

# Sociology 929

## *Envisioning Real Utopias*

Fall Semester, 2003

Thursdays 3:30-6:00

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Catacombs Coffee House

“Real Utopia” seems like a contradiction in terms. Utopias are fantasies, morally-inspired designs for social life unconstrained by realistic considerations of human psychology and social feasibility. Realists eschew such fantasies. What is needed are hard-nosed proposals for pragmatically improving our institutions. Instead of indulging in utopian dreams we must accommodate to practical realities

This seminar embraces this tension between dreams and practice. Its premise is that what is pragmatically possible is not fixed independently of our imaginations, but is itself shaped by our visions. Self-fulfilling prophecies are powerful forces in history, and while it may be pollyannaish to say “where there is a will there is a way”, it is certainly true that without “will” many “ways” become impossible. Nurturing clear-sighted understandings of what it would take to create social institutions *free* of oppression is part of creating a political will for radical social changes needed to *reduce* oppression. A vital belief in a Utopian ideal may be necessary to motivate people to leave on the journey from the *status quo* in the first place, even though the likely actual destination may fall short of the utopian ideal. Yet, vague utopian fantasies may lead us astray, encouraging us to embark on trips that have no real destinations at all, or worse still, which lead us toward some unforeseen abyss. Along with “where there is a will there is a way”, the human struggle for emancipation confronts “the road to hell is paved with good intentions”. What we need, then, are “real utopias”: utopian ideals that are grounded in the real potentials of humanity, utopian destinations that have accessible waystations, utopian designs of institutions that can inform our practical tasks of muddling through in a world of imperfect conditions for social change. Exploring a range of such institutional designs will be the central focus of this seminar.

## AGENDA FOR THE SEMINAR

The topics of the seminar are organized around three broad institutional spheres:

- Egalitarian projects for reconstructing economic organization
- Deepening democracy
- Emancipatory reconstructions of community

There is a certain artificiality to this grouping, since clearly the substantive problems of institutional design interpenetrate. In particular, in a number of the discussions we have grouped under “economic organization”, the problem of democratic governance plays a pivotal role, and in at least two of those discussions (Basic Income and Egalitarian Asset Redistribution) the issue of the implications of the proposed institutional changes for families, gender and communities is a central theme. In terms of substantive issues raised in the discussions, therefore, there is no intention of rigidly compartmentalizing the agenda. In every session it is appropriate to raise questions of the implications of the institutional design for gender relations, the distribution of power in communities, and cultural autonomy, as well as the more immediately obvious concerns of economic equality, efficiency and so on.

Most of the sessions revolve around quite focused institutional design proposals that are thought to embody some important normative principle. Our task in these discussions is four-fold:

- 1) to clarify what precisely are the *normative underpinnings* of a given proposal;
- 2) to clarify the analytically salient *properties of the institutional design* itself;
- 3) to discuss the extent to which the normative principles *are likely to actually be accomplished* within the proposed institutional arrangements;
- 4) to examine a range of *possible unintended consequences*, side-effects, contradictions, within the design proposal which might subvert its sustainability or desirability even if it were to realize its normative objectives.

Several of the sessions involve empirical case studies rather than simply theoretical proposals. Here our focus will shift to the problem of the extent to which the actual experiment accomplishes what the abstract model suggests.

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## SCHEDULE OF TOPICS

9/4 1. Introduction: the possibility of real utopias

### *Part I. Egalitarian projects for transforming economic organization*

9/11 2. Basic Income vs Stakeholder Grants

9/18 3. Egalitarian Asset redistribution

9/25 4. Market Socialism

10/2 5. Workers Cooperatives

10/9 6. Participatory-Economics: Parecon

### *Part II. Deepening Democracy*

10/16 7. Associations & Democracy

10/23 8. Empowered participatory governance

10/30 9. Reconstructing representative democracy: Deliberation Day

11/6 10. Egalitarian Education

### *Part III. Community*

11/13 11. Communitarianism

11/20 12. The Kibbutz experience

12/4 13. Intentional communities

12/11 14. Intentional communities

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## REQUIREMENTS

There are three basic requirements for the seminar: (1) Preparation of weekly reading interrogations on seminar readings (200-400 words); (2) Mini web-project on Intentional Communities; (3) Term paper (about 20-25 pages)

### **1. Weekly reading interrogations**

I believe strongly that it is important for students to engage each week's readings in written form prior to the seminar sessions. My experience is that this improves the quality of the discussion since students come to the sessions with an already thought out agenda. *This is a requirement for all auditors as well as students taking the seminar for credit.*

I refer to these short written comments as "reading interrogations". They are not meant to be mini-papers on the readings. Rather, they are meant to be think pieces, reflecting your own intellectual engagement with the material: specifying what is obscure or confusing in the

reading; taking issue with some core idea or argument; exploring some interesting ramification of an idea in the reading. These memos do not have to deal with the most profound, abstract or grandiose arguments in the readings; the point is that they should reflect what you find most engaging, exciting or puzzling, and above all: *what you would most like to talk about in the seminar discussion*. These interrogations will form a substantial basis for the seminar discussions: I will read them, write comments on each memo, distill the issues into an agenda for each session, and then circulate the entire set of memos to everyone in the class. It is therefore important to take the task seriously. I have no length specification for these interrogations. It is fine for them to be quite short – say 200 words or so – but longer memos (within reason – remember: everyone in the class will read them) are also OK. These memos should be e-mailed to me by *by 6 pm on the Wednesday night* before the seminar meets. I will circulate these memos with my comments by Thursday noon (usually by late Wednesday night). Everyone should try to read all of these memos before coming to class on Thursday afternoon.

This is a real requirement, and failing to hand in memos will affect your grade. I will read through the memos to see if they are “serious”, but will not grade them for “quality”. Since the point of this exercise is to enhance discussions, late memos will not be accepted. If you have to miss a seminar session for some reason, you are still expected to prepare an interrogation for that session.

## 2. Collaborative Mini Web-based Project on Intentional Communities

On the last two session of the semester, December 4 and 11, we will have two sessions on intentional communities based on Internet research that will be done by research groups formed in the class. We will collectively decide the specific parameters of this project in the course of the semester, but here is the basic idea:

There is a website called “Intentional Communities” (<http://www.ic.org/>) which has links to some 400+ websites of intentional communities around the world (<http://www.ic.org/iclist.html>). These include co-housing communities, communes, eco-villages, and other related projects. Most of the sites contain lots of information as well as contact information. Some of these are commercial ventures in disguise; others are longstanding communes founded by Hippies in 1960s; and others are new start-ups, still in formation. Many of these websites have extensive information on the history of the community, its goals and practices. Others are fairly sketchy. During the first three weeks of the semester, students should meander through these links to get a sense of the range of possibilities and of which kinds of intentional communities they are interested in studying. On September 25 we will then form research groups of 2-3 students to gather data and prepare a report on a subset of these intentional communities. As part of this project, the research teams will contact people in the intentional community by email or phone and interview them about various sociologically-relevant issues concerning their community: the normative ideals of the community; the practical mechanisms in places to realize these ideals; the contradictions and dilemmas of the community. One of the issues we need to decide as a class is whether or not we want to develop a common set of questions that we pose to each

interviewed community. This may be worth doing, but I want the detailed agenda of this collective project to emerge from our own deliberations. At the end of the semester, each research group will present their findings in the class, and we will use these reports as the basis for a more general theoretical discussion of intentional communities as a way of envisioning real utopias. These reports do **NOT** require extra reading in the literature on intentional communities, communes, co-housing, etc.; they are meant to be focused, descriptive accounts of the communities that can serve as interesting raw material for the class discussion. Students can use this web-project as the basis for their term papers if they want to, but then the expectation is that the research would be more extensive and systematic, and that it would be embedded in the theoretical and empirical debates in the literature on intentional communities.

### 3. Term Papers

**Topics.** The core written assignment for the course is to write a term paper on some historical/empirical case study that embodies some principle of “real utopian” institutional design. I do not want term papers which focus *exclusively* on the philosophical/moral underpinnings of an institutional model – although such discussion should be part of the paper. Rather, the paper should focus on some empirical case and examine its institutional principles, the dilemmas and contradictions faced by the institution in practice, the ways in which it embodies and/or violates the normative principles it was meant to accomplish, etc.

Examples of topics for such papers would include:

- The Kibbutz
- Workers coops: taxi companies; Pacific lumber; etc
- Housing cooperatives; community land trust schemes
- OEO war on poverty: “maximal feasible participation”
- The “Quincy Library” forestry plan
- Various environmental experiments: Chesapeake Bay, EPA
- Social juries
- “Intentional communities”: religious; hippy communes
- Labor credit schemes, local money (Ithaca Money)
- Gremine banks, co-lending credit systems
- Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership
- 19<sup>th</sup> century utopian socialist experiments
- ESOPs and other employee share ownership share schemes
- Pension fund socialism: Meidner plan; AFL-CIO proposals
- Large corporation “worker ownership”: United Airlines; Avis; etc.
- “Voluntary Simplicity”: strategies for individuals creating their own utopia

**Length.** The general expectation is that these papers be in the 20-25 page range, but there are no strict page requirements. A shorter paper will not be penalized if it is tightly written and deals

adequately with the subject.

**Deadlines.** I want to discuss each term paper with the student(s) involved by the middle of the semester. If a paper has not been formulated by mid-semester it is very unlikely that it will be completed by the end of the semester. All students must give me a 2-3 page statement about the topic of their term paper with an accompanying bibliography no later than October 9 (sixth week of the term). The final term papers are due by the last seminar session, Thursday, December 11. Late papers will not be accepted *unless arrangements have been made in advance*.

*Dates to remember for term paper:*

October 9	Proposal for term paper, with preliminary bibliography
November 7	Progress report on paper
December 11	deadline for completion of paper (unless given prior permission for extension)

### GRADING

In an advanced seminar of this sort, I find grading an extremely aggravating task. I want the sessions and discussions to be a stimulating and exciting as possible, with a collegial and supportive atmosphere, and yet in the end I have to evaluate your work and assign a grade. This reinforces the ultimate authority relation that is lurking behind the social relations of the seminar.

My basic principle of grading is as follows: I put more emphasis on good faith, serious effort on the part of students than on sheer brilliance. If a student does all of the assignments seriously, then they will almost certainly receive at least a B for the course regardless of the “quality” of the work. The weekly issue memos will not be graded for quality, although I will keep track of whether or not they were completed.

The final grade will be based on a point system in which completion of all requirements can improve the seminar grade above the term paper grade. The points are as follows:

Assignment	Points for task
Weekly interrogations (11 sessions): 5 points each	55
Web-project done seriously (ungraded):	25
Participation in seminar	20
Total points for ungraded components	100

Term paper: 100 points (90-100 = A; 80-89 = AB; 70-79 = B; 60-69 = BC; 50-59 = C)

Final Course grades: 185-200 = A 175-184 = AB; 165-174 = B; 155-164 = BC

### Web Resources for *Envisioning Real Utopias*

The following is a very partial list of websites with interesting material relevant to the broad idea of *Envisioning Real Utopias*. Some of these sites may be relevant to specific term paper projects, but more generally they are interesting places to look at for the themes of the seminar.

World Futures Society: especially the utopias forum

<http://www.wfs.org/> forums: <http://www.wfs.org/inter.htm>

Society for Utopias Studies

<http://www.utoronto.ca/utopia/>

Schumacher UK: promoting human scale sustainable development

<http://www.schumacher.org.uk/homepage.htm>

Center for the Study of Democratic Societies

<http://www.centersds.com/>

Post-autistic economics network

<http://www.paecon.net>

Basic income

<http://www.etes.ucl.ac.be/bien/bien.htm>

Sustainable agriculture

<http://www.dietforasmallplanet.com/>

<http://www.thefarm.org/>

Quincy library Group (sustainable environment project)

<http://www.qlg.org/>

A website of Utopia Links

<http://www2.coloradocollege.edu/Dept/EN/Utopus/links.html>

Intentional communities

<http://www.ic.org/>

list of intentional communities and their websites: <http://www.ic.org/iclist.html>

Anarchist communitarian Network

<http://www.anarchistcommunitarian.net/>

Communitarian Network

<http://www.gwu.edu/~ccps/index.html>

Institute for Communitarian Studies

<http://www.gwu.edu/~icps/about.html>

## PRINCIPLES FOR SEMINAR DISCUSSIONS

The following guidelines are intended to facilitate seminar discussions. Some of them may sound obvious, but from past experience it is still important to make them explicit.

**1. READINGS.** At least for the first part of each seminar session the discussions should revolve around the weeks readings rather than simply the topic. There is a strong tendency in seminars, particularly among articulate graduate students, to turn every seminar into a general “bull session” in which participation need not be informed by the reading material in the course. The injunction to discuss the readings does not mean, of course, that other material is excluded from the discussion, but it does mean that the issues raised and problems analyzed should focus on around the actual texts assigned for the week.

**2. LISTEN.** In a good seminar, interventions by different participants are linked one to another. A given point is followed up and the discussion therefore has some continuity. In many seminar discussions, however, each intervention is unconnected to what has been said before. Participants are more concerned with figuring out what brilliant comment they can make rather than listening to each other and reflecting on what is actually being said. In general, therefore, participants should add to what has just been said rather than launch a new train of thought, unless a particular line of discussion has reached some sort of closure.

**3. TYPES OF INTERVENTIONS.** Not every seminar intervention has to be an earth-shattering comment or brilliant insight. One of the reasons why some students feel intimidated in seminars is that it seems that the stakes are so high, that the only legitimate comment is one that reveals complete mastery of the material. There are several general rules about comments that should facilitate broader participation:

- a. No intervention should be regarded as “naive” or “stupid” as long as it reflects an attempt at seriously engaging the material. It is often the case that what seems at first glance to be a simple or superficial question turns out to be among the most intractable.
- b. It is as appropriate to ask for clarification of readings or previous comments as it is to make a substantive point on the subject matter.
- c. If the pace of the seminar discussion seems too fast to get a word in edgewise it is legitimate to ask for a brief pause to slow things down. It is fine for there actually to be moments of silence in a discussion!

**4. BREVITY.** Everyone has been in seminars in which someone consistently gives long, overblown speeches. Sometimes these speeches may make some substantively interesting points, but frequently they meander without focus or direction. It is important to keep interventions short and to the point. One can always add elaborations if they are needed. This is



not an absolute prohibition on long statements, but it does suggest that longer statements are generally too long.

**5. EQUITY.** While acknowledging that different personalities and different prior exposures to the material will necessarily lead to different levels of active participation in the seminar discussion, it should be our collective self-conscious goal to have as equitable participation as possible. This means that the chair of the discussion has the right to curtail the speeches by people who have dominated the discussion, if this seems necessary.

**6. SPONTANEITY vs. ORDER.** One of the traps of trying to have guidelines, rules, etc. in a discussion is that it can squelch the spontaneous flow of debate and interchange in a seminar. Sustained debate, sharpening of differences, etc., is desirable and it is important that the chair not prevent such debate from developing.

**7. ARGUMENTS, COMPETITIVENESS, CONSENSUS.** A perennial problem in seminars revolves around styles of discussion. Feminists have often criticized discussions dominated by men as being aggressive, argumentative, competitive (although there are always plenty of men who find such styles of interaction intimidating). Some people, on the other hand, have at times been critical of what they see as the “feminist” model of discussion: searching for consensus and common positions rather highlighting differences, too much emphasis on process and not enough on content, and so on. Whether or not one regards such differences in approaches to discussion as gender-based, the differences are real and they cause problems in seminars. My own view is the following: I think that it is important in seminar discussions to try to sharpen differences, to understand where the real disagreements lie, and to accomplish this it is generally necessary that participants “argue” with each other, in the sense of voicing disagreements and not always seeking consensus. On the other hand, there is no reason why argument, even heated argument, need be marked by aggressiveness, competitiveness, put-downs and the other tricks in the repertoire of male verbal domination. What I hope we can pursue is “cooperative conflict”: theoretical advance comes out of conflict, but hopefully our conflicts can avoid being antagonistic.

**8. CHAIRING DISCUSSIONS.** In order for the discussions to have the kind of continuity, equity and dynamics mentioned above, it is necessary that the discussion be lead by a “strong chair.” That is, the chair has to have the capacity to tell someone to hold off on a point if it seems unrelated to what is being discussed, to tell someone to cut a comment short if an intervention is rambling on and on, and so on. The difficulty, of course, is that such a chair may become heavy-handed and authoritarian, and therefore it is important that seminar participants take responsibility of letting the chair know when too much monitoring is going on.

**9. PREPARATION FOR SEMINAR DISCUSSIONS.** Good seminars depend to a great extent on the seriousness of preparation by students. The following generally helps:

- a. Above all, do the readings carefully. This need not mean reading every word, of course, but give yourself time to study the readings, not just skim them.
- b. Read the interrogations of other students. It is also a good idea to write down reactions to any that you find especially interesting. The more written “virtual dialogue” that occurs before the seminar session the more lively the sessions are likely to be.
- c. Try to meet with at least one other student to discuss the week’s reading prior to the seminar session.

**10. DISCUSSION FORMAT.** I will come with an organized agenda for each session. I may make some introductory comments as well, but this will depend upon the character of the interrogations provided by students.

**11. PROCESS EVALUATION.** The success of a seminar is a collective responsibility of all participants. Professors cannot waive magic wands to promote intellectually productive settings. It is essential, therefore, that we treat the process of the seminar itself as something under our collective control, as something that can be challenged and transformed. Issues of competitiveness, male domination, elitism, bullshit, diffuseness, and other sins should be dealt with through open discussion. We will therefore have periodic collective self-evaluation discussions (not “trash the professor” sessions, but self-evaluation discussions, hopefully) to try to improve the process of the seminar itself.

## READING ASSIGNMENTS

*Books available in Rainbow bookstore*

Joshua Cohen & Joel Rogers, *Associations and Democracy* (London: Verso, 1995)

John Roemer, *Equal Shares* (London Verso, 1996)

Samuel Bowles and Herb Gintis, *Recasting Egalitarianism* (London: Verso, 1998)

Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright, *Deepening Democracy* (Verso, 2003)

Jehn Pencavel *Worker Participation: lessons from the worker coopers of the Pacific Northwest* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2001)

Amitai Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule: community and morality in a Democratic Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1996)

Michael Albert, *Parecon: life after capitalism* (London: Verso, 2003)

\* Articles and chapters that are marked with an \* are available from electronic reserve in the Social Science library at: <http://www.library.wisc.edu/libraries/SocialSciRef/>

### **Session 1. 9/4 Introduction: the possibility of real utopias**

One of the basic problems radical egalitarian critics of existing societies always face is convincing people that a fundamental alternative is possible. People may recognize that they live in a world in which the opportunities for human flourishing are blocked by power and privilege and yet believe that there is nothing that really can be done about this. Even those people most harmed by existing social arrangements are often deeply skeptical that anything can really be done about the conditions that generate these social harms. The cry of radicals is always: *another world is possible*. But the daily lived-experience of people tells them that the institutions that govern their lives are robust, backed by powerful forces; and so, radical egalitarian alternatives seem like pie in the sky. And, of course, the skeptic is in a certain sense right: It is at least partially because people don't believe in the feasibility of radical alternatives, those alternatives become infeasible. How, then, to make such alternatives credible?

Karl Marx proposed a brilliant, if ultimately unsatisfactory, solution to this problem. Instead of providing an elaborate argument for the viability of an alternative to capitalism, what Marx attempted to demonstrate was that in the long run capitalism itself was an unsustainable, unreproducible, social order. The inherent dynamics of capitalism, he argued, would ultimately destroy the very possibility of capitalism. What is more, the same trajectory of development that generates the unsustainability of capitalism also generates a massive category of people – called the working class – that would benefit greatly by a collective, democratic organization of the economy. So, while strictly speaking, demonstrating that capitalism is doomed and that socialism is in the interest of workers does not demonstrate that socialism is itself feasible, it does take some of burden off of the need to demonstrate the workability of socialism since some kind of

alternative to capitalism is inevitable.

Today, few people – even those who still identify with the Marxist tradition of social criticism – accept the deterministic currents in Marx’s theory of capitalism and its prediction of the inevitability of capitalism’s demise. And, of course, the collapse of the USSR and the metamorphosis of China mean that the practical example of large scale, viable alternatives to capitalism, however imperfect those examples were, no longer underwrites the belief that “another world is possible.” The task of elaborating alternatives, therefore, has never been more important for critics of capitalism than it is today. I refer to this task as “envisioning real utopias”.

Many people, however, believe that this is a bankrupt theoretical project, or what Frederick Hayek called the “fatal conceit” of intellectuals. Radical visions of emancipatory redesigns of institutions are inherently pie in the sky, illusions, impossibilities, because the attempt at creating such alternative inevitably unleashes massive uncontrollable unintended consequences, and the strategies needed to cope with these unintended consequences in turn inevitably unravel the emancipatory character of the original project of social change. In this first session we will discuss the contours of this problem: why do we need to theorize real utopias, and is this a self-defeating endeavor?

*Reading:*

Erik Olin Wright, “Preface: The Real Utopias Project”, in Cohen & Rogers, *Associations and Democracy*

\*Frederick Hayek, *The Fatal Conceit* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988). pp.6-10, 48-88

## ***Part I. The Economy***

### **Session 2. 9/11 Basic Income and Stakeholder grants**

Basic Income and Stakeholder grants are two proposals for the radical redesign of institutions of income distribution. They both see capitalist markets as generating morally unacceptable forms of inequality, and they both defend strong forms of state intervention to alter this distribution, but the specific design of the solution are significantly different.

*Basic Income.* All citizens are given a monthly stipend sufficiently high to provide them with a standard of living above the poverty line. This monthly income is *universal* rather than means-tested – it is given automatically to all citizens regardless of their individual economic circumstances. And it is *unconditional* – receiving the basic income does not depend upon performing any labor services or satisfying other conditions. In this way basic income is like publicly-financed universal health insurance: in a universal health care system, medical care is provided both to citizens who exercise and eat healthy diets and to those who do not. It is not a

condition of getting medical care that one be “responsible” with respect to one’s health. Unconditional, universal basic income takes the same stance about basic needs: as a matter of basic rights, no one should live in poverty in an affluent society.

*Stakeholder Grants.* All citizens, upon reaching the age of early adulthood – say 21 – receive a substantial one-time lump-sum grant sufficiently large so that all young adults would be significant wealth holders. Ackerman and Alstott propose that this grant be in the vicinity of \$80,000 and would be financed by an annual wealth tax of roughly 2%. In the absence of such grants, children of wealthy parents are able to get lump-sum stakes for education, housing, business start-ups, investments, and so on, whereas children of non-wealthy parents are not. This situation fundamentally violates values of equal opportunity. A system of stakeholder grants, they argue “expresses a fundamental responsibility: every American has an obligation to contribute to a fair starting point for all.”

In some ways, basic income and stakeholder grants are not completely different kinds of proposals. After all, if one invests a stakeholder grant in a relatively low-risk investment and waits a number of years, then it will eventually generate a permanent stream of income equivalent to an above-poverty basic income. Similarly, if one continues to work for earnings in the labor market while receiving a basic income and one saves the basic income, after a number of years it will become the equivalent of a stakeholder grant. Nevertheless, the two proposals reflect quite distinct visions of what kind of system of redistribution would be morally and pragmatically optimal in developed market economies. Stakeholder grants emphasize individual responsibility and what is sometimes called “starting gate equality of opportunity”. Individuals get a stake, and if they blow it on conspicuous consumption rather than long-term plans, then this is their responsibility. Basic income envisions a system of distribution that permanently guarantees everyone freedom from poverty and a certain kind of lifetime flow of basic equality of opportunity: the opportunity to withdraw from the labor force to engage in non-remunerated, noncommodified activity.

*Core Reading:*

Bruce Ackerman, Anne Alstott and Philippe van Parijs, *Redesigning Distribution: basic income and stakeholder grants as cornerstones for a more egalitarian capitalism*. Volume V of the Real Utopias Project Series (London: Verso, 2004), available at: <http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~wright/RUP-vol-V.pdf>

*Additional Reading:*

\*Robert Van der Veen and Philippe van Parijs, “A Capitalist Road to Communism”, *Theory & Society* v.15:5, 1986, pp.635-655

Erik Olin Wright, “Why Something like Socialism is Necessary for the Transition to

Something like Communism”, *Theory & Society* v.15:5, 1986. reprinted in Erik Olin Wright, *Interrogating Inequality* (London: Verso, 1994), pp. 157-172

\*Philippe Van Parijs, “Competing Justifications of Basic Income,” in Philippe Van Parijs (ed). *Arguing for Basic Income* (London: Verso, 1992), pp. 3-29

Jon Elster, “Comment on Van der Veen and Van Parijs”, *Theory & Society* v.15:5, 1986, pp.709-721

\*David Purdy, “Citizenship, Basic Income and the State”, *New Left Review* #208, November-December 1994, pp.30-48

Philippe Van Parijs, “The second marriage of Justice and Efficiency,” in Philippe Van Parijs (ed). *Arguing for Basic Income* (London: Verso, 1992), pp. 215-234

### **Session 3. 9/18 Generalized Egalitarian Asset redistribution**

Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis have developed a provocative proposal for an efficiency-enhancing, egalitarian market economy. They argue that if institutions are properly designed, markets can actually enhance the achievement of certain core values on the Left, especially equality, while at the same time preserving (and maybe even enhancing) various forms of efficiency. With such “new rules for markets, states and communities,” they argue, left-wing consequences can be built into institutions traditionally defended by the right. This proposal is more than a reluctant acknowledgement that for pragmatic reasons the Left has to tolerate a certain aspects of market relations; it is an leftwing affirmation of the positive virtues of markets under suitably designed rules of the game.

At the core of this proposal is a simple idea. The twin goals of enhanced and sustainable equality -- a value stressed by the Left -- and economic efficiency -- a value emphasized by the Right -- can both be met if the basic assets which underlie various kinds of transactions are redistributed in a particular way. Specifically, Bowles and Gintis argue that equality and efficiency can both be advanced if assets are broadly redistributed from principals to agents. Here is the basic argument:

One of the commonly alleged virtues of markets is that markets hold people who make consequential decisions accountable for their actions. This personal accountability is responsible for much of the vaunted efficiency of markets, for it creates incentive structures in which people have an interest in avoiding waste and in correcting mistakes when they occur. Much of what is called "market failures" in the standard economics literature can be considered situations in which such accountability breaks down. Above all, when there is a conflict of interest between "principals" and "agents" it can often happen that agents can make consequential decisions which are deficient from the point of view of principals, but the principal has no effective way of holding the agent accountable, at least not without expending considerable resources in monitoring and sanctioning the actions of the agent.

Bowles and Gintis propose that if the assets used in economic transactions are properly distributed, then many of these accountability-linked market failures can be avoided. Specifically, if assets are redistributed from principals to agents so that the agents directly experience the consequences of their actions, then such efficiency-enhancing accountability will be strengthened. Such redistribution will also further the goals of the left by generating a much more egalitarian distribution of all sorts of valuable assets in the population. The result will be what might be termed a radically egalitarian market economy in which the affirmative state plays a significant role in maintaining the egalitarian character of the asset distributions, but the actual use of those assets takes place within relatively unfettered markets relations.

*Reading:*

Samuel Bowles and Herb Gintis, *Recasting Egalitarianism: new rules for communities, states and markets*. Volume III in the Real Utopias Project. (London: Verso, 1998).

#### **Session 4. 9/25 Market Socialism: Equal Shares**

For a hundred and fifty years, struggles for radical egalitarian alternatives to capitalism have been waged under the banner of "socialism." While the precise meaning of this idea has always been the object of intense debate, radical egalitarians have usually believed that an economy based on private ownership of the principle means of production and the overriding search for profit maximization could be supplanted by one organized around the satisfaction of human needs through some kind of public or social ownership. Even among those social democratic reformers whose political efforts were directed mainly towards ameliorating conditions in the existing society rather than working for a rupture with capitalist institutions, socialism still served as a visionary backdrop which kept radical egalitarian values alive.

In recent years, particularly since the demise of the command economies, the idea of socialism has lost much credibility. Capitalism increasingly seems to many people of the left as the only viable possibility. For all of its deep and tragic flaws, the empirical example of the Soviet Union at least demonstrated to people that some alternative to capitalism was possible; capitalism was not the only game in town.. Without the practical example of even a flawed, but still radical, alternative to capitalism, capitalism assumes ever more strongly the character of a "natural" system, incapable of radical transformation.

In this context, John Roemer has developed innovative and provocative model for how institutions could be designed so as to make "market socialism" a sustainable -- and desirable -- way or organizing an economy. To many people the expression "market socialism" is an oxymoron: either the markets have to be massively curtailed for socialist principles to mean anything, or the socialism has to be deeply corrupted to enable markets to work properly. John Roemer, challenges this view by elaborating a relatively simple device which, he believes, will both enable an economy to have well-functioning markets and to remain faithful to the egalitarian ideals of socialism.

How does Roemer propose to accomplish this? In a nutshell, his proposal involves

creating two kinds of money in a society: commodity-money, used to purchase commodities for consumption, and share-money, also referred to as “coupons”, used to purchase ownership rights in firms. These two kinds of money are nonconvertible: you cannot legally trade coupons for dollars. Coupons are distributed to the population in an egalitarian manner. Citizens, upon reaching the age of majority, are given their *per capita* share of the total coupon value of the productive property in the economy. With these coupons they can then buy shares from which they derive certain ownership rights, including dividends from the profits of firms and the right to vote for at least some of the people on the boards of directors of firms. There is thus a stock market, but the stocks can only be purchased with coupons, not dollars. Shares and coupons are nontransferable. You cannot give your shares away, but must sell them at the market coupon rate, and you cannot give your coupons away. At death, all shares and unspent coupons revert to the state for redistribution. The nontransferability and nonconvertibility of coupons prevents ownership from becoming concentrated: the rich (in dollars) cannot buy out the poor. Since stocks are sold for coupons, not dollars, firms cannot directly raise capital by selling stocks. Financial capital is raised through credit markets organized by state banks and through various schemes by which the state converts the coupons acquired by firms into dollars. This involvement of the state allows for a significant degree of “planning the market”. The result of this scheme, Roemer argues, is relatively freely functioning market mechanisms along with a sustainable egalitarian distribution of property rights, a roughly equal distribution of profits, and a significant planning capacity of the state over broad investment priorities. Thus: market socialism.

*Reading:*

John Roemer, *Equal Shares* (London: Verso, 1996)

*Other readings on Market Socialism*

David Schweickart, *Against Capitalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)

David Miller, *Market, State and Community* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990)

## **Session 5. 10/2 Workers Cooperatives**

Workers Cooperatives are a critical practical expression of the desire of people to live and work in settings in which they exercise control over their lives and fates. At their best, workers coops embody many emancipatory ideals: equality, democracy, autonomy, solidarity. But they also often face daunting problems: the difficulty of obtaining adequate credit; the problems of collective decision-making as size and complexity increase; problems of exclusion of outsiders; incentive difficulties because of internal egalitarianism; risk aversion because members of “all their eggs in one basket”. The Hansman reading presents a general theoretical approach to understanding the opportunities and dilemmas of collective forms of ownership. Pencavel presents an empirical study of one of the premiere examples of workers coops in the United



States.

*reading:*

\*Henry Hansman, *The Ownership of Enterprise* (Yale University Press, 1997), chapters 2-3, 5-7

Jehn Pencavel *Worker Participation: lessons from the worker coopers of the Pacific Northwest* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2001)

*Other readings:*

Sherryn Kasmir, *The Myth of Mondragon: cooperatives, politics and working class life in a Basque town*. (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996)

William F Whyte and Kathleen K. Whyte. *Making Mondragon* (Ithica, NY: ILR Press), 1991.

R. Jackall and H. Levin. (eds). *Worker Cooperatives in America*. Berkeley: U. California Press. 1984

## **Session 6. 10/9 Parecon: a proposal for a comprehensive participatory economy**

Michael Albert is an economist who comes out of the Marxist tradition and has long written on the problem of the design of a post-capitalist social order. He calls this model “parecon” – which stands for participatory economics. His work is marked by a particular strategy: elaborating in a fair amount of detail a full array of institutional arrangements needed in an economic system in which popular participation was the central organizing principle. Basically he asks: if we wanted to replace markets and hierarchies with participation as the fundamental coordinating mechanism, how would we have to design socio-economic-political institutions? (Actually, he almost asks the question: if participation were to become the exclusive mechanism of social coordination, how would we have to design institutions. He leaves virtually no space for either markets or conventional hierarchy in his institutional designs.)

*Reading:*

Michael Albert, *Parecon: life after capitalism* (London: Verso, 2003)

*Other discussions of participatory planning:*

Pat Devine, *Democracy and Economic Planning* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988)

David McNally, *Against the Market: political economy, market socialism and the Marxist critique* (London: Verso, 1992)

Michael Barratt Brown. *Models of Political Economy* (New York: Penguin, 1995)

## ***Part II. Democracy***

### **Session 7. 10/16 Associative Democracy**

Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers have proposed a strategy for deepening and extending the democratic state by invigorating secondary associations in ways which enable them, on the one hand, to be effective vehicles for the representation and formulation of the interests of citizens, and on the other hand, to be directly involved in implementation and execution of state policies. Secondary associations include such things as unions, works councils, neighborhood associations, parent-teacher organizations, environmental groups, women's associations, and so on. They are characterized by, on the one hand, their organizational autonomy from the state, and on the other, by their role in politically representing and shaping the interests of individuals. The Cohen/Rogers proposal, then, is to enhance democracy by transforming the ways in which such associations mediate between citizens and states. This poses a range of difficult issues: enhancing the political role for such associations risks undermining their autonomy from the state and turning them into tools of social control rather than vehicles for democratic participation; secondary associations often illegitimately claim a monopoly of interest representation for specific constituencies and any formal role in democratic governance risks consolidating such monopolistic claims; the shift from a primary emphasis on territorial representation to functional representation risks strengthening tendencies towards particularistic identities, thus further fragmenting the polity. But associational democracy also offers the prospect of enhancing the capacity of ordinary citizens to effectively participate in politics through the intermediation of these associations.

#### *Reading:*

Joshua Cohen & Joel Rogers, *Associations and Democracy* (London: Verso)

#### *Other readings on Associative Democracy:*

Paul Hirst and Veit Bader, "Associative Democracy: the Real Third Way", special issue of *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* vol 4:1, Spring 2001

Paul Hirst. *Assoicative Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994)

### **Session 8. 10/23 Empowered Participatory Governance**

Democracy is in many ways an ideal subject for a discussion of envisioning real utopias. After all, the very idea of democracy is an example of real utopian thinking: democracy means rule by the people. What an extraordinary, radical, egalitarian ideal: power should be vested in the people, not a hierarchy, not a king, not an elite, but the people. Of course, defenders of democracy have always recognized that this ideal requires concrete institutions, and such institutions will always embody compromises, compromises that reflect the difficult trade-offs any institution faces between different values. In the case of democracy, for example, many people have argued for *representative* democracy instead of *direct, participatory* democracy not because representative democracy is the perfect embodiment of democratic ideals but because it is pragmatically the best compromise between values of democracy on the one hand and various other values, such as efficiency or the right of individuals to devote most of their time and energy to private rather than public concerns. Defenders of democracy have, as a result, been very skeptical of calls for forms of “direct democracy”, arguing that except in very limited settings, it simply won’t work.

In this session we will examine some innovative cases which, to varying degrees attempt to create new forms of direct, participatory democracy. The institutional design underlying these cases I refer to as “empowered participatory governance”. The basic question is this: can democratic institutions be redesigned in such a way that they *empower ordinary citizens to directly participate in making political decisions*? In a representative democracy, ordinary citizens are involved in politics only to the extent that they chose decision makers -- their representatives -- through elections and voice their opinions through various channels of communication. The ideal of empowered participatory governance involves ordinary citizens directly in the problem-solving arenas through which public decisions are made. This is therefore a form of direct participatory democracy.

*Reading:*

Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright, *Deepening Democracy: institutional innovations in empowered participatory governance* (London: Verso, 2003)

## **Session 9. 10/30 Reconstructing Representative Democracy**

Even if associative democracy and empowered participatory governance were instituted, there would still be a need for conventional representative democracy. It is difficult to imagine the governing of a complex polity that was done entirely through associative and direct democratic mechanisms. How, then, can representative democracy be rendered more deeply democratic? One familiar set of issues in such discussions concerns the advantages and disadvantages of different rules of electoral competition: first-past-the-post single-member districts vs proportional representation vs instant run-off elections. Here we will discuss a separate problem: how to deepen the involvement of the mass of citizens in the deliberative processes that would render democracy for actively democratic under whatever electoral rules. Bruce Ackerman has proposed two sets of complementary institutional innovations to address this issue: the first

concerns the problem of campaign finance – how to get private interest money completely out of politics; and the second directly concerns deliberation – how to get masses of people actively talking about politics.

Bruce Ackerman and Ian Ayres, *Voting with Dollars: a new paradigm for campaign finance* (Yale University Press: 2002), pp. 2-44, 181-221

\*Bruce Ackerman and James Fishkin. *Deliberation Day* (Yale University Press, forthcoming), chapters 1-4, 7-10.

### Session 10. 11/6 Education

Education raises a host of interesting and complex issues for a real utopian alternative to existing arrangements. If we are radical democratic egalitarians but also believe in cultural pluralism and liberal ideals of individual choice, then should we allow religious and culturally restrictive schools to exist? How deep should be the egalitarian concern with “equality of opportunity” be in the design of schools: should it try to fully counteract all kinds of individual disadvantages (i.e. give sufficiently extra resources to kids with social, cultural and biological disadvantage to enable them to have “equal” opportunity)? For example, children of parents with high “cultural capital” gets lots of education in the home. Should schools try to neutralize this by intensive cultural problems directly only for kids without that advantage? This implies that schools would have to be better for disadvantaged kids than for advantaged ones. Or should an egalitarian school provide the same quality of education for all kids? Given that a good part of the economic payoffs from university education are privately appropriated by university graduates, how should the costs of higher education be paid? Is it fair for people without university education to pay for the university education of future high earners? These, and many other questions, are bound up with the design of a socially-just education system.

Harry Brighouse (Philosophy professor at UW) is in the process of preparing a manuscript on social justice and egalitarian education for a future *Real Utopias Project* conference. We will read a draft of this manuscript in the seminar.

\*Harry Brighouse, “A Real Utopian Proposal for Egalitarian Democratic Education”

## Part III. Community

### Session 11. 11/13 Communitarianism

Communitarianism has in recent years become one of the important strands of social and political thought critical of existing social practices and institutions. It resonates both with certain moralistic strands on the Right and with solidaristic values on the Left. Amitai Etzioni is a sociologist who is the leading spokesperson for this approach to social change, and has written extensively on the issues of the role of morality in social processes and the importance of strengthening community for a well-ordered society. Unfortunately for our purposes, his writings – and those of other Communitarians – generally lack systematic discussion of problems of institutional design. There is much discussion of the goals of a communitarian reconstruction of society, of what values it would embody, and less of the specific institutional rules which would enable this to happen, and even less of the contradictions and dilemmas embodied in such rules. To be sure, there are many pronouncements on specific legal and institutional reform proposals – ranging from the problem of censorship of pornography to the role of religion in education. But I have not found a systematic, comprehensive discussion of the institutional design of a democratic communitarian society. Still, there are enough elements of such discussion scattered in Etzioni's most general book on these themes – *The new Golden Rule* – that I think we can use it as the basis for a discussion of the design of a communitarian society. In this session it would also be good to spend some time on the web reading things on various communitarian websites, especially the *Communitarian Network* at <http://www.gwu.edu/~ccps/>.

#### Reading:

Amitai Etzioni, *The New Golden Rule: community and morality in a Democratic Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1996)

Robert N. Bellah, "Community Properly Understood: A Defense of 'Democratic Communitarianism'" at: <http://www.gwu.edu/~icps/bellah.html>

Philip Selznick, "Social Justice: A Communitarian Perspective" at: <http://www.gwu.edu/~icps/selznick.html>

### Session 12. 11/20 The Kibbutz

One of the most striking examples of an attempt at putting into practice the idea of envisioning real utopias is the Israeli Kibbutz. Of course, there are many troubling and contradictory issues raised by the historical context in which these radical egalitarian, democratic communities were initially created and subsequently defended, especially the problem of the displacement of previous Arab occupants of the land. Nevertheless, I believe that it is possible to bracket these issues and examine the Kibbutz primarily from the point of view of the radical principles of its

internal institutional design and the complex and contradictory ways these communities have developed on the basis of those principles. The core principles of the “classical” kibbutz are, indeed, amazingly radical: nearly complete equality on the basis of “to each according to need, from each according to ability”; no individual earnings, everything shared communally (in the most extreme early cases this included clothing); children raised in children’s houses, spending relatively limited (if high quality) time with their families; decision-making in the form of direct democracy with rotation of managerial responsibilities; extremely muted division of labor, including a muted gender division of labor. These principles were in place in a fairly intact way for some fifty years in the oldest kibbutzim, but in more recent years have been quite significantly transformed. The 1980s constituted a period of what came to be known as the “Crisis of the kibbutz”, and they no longer come close to the radical principles of the earlier period. This transformation raises many interesting questions: How did these principles work in practice during the period when they were most clearly operating? What prevented the erosion of the principles for such a long period? What generated the crisis, and was it in fact inevitable that the radically egalitarian principles would be abandoned?

*Reading:*

\*Melford E. Spiro. *Kibbutz: venture in Utopia* (NY: Schocken books: 1963), pp.3-37

Daniel Gavron, *The Kibbutz: awakening from Utopia* (Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield, 2000)

\*Uriel Leviatan, Hugh Oliver and Jack Quarter (eds), *Crisis in the Israeli Kibbutz: meeting the challenge of changing times* (Wesport, CN: Praeger, 1998), pp. vii-xvi, 13-40

*Articles on Kibbutzim on the Anarchist Communitarian network*

<http://www.anarchistcommunitarian.net/>. Articles are located at:

<http://anarchistcommunitarian.net/articles/kibbutz/index.shtml>

“Anarchy Rules!” by Michael Liskin (an article about Kibbutz Samar, a 25-year-old anarchist kibbutz)

“The Kibbutz Caught Between ‘Isms’” by Giora Manor

“Reflections on Utopia” by S.F.

“Anarchism In The Kibbutz Movement” by Yaacov Oved

“The End of the Kibbutz Movement?” from *The Raven*, #30

**Session 13. 12/4 Intentional Communities**

Reports from web-project on Intentional Communities

Some background readings on “Intentional Communities” (not required)

Rosabeth Moss Kanter *Commitment and community; communes and utopias in sociological perspective*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972.

Barry Shenker, *Intentional Communities : ideology and alienation in communal societies* (Boston : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986).

Robert C Schehr, *Dynamic utopia : establishing intentional communities as a new social movement* (Westport, Conn.: Bergin & Garvey, 1997).

**Session 14. 12/11 Intentional Communities, continued**

Reports from web-project on Intentional Communities

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**Other Readings Relevant to *Envisioning Real Utopias***

There were a range of interesting books that I considered using in the seminar, but which, ultimately, had to be dropped because of time constraints.

*Envisioning Environmental Real Utopias*

Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins, L. Hunter Lovins, *Natural Capitalism: creating the next industrial revolution* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1999)

Lester Brown, *Eco-economy: building an Economy for the Earth* (NY: Norton, 2001)

Ernest Callenback. *Ecotopia* (Berkeley: Banyan Tree Books, 1975)

*A model of “People’s Capitalism”*

Jeff Gates, *The Ownership Solution: toward a shared capitalism for the 21<sup>st</sup> century* (Reading, MA: Perseus Books, 1998)

*Other models of Redesigning Economic Institutions*

Robley George, *Socio-Economic Democracy: an advanced socioeconomic system* (Westport, CN: Praeger, 2002)

Severyn Bruyn, *A Civil Economy: transforming the Market in the Twenty-first century* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000)

*Real Utopia as transforming Individual ways of life*

Ellis Jones, Ross Haenfler and Breet Johnson, *The Better World Handbook: from good intentions to everyday actions* (Boulder, CO: New Society Books, 2001)

*Handbooks for Utopian Possibilities*

Thad Williamson, *What Comes Next? proposals for a different society* (Washington, DC: National Center for Economic Alternatives, 1997)

Arthur Shostak (ed). *Viable Utopian Ideas: shaping a better world* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2003)

*A philosophical novel exploring alternative utopias*

Steven Lukes, *The Curious Enlightenment of Professor Caritat* (London: Verso, 1995)