

LOOKING BACKWARD AT PROGRESS AND POVERTY:

EDWARD BELLAMY AND HENRY GEORGE LOOK AT THE FUTURE

by

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Introduction: The Perfection of Society

In a strange short story originally published in 1895, Robert W. Chambers, a 19th Century American writer, told of a 20th Century future in which all social problems had been solved, one way or another. By 1920, the country was “tranquil,” “in a superb state of defense,” “prosperous,” the arts were subsidized, “foreign-born jews” were excluded, the “independent negro state of Suanee” had been established, and the “Congress of Religions” had brought out “kindness and charity.” All in all, the narrator notes, “many thought the millennium had arrived, at least in the new world, which, after all, is a world by itself” (“The Opening of the Chamber,” pp. 72-73; further citations will be given in the text by page number from this edition).

But, what is the result of this long-pursued perfection? Unexpectedly, for the reader, “the first Government Lethal Chamber was established on the south side of Washington Square,” opened for anyone whose “existence may have become intolerable to him, through physical suffering or mental despair” (“The Opening of the Chamber,” p. 74).

Chamber's narrator does not tell us why the government felt compelled to make it easier for its citizens to escape permanently from what would seem to be the perfected new world. He does quote the Governor at the chamber opening as saying that the "community will be benefited by the removal of such people from their midst" ("The Opening of the Chamber," p. 74).

While it is not so obvious what point Chambers is making here about human nature, overall it is clear that the perfection of society – the creation of a utopian society, a new millennium – is no easy matter, either for those who structure the society or for the individual who lives in it. In Chamber's story, society is perfected in a rather blunt and pragmatic way, but the individual citizen is evidently unchanged, unperfected, some still unhappy, some still needing the challenges that no longer exist to make their lives meaningful – and so, they have the lethal chamber as their escape.

Aldous Huxley's Brave New World, published in 1932, is a more familiar dystopian work, which has a different kind of plan for the perfection of society. In that work, Huxley attacks just that problem that Chamber's story reveals: society is not perfected until and unless the individual is made happy. And, according to Mustapha Mond, the World Controller in the novel who explains much of the New World's rationale to the reader, the abstract ideal perfected individual citizen – a person physically and mentally at the peak of human existence – will not be happy.

The two cases in point in the novel are Bernard Marx, a member of the Alpha (highest) class, who seems physically to be a member of a lower class and so gets no respect, and Helmholtz Watson, an Alpha who is physically and mentally highly

developed but who is unhappy because he feels as a writer he is not being allowed to express himself fully. To explain the innate dissatisfaction of Alphas, Mond tells the story of a large number of Alphas who were allowed to colonize the island of Cyprus. Those who had low-grade jobs resented doing them; those with high-grade jobs schemed to keep them; within six years, they were at war and managed to wipe out most of the colony. The survivors, Mond says with satisfaction, “petitioned the World Controllers to resume the government of the island” (Brave New World, pp. 151-152; further citations will be given in the text by page number from this edition).

So, to correct this possible unhappiness in man, Huxley posits a dystopian world in which, paradoxically, almost everyone is happy and the assembly-line, consumption-based society hums along like a machine. But, this society is based, not on man perfected or society perfected, but on Physical and Social Predestination – each person being physically and mentally prepared to function in and like his or her predetermined role in the mechanism of society. As the Director of Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Center puts it, “that is the secret of happiness and virtue—liking what you’ve go to do. All conditioning aims at that: making people like their unescapable social destiny” (p. 10).

Huxley thoughtfully prepares a suitable place for the misfit Helmholtz Watson, who wants “a thoroughly bad climate I believe one would write better if the climate were bad. If there were a lot of wind and storms” Mustapha Mond sends him to the Falkland Islands (p. 156).

From these two works come some basic concepts of millennial perfection: man and society must be perfectly matched. If there is a mismatch, then either man or society must be changed. Chambers' future allows those who are unhappy with their society for whatever reason to simply eliminate themselves; Huxley's more scientific future distorts and molds man to fit a social structure designed to ensure happiness at any cost – even at the cost of enforced imperfection.

A third road toward social perfection is traveled in George Orwell's 1984, published in 1949. In Orwell's work there is no attempt to perfect society in the usual sense, even to the extent shown in Chambers' story; those in charge want to ensure their eternal control over the productive middle class and will go so far as to distort history, manipulate the media, and change language and even thought itself to enforce totalitarian control. Only the lowest class is left alone: "Proles and animals are free" (1984, p. 62; further citations will be given in the text by page number from this edition).

The controlling political doctrine in 1984 is Ingsoc, a political system designed to preserve a hierarchical society – one in which there are rigid gaps between the rich and the poor. In the view of those in charge, wealth was a great equalizer and so was to be avoided: "For if leisure and security were enjoyed by all alike, the great mass of human beings who are normally stupefied by poverty would become literate and would learn to think for themselves; and when once they had done this, they would sooner or later realize that the privileged minority has no function, and they would speed it away. In the long run, a hierarchical society was only possible on a basis of poverty and ignorance" (pp. 156-157).

O'Brien, the spokesman for this society in the novel, explains his world view: "It is the exact opposite of the stupid hedonistic Utopias that the old reformers imagined. A world of fear and treachery and torment, a world of trampling and being trampled upon, a world which will grow not less but more merciless as it refines itself. . . . There will be no art, no literature, no science. . . . If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face—forever" (p. 220).

Dissidents like Winston Smith, the main character, will never see a better world; they will just be tortured, their language modified into Newspeak, and their thoughts changed into Doublethink. In the end, Smith is defeated so completely that he believes that the world of 1984 is best: "But it was all right, everything was all right, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother" (p. 245).

In these three works then, we see differing approaches to the idea of perfecting society. In Chambers' story, society is perfected in that social problems are alleviated, seeming with little regard for the happiness of the affected individuals. The state, evidently very powerful, simply excludes or removes troublesome groups of people. For those individuals who don't like it still, they open a Lethal Chamber to get dissidents out of society, thereby eliminating them also.

Huxley shows a more sinister society, whereby each person from birth is suited for a predetermined place in a predetermined society; thus, the society is perfected and the individual has neither the mental or physical capacity to do anything else but fulfill his or her role – in other words, to be dissatisfied. For the few who are still whole humans in our sense of that phrase – the Alphas – they exercise so much authority and

have such pleasurable lives that most have nothing to dislike. For the odd Helmholtz Watson, there is self-exile.

Orwell's world of 1984 is both the most realistic and least humane. In Orwell's future, there is no attempt to make man happy in the usual sense of that word or to create a better society in the usual sense of that phrase. The future in that novel is one designed to keep one group permanently in power; those who disagree or oppose that group or their ends are broken mentally and spiritually; in this future, man must accept society and his place in it or else be forced to do so. Winston Smith will spend his future, not hating Big Brother or trying to improve himself or his world, but instead working on the "Interim Report" for the 11th Edition of the Newspeak dictionary, trying to figure out "whether commas should be placed inside brackets, or outside" (p. 242) – hardly the job anticipated by a social reformer.

These works, then, with their displays of dystopian futures, focus on the creating of better societies in the negative sense – they tell us what to avoid, they warn us of trends and tendencies that may get out of hand in the future. Chambers tells us that even a more perfect society may not be desirable if it removes the personal quest for betterment; Huxley warns his reader that if society is considered perfected when each person in it is happy, then one could use science to ensure that each person is happy with his or her predetermined role. And Orwell points out that the perfection of society – bringing on the new millennium – is a matter of the point of view of those in charge. If their goal is the permanent maintenance of themselves in absolute power, then the society of 1984 has reached perfection. And, like Huxley's world, everyone in Orwell's

novel likes the new world of 1984 – but instead of being born to like it, they are tortured until they do so.

No one reading these three works, no matter how much they desire the betterment of society, would want it to be done in any of those three ways. What is obvious in all three is the shrinking role of the individual and the increasing importance of the state, so much so that these three futures have states almost absolutely in control of the individual, and the goals of the state overshadow the happiness of the citizens.

But, other works of the late 19th Century try to create not dystopian societies but truly utopian societies, offering solutions and partial blueprints for what their authors saw as possible better worlds for a new millennium, worlds that would let the individual achieve his or her potential. This possibility would be realized not by changing the person physically or mentally but by changing the environment.

The Millennial Future: Socialism, Darwinism, and Individualism

According to Richard Hofstadter in Social Darwinism in American Thought, the second half of the 19th Century presented contradictory points of view about possible futures. Some were “. . . troubled by questions about what Darwinism would mean for the moral life. Spencer and the evolutionary anthropologists promised them that it would mean progress, perhaps perfection. The Malthusian element in Darwinism, however, pointed to an endless struggle for existence regulated by no sanction more exalted than mere survival” (Social Darwinism in American Thought, p. 85; further citations will be given in the text by page number from this edition). So, Hofstadter notes, there “arose a stream of dissenting opinion on the merits of the free competitive

order” (p. 105); one of the parts of this stream was the social gospel movement, made up of Protestant ministers who sought “a compromise between the harsh individualism of the competitive order and the possible dangers of socialism” (p. 106). These dangers they had seen, they felt, in “the doctrines and methods of European socialism” (p. 106). But, this social gospel also evidenced a contradiction: even as they feared socialism, they also “detested and feared the free competitive order and all its works. However profoundly influenced by individualism, however timorous about socialism, they were in agreement on the need to modify the free workings of competition” (p. 108).

Two writers who became spokesman for what Hofstadter call this social-gospel “urban discontent” and whose beliefs and concerns paralleled the social gospel movement were Henry George and Edward Bellamy:

The movements inspired by Henry George and Edward Bellamy were of one piece with the social gospel. Both of these men, products of pious home environments, were intensely religious; their writings were filled with a moral protest thoroughly familiar to readers of social-gospel literature. That the social gospel and the followers of George and Bellamy shared a common outlook was shown by the adherence of many socially-minded clergymen to both the Nationalist and single-tax movements. On another front the social gospel was linked to those academic economists who had begun to criticize individualism” (p. 107)

Considered together, these two writers and their works combine a clear focus on the problems their authors saw in their contemporary society along with an optimism that all those problems could be solved in ways that would, in effect, create that time of future greatness – that new heaven and new earth, a time of both social equality and personal individualism.

Progress and Poverty

Henry George's Progress and Poverty, published in 1879, may seem an odd choice for discussing societal ills and utopian futures, as the book is best known for its advocacy of the "single tax" theory. As its title implies, George thought that societal problems were at base problems of the unequal distribution of wealth; however, the title of his book is not a contrast of "Progress and Poverty," but rather a cause/effect relationship. George says that "material progress does not merely fail to relieve poverty—it actually produces it (Progress and Poverty, 1971, p. 9; further citations will be given in the text by page number from this edition). He explains what he calls the "great enigma of our times (p.10) this way:

So long as the increased wealth which modern progress brings goes but to build up great fortunes, to increase luxury and make sharper the contrast between the House of Have and the House of Want, progress is not real and cannot be permanent. The reaction must come. The tower leans from its foundations, and every new story but hastens the final catastrophe. To educate men who must be condemned to poverty, is but to make them restive; to base on a state of most glaring social inequality political institutions under which men are theoretically equal, is to stand a pyramid on its apex. (p. 10)

Later, George homes in on the specific cause of this unequal distribution of wealth: the ownership of land. He says that "Poverty deepens as wealth increases, and wages are forced down while productive power grows, because land, which is the source of all wealth and the field of all labor, is monopolized" (p. 328). Vernon Louis Parrington, in Main Currents in American Thought, sees this focus as natural: "It was no accident that his mind fastened upon land monopoly as the deeper source of social injustice. As a child of the frontier he thought in terms of land as naturally as the

money-broker think in terms of discounts” (Main Currents in American Thought, p. 127; further citations will be given in the text by page number from this edition).

And, to George, if land is the problem, then the solution must focus on land. But, although he says the solution is to “make land common property (p. 328), he does not favor confiscating land; rather he favors confiscating the rent that could be made from the land. For, Parrington points out, George is no socialist, either: he was “distrustful of all social panaceas that hopeful idealists were seeking in Europe. With any form of collectivistic theory he would have nothing to do. Marxian socialism he looked upon as an alien philosophy, inadequate in its diagnosis and at fault in its prescription” (p. 128).

George’s confiscation would be done through taxation: “For, rent being taken by the State in taxes, land, no matter in whose name it stood, or in what parcels it was held, would be really common property, and every member of the community would participate in the advantages of its ownership” (p. 406). And this taxation, George says, would negate the need for any other taxes; he advocates abolishing “all taxation save that upon land values” (p. 406). This, then is George’s famous “single tax” theory.

But the value of Progress and Poverty does not lie in its economic theory, dated or not as it may be; rather, Progress and Poverty is most eloquent – and becomes most millennial – when it outlines the ills of society while at the same time asserting an extremely optimistic view of the goodness and worth of the individuals who inhabit it. Parrington also points out this aspect of the work: “This was the deeper purpose of Progress and Poverty – to humanize and democratize political economy, that it might serve social ends rather than class exploitation” (p. 132).

First, let us look at what George fears future society could become if the poverty is not alleviated – a materially and culturally modern future endangered by some of its own citizens:

Upon streets lighted with gas and patrolled by uniformed policeman, beggars wait for the passer-by, and in the shadow of the college, and library, and museum, are gathering the more hideous Huns and fiercer Vandals of whom Macaulay prophesied. (p. 7)

It is this contrast of education and material well-being co-existing with barbarism that George returns to again and again as his nightmare of the future:

Whence shall come the new barbarians? Go through the squalid quarters of great cities, and you may see, even now, their gathering hordes! How shall learning perish? Men will cease to read, and books will kindle fires and be turned into cartridges. (p. 538)

Indeed, the combination of modern inventions and men reduced to animal violence causes George to doubt that American civilization would survive:

It is startling to think how slight the traces that would be left of our civilization did it pass through the throes which have accompanied the decline of every previous civilization. Paper will not last like parchment, nor are our most massive buildings and monuments to be compared in solidity with the rock-hewn temples and titanic edifices of the old civilizations. And invention has given us, not merely the steam engine and the printing press, but petroleum, nitroglycerine, and dynamite. (p. 538)

George saw clearly not only the machines of progress – the steam engine and the printing press – but also the machines of destruction – nitroglycerine and dynamite. And, George fears that this destruction is already in progress. He says that “Beauty still lies impoverished, and iron wheels go over the good and true and beautiful that might spring from human lives” (p. 564). He goes on: “There is a vague but general feeling of disappointment; an increased bitterness among the working classes; a widespread

feeling of unrest and brooding revolution. If this were accompanied by a definite idea of how relief is to be obtained, it would be a hopeful sign; but it is not" (p. 542).

Hofstadter well summarizes George's pessimistic point of view:

The principle conditions of social progress are association and equality, and society is now threatened by the division and inequality it breeds. The seeds of the destruction of the existing order could be found in its own poverty; in its squalid cities were already breeding the barbarian hordes which might overwhelm it. Civilization must either prepare itself for a new forward leap or plunge downward into a new barbarism. (p. 112)

And, unlike Thoreau, George sees no hope in the political arena; he believes that poverty will inevitably corrupt a democracy by encouraging demagogues:

Given a community with republican institutions, in which one class is too rich to be shorn of its luxuries, no matter how public affairs are administered, and another so poor that a few dollars on election day will seem more than any abstract consideration; in which the few roll in wealth and the many seethe with discontent at a condition of things they know not how to remedy, and power must pass into the hands of jobbers who will buy and sell it as the Praetorians sold the Roman purple, or into the hands of demagogues who will seize and wield it for a time, only to be displaced by worse demagogues. (p. 531)

With a grim humor, George describes his view of the politician created by the presence of poverty in a democracy:

Who are these men? The wise, the good, the learned—men who have earned the confidence of their fellow citizens by the purity of their lives, the splendor of their talents, their probity in public trusts, their deep study of the problems of government? No; they are gamblers, saloon keepers, pugilists, or worse, who have made a trade of controlling votes and buying and selling offices and official acts. . . . Why, there are many election districts in the United States in which a George Washington, a Benjamin Franklin or a Thomas Jefferson could no more go to the lower house of a state legislature than under the Ancient Régime a baseborn peasant could become Marshal of France. Their very character would be an insuperable disqualification. (p. 534)

But, eloquent at outlining the problem, George is equally eloquent at outlining his solution, the single tax on property:

What I, therefore, propose, as the simple yet sovereign remedy, which will raise wages, increase the earning of capital, extirpate pauperism, abolish poverty, give remunerative employment to whoever wished it, afford free scope to human powers, lessen crime, elevate morals, and taste, and intelligence, purify government and carry civilization to yet nobler heights, is—to *appropriate rent by taxation*. (pp. 405-406)

It is this vision of the future, in which man is able to rise to the level of his best aspirations, that George gives what is clearly his vision of a new Millennium. With want destroyed, with real social equality, with mental powers unfettered, he says,

who shall measure the heights to which our civilization may soar? Words fail the thought! It is the Golden Age of which poets have sung and high-raised seers have told in metaphor! It is the glorious vision which has always haunted man with gleams of fitful splendor. It is what he saw whose eyes at Patmos were closed in a trance. It is the culmination of Christianity—the City of God on earth, with its walls of jasper and its gates of pearl! It is the reign of the Prince of Peace! (p. 552)

Edward J. Rose concludes his book-length study of George by putting him in the context of the American Dream and America and the City on the Hill:

Henry George's philosophy is essentially an American world-view, true to the tradition of the American Dream. He saw no reason why the entire world could not become – if men were willing – the promised land of milk and honey In fact, it was America's task to show how such promise could be fulfilled, since America had the greatest opportunity that any nation ever had had; . . . He continued to be simultaneously left and right of center politically left and spiritually right. (Henry George, pp. 159-160)

Edward Bellamy is equally optimistic about man's possibilities; but rather than George's economic/philosophical approach, with its simplified solution of the single tax on land, Bellamy, in Looking Backward, published in 1888, creates a fuller, more complex fictional future at the beginning point of the new millennium, the year 2000.

According to Parrington, Bellamy's "Utopian romance" had its roots in its author's "distrust of private capitalism and an idealistic faith in cooperation" (p. 302). Like George, he does not base his ideal society on socialism, at least as it might be practiced in an industrial society in conflict: In the world of 2000, change has been brought about by "social intelligence and social ethics," not through "strikes, boycotts, and lockouts" (p. 312). Unlike George, Bellamy made the machine an integral part of his new millennium; Bellamy understood "the part the machine will play in the society of the future" (p. 312).

But Bellamy, just as George did, begins with the problems he sees in the 19th century. But, rather than offering a broad solution such as the single tax, Bellamy's narrator, Julian West, awakens in the new millennium and sees the problems of his time solved in very specific ways.

West describes his own society – that of the 19th century – as made up of two classes: the rich and the poor. Their progress through life is described in terms of a "prodigious coach which the masses of humanity were harnessed to and dragged toilsomely along a very hilly and sandy road" (Looking Backward, 1982, p.5; further citations will be given in the text by page number from this edition).

One's life is then put in terms of a coach ride, with everyone wanting to ride in the coach and no one wanting to pull it. In actuality, West tells us, there were many fewer riders than rope-pullers. But, since the road was rough, some riders fell from the coach and had to pull while at the same time some of the pullers managed to scramble up and get a seat on the coach. Others had always to pull, never getting to ride on the coach, while some riders were never dislodged and so never had to help pull it. It was the poor who pulled and the rich who rode; sometimes they exchanged economic classes.

And Julian West, having been one of the 19th century coach riders, evidenced the same pessimism that George felt about the future of civilization. West says that "The parabola of a comet was perhaps a yet better illustration of the career of humanity. Tending upward and sunward from the aphelion of barbarism, the race attained the perihelion of civilization only to plunge downward once more to its nether goal in the regions of chaos" (p. 11).

West went to asleep under the powers of a "mesmerizer" in 1887; he awoke in September of the year 2000 under the care of Dr. Leete, in Boston, now described as a great city, one having open squares filled with trees, statues, and fountains – not the Boston in which West went to sleep. From that point on, the novel is a guided tour of the new millennium, intended to show how all the social problems of the 19th century have been solved while material progress has not only been maintained but has been accelerated.

First is the revamping of the role of government. In the year 2000, governments have no war powers. Also, there are no political parties or politicians. In fact, there are

no corrupt officials of any kind; private profit has been done away with by the construction in the new millennium of “The Great Trust,” which replaced all private corporations:

The nation . . . organized as the one great business corporation in which all other corporations were absorbed; it became the one capitalist in the place of all other capitalists, the sole employer, the final monopoly in which all previous and lesser monopolies were swallowed up, a monopoly in the profits and economies of which all citizens shared. (p. 38)

Later, we are told that “When the nation became the sole employer, all the citizens, by virtue of their citizenship, became employees, to be distributed according to the needs of industry” (p. 43). And, it is each citizen’s duty to serve “The Great Trust.” “The period of industrial service is twenty-four years, beginning at the close of the course of education at twenty-one and terminating at forty-five” (p. 44). This centralization of economic power was done, Parrington says, because of Bellamy’s “sharp distrust of private capitalism and an idealistic faith in cooperation” (Parrington, p. 302). Bellamy’s proposal to nationalize industry led to the Nationalist movement and Nationalist clubs after the publication of Looking Backward (Hofstadter, p. 113; Parrington, p. 302).

One’s employment in this industrial army varies with each person: “The principle on which our industrial army is organized is that a man’s natural endowments, mental and physical, determine what he can work at most profitably to the nation and most satisfactorily to himself” (p. 45). Each person is required to do three years of common labor; at the end of that time, the worker chooses “whether he will fit himself for an art or

profession, or be a farmer or mechanic” (p. 50). Easy jobs have longer hours than do the hard jobs, such a mining.

Each person contributes only so much as their God-given abilities allow; Dr. Leete explains that “All men who do their best, do the same. . . . The Creator sets men’s tasks for them by the faculties he gives them; we simply exact their fulfillment” (pp. 66-67). And, the nation takes care of all of them; it “guarantees the nurture, education, and comfortable maintenance of every citizen from the cradle to the grave” (p. 63).

All of this is carried out in day-to-day terms by dividing the annual product of the nation by the number of citizens and issuing a credit card to each citizen, “with which he procures at the public storehouses, found in every community, whatever he desires whenever he desires it” (p. 61). Doctors are also paid by checking off their charges from the credit card (p. 87). To ensure equality, washing is done at public laundries, cooking at public kitchens, and clothing creation and repair at public shops (p. 87).

However, within this enforced equality, there is room for social movement. Workers are ranked into three classes, the 3rd grade worker having an iron badge, the 2nd grade one having a silver, and the 1st class having a “gilt” one (p. 90). These grades are further divided into classes, with the lowest class being made up of “recent apprentices, all of whom expect to rise” (p. 91). Those who are sick in mind or body, the “deaf and dumb, and lame and blind and crippled and even . . . [the] insane” are placed in an invalid corps; Dr. Leete informs Julian West that “In their lucid intervals, even our insane are eager to do what they can” (p. 95). And all workers, whether in the

invalid corps or among the most efficient and able-bodied, have the same income (p. 95).

And so, as Henry George envisioned in *Progress and Poverty*, this equal distribution of wealth has resulted, in Looking Backward, in the elimination of crime; there are no jails (p. 145); no lawyers (p.147); no criminal class (p.165). And, neither are there wars, a military establishment, nor tax assessors or collectors (p.165).

Positive changes include “an era of mechanical invention, scientific discovery, art, musical and literary productiveness to which no previous age of the world offers anything comparable” (p.117). There are “country, mountain, and seaside houses for sport and rest in vacations” provided for all the industrial and professional guilds (p.114); a “universally high level of education” (p.118); and, women have an equal part in the industrial army. Oddly, they are treated equally but separately: “They are under an entirely different discipline They have a woman general-in-chief and are under exclusively feminine régime” (p.190). They do, however, have credit cards with the same income level as given the male workers (pp. 190-191).

On the other hand, prosperous material well-being and real human equality have had what we would consider to be a detrimental effect on literature: it lacks any conflict attributable to society. West tells the reader that

The storywriters of my day would have deemed the making of bricks without straw a light task compared with the construction of a romance from which should be excluded all effects drawn from the contrasts of wealth and poverty, education and ignorance, coarseness and refinement, high and low, all motives drawn from social pride and ambition, the desire of being richer or the fear of being poorer, together with sordid anxieties of any sort for one’s self or others; a romance in which there should, indeed,

be love galore, but love unfretted by artificial barriers created by differences of station or possessions, owning no other law but that of the heart. (p. 123)

The net result of this new society has been to let humanity demonstrate true human nature; mankind is good, generous, pitiful of others, sympathetic, godlike in aspiration, and prone to tenderness and self-sacrifice; in other words, Bellamy says, “images of God indeed, not the travesties upon Him they had seemed” (p. 210). Parrington notes that Bellamy was “an incorrigible idealist” and “a child of the Enlightenment . . . [who] put his trust in the natural goodness of man. They are not inherently base and ignoble, but the victims of an evil system that breeds what is base and ignoble” (pp. 313-314).

This citizen of the future is in such a state of perfection that even the need for religion has been lessened, as is explained in a sermon by Mr. Barton, a minister, given over the amplified telephone to as many as 150,000 listeners:

‘The ten commandments became well-nigh obsolete in a world where there was no temptation to theft, no occasion to lie either for fear or favor, no room for envy where all were equal, and little provocation to violence where men were disarmed of power to injure one another. Humanity’s ancient dream of liberty, equality, fraternity, mocked by so many ages, at last was realized.’ (p. 209)

For Julian West and the world of the year 2000, the new heaven and earth have come into being. The minister ends his sermon with a description of this new world:

‘The betterment of mankind from generation to generation, physically, mentally, morally, is recognized as the one great object supremely worthy of effort and of sacrifice. We believe the race for the first time to have entered on the realization of God’s ideal of it, and each generation must now be a step upward.

. . . For twofold is the return of man to God “who is our home,” the return of the individual by the way of death, and the return of the race by the fulfillment of the evolution, when the divine secret hidden in the germ shall be perfectly unfolded. With a tear for the dark past, turn we then to the dazzling future, and, veiling our eyes, press forward. The long and weary winter of the race is ended. Its summer has begun. Humanity has burst the chrysalis. The heavens are before it.’ (p. 213)

This last sentence, it should be noted, is a purposeful change from the well-known and often-quoted line at the end of Milton’s Paradise Lost, when Adam and Eve are leaving the Garden of Eden. Milton says that “The World was all before them,” emphasizing the future possibilities of the human race as mankind begins to inhabit the new earth. Bellamy now has his minister moving humanity’s focus from the world around him to the heavens, implying that it mankind is no longer the flawed being of the Bible and Paradise Lost but now is really “God-like.”

Summary – Wealth and Individualism

As different as these two book are in intent – George’s an exposition on economics and Bellamy’s a broader work of fiction – they agree surprisingly well both on the nature of the problems they see in society and on the solutions to those problems. Both see the 19th century as a time of increasing material wealth; they also both see that period as a time when the gap between the state of the wealthy and the poor was increasing. Both fear that large-scale dissatisfaction will lead to turmoil in society, if not a real revolution. And they fear that this dissatisfaction could lead to the destruction of the cultural, intellectual, and moral values and institutions of their society.

In outlining the possible causes of discord, both authors settle on the unequal distribution of wealth as the root cause. Neither author accepts the theory of an almost

inevitable competition-driven societal discord as outlined by Thomas Malthus, in On Population (1798) and, by implication, in Charles Darwin's Origin of Species (1859).

Malthus posited that members of society and societies and nations themselves will be driven to compete, perhaps violently, for resources whose supply is being rapidly outstripped by the growth of the population. Darwin noted in his Autobiography that it was Malthus who gave him the key to the idea of favorable variations of species surviving and unfavorable ones perishing, the survival of the fittest.

If applied to 19th century society, biologically-driven evolutionary theory would call for an almost-constant competition to see which segment of society would be best suited for survival. From the standpoint of such competition, George's House of Have and House of Want and Bellamy's coach riders and coach pullers would be in constant competition to see which was best suited to control society. But neither George nor Bellamy seem to accept the premises that the population must outrun the food supply or that society is inevitably based on a struggle between competing forces.

One reason may be that such theories tend to focus on individualism, with the fittest being the most perfect of the species or most perfect of the type. But Bellamy and George focus on society rather than on the individual, expressing over and over that all individuals can reach a state of perfection – a perfection that is possible only when the Darwinian jungle is removed. For these two writers, the jungle of society is not the accepted field of combat where individuals will prove their worth or lack of it by their relative success in conquering that jungle; rather, they say that humanity has made a jungle of society by the unequal distribution of the overall wealth of 19th century

society, forcing the “have nots” to attempt to seize what they have not gotten by a fair distribution. The solutions of George and Bellamy call for the elimination of the jungle itself – to do away with what Parrington, in discussing Looking Backward, calls “the anarchy of individualism [which] must give way to an ordered regimentation, under a centralized authority” (p. 311).

At base, I think both works are saying that society must be perfected because, if civilized humanity must finally compete against the uncivilized hordes society is itself creating, civilized humanity and civilization itself will be the losers. George sums up this idea:

In our time, as in times before, creep on the insidious forces that, producing inequality, destroy Liberty. . . . It is not enough that men should vote; it is not enough that they should be theoretically equal before the law. They must have liberty to avail themselves of the opportunities and means of life; they must stand on equal terms with reference to the bounty of nature. Either this, or Liberty withdraws her light! Either this, or darkness comes on, and the very forces that progress has evolved turn to powers that work destruction. This is the universal law. This is the lesson of the centuries. Unless its foundations be laid in justice the social structure cannot stand. (p. 548)

Neither writer is interested in picturing or praising the strong individual leading society, or worse yet, coping with the apocalypse, for that would be to put their faith for the future in the Darwinian/Malthusian model of survival of the fittest. Rather, they are interested in preventing the apocalypse itself and eliminating even the need for the strong leader on whom society is dependent.

Their new millennium, the world of 2000 and beyond, is a world of prosperous equality, calm, peace, and culture. The citizens are equally necessary as elements of

the larger social fabric; however, rather than simply being ant-like drones, as people are sometimes pictured in treatments of socialistic societies, these two authors, believing as they do in a high state of perfectability, envision all people in the new millennium as now beginning to take advantage of the boundless possibilities of human nature and human society.

And so, while we may initially think that such optimism would have George Orwell shaking his head in disagreement, we need to keep in mind that dystopian novels such as 1984 and Brave New World are usually written as warnings about destructive tendencies their authors see in society; the authors want their readers to become aware of the consequences of those tendencies and so avoid them even though the possible remedies may not be discussed.

Unlike Chambers, Huxley, and Orwell, George and Bellamy choose to write, not about the problem and some very unpalatable ways of solving it, but about the prevention of the problem itself. They hope their brighter pictures of better futures in the new millennium, futures created by economic changes, might serve as preventative measures against a possible dark future in which imperfect humanity is forced to conform to an imperfect society. George and Bellamy hope for the perfection of both.

Conclusion

So, we might ask, how well did George and Bellamy anticipate our time, either as to problems or solutions? First, we must say that our world of 2000+ has probably increased the emphasis on economic competitiveness, at the individual, state, and international levels. At the same time, the nation, through such entities as tax systems and the overall system of social assistance, has found ways of distributing wealth throughout the economic classes to insure a basic level of living for its citizens. However, the gap between the richest and the poorest – between, for instance, Bill Gates and an unemployed factory worker – may well be larger than it was in the time of Bellamy and George.

Also, since the times of those writers, the educational system has become more open to all classes of students, resulting in what should be a better educated and employable working class, removing more of the syndrome of coach riders and coach pullers. And because of machines and communication, fewer workers are called on to do the heavy labor which would have been more common in the time of George and Bellamy. Retirement systems have also eased the need for a lifetime of work for many. So, better educations, better working conditions, better pay, and more mobility have probably all contributed to defusing the fear of revolution that George spoke of.

But, before we think these writers were wrong, we should remember that many of the changes affecting workers of today were due to changes made after the Depression of the 1930's, when hard times encouraged, if not direct talk of revolution, certainly an interest in Socialism and Communism. “Yank” in Eugene O’Neill’s play The Hairy Ape

is a good representative of the type of disaffected masses that George and Bellamy feared may be created by economic and working conditions. Yank wants to join the “Wobblies” and blow something up.

But, while present conditions may imply that George and Bellamy were alarmists, we could as well make the case that works like theirs may have led to some of the changes that have improved upon the conditions they were concerned with. And, we should admit that in their focus on de-emphasizing competition in the economic arena still seems on the right track: the present-day reliance on the stock market for funding retirement plans, scholarships, and personal wealth has revealed that even if the individual is not competing in a societal jungle so much, large corporations are engaged in a survival-of-the-fittest competition, with the scarred hulks of “dotcoms,” Worldcoms, and other large economic entities lying lifeless on the economic battlefield. And, as their dependents, the investors may perish also, secondary victims of the corporate jungle. It seems that because gaining great wealth is still possible as society is now constituted, the leaders and shareholders of corporations will try to do so; when several compete, the economic jungle still exists. Perhaps only by the drastic measures outlined by George and Bellamy, which ensure much more equality in the distribution of wealth, could this competition and its requisite failures be negated.

But, as long as we feel that as individuals that we can do more and have more, we will probably not agree to any such equal distribution – not to speak of the fact that several wars and other events in society have given us doubts about the goodness of

basic human nature. But writers like George and Bellamy will dream of those perfect futures and present them to us to inspire us to come ever closer to achieving them.

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