

IS THIS TOO UTOPIAN?

It does not require any examples from me to indicate how our society is less than perfect. There is deterioration of respect and concern for others, and a corresponding preoccupation with status, financial standard of living and having an enjoyable life.

I would like to present an alternative philosophy and ask whether others are interested in an organisation of society based around such ideas.

I would like to live in a society that encouraged and supported each individual in a quest to know himself or herself and others. This is not an idle fascination as I believe it goes to the heart of some of the fundamental questions we have about creation and our own existence. Mystics of the major religions have emphasised that genuine spirituality is a search for Truth involving a deep and honest knowledge of oneself.

Such a search also leads to true sociability. In my opinion being 'sociable' does not mean trying to further one's image or desires within a group of people, nor does it involve reinforcing personal opinions with others. Instead it means helping ourselves and others to grow as human beings by knowledge of oneself and others and by changing aspects of one's personality that cause distress to oneself and others. Being sociable does not mean we have to talk to each other all of the time and often means being quiet.

Verbal communication may be humorous, personally challenging and probing, or supportive and sympathetic or any kind of communication with the overriding aim being the personal growth of the persons in the social group. This does not mean we need to talk earnestly on the sole topic of personal development. What I have in mind is something much more subtle where the disposition of people is towards these objectives but where their attributes are sensitivity and a natural manner.

Those who have no wish to be sociable and who engage in disruptive, destructive behaviour would face consequences as society demands they change their attitudes and behaviour. However, there should be no rejoicing that a person has to be penalised for their actions.

The aim of the criminal justice system should be contrite reform of the offender obtained by a psychologically and physically therapeutic regime. Such a regime would consist of a range of physical penalties and psychological techniques. Physical penalties may include austere solitary confinement on the one hand or a relatively pleasant penal community on the other.

Prisoners would be moved around the penal system depending on how they responded to demands for changes in their attitudes and behaviour within a therapeutic environment. The regime would be based on the same principles operating in the wider community. Prisoners would be expected to grow as persons with the penal environment providing challenges to their attitudes and behaviour.

For the majority of the population life is often an experience of being insecure and it should be the job of a healthy community to make its members feel more secure. The remedies for insecurity are a healthy support from the community and psychologically strong individuals with the one flowing from the other. Society should provide physical security when needed by the individual, but it should be the desire of an individual to dispense with many of the protections provided by the community.

Those content to remain dependent on the security offered by the community and not to grow as human beings may be denied some of the securities provided for them. This should be done with sensitivity with their welfare the major concern. Again, my overriding vision is that individuals should develop and grow as human beings with society providing the protections, encouragements and incentives to promote this aim.

My ideal society would not be desirous of noise and excitement but of genuine human contact. This would include sports where participation in games involving other people was considered more important than winning the game. Such activity should make one relaxed in the company of others leading to increased self-confidence and a greater ability to develop as a person.

There is no reason to respect those in authority just because they are in authority. Instead respect, or a healthy disrespect, of an individual, should be seen as a natural consequence of knowing that person. No greater respect should be sought or given for those in a leadership role in society. Each person should be respected for being an individual, whatever their position in society.

The society I would like requires certain qualities from its members. Of primary importance is an individual's desire to search for answers about himself or herself and to be ruthlessly honest with themselves. From these two principles flow all other attributes. Such a struggle requires individuals of courage who are prepared to admit they are wrong within themselves particularly when this involves inner turmoil and discomfort.

However, such a struggle will lead to a better perspective of other people's personalities and behaviour by showing how they too could be caught up by internal forces that are not easily tamed. This also leads to forgiveness which occurs when a person accepts the genuine attempts of another to become a better person despite the forces which may be impeding their development.

Although it is possible to list a range of attributes required by individuals in my ideal society, this is of little use. It is not possible to become, for example, a gentle person by the act of willing such a result. It is necessary to go through a self discovery process in order to become one's True Self which will have ideal characteristics.

From support and help for those engaged in Self discovery, to changes in government institutions and the organisation of society, the philosophy I have outlined would have profound consequences for the way we live and organise our lives.

Does anyone else share my vision?