A Utopia

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Okay, I don't really believe in utopias, and I've always been skeptical about them. Because you never know how things will turn out until they are put into reality. Nothing is perfect, and it is good to be critical on everything, being aware of possible bad outcomes. Every utopia could turn into a dystopia when made reality.

So I'm very aware that all the ideas and scenario's proposed here could as well end very badly. But for this post, I want to turn off my critical lens. Because I think it is also important to imagine what kind of world we want – and not just think about all the things in this world we do not want. Because being able to envision it is a first step of getting there – while we are constrained by today's reality, making it hard to depict a totally different world. In this post, I try to imagine how a world I would like more would look – and this is of course a very personal preference.

My utopia wouldn't be perfect, as a perfect world looks pretty boring. If everything is already as it should be, what is there left to do? To use a parkour metaphor: the world wouldn't be an empty field free of obstacles, but a space full of diverse obstacles you can jump, climb, vault … But it would neither be a prison of high-wall obstacles impossible to tackle, as the world often feels today. This relates to the 'flow' concept from psychology, which states that a challenge shouldn't be too easy or difficult. Challenges like this put you in a flow-state, where you want to continue to tackle them and grow.

Now, I will describe how a day in a utopian future world could look like.

A day in the future

After gradually allowing daylight into my room, my alarm clock turns on with some music. Words emerge on my wall: "Do you dare to push the button?". And yes, there is a big red button right next to my bed. After ten minutes or so, I'm awake enough that I dare. Directly, my blankets are pulled away from me, and a hole opens into my bed where I fall in. I get inside a slide, where I automatically glide inside my clothes. A screen displays: "Third place, good job!". This is a personal challenge I've set for myself, trying to beat myself in getting out of bed as fast as possible. The message I got is always different, but always positive.

Breakfast is already waiting for me, and my household-creatures have cleaned my dishes and house. These are wonderful creatures really, that live from the trash I produce or leave. I can artificially select them, so that if some exhibit behavior I do not want, like eating something I still wanted to keep, these are selected out. Most are like little ants, while some are bigger, and it is unclear whether they are natural, cyborg or something else. Usually I trigger some pheromones so that they automatically disappear as soon as I get in or near a room – so that they mainly clean at night, cleaning my sleeping room during the day. But I do have a dog-like creature which greets me when I wake up, leaves for me to eat, and comes back after breakfast. They all leave their excretions on the fields that grow our food.

In general, we have formed a kind of technological ecosystem: our environment is self-maintaining in the way we want it. Our waste gets back into our fields, generating our food. But all the products we use are part of a cycle. I think of these strange primitive times, where products simply created unused waste, requiring tons of energy. They invented a complicated thing called 'money' to accommodate for this scarcity, making that only certain people could get goods, which helped to maintain power relations.

These things are arranged pretty smoothly and without you needing to put any effort in it. Quite a different with the old days which were often filled with bureaucracy and administration.

I was thinking of all that as I hopped onto my bike, riding through a nail. That gave a flat tire, luckily, my bike could self-repair, so it was soon as good as new. My mp3-player however fell in the process and I rode over it, so it could no longer self-repair. No worries, though: it put itself in the offer network, and its parts soon found a new purpose somewhere else, while I had my back-up mp3 ready.

We humans still play a part of this ecosystem though. Despite getting a lot out of it, it still needs us for certain stuff. So we don't just sit on our ass all day. I spent a lot of time learning and researching, while also explaining some of these things to others. A lot of people are busy socially: to take care of kids, to help people with their psychological challenges,... While you can also contribute by doing things alone.

My research (and a lot of other people's work) is often on how to improve the world around me, to build this ecosystem. Because this ecosystem is constantly changing, adapting itself on the present wants of the people. And it's quite individual, everyone wants to do things in a different way, and that's all possible. So the ecosystem looks different for everyone, they all connect with a different part of the ecosystem, you could say.

Money doesn't exist anymore, basically everybody simply contributes what he can to the network, and gets out of it what he needs. But you can put some personal constraints on where you want do contribute. For example, like most people I've put that I don't want to directly or indirectly contribute to the production of guns or weapons of mass destruction. Because of this, there are virtually no destructive weapons.

Today, a guy announced himself the leader of our community, and called together a meeting to describe the rules he decided, while also sending these rules over the net. I (and several others) immediately blocked my non-essential contributions to him, making that my contributions could only give him the resources necessary for survival, but nothing extra. Nobody showed up at the meeting, and the only reason people were reading these rules, where to see what of these forbidden stuff could be fun to do without hurting anyone. So quickly the streets became a playground where everyone was breaking the rules. Soon, the guy saw his mistake and backed down. Good, so I withdrew my blocking of contributions.

Less fun was that some kids found some sticks and beat up another kid with it, to force him to do whatever they wanted. He managed to get away, and we made sure he was in a house with some people who could protect him in case they would come back. But we suspected some people in this "gang" were also forced in it. They were all staying in one house, and some people decided to sneak in there at night, and take them one by one away to a different location. There, someone talked to them, trying to figure them out, and checking whether they needed protection and/or wanted to stay away from this group. Some where happy to go to a safe house, others quickly ran back to their house. As those remaining still had some power to get resources through force, me and several others decided to block them also from our essential contributions (so things like food, needed for survival). While as soon as their power diminished, we loosened these constraints.

Not everyone agreed with how this was dealt with, and we did had some discussions about it. Sure it wasn't perfect, and maybe we'll find better ways in the future.

Hence as you can see, they are no cops in this world, but we do use some mechanisms to keep us safe. It depends on the situation how we resolve conflict, but usually a conflict falls in one or more of these cases:

- Somebody wants to gain power: terrorizes people, uses manipulation,... These are the examples given beforehand. We have a constant opposition in our nature, which makes that we see a seed of authority, we immediately push it down. There is kind of an ecosystem of struggle, which makes that our struggles give us energy, so that we aren't burned out from this opposition, but get joy from it.

- A personal conflict: usually, people will talk to both parties and try to find a solution that is ok for everyone.

- Somebody that feels wronged, and does counteracts, often in a way other people feels wronged, creating a cycle. Again, somebody will talk to the person, and try to solve the wrongdoings.

Sure, these cases are often overlapping, and I know I'm still pretty vague about it. But we have people here who are pretty awesome in conflict management. I don't always have the social intelligence to get how they do it, but in practice conflicts here rarely get out of hand.

From time to time I go a day in 'independent mode': all technology is switched off, just to make sure I can still live without. Can be quite annoying, spending the whole day doing dishes and cleaning. While usually I also do some survival stuff, searching for food to eat in the forest (part of my time is spend on learning what's eatable and what not).

Cooking I often do, also when I'm not on 'independent mode' , simply cuz I like to prepare my own food. It is often done socially though: I cook for several people, and the other days I eat from what someone else cooked. We don't necessary eat it together, it is perfectly fine to just take it and ate it alone or with somebody else.

In general social life looks like that: if you want to see friends or family, that's easy, while if you want to be alone, that's also easy.

I live at my own place, but one step out of the door and I can be in a collective living room where some friends are.

That's eased because mobility is no longer such an issue. We can travel at light speed, so that what feels as a room next door, is actually long away. That makes that where we live is no longer an obstacle to visit others.

It is not that we no longer have any feel with our surroundings though, and we often still move at lower speeds, like by bike or feet. I move a lot, and our outsides are great for parkour!