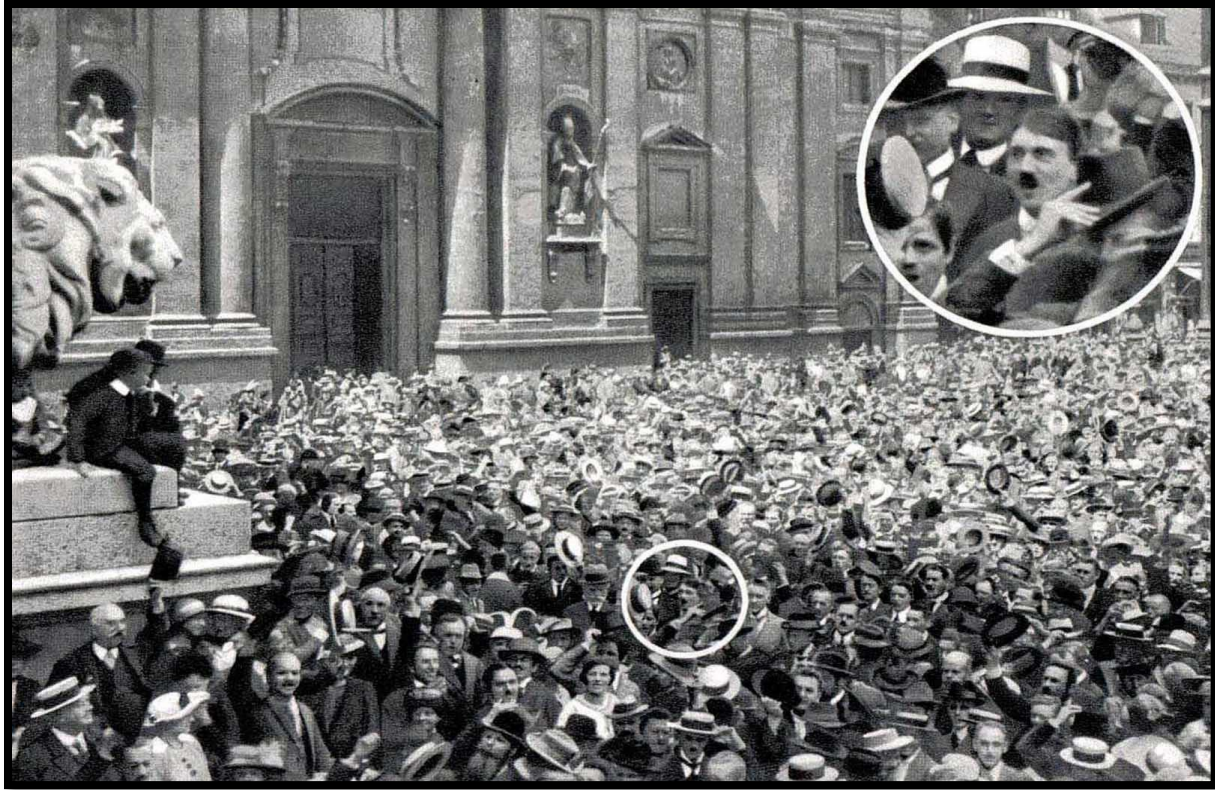


Figure 3 "Adolf Hitler, the German patriot in the middle of the crowd stands with blazing eyes" (1914)

IV: THE END OF UTOPIA?

The second disaster was the success of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1918, also a direct outcome of the First World War. More precisely, its ultimate success, after four years of civil war, created a disaster waiting to happen: First because, although it had forged its ideology in the name of Marx and Engels, those thinkers had maintained that the seizure of power leading to socialism and communism would be possible only in countries where capitalism had reached its highest point of development, which excluded Russia. As a result, its core ideology became nothing more than a fig-leaf concealing the operation of a state apparatus which oppressed, rather than liberated, its working class and peasantry. It was nothing less than a terroristic police state from the beginning and remains so to this day, even after the so-called "collapse of communism" in 1991.

Second, because its success cleaved the older European working-class movement in two, one socialist and the other communist; more importantly, it created a collection of communist parties in Europe (in Germany, the KPD) which were slavishly subservient to the interests of the Soviet Union. (In the run-up to their assumption of power in 1933, the Nazi party had never gotten anywhere near the vote totals in free elections of the socialist and communist parties combined.) Already in 1918, the SPD's Friedrich Ebert, the first democratically-elected leader of a German government, had poisoned the postwar political

well by enlisting the support of the Imperial German Army and, even worse, the proto-fascist *Freikorps* volunteers, against communist-led uprisings in various cities.

It was in disgust at this betrayal that the young Marcuse, then serving in the German army, left the SPD (although unlike others he did not join the KPD). He and others had to watch during the 1920s as the KPD, under instructions from Moscow to regard the SPD as a more dangerous enemy than the Nazis, waged street battles against the socialists. Eventually both KPD and SPD partisans became long-term residents of Dachau and other Nazi concentration camps, although as Nikolaus Wachsmann tells us, they continued to hold each other in disdain while imprisoned, and “the Left never formed a united front in Nazi captivity” (*KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps* [2015], p. 131).

The traditional utopian vision, alive in various forms for four hundred years, died an ignoble death during the First World War. When it reappeared, as the official ideology of various murderous and repressive states ostensibly dedicated to the realization of that old vision, it was no longer recognizable. Stalin’s Soviet Union, Mao’s China, the Eastern European postwar satrapies beholden to their Russian conqueror, and the utterly bizarre anti-utopias of Pol Pot’s Cambodia and North Korea’s family dynasty, all paid or still pay effusive tribute to the withering away of the state whilst terrorizing its own people, turning society itself into a vast prison, the Gulag Archipelago.

In this light it is ironically appropriate that, when the turn from utopia to dystopia happened in the literary imagination, it was an obscure Russian naval engineer, writing in the glorious dawn of the Bolshevik state, who penned its story in immortal terms. Yevgeny Zamyatin (1884-1937) had served the Imperial Russian Navy on assignment in Great Britain during World War I, supervising the construction of icebreakers. He had been a member of the Bolshevik Party since 1908, had returned to Russia in late 1917, and had supported the October Revolution. By that time, he had also been writing fiction for a decade, and was very familiar with English literature of that period; after returning to Russia, he edited Russian translations of works by Jack London, O. Henry, and H. G. Wells.

It is not clear whether he also knew the writings of E. M. Forster (although it would be odd if he did not), whose great 1909 short story, “The Machine Stops,” marks the beginning of dystopian literature. Forster’s story was closely related to the nineteenth-century literary fascination with the Machine Age, represented best by two remarkable short stories written by Herman Melville in 1855 (see the chapter “Sublime Machine” in my 2017 book, *Hera The Buddha*). But by around 1920 Zamyatin was writing his novel *We*, which details a future society wherein all citizens (who are known only by a unique number assigned by the state), including the Leader, submit to “the operation,” in which the part of the brain responsible for the faculty of imagination is cauterized, after which, the narrator explains: “You are perfect. You are machine-like.”

He was forbidden to publish his novel, for perhaps obvious reasons, in the young Soviet Union, so he smuggled a copy to an English publisher, and the English translation, which came out in 1924, was its first appearance anywhere. In subsequent years the Russian original was printed abroad and smuggled back into the Soviet Union, which

further annoyed the authorities there. In 1931 he petitioned Stalin to grant him the right to go into exile, which was granted, and he moved to Paris, where he died six years later.

But what greater testimonial is there, than the novel *We*, to the obscene actuality of what Stalin was busily creating, a society in which any exercise of the faculty of free human imagination was the surest path to torture and either long imprisonment in the Siberian camps or a quick bullet to the back of the head? Or, in a distinctly Stalinist improvement on Zamyatin's imaginative work, a society where committing no crime or misdemeanor at all—where quotas for killings were set in terms of aggregate numbers for each region, where regional authorities were wont to exceed their assigned quotas in order to demonstrate their fealty to the Leader—was needed in order to qualify for punishment or death?

V: TRANSITION

How could it have come to pass that the bitter struggles and sacrifices of the workers' movements for the previous three-quarters of a century before 1914 led to naught? How could it have come to pass that a popular movement, led by deeply humane and progressive thinkers and activists, could have been so badly perverted in its outcomes? These questions must be posed and answered before one can legitimately say that the utopian vision still holds promise for the future.

First, a qualification: One may not be permitted to say that the struggles of the workers' movements between, say, 1840 and 1914 were all for nothing. True, European nations had to endure the hell of two world wars, with tens of millions killed, maimed and wounded, with incalculable damage to economies, private property and cultural treasures, in order to arrive at the year 1945. And yet in the postwar period, inspired by the example of Sweden's innovations in the 1930s, the northern European nations created a reasonable facsimile of older socialist and social-democratic models of a better society. Moreover, with the creation of the European Union, founded on the alliance of two longstanding enemies, France and Germany, another old dream of internationalist solidarity was recreated, which to be sure is being severely tested as of late.

Second, another qualification: Is it fair to represent the Bolshevik Revolution as, frankly, an unmitigated disaster for historical progress on the Eurasian continent? Admittedly, the true story is bleak enough, as any reader of Simon Sebag Montefiore's *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*, or Alexandr Solzhenitsyn's *The Gulag Archipelago*, or any comparable volumes, can attest. But was Stalin's brutal modernization campaign, involving mass starvation in the Ukraine and the Terror of the 1930s, necessary in order to create, within a mere twenty years after the Soviet Union lay prostrate and economically ruined in 1922, once the Civil War had ended, an industrial state powerful enough to resist, and ultimately defeat, a determined enemy that, as of 1941, had assembled the largest and most powerful army in human history on its borders?

No matter how much evidence is assembled, it is virtually impossible to comprehend the scale of the titanic four-year struggle between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, waged along a battle line that stretched some four thousand kilometers from north to south. By far the largest proportion of German war dead occurred on the Eastern Front, and the Soviet Union absorbed by far the greatest proportion of the German war machine's savage destructiveness, which laid waste to vast sections of the country and its infrastructure and caused some *twenty-five million* military and civilian casualties. Had the Soviet Union not been able to absorb this punishment, and had it, for all practical purposes, capitulated at the end of 1941, what would have been the result for the other two allied powers, Great Britain and the United States? Would Britain have been swallowed up too, and would Nazi rule have endured for longer than it actually did on the Eurasian continent, until, for example, the USA had been able to use its atomic bombs to finally defeat this malignant empire?

Would the Soviet Union have been able to resist and defeat Nazi forces on the Eastern Front in the absence of Stalin's brutal modernization, transforming a weak and impoverished 1922 nation into an industrial powerhouse a mere twenty years later? Could this have been done absent Stalin's great crimes against his own people? Almost certainly the answer must be, yes, of course. Surely it was not necessary to starve between 7 and 10 million people to death in the Holodomor in the Ukraine between 1932 and 1933, just to create an agricultural surplus capable of procuring foreign machinery and feeding the new army of industrial workers.

Surely it was not necessary to disrupt the fragile workings of the Soviet Union's new industrial economy by imprisoning and killing some two million innocent civilian workers during the Terror, or to eliminate the cream of the military leadership in its entirety, including the brilliant Marshal Tukhachevsky, author of original works on the conduct of modern mechanized warfare? Or to torture and almost kill, in the military purges, simply because of his half-Polish ancestry, Konstantin Rokossovskiy, later a commander in the three great, decisive battles on the Eastern Front, at Moscow in 1941, at Stalingrad in 1942, and at Kursk in 1943, the cavalry officer whom the German generals later referred to as "The Dagger," the one they most feared to face on the battlefield, the one whose armies destroyed Germany's most powerful military formation, Army Group Center, in August 1944?

Of course, there must have been other possible pathways to industrial strength for the young Soviet Union, pathways sufficient to resist and then defeat the Nazi war machine, other than those pursued in Stalin's criminal reign. But we can never know for certain. Still, the path that twentieth-century Eurasian history actually took, giving us Stalin's perversion of the utopian dream, along with those of the other states gratuitously referring to themselves as "communist" regimes, is the path we inherited.

It was and remains a dead end: There is no sensible route through a "dictatorship of the proletariat" (a nonsense phrase in any case), or any form of dictatorship for that matter, to an ultimate goal of rule by a free and equal assembly of enlightened citizens, exercising communal control over the means of production, and living by the doctrine, "from each

according to her abilities, to each according to her needs.” Confirmation of this truth can be had from the present state of Russia, ruled by a just another despot with the backing of a criminal class which was enriched by stealing the hard-earned wealth of the common people. Additional confirmation is supplied in the present state of the former communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Asian nations of the former Soviet Union, few of which are self-evidently on the path to an enlightened future, and most of which instead now appear to be striving to reproduce many of the uglier aspects of their former existence. There is simply no justification for arguing that the route should be tried again, to see if it can produce a better outcome. That would be an exercise in both stupidity and futility.

But perhaps no set of ideas can allow itself to be defined by the perversions and crimes perpetrated in its name. For if it were to be allowed, how could organized religions still command the loyalty of the billions of the faithful? If it were allowed, how could the signatories to the Declaration of Independence have celebrated in 1776 the “self-evident truths” referred to therein, including the mantra, “all men are created equal,” while simply ignoring the reality of slavery? (The enslaved population in the U.S., each one of whom was counted for purposes of a state’s entitlement in Congress as three-fifths of an entity, literally exploded *after* the Declaration was penned, increasing from about 500,000 in 1780 to about *four million* by 1860.) If it were allowed, how could the pervasive oppression of women go on, around the globe, in an age ostensibly committed to the dignity of persons?

And yet, despite all the horrors that have been perpetrated in its name, how could we possibly justify surrendering the utopian vision once and for all? Right now, the richest 1% of the world’s population owns at least 50% of all wealth, a proportion that is still rising. At least half of the world’s population lives at the level of crippling poverty. In the “ecological footprint” calculation, 1.6 earths are required to produce what we now consume collectively; in other words, we are drawing down the earth’s ecological capital at a rate that is unsustainable in the long run. And all this is occurring before the full impacts of climate change have been felt. By 2100 there will be a global sea-level rise of between four and eight feet, and the oceans will continue to rise for centuries thereafter (these impacts are already “pre-loaded” into the climate system and cannot be forestalled by any future human controls on GHG emissions). At present, about half of the world’s population already lives along coasts at current sea levels. In addition, cycles of severe droughts and other forms of severe weather will strike many others living away from coastlines.

And why forget the continuing risk of catastrophic nuclear war? The two remaining nuclear superpowers, Russia and the USA, each still have at the ready sufficient numbers of nuclear bombs to bring civilization to an end. A fair number of other nuclear-equipped nations have the capability to obliterate each other in regional wars.

In view of all this, how could we possibly justify surrendering the utopian vision? The answer is, or should be, obvious: We cannot.

But how to revive it? According to its history to date, the utopian dream was supposed to “materialize” in just one of three ways. First, it would have arisen spontaneously in some remote place, usually on a small island, to be discovered by

explorers who would take the news of its superiority back to their home countries, presumably so that the example could be emulated there. Second, it would be constructed according to the plans of a visionary, and embraced by his (always his) small band of devout followers; the success of the first settlement would encourage others to follow suit. And third, following the revolutionary seizure of power by the proletariat in one or more developed capitalist states, the new regime would morph through the two phases of socialism and then communism until it reached its completed form.

None of the three is viable any longer. (There was a brief revival of the second during the “hippie” phase in the 1970s in the U.S.; alas, those experiments were as short-lived as their 19th-century predecessors were.) But perhaps it is premature to fret about what new pathways might be possible, and to start by asking: What is the end state that is sought? After all, well over a century has passed since the last major literary figure, William Morris in 1890, answered that question. So, to whom should we look? Morris? Bellamy? Fourier? Owen? Or further back: More? Campanella? Or something entirely new, not yet detailed?

Interviewers liked to pose this question to Marcuse during the 1970s. He answered that one was supposing that there would be groups in the future who were no longer under the thumb of necessity, and who thus had, for the first time, the freedom to choose what their better future would be like. In such cases, it would be illogical to suggest that someone not yet experiencing such freedom could predict what their choices would be. Not to put too fine a point on the matter, this response was rather coy. Or was Marcuse just being a good Marxist? There is nothing in Marx’s opus to tell us what the end state of the better society would be like, although there is something a bit peculiar in this reticence, since according to Marx all of previous human history is a preparation for it.

Herbert’s compatriot Theodor Adorno suggested, in his *Minima Moralia*, that one only needs to know that in utopia everyone will have enough to eat. (*Panem et circenses?*) To be fair, Adorno has a few additional prescriptions as well; one of them, the “re-eroticization” of work and life (whatever that is supposed to mean), comes from Fourier, and Marcuse too makes a similar reference to Fourier in his essay, “The End of Utopia.” A good guide to this reticence is the book by Russell Jacoby, *Picture Imperfect: Utopian Thought for an Anti-Utopian Age* (2005). It can be called “negative utopia,” that is, the idea that it is somehow inappropriate or impossible to detail the positive features of a future better society, whilst declaring one’s continuing adherence to it as an abstract ideal. I do like Jacoby’s relating this reticence to the ban on images of the deity in Judaism (it is the same in Islam, by the way). [We must not forget in this context the important books on utopia by the great Ernst Bloch, including his three-volume work, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (*The Principle of Hope*), written during his exile in the United States. For an interesting Internet essay on these themes, see the 2015 piece by Michael R. Ott (<https://philarchive.org/archive/OTT SMA-2>), “Something’s Missing: A Study of the Dialectic of Utopia in the Theories of Theodor W. Adorno and Ernst Bloch.”]

Marcuse’s “The End of Utopia” was delivered as a speech in Berlin in 1967 (later printed in his slim volume, *Five Lectures*). Here are a few excerpts:

- “Today we have the capacity to turn the world into hell, and we are well on the way to doing so. We also have the capacity to turn it into the opposite of hell. This would mean the end of utopia, that is, the refutation of those ideas and theories that use the concept of utopia to denounce certain socio-historical possibilities. It can also be understood as the ‘end of history’ in the very precise sense that the new possibilities for a human society and its environment can no longer be thought of as continuations of the old, nor even as existing in the same historical continuum with them. Rather, they presuppose a break with the historical continuum; they presuppose the qualitative difference between a free society and societies that are still unfree, which, according to Marx, makes all previous history only the prehistory of mankind.
- “All the material and intellectual forces which could be put to work for the realization of a free society are at hand.” And: “[T]he so-called utopian possibilities are not at all utopian but rather the determinate socio-historical negation of what exists...”

There are some difficulties, at least in my own mind, in trying to decide what exactly Marcuse is claiming here. (See Russell Jacoby’s *The End of Utopia: Politics and Culture in an Age of Apathy* [2000].) If we go by the two statements in the second bullet point, we can say that the transition to utopia is ready to happen, as a set of real possibilities to create a radically-different society (in this sense, Marcuse says, “they are not at all utopian,” using utopian, presumably, to mean a goal set far into the future); so that what is required is to just tear down everything now existing and – *hey presto!* – we are there. This is perhaps unkind, or even patronizing, although I don’t intend it as such. Perhaps it would be better to say that it is just frustrating, for all of us who know how important the Hegelian concept of *Aufhebung* is, with its dual meanings of preservation/cancellation.

The “negation of what exists” cannot possibly mean, in crude terms, “throwing out the baby with the bathwater.” Fine. But don’t we need to know how to sort out what’s to be kept from what’s to be discarded? It is possible that we cannot know which things are to go into each of the two piles until *after* we have already crossed the line from the existent to its negation? Do we just pull the plug and hope for the best? Surely, this concept of “the end of utopia” presents us with a conundrum, and as a call to action it just will not fly.

A Modest Proposal.

And so, I have a modest proposal for your consideration. I can agree with Marcuse that today we have – almost! – all the material and intellectual resources we need, ready to hand, to bring a better society into existence. What we also require, however, and do not yet have ready to hand, is a point of entry into the problem of the transition, which is the preservation/cancellation conundrum. The point of entry will be *the one main element, among the institutional structures that make up modern society at present, that is not ready-to-hand*. It is the element that should have been brought into being some time ago, in part

because it ought to have been, and has not been, seen as a logical and necessary part of a modern society. It is, therefore, a serious deficiency in any *preparation for utopia*.

That deficiency does not lay in our material economy, which is if anything over-developed: We need to reduce our ecological footprint on the planet, not increase it further. It is not to be found, as such, in our scientific, technological and computing capabilities, or in our medical wizardry, although there will always be further advances to be made in those domains. It is not to be found with respect to high or low culture, the spheres of media and entertainment, in sports, the fine arts, education, religion, foreign relations, the justice system, politics, government, police, crime, the military, the corporate and business domains, or any of the other dozens of particular forms of activity that make up a modern society. It is not to be found in any of them individually for the simple reason that it pervades all of them so thoroughly, and so deeply, that it remains largely invisible to the naked eye.

That deficiency is a systematic lack of the empowerment of women.

This is the single greatest lacuna in the traditional utopian vision over the entire course of its history. Across its literary trajectory from More to Morris, as well as in the real-world experiments with utopian communities, any question about the appropriate place of women was greeted with studied silence. Across the powerful waves of reformist socialism and revolutionary communism, and in the political parties that carried their momentum, it was so completely absent as to be almost laughable. The First and Second Internationals were for the most part male bastions, and after a while “socialist women” were forced to organize separate bodies in order to advance their causes. As for the communist parties in particular, just glance at the gender profiles of the leadership cadres in the so-called communist nations, all of them, but especially China, the largest and most enduring: all male, all the time, with trivial exceptions.

In this respect, almost all aspects of this long tradition are dated and utterly inadequate for future progress. In terms of what is worth preserving, I would single out only the need to find pleasure and satisfaction in work, through skilled craft labor, and to experience a closeness to nature in rural settings, vast wilderness tracts, and smaller cities graced with abundant parkland, as necessary elements of a sustainable form of life. Apart from that, traditional utopian visions no longer have anything much to offer us.

To be sure, we need not be bound by the prevailing technological limitations of the time when traditional utopia ended (around 1890). I refer above all to electricity, computing and communications machinery, robotics and artificial intelligence, and many advances in modern medicine. Renewable-energy systems make it entirely feasible to integrate these innovations into the lifestyle settings drawn from the utopian tradition that were said to be, in the paragraph just above, well worth preserving.

Yet I maintain that without the full empowerment of women the realization of a better society cannot and will not happen.

VI: EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

In Vienna, on 16 July 1782, a new opera was premiered, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (*The Abduction from the Seraglio*), conducted by the composer. It created something of a sensation in the city, which at that time was obsessed with all things Turkish, including coffee. (Only a century early, in 1683, the Ottoman Empire had besieged the city for two months before being defeated by the forces of the Holy Roman Empire under the command of a Polish king.)



Figure 4 Mozart (at center) in Berlin in 1789 at a performance of "The Abduction from the Seraglio"

Goethe, who by that time had tried his hand at writing a libretto, was discouraged at his own effort's prospects: Mozart's opera, he said, had "conquered all." Mozart's *Singspiel* contains music of such spectacular beauty and range (and difficulty for singers) as had never been heard previously, but he is also known to have taken a hand in rewriting the

final text of the libretto. In Act 2, there is a duet ("Ich gehe, doch rate ich dir" – "I'm going, but mark what I say") between Osmin, the boss of the Pasha's harem, and Blonde, the maid to a captive Englishwoman in the harem; she boldly confronts him, even mocking him by imitating his deep bass voice:

OSMIN:

O Engländer! Seid ihr nicht Toren,
Ihr laßt euern Weibern den Willen!
Wie ist man geplagt und geschoren,
Wenn solch eine zucht man erhält!

O Englishmen, what fools you are
To let your women have their own way!
What a bother and nuisance it is
To be landed with such a creature.

BLONDE:

Ein Herz so in Freiheit geboren
Läßt niemals sich sklavisch behandeln;
Bleibt, wenn schon die Freiheit verloren,
Noch stolz auf sie, lachet der Welt!

A heart born to freedom
Will never submit to slavery;
Even if liberty is lost
It's still proud to be free, laughing at the world!

Mozart's more famous later operas, *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, and *The Magic Flute*, also all have strong female roles. (But it is not known why he thought that women in England, in particular, were permitted by their men to have their own way.) In that same period, the 1780s, important figures in the French Enlightenment, most notably the Marquis de Condorcet, were strong advocates of equal rights for women, including the suffrage. That, it as it turned out, would take a bit longer to achieve: The first nation in which men granted women the right to vote in national elections was Australia, in 1902; Finland followed, in 1907; then Norway, 1913; Denmark, 1915; Germany, 1918; the USA, 1920. The fight for women's suffrage had become a national movement in Great Britain in 1872, but it took over fifty more years, until 1928, to succeed fully. In France and Italy, the right was granted only in 1944 and 1946, respectively.

A. What is Empowerment?

Enfranchisement is one thing, empowerment quite another. How might empowerment be defined? The short answer is: Representation of women, in proportion to their share of the adult population, in the leadership positions of *all* important social institutions. The natural sex ratio at birth is about 1.05 male/female. Nature provides this slight excess because male mortality is higher in the first 25 years or so of life, due to the higher riskiness of male activity. After this age there is usually a slightly larger proportion of females, *except in those countries where some female births have been deliberately suppressed*. Therefore, we can postulate that, on grounds of fairness, women should hold a slightly larger share of all leadership positions in important social institutions, in aggregate, than men do. The list of such institutions should include:

Government (all levels):
 Representative bodies
 Executive bodies
 Bureaucracy
Armed Forces (Senior Officers in particular)

- Police, including chiefs
- Judiciary (including criminal justice system); lawyers
- Health sector senior administration; doctors
- Education (all levels):
 - Teachers/faculty
 - Senior Administration and Boards of Governors
- Corporations:
 - Senior Management
 - Boards of Directors and Committees
- Mass Media, including news organizations

Key features of this list are: (1) *all* institutions that hold legitimate coercive authority over individuals must be included; and (2), *all* institutions representing economic power, that is, control over the livelihoods of individuals, likewise must be included. Religious bodies are excluded because they are private and voluntary, but it should be noted that in most cases, especially in the Abrahamic religions, they are one of the original, and most long-lasting, bastions of patriarchy. The long-term prospects for the success of the empowerment of women is likely to be, in part, a function of the decline of participation in organized religion as a factor in social life. On the other hand, who could deny that the *one thing that all Muslim-majority nations most need* is the full emancipation and empowerment of women?

B. Relevant Social Indicators

What data do we have, across the world, that is relevant to the issue of the empowerment of women? Perhaps the most relevant is the *Global Gender Gap Report*, issued annually by the World Economic Forum. It measures four variables: Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment. The 2017 Report covers 144 countries, and summarizes the level of attainment to date, with respect to “closing” the gender gap, across the four dimensions as follows:

Global Gender Gap Index	68%
Economic Participation and Opportunity Subindex	58%
Educational Attainment Subindex	95%
Health and Survival Subindex	96%
Political Empowerment Subindex	23%

On the country index, Iceland ranks first in the world, followed by Norway and Finland; in most years in which the index has been reported, all of the top countries are Nordic (in addition to the three above, Sweden and Denmark).

However, one notes immediately that “empowerment” occurs only in the political sphere. In the two largest dimensions (education and health), the index measures mainly *enrollment in schooling* in the first, and *life expectancy* in the second. Since these figures are so high, they of course skew the whole gap index strongly towards the high side – in other

words, the result that shows the world as a whole as having already closed two-thirds of the gender gap can be seriously misleading. In *none* of the first three sub-indices is the relative standing of men and women, in terms of controlling positions in important social institutions, even measured.

The Political Empowerment Subindex measures female/male ratios in ministerial positions and seats in parliament, and number of years with a female as head of state. The top ten nations in the world on this subindex for 2017 are, ranked in order: Iceland, Nicaragua, Rwanda, Norway, Finland, Ireland, Bangladesh, Sweden, France, and Germany. The relatively low overall score on the political empowerment subindex is the most relevant indicator in terms of our present discussion.

Another, albeit single, metric is what is known as the gender pay gap. The accounting firm PWC PriceWaterhouseCoopers issues an annual *Women in Work Index*; the 2017 report shows the Nordic countries, particularly Iceland, Norway, and Sweden, in leadership positions. But even though in Nordic countries fully 88% of women report wanting to combine steady work with having children, the “glass ceiling” in economic enterprises remains firmly in place (“A Nordic Mystery,” *The Economist*, 15 Nov. 2014). Thus the “economic participation” subindex also fails to have any measure of the gender distribution of senior executive positions in the economic sphere.

Finally, there is the OECD’s biannual “Better Life Index,” in which citizens report their degree of satisfaction across ten broad indicators: housing, income, jobs, community, education, environment, civic engagement, health, life satisfaction, safety, and work-life balance. The country scores for the Nordic countries (Norway, Iceland, Denmark, Finland, and Sweden) are consistently in the high end of the range.

All in all, it seems likely that, if and when a breakthrough is achieved, one that leads to steady progress towards the full empowerment of women, it will occur in the Nordic nations of Europe, either one by one, or gradually as a regional group. This is plausible for a number of reasons: (1) These countries already rank high, and consistently so, on a number of relevant indices; (2) they are close to other countries that are likely to be broadly supportive, and which will also be encouraged to move in the same direction; (3) organized religion is fairly weak and growing weaker there; (4) there is low militarism, no imperial pretensions, and strong social-democratic values; (5) they all score in the high end of the range on the “Better Life Index.”

C. Mary Beard’s Manifesto

The Cambridge University classics professor Mary Beard’s 2017 book, *Women and Power: A Manifesto*, is a compilation of two essays, the second of which is entitled “Women in Power.” It opens with a reference to *Herland*, a delightful 1915 utopian fantasy by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, which tells of an isolated community consisting of women only (they had discovered the secret of parthenogenesis). It is visited by three men from afar and, in Beard’s words, as a result of this experience, “the women simply don’t recognize their own

achievements”; “they tend to defer to the men’s competence, knowledge and expertise; and they are slightly in awe of the male world outside.”

Along the way to the present, Beard takes some delightful and instructive side-trips. The Greek myth of the Amazons, where women supposedly ruled, describes them as violent and militaristic, and thus a threat to other “normal,” male-dominated societies; it was only just a myth, but the “underlying point was that it was the duty of men to save civilization from the rule of women.” Beard also recalls the story about the beheading of Medusa, where Perseus is shown holding aloft the severed head with its writhing snakes, while trampling on the body, and reminds us of its use by the Trump side in the contest with Hillary Clinton: an image featured on T-shirts, tank tops, coffee mugs, tote bags, and laptop sleeves. But, she shows us, Angela Merkel and Theresa May have also been subjected to similar imagery using the head of Medusa.

Her big question for the present day is: “If women are not perceived to be fully within the structures of power, surely it is power that we need to redefine rather than women?” She suggests the “decoupling power from public prestige”: “What I have in mind is the ability to be effective, to make a difference in the world, and the right to be taken seriously, together as much as individually.” And further: “I would like to pull apart the very idea of ‘leadership’ (usually male) that is now assumed to be the key to successful institutions, from schools and universities to businesses and government.”

To be fair, she has not allowed herself to take the time to develop these sketchy ideas into a full-fledged argument. And so I will just confine myself to the comment that my scheme for the full empowerment of women across all powerful social institutions does, in a sense, decouple power from public prestige: Most such senior positions in important bureaucracies operate behind the scenes, out of the public view. On the other hand, they are all prestigious positions in and of themselves, and there are indeed many occasions when the holders of those office appear in public in the discharge of their duties. I will leave it at that for the time being. I do not think there is any way to redefine power in the runup to the full empowerment of women. On the other hand, actually achieving that specific goal—which, admittedly, will take a bit of time—might very well put into motion a process whereby the nature of power in social institutions might be transformed in some beneficial way. That process, however, is perhaps something like the “withering away of the state,” a speculative idea not yet fully formed.

VII: WHAT DIFFERENCE MAY IT MAKE?

The modest proposal made here is, I suggest, straightforward and unarguable. Assuming, as I think we must, that the notion of the intrinsic dignity of the person applies equally to women and men, the proposal for the empowerment of women should need no justification. As to why it has not yet happened, do we need even to ask? The holders of a disproportionate share of the seats of privilege (males) are in some cases reluctant to yield

their advantages, understandably so, and in many other social contexts are ready and willing to kill or maim any female claimants to a share on the throne of power.

But some may simply respond, “Oh, of course, this will all happen eventually, things seem to be moving in that direction, albeit slowly, but so what? Can you prove that when the day arrives, human social behavior will be any different? And, more to the point, what makes you think it will be any better?” This last point is something I have to confront, since I have introduced the empowerment of women as part of the future prospects for utopia, the prospects for a distinctively better society. In fact, I will go further, and state: Achieving the empowerment of women is the *only* feasible entry-point, at the present time, to the path that leads to the substantially better society that utopian dreamers have always sought.

This is because in large part all the other routes have been tried and found wanting. First, there is no possibility that the better society already exists on a remote island and is just waiting to be discovered and emulated. Second, the experimental utopian communities were all miserable failures, mainly because they were not so very much different—especially in the gender division of labor and leadership authority—from the society they proposed to leave behind. Third, because the idea that a revolutionary seizure of power by a minority could design and impose by force a path to a better future, a path that the majority had not freely chosen for themselves, was a ridiculous notion to begin with, and so it is unsurprising that, inevitably, the idea consumed itself in an orgy of terror, murder, and repression.

Fourth, and finally, there is very little chance that, left to its own devices, one or more modern societies will just drift along, swept on by the prevailing currents, without any kind of conscious, visionary impetus, until one day it finds itself willy-nilly on the shores of a utopian isle: Recent experience should convince us that the world is an increasingly chaotic theater of tension and conflict, and that progressive forces have enough on their plates just trying to protect the democratic and social-welfare gains of the recent past from being undermined and overthrown.

Referring to these past failures is not meant to diminish in any way the importance of recognizing the full empowerment of women as an intrinsically-worthy goal. Quite the contrary: Nominating it as the main route of attack against the deep inadequacies of all present-day societies should be seen as both a practical and a moral imperative. In a practical sense, without a concrete vision of a better future that some strong majority of citizens in one or more nations, acting freely, actually want to bring to fruition, with a sense of the intrinsic justice of the cause, and keenly aware of the many mistakes of the past, it just will not happen. In a moral sense, it is the right and just thing to do.

The better future will not suddenly appear of its own accord on the horizon after society becomes collectively richer in material terms, for example, because inequality and the defense of unjust privilege is becoming stronger, not weaker. It will not just appear one day because the world has suddenly achieved collective security in a sustainable future, because that too is drifting away, corroded by endemic regional conflicts, threats of nuclear

conflict, climate change, and the dead weight of humanity's increasing ecological footprint. It will not appear just because a proposed new path seems to be interesting, in part because it's never been tried before, and can always be abandoned again if it doesn't work: This approach will not succeed, because the global conditions that are being prepared for the second half of the twenty-first century will not permit idle experiments; the endemic conflict and mayhem that is coming will demand a steely resolve and a firm focus on protecting new structures against expected threats, domestic and foreign.

This is, so to speak, the negative side of things, the ways that have already been tried and failed, as well as the reasons why we cannot expect just to stumble accidentally into the better future, and the reasons why we cannot hope to instaurate any fundamental change in social relations within one or more discrete nations, within the larger context of global instability, without having a clear and concrete objective and the resolve to see it succeed. But what about the positive angle? Is there any good reason to believe that proceeding to the empowerment of women will have an immediate, qualitative, and beneficial impact on society? I believe that there is indeed such a reason, and it can be explored with respect to two specific cases: the first is male violence, and the second is reproduction.

A. Women's Empowerment: Male Violence

The predisposition of males to use violence and to intimidate others by threatening violence is one of society's enduring and greatest evils. Male violence is the core feature of the entire history of settled human society, generating endless wars, pillage, mass rape, imperialism, conquest, despotism, terrorism, oppression, torture, and murder. The career of Timur (Tamerlane), the 14th-century conqueror born in modern-day Uzbekistan, whose armies swept as far West as Egypt, and who is estimated to have caused the deaths of fully 5% of the entire world population in his lifetime, with no apparent benefit whatsoever to the peoples he conquered, can serve as an emblem of this madness.

The predisposition for using and threatening lethal violence is a constant *modus vivendi* of male life, an ever-present, menacing aura, a blind, unthinking rage triggered by the slightest of circumstances, a sudden surge of power often released without warning, amplified by the group, escalating at a terrifying speed; emboldened by the perceived weakness of its target, it seeks to conceal the cowardice, insecurity, and inarticulateness that lies at its core. It seeks above all the *unequal* contest; its favorite targets are the out-group, the vulnerable, the different, the unsuspecting, and, above all else, women.

Women certainly engage in lethal violence but so rarely, in comparison to men, as to often rate special mention. Men alone—with few exceptions—are serial killers, and women make up the great majority of their victims; men are the practitioners of torture and most of the rapists (although they sometimes have female helpmates). They are also, overwhelmingly, the perpetrators of domestic violence, in numbers unaccounted for due to women's fear and sublimation of blame; they are also, equally overwhelmingly, the abusers of children. In all of the Abrahamic religions men have been taught that women are responsible for tempting them into sin, by their odor, by their gait, by the tone of their voice, by the clothes they wear, by the slightest glimpse of their flesh; that they are

inherently promiscuous and therefore invite rape and sexual assault, and that therefore it is entirely their fault if they suffer beatings, maiming, or death as a result. In some traditional Islamic cultures, a woman is not entitled even to have a public *name*. In wartime, everything is permitted when it comes to the degradation of women.

Non-lethal intimidation, domination, and the presumed sexual entitlement of males run through the everyday life of women like a malignant meme at work, in public life, schools, churches, and play. In traditional societies the degradation of women is transparent and, indeed, obligatory for males; in modern societies it is expected to remain discreet and unspoken, except in all-male gatherings, where it can be allowed free rein. And although in these settings physical violence is regarded with distaste, and may be sanctioned, the many subtler forms of non-lethal intimidation and humiliation, resulting in loss of employment or advancement, rupture in an otherwise successful career path, disruption in family life and disadvantages for children, extreme psychological distress, depression, anxiety, and ill health, are usually sufficient to achieve the desired objective.

The empowerment of women as defined—an equal share, proportionate to their ratio in the adult population, of all leadership positions in the major social institutions—will mean, in practice, the much greater presence of women in senior administrative roles in all those areas of society where legitimate coercive authority is exercised (police, judiciary, criminal justice, etc.). This can be expected to lead to a more determined effort to curtail to a far greater degree than at present, not just overt and covert (domestic) physical violence, but also the subtler, but omnipresent, forms of non-lethal intimidation and presumptions of sexual entitlement. It is no accident that, in societies where women have made some progress towards equality of employment in these institutions, such as the police, they have faced there systematic sexual harassment and intimidation, along with cover-ups of the same by senior male officials.

Policy changes as well, such as more severe legal penalties for acts of violence, more adequate compensation for victims, and sweeping changes in administrative practices covering protection of women in workplaces and other social settings, will, without a doubt, bring about a very substantial reduction in male violence, and, *ipso facto*, a qualitatively better society. The prevalence of male violence and non-lethal intimidation, even in modern societies, is so great that it beggars belief to think that a substantial reduction of it would not represent a huge, positive benefit for society as a whole, *including for most men as well*, since men are more likely to be victims as well as perpetrators of interpersonal violence.

I have previously mentioned the fact that gender pay equity, although it is taken seriously in the Nordic countries, does not automatically lead to women's empowerment in the economic sphere; this has been called a "Nordic mystery." But the finding that the incidence of intimate partner violence against women is quite high in the Nordic countries at present is a very telling indicator; and in this context it is referred to as the "Nordic paradox." According to the 2014 study by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, among all European countries, Denmark had the highest prevalence of physical and sexual violence against women [\file:///C:/Users/Administrator/Downloads/fra-2014-

[vaw-survey-main-results_en%20\(2\).pdf](#)]. (See Jenny Nordberg, “Yes, It Happens in Sweden #Too,” *The New York Times*, 15 Dec. 2017; E. Garcia & J. Merlo, “Intimate partner violence and the Nordic paradox,” *Social Science & Medicine*, vol. 157, May 2016, pp. 27-30; the website for the book, *The Nordic Gender Equality Paradox* [2016], may also be of interest here: <http://nordicparadox.se/>.) The existence of this paradox reminds us that violence against women is a deeply-rooted, ongoing phenomenon even in countries which are widely regarded as being socially progressive in the area of gender relations.

I argued above that there will be substantial *direct* benefits in drastically curtailing male violence in domestic and other settings. Such a development will also set in motion a cascade of benefits for subsequent generations. This is because of the well-studied phenomenon of the intergenerational transmission of trauma, violence, abuse, and the stress related to all of them. Both male and female children who witness intimate partner violence are affected directly thereby, beginning at very young ages, and are also disproportionately prone to replicating such behavior when they grow up and have families of their own. For males this can mean becoming abusers themselves, and for females it can be adopting the coping mechanisms (silence, suppression of feelings) they have observed in their mothers. Negative effects on success in schooling for both sexes are also well-confirmed. Intergenerational effects of trauma have also been analyzed in the case of aboriginal children taken from their parents and sent to residential schools.

A recent useful, short review noted: “The concepts of re-enactment or repetition compulsion are implicated in the intergenerational transmission of trauma, which is the consequence of violence. Trauma tends to be repeated on behavioural, emotional, physiological and neuro-endocrinological levels and many traumatised people expose themselves, seemingly compulsively, to situations reminiscent of the original trauma.” This review also emphasized the phenomenon of *displaced aggression*, whereby victims who are unable to confront their own abusers perpetrate abuse on other, weaker individuals, in a kind of chain of abuse, including children who wind up abusing pets or other animals (N. Woollett & K. Thomson, “Understanding the intergenerational transmission of violence” [2016]: <http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/samj/v106n11/10.pdf>).

Realizing and securing both the immediate and secondary benefits from curtailing the intergenerational transmission of violence, to a far greater degree than obtains at present, will be the most immediate and long-term effect of the empowerment of women.

B. Women’s Empowerment: Reproduction

There is but a single dimension of human rights and the dignity of the person in which there is a radical difference based on gender, and that is reproduction. Although for all mammals reproduction is, of course, a joint affair necessarily involving both sexes, only one of them bears the immediate consequences, pregnancy and childbirth. (So far as the next stage, the rearing of offspring, is concerned, only in a small minority of mammalian species, including humans and gorillas, does the male get involved; as for some of the rest, the male may be more likely to kill the offspring than to nurture them.) The radical difference that

gender makes in the case of reproduction is best understood through the prism of risk: In all premodern societies, prior to the advent of modern medicine, pregnancy and childbirth combined constitute the largest single lifetime risk of premature death for females. Males are isolated from these risks and as a result are in many cases utterly oblivious to them.

The issue of reproduction is sometimes cast in terms of women having “control over their own bodies,” but this actually a poor framing of the problem, since women do not have any natural control (in the absence of medical intervention) over the most serious risks associated with pregnancy and childbirth. Just mentioning two of the many serious risks, namely, eclampsia and ectopic pregnancy, makes this point clear. But it is useful to take a step back from these immediate dangers and look at the bigger picture, which is that, in the realm of evolution and natural selection, the intrinsic life-interests of females and males diverge. The basic biological interest of males is the transmission of their genetic heritage to the next generation, which is achieved by the survival of healthy offspring, whether or not the mother happens to also survive the experience. If she doesn’t, he can always find another wife, if he doesn’t already happen to possess one or several more.

Another reality to which most males remain oblivious is that from the perspective of biology the life-interests of mother and fetus during pregnancy are not identical: The fetus competes with the mother for the life-sustaining resources in her body, a situation that becomes critical if nutritional resources become scarce, for example during famines. This competitive struggle is actually hard-wired into our genetic makeup: Paternal genes control the blueprint for the building of the placenta. The complex role played by the placenta results from what is called DNA imprinting, a process of epigenetic modification in which one allele (either the male or the female) is silenced as the two genomes are intermixed during reproduction. With respect to the fetus, this imprinting is an evolutionary result of the competition between male and female genomes for what is called “maternal nutrient provision” to the fetus. In a nutshell, the father wants a larger fetus and the mother a relatively smaller one, to conserve her resources for future pregnancies.

The placenta is not only just a pathway for the fetus to access resources and discard waste, but is an endocrine organ in its own right, producing a large and diverse number of hormones that affect the physiology of both the fetus and the mother, some of which can manipulate the maternal physiology for fetal benefit. Other proteins produced in the placenta dissolve calcium in the mother’s bones, which are used by the fetus to build its own skeleton, causing maternal osteoporosis. Through hormones secreted by the placenta, the fetus in effect strives to increase nutrient and blood flow (for oxygen) from the mother, sometimes causing preeclampsia or eclampsia, both of which can be fatal.

This highly-complex biological interaction of mother and fetus contrasts sharply with the often-simplistic representations frequently heard when reproduction becomes a contested social and political issue. This is especially the case with the voluntary termination of pregnancy through abortion, but also with respect to the provision of contraceptives for birth control, including the morning-after pill. These are very old issues, of course, but ones which are still very much alive around the world, including in the most highly-developed nations of Europe and North America, and one where organized religions

have played powerful roles in this matter, down to the present day. Where evangelical forms of Protestantism are strong in the United States, there are never-ending pressures to erect legal and access barriers against abortion. Among Catholic countries, Ireland is still wrestling with this issue, and in countries like Spain and Italy, some policy debates go on, and actual access to abortion services, although allowed by law, is by no means guaranteed in practice.

To repeat, women face risks associated with pregnancy and childbirth that are unique to them as persons. (They are partially compensated by the pleasurable flooding of their bodies with the hormone oxytocin following childbirth and during breastfeeding.) Men do not face these risks, except vicariously, and thus it is reasonable to think that they cannot understand them to the same degree and depth as women do. Thus, it is also reasonable to think that the full empowerment of women will make society as a whole more capable of understanding and controlling those risks. What social and political policy framework on this matter is consistent with the empowerment of women?

Most (but not all!) people in economically-advanced societies today will agree, I think, that *all* forms of contraceptives should be freely available to women, ideally in the context of national healthcare systems where they are provided free of charge. One ought to regard this proposition as an unarguable basis of the autonomy of the person for all women. Abortion, on the other hand, is regarded by many as a different matter, although increasingly there is a strong consensus that there should be no restrictions during the first trimester (three months) of pregnancy. In the most progressive countries there is no legislation on the matter, and access to abortion is regulated and administered by medical professionals; through the first half of the second trimester, concerns for the health of the mother, including her psychological well-being, are the main consideration. Thereafter only very serious risks to the mother's health, or to the future viability of the fetus, which are expected to arise only rarely, will be a factor in the decision to terminate a late-stage pregnancy.

The struggle by women to be fully empowered in the matter of reproduction has been a long and bitter one, and it is not over by any means. Society too has a legitimate interest in *refocusing the attention of all parties, women and men alike, on the impact of pregnancy on women's health* (including psychological health). In this regard, any refusal to deal adequately with unwanted pregnancies, especially for teenage females, is simply unwarranted and cruel, and a distraction from what should be the real concern: namely, that pregnancy itself imposes a set of unique risks on the mother, including high blood pressure, gestational diabetes, and osteoporosis, and that all these risks need to be reduced and controlled by a clear focus on promoting the health of pregnant women. Some of them are also risk factors for the premature birth of the infant.

The second requirement is that a strong focus on fetal health is crucial for avoiding the serious intergenerational risks to the fetus represented by any unintended neglect or abuse of the fetus by pregnant women, as well as by factors outside her control, such as lack of proper nutrition, shelter, and medical care. The best-known example of fetal abuse is with respect to alcohol consumption, but there are many others, including smoking, drug

use, poor nutrition, folic acid deficiency, and any lack of regular medical monitoring for developing risks associated with these and other conditions. All of these factors can have a huge impact on lifetime health outcomes for a person after birth. Some of them are additional risk factors for preterm birth, which needs to be reduced to the lowest possible level, since preterm birth sets up the infant for a litany of serious health risks later in life.

As in the case of male violence, the empowerment of women should be expected to have a substantial and immediate benefit, in terms of society-wide outcomes, as a result of a stronger focus on women's health and the health of the fetus. The age-old and, regrettably, largely successful attempt by males to dictate the terms of women's interests in all aspects of pregnancy and childbirth should come to an end, *and both males and females will benefit when this happens.*

VIII: TWO SCENARIOS

Writers of utopias spent little time speculating how the better society might come into being. Readers today might be more demanding of any authors who want to persuade them that an exercise in revivifying such a vision is worth their time and attention. So, based on current political realities, are there realistic options for bringing into existence a future society where the full empowerment of women has been realized?

The first possibility involves a further progressive transformation of the Nordic countries and by imagining that their example spreads to Western Europe; let us arbitrarily baptize this entity "New Europe." Almost certainly the Baltic nations would want to be included as well, and even Ukraine, although like the position of Greece this would present challenges for geographical contiguity. Depending on future developments during the 21st century, of course, some of the peoples of Eastern Europe, especially the smaller nations along the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea, might also wish to join. However, in recent times, others among these countries, especially Hungary and Poland, have been relapsing into earlier forms of backward political and social life, including corruption, authoritarian government, antisemitism, and anti-immigrant policies. (It would also be useful for the empowerment of women in the New Europe if the Vatican could be persuaded to relocate to somewhere in southern Africa or South America.) The European situation generally will remain unstable for some time to come.

The chief problem for such a New Europe would be the existence of a militarily powerful and confrontational Russia on or near its eastern border. At present Russia is a dangerous authoritarian state, willing to provoke its perceived enemies by aggressive moves, as it has shown in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. It possesses a mighty army, navy and air force, and maintains a massive nuclear weapons capability. To the extent that the current trend continues, in which Europe's post-second-world-war protector, the United States, reduces its commitments to Europe's security, the New Europe would have to assume much greater responsibility for its own defense, including a nuclear-weapons capability of its own.

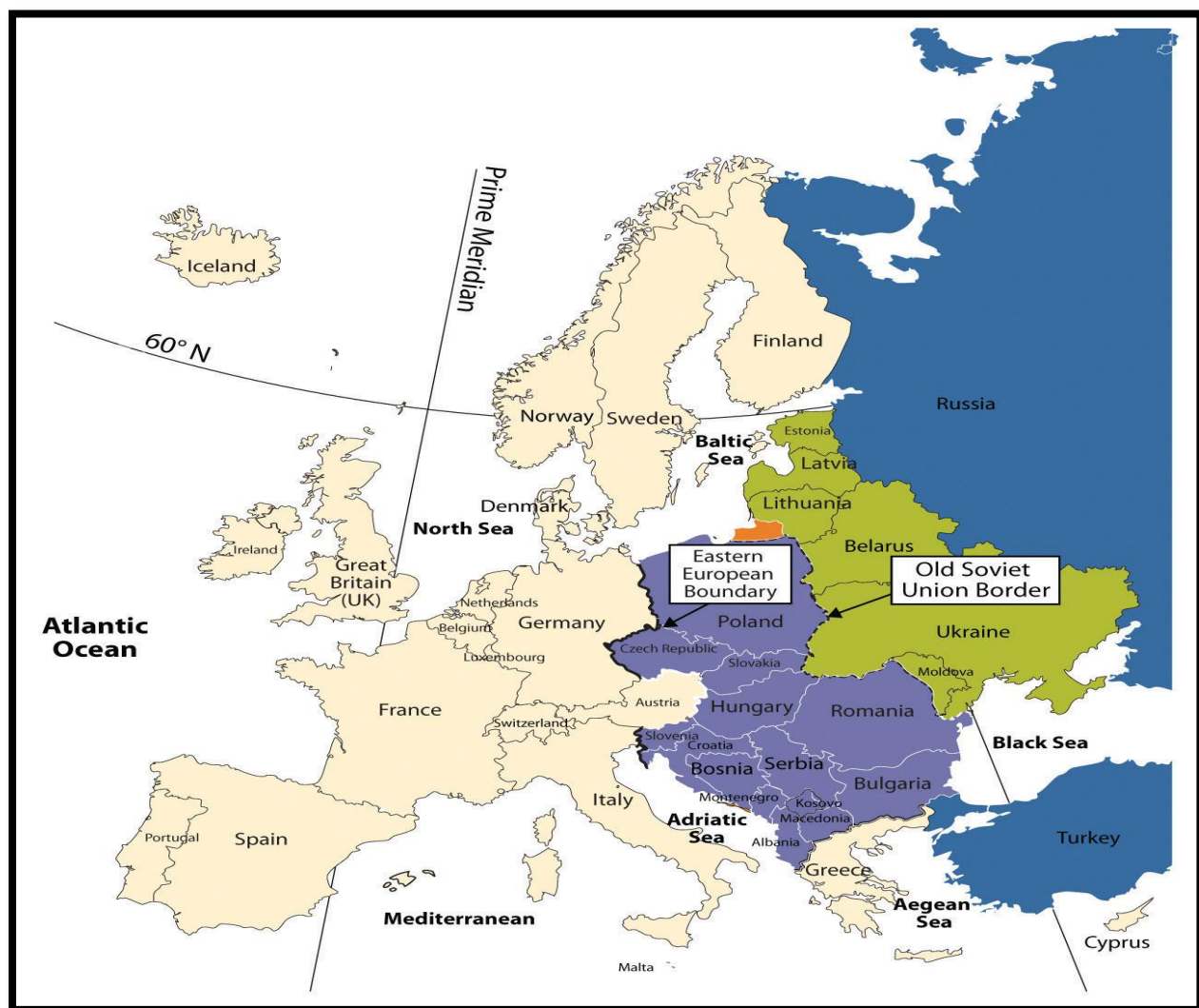


Figure 5 Western Europe plus the Nordic Countries

Thus, any New Europe featuring the empowerment of women is likely to face serious and ongoing challenges to its security, and as a result would be forced to maintain a high level of traditional military capability as well as defenses against the newer forms of conflict, such as cyberwarfare, covert attacks on economic and financial systems, and new forms of internet-based political destabilization attempts. In addition, I am assuming that, as the 21st century advances, there will be sharply increasing levels of global instability, stemming from a variety of sources, including climate change, regional conflicts of different types, notably terrorism and the threat of nuclear warfare (especially in the Middle East, uncomfortably close to the New Europe), and threats to stability in Asia stemming from the resurgent economic and military power of China.

Another possibility, somewhat more whimsical (but perhaps not entirely unrealistic), posits the existence of second progressive bloc located in North America. If

this were to come into being, it would have the distinct advantage, which the United States has long enjoyed, of being protected by two large oceans on its eastern and western frontiers. Current political developments have set up a very dynamic situation there, in which the United States appears to be splitting into two distinct political and social entities, one (the “blue states”) that can be labeled as liberal, progressive, secular, and strongly democratic, and the other (the “red states”) as conservative, elite-controlled, increasingly authoritarian, and religious. The first bloc is made up of much of the territory of the eastern seaboard, north of Virginia, and the entirety of states along the West Coast, plus some states along the Canadian border. The blue zone also appears to have much in common with most of Canada; some time ago, this affinity was recognized in a highly amusing representation in which all of North America is divided into two entities. (After a hiatus with a national Conservative government, 2006-2015, made possible by a split on the left, Canada reverted to type with a Liberal government in 2015, restoring the plausibility of a North American divide between the “United States of Canada” and “Jesusland.”)



Figure 6 Map created by G. Webb after the 2004 U. S. Presidential Election

The results of the 2016 presidential election did not substantially alter the overall geographical reality of the two-part configuration in the United States itself, especially when one takes into account the relatively small 2016 margins of victory in Michigan, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, and some other states.

The blue-state/red-state divide is likely to remain quite stable for some time to come, leading to some intriguing possibilities about a permanent fracturing during the coming decades, in which each side will be motivated to solidify and enhance the political differences between them. What will not be stable throughout the 21st century are sea levels, and since oceans and seas pretty much surround the continent of North America, the rising seas will have a major impact on coastal settlements everywhere, and towards the end of this century, if the current projections (4 to 8 feet by 2100) prove to be accurate, or even an understatement, major seaboard cities, as well as much of Florida, may have to be abandoned. These stresses will exacerbate political tensions.

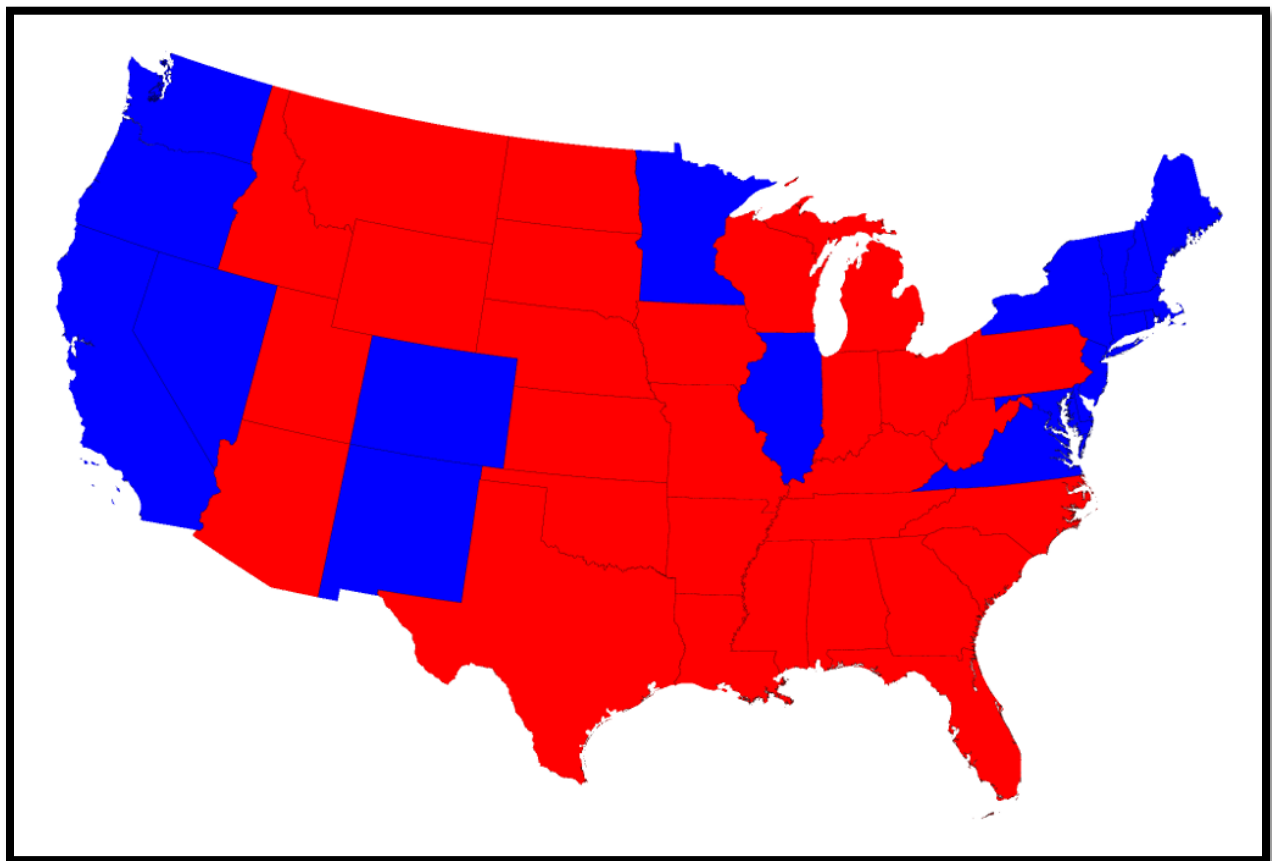


Figure 7 The Blue/Red Divide in the 2016 U. S. Presidential Election Results

IX: ROUTES

Inevitably, the main routes to the full empowerment of women will be found in the actions of national governments, probably starting with federal cabinets. As of 2017, Canada has equal numbers of men and women; Iceland has five out of eleven; in Norway, the three most senior cabinet members are women; in Sweden, 24 cabinet positions are gender-balanced, as are all government boards; in Finland over the course of the 21st century to date, about half of all ministers have been women. Denmark has had two women prime

ministers in this century, and has a Minister of Gender Equity. According to World Bank data, as of 2017 these are the percentages of women in national parliaments:

Denmark	37%
Finland	42%
Iceland	48%
Norway	40%
Sweden	44%
UK	30%
EU	29%
Canada	26%
United States	19%

National and regional governments control appointments to senior management levels in their own bureaucracies, in all of the arm's-length agencies they create, and in their national police forces, the military, the judiciary, and the criminal justice system; where there is publicly-funded healthcare, to the senior levels of health administration.

The major exception is the economic sector. In 2003 Norway passed a law requiring at least 40% of each gender to be represented on the boards of directors of all publicly-listed corporations. So far as I know, no other country has yet followed suit, although this appears to be the best way to try to influence gender-equity behavior in the corporate sector, since boards have full control over the appointment of senior managers and the rigorous enforcement of sexual harassment policies.

Thus, the most promising route to the full empowerment of women would appear to be as follows: First, major political parties need to commit to increasing the proportion of women in their national parliaments to 50% or slightly more, and to reflect this share in their federal ministerial positions; second, the national and regional governments need to begin systematically increasing the number of women in all of the senior management portfolios under their control, as listed above. (In only a few areas, such as the judiciary, is the turnover relatively slow; in all others, it is or can be quite rapid.) Third, the national parliament needs to pass laws, where they have the authority to do so, mandating the movement towards gender equity in senior management ranks in the private sector.

X: CONCLUSIONS

This essay presupposes that we still need a vision of a radically different and qualitatively better society than the one we now have. It also suggests that, in order to make progress towards such a society, we need to find a point of entry into the problem of how to drive the change from the present to the future. That decisive point of entry must be practical, not pie-in-the-sky. Furthermore, it needs to be realistic: This means that it should build upon a longstanding, existing trend line within the group of economically-advanced and

somewhat socially-progressive nations. It also means that a firm commitment to a specific point of entry will be made in full recognition of the fact that there will be still a long way to go, along this trend line, before the final goal can ever come into sight. The stated goal is, as already mentioned, practical and concrete: As such, everyone will be able to see that it has been achieved, at least approximately. And once such a group of nations knows that it is “over the hump,” so to speak, it will also be aware at that point that it has only arrived at the start of a long process of consolidation and protection of what has been accomplished.

Finally, that point of entry can be affirmed because, in addition to representing an intrinsically-worthy pathway, it has no competitor: There is no feasible alternative route, certainly not any realistic one, if one is serious about the need to build a qualitatively-better future society. This point of entry, I have argued, is the full empowerment of women. It fulfills all the criteria set out above, and it has no competitor. (Throughout this essay I have consistently used the phrase “a better society,” not a perfect one. Women are not perfect, just on the whole somewhat less imperfect than men are; it is in that small but meaningful disparity that the hope of betterment lies. And women in power will need checks and balances, too: For example, so long as institutions remain hierarchical, with top-down authority, no matter who is in charge the rights of those in subordinate positions to enjoy protection against arbitrary and unjust treatment must be safeguarded.)

This choice is not built upon illusory foundations. It does not assume that every social problem will be automatically solved thereby. It does not underestimate the length of the road yet to be travelled, even among the existing group of socially-progressive nations. It does not fail to acknowledge how far even those nations currently are from the stated goal, nor the ever-present risk that a backlash may occur, at some point, which puts advances already achieved in jeopardy. And yet, it would be hard to deny that a definite trend line has been established there, one that has laid down some firm foundations for further progress toward the stated goal.

There are also reasons to be optimistic about its ultimate success, even in the context of the extraordinary developments of the past few months, wherein the conspiracy of silence over the long-suppressed agonies of women’s experiences in the workplace has been, at least in part, destroyed. If, as I have suggested, the preferred route to further progress—namely, for women to achieve a stable numerical majority in national parliaments—is, in some of the target countries, getting reasonably close to realization, a clear focus on getting over this hump is warranted. Once it is achieved, we might find that the next practical steps, involving gender parity in the senior management ranks of all key social institutions, are not quite as difficult to carry out as it might have seemed at first glance.

APPENDIX: READERS’ COMMENTS

Please send me your comments on this essay, and indicate whether I can post them in this section along with your name and contact information.