The plausibility of utopias

Is the perfect society only a myth or is it really a possibility

Gísli Jón Þórisson

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12 eininga lokaverkefni
sem er hluti af
Bachelor of Arts-prófi í Nútímafræði

Leiðbeinandi/-ur/ráðgjafi
Markus Meckl

Félagsvísindadeild/-braut Nútímafræði
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Yfirlýsingar

„Ég lýsi því yfir að ég ein höfundi þessa verkefnis og að það er afrakstur eigin rannsókna".

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Gísli Jón Þórisson

„Það staðfestist að verkefni þetta fullnægir að mínum dómi kröfum til námsmats í námskeiðinu LOK0142-V16".

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Markus Meckl

Útdráttur

Útópíur eða fullkomin samfélög, hafa í hundruðir ára verið umfjöllunarefni sem hefur vakið mikla forvitni hjá manneskjum. Þær hafa hins vegar því miður oft verið álitnar sem vísindaskáldskapur sem hæfir kvikmyndum frekar en raunhæfur möguleiki fyrir samfélagslegarumbætur. Það getur verið erfitt að horfa á allar þær neikvæðu fréttir sem dynja á heiminum þessa dagana án þess að velta því fyrir sér hvar mistök okkar liggja. Hvar gætum við bætt okkur? Að mínu mati liggur svarið í samfélagsbyggingu okkar svo hvað gæti verið betri staður til þess að byrja ferðalag okkar til betra samfélags en hin miklu verk heimspekinganna sem hafa raunverulega sett hugmyndir sínar á blað og birt bækur sem lýsa hinum fullkomnu samfélögum. Ég vildi líta til þeirra og athuga hvort hugmyndir þeirra um útópíur gætu verið raunverulegur kostur sem samfélög í nútímanum. Til þess að ná þessu fram vildi ég einnig kanna skoðanir fólks á sumum af lykil hugtökum útópíanna og finna út hvort að virkilegur grundvöllur væri fyrir breytingum, hvort fólk vildi breyta samfélaginu. Ef við setjum fram þá kenningu að jafnrétti og réttlæti séu lykil gildi sem þurfu að halda á lofti þá höfum við byrjunarreit, ef við bætum við hugtökum útópíanna of vilja fólksins getum við vonandi séð mynstur sem myndi sýna okkur á hvaða leið við værum með samfélagið okkar en einnig og mikilvægara, gætum við séð hvert við viljum fara á leið okkar til þess að skapa hið besta mögulega samfélag.

Lykilhugtök: Útópía, samfélag, mannlegt eðli, fullkomið samfélag

Abstract

Utopias have for hundreds of years been a very intriguing topic for human beings. But they have sadly often been regarded almost as science fiction movies more than actual possibilities to improve on our society. These days it is hard to look at all the negative news in the world and not wonder what are we doing wrong? Where can we improve? To me the answer lies in the structure of our society so what better way to start our journey to a better society than to look back to the past at the great works of philosophers who have actually but ideas down on paper, into books that describe the perfect societies. I wanted to look to them in order to see if the old utopias might actually be a plausible alternative for our societies. To do so I also wanted to get the peoples opinion on some of the key elements of those utopias and find out if the most basic possibility existed, the will of the people. If we establish equality and justice as key values that we need to uphold, we have a starting point and combined with the elements of the utopias and the will of the people there hopefully is a pattern that shows us where we are going but also most importantly where we want to go when creating the best possible society.

Keywords: Utopia, society, human nature, the perfect society

Þakkarorð

Það eru margir sem ég vil þakka fyrir hjálpina við gerð þessa verkefnis. Fyrst og fremst vil ég þakka Lilju Rún Gunnarsdóttur sambýliskonu minni fyrir ómetanlegan stuðning þann tíma sem þessi vinna hefur tekið. Einnig börnum mínum Stefaníu Mist og Þóri Hafnfjörð fyrir að gleðja mig á hverjum degi.

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Að lokum vil ég þakka öllum þeim sem gáfu sér tíma til þess að svara spurningum í spurningakönnun sem ég lagði fram sem skilaði sér í niðurstöðum á þessu verkefni.

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Gísli Jón Þórisson

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1 Introduction

Throughout human history we have been trying to govern societies. Early on humans discovered they faired better in groups than as individuals but the task has always been to find a way to manage these societies the best way possible. Now the term " best way possible " is kind of vague as it depends on who is looking at the objective and the view is often tainted with our own natural instinct to look for what is the best for us as individuals. But some of the greatest minds of our time have sat themselves down and put forth theories about what a perfect society would look like and how we could actually achieve it.

I have always found the many aspects of society fascinating and with that in mind I wanted to know if we could do better as a society. So after my 3 years as a student at Háskólinn á Akureyri I had read many of these perfect societies which are known by another name, which is Utopias. I wanted to examine the question " Are utopias plausible ", meaning, could we use the literature written over the years describing utopias, these perfect societies, could we use them to better our own governing system for the betterment of all.

The 2 fundamental pillars in deciding this are first of all, do people actually want to change our governing system and second does our human nature allow for these changes to occur. In my mind there is no chance to even consider the utopias as plausible if either one of those pillars is missing.

To find out the answer I will go through the utopias I found both most interesting and most plausible. But I also include 2 dystopias to get a contrast and look at what might go wrong when implementing the changes towards the utopias. I then put out a questionnaire to try and get a clearer picture about the zeitgeist of the modern society and to find out

what people really think about changing the governing system and to establish if there really is a social want for change. By looking at the traits of the utopias and comparing them with the answers I get from the questions I hope to find out if any of the utopias are plausible.

When looking at news from my home country Iceland and all around the world there seems to be a really strong cry from the people for a change. There is a big difference between classes and people seem to be sick of it. Women, gays, transgender and religious groups are all fighting for their rights and places in the society and we seem to be on the cusp of a major shift concerning individual and group rights. I am not claiming these things are new on the horizon but with the invasion of social media and improved use of the internet the voices are always getting louder and louder. Everybody has a voice in the public sphere now and that puts added pressure behind every claim. In my view this is going to be the big issue in the near future, social order and government are put in the spotlight and become more and more transparent as technological advances are brought from the research labs and put in the hands of the public. We must have an idea how to manage this but also if we assume that equality and justice are the most important values for the future of our society then what are the next steps according to the utopians and are we succeeding in getting closer to the best possible society.

2 What is the difference?

Utopias have been a popular topic or genre in literature for hundreds of years, written by authors who thought their society could be better and read by people who wanted their society to be better. Dystopias have evolved alongside the utopian works but they are more of a warning about how disastrous the effects might be if society goes too far in directions like totalitarianism. Therefore it is necessary to take a look at the differences between utopias and dystopias. By explaining more about what utopias and dystopias are and the difference between them I want to make it easy to comprehend the focus points of each theory. Being quite the opposites there is still a remarkable resemblance with at least some of the utopias and the dystopias. While the utopias show us some desirable things the dystopias show us how close the lines really are when talking about a social paradise and a social nightmare.

2.1 Utopia

The definition of a utopia is " An imaginary place where government, laws and social conditions are perfect" (a. Merriam-Webster Incorporated, 2015). Looking at the definition it sounds like a paradise, what most people would like to achieve with their society. It is like a paradise as it is described in the bible only now it could be described as a secular paradise. The paradise is no longer built by God but rather by men, using reasoning and science to produce a better society. We look at utopias as a goal for the future, a society we hope to create to enable us to live together in peace and harmony with each other.

2.2 Dystopia

The dystopias on the other hand show us the dark side of social evolution. Defined by Merriam- Webster as " An imaginary place where people are unhappy and usually afraid because they are not treated fairly" (b. Merriam-Webster Incorporated, 2015). It is clear that this is the total opposite of how utopias are defined. The dystopias I have chosen are exactly that, they show where the social development has gone wrong, they show us the bad side of government control. These dystopias might apply especially well today with the technological advances and how they have changed our society.

3 The Utopias

Comparing utopias will give us a better understanding of the key elements that the authors of the utopias think are essential to create a perfect society. That is the best way to set up the platform from where we will compare the utopias with the dystopias. It will give the clearest view of the similarities but also the striking contrast where the authors opinion on social evolution and where we might be headed. They do tend to lean towards similar outcomes but none the less there are different ways described how to create a utopia and what should be the focus point in the system to achieve their goal.

3.1 Eden

The bible gives us an example of an early utopia. A place that is perhaps not focused on a social structure but a paradise to men and women. Eden is described in Genesis 1 to 3, it starts with telling us that God created the garden of Eden (Nelson, 1982). The description of Eden is quite beautiful but also a little vague.

God created beautiful and bountiful trees which include the tree of life (Nelson, 1982), river to water the garden (Nelson, 1982) and everything is perfect. God then creates Adam and his life will become perfect, he can eat whatever he wants, of every tree and he is supplied with all the animals on land and in the air. To top it of God makes Eve so Adam can have some help maintaining the garden and so he does not get lonely and they live a great life in this paradise (utopia), walk free and naked, basically just enjoying life. But the only rule is that they cannot eat of the tree of knowledge (life). Everybody knows how this story goes, the serpent tricks Eve to eat of the tree of knowledge and she gives some to Adam and their eyes are opened and they are ashamed.

God finds out and he is very angry, they are punished severely. Eve must endure great sorrow and her husband will rule over her, Adam must till the fields and they are made outcasts from Eden and God closes Eden up and it is never seen again.

There might not be so much information about social development in the story itself but looking at it with the eyes of the future we might get a sense of the social order at the time of the writing of the bible. There are a million interpretations of Eden so it is hard not to just look at it and try to make up your own mind. In my interpretation I see a social structure emerge on how people should behave in this utopia and what it takes to continue to live there. But in this paradise where the conditions are beautiful and perfect there are still these rules or rule if you will about what you can and cannot do. Ignorance is bliss so the people are best kept from knowledge is what is being described here. It is sacrificing something, in this case knowledge for benefits, so if we would modernize the story and replace the word God with government we might get a world picture of people doing what they are told while they are being kept in the dark about the truth around them. So a totalitarian government with full control if you will. Exchange some pros like food for obedience might not sit to well with the modern citizen of the civilized world. We also see man as a ruling power over women so equality is not a priority in the picture we get of Eden.

So there are elements of total power from a higher source and also elements of dividing into classes resulting in inequality.

3.2 Plato's Republic

Plato's Republic is an early example for a secular utopia and is almost universally discussed or mentioned when talking about governments and societies. Plato talks about 2 cities in his work and he uses them to describe a utopia. His first city is a good city, a just

city and this is important because in Plato's opinion there can be no utopia or a good society with out justice. But this city has no provisions for war and no distinction between classes so essentially you have a peaceful populace who thrive in equality and everyone does what he or she is best suited for according to their skillset (Brown, 2009). The state provides the basics for the citizens needs to be met but there is no luxury and the people are not troubled by this fact (Dealy, 1997).

But the first city is assuming much, like disregarding human selfishness, competitiveness and also the need for protection from other nations who might want to conquer more land. So Plato moved on the second city. In this city we have Plato's trademark which is reason and logic, the importance of education and knowledge (Dillon, 2004). But the interesting thing is that Plato gets more realistic in his portraying of the city. We have class division into Rulers, Guardians and Producers .The rulers are the philosophers those who have the education and knowledge to rule a state and make decisions for the general public. The Guardians are a warrior caste whose only purpose is to wage war and patrol the city. The producers are the rest basically. Those who can work and produce things for the city to thrive (Brown, 2009).

So in Plato's opinion we have what is called a functional specialization, which is a virtue. In this concept everyone does what they are most suited to do, so the scholars devote their time to knowledge and governing, the naturally strong become professionals warriors and the rest do menial work to keep the state running. To take matters even further Plato saw the possibility of creating philosopher kings who would become the ultimate rulers (Levin, e.d). Plato is meaning yet again that people should stick to what they know and philosophers are much better equipped to rule with all their vast knowledge rather than the common people (Matassa, 2013).

Plato seems to have set up a society based on the functional specialization but not everybody have the opportunity to rise above their station. So the producers become essentially slaves who work so the upper classes can spend their time on what he perhaps considers more important matters.

3.3 Utopia

Thomas Moore's Utopia is a perfect example for the definition of a Utopia. In his utopia the people are so socially evolved that achieving harmony seems to be a straightforward objective. But Moore hits the nail on the head very early in his books with the quote " Things will never be perfect until human beings are perfect" (Wood, 1997).

In Utopia everybody minus a few must work, all goods are common and for all citizens, there is religious freedom and people should seek moderate pleasure without stepping on someone else's toes (Wood, 1997). All things are built in a hierarchy from the household unit to the governing head of state, there is always a ruler over every social unit (Baker-Smith, 2014). The head of the state is elected through a vote from the governors of the provinces. He helps the senate or they help him to make decisions for the state while the common people work and pursue their idea of a happy life. There is a tightly worded constitution however to limit the governing entity of each time.

This well built governing hierarchy is at the heart of a society who concern themselves with their interest in a happy life (Baker-Smith, 2014). Again just like Plato there is always this notion of the socially evolved human, which is content with just what they need. But also the evident need for a leader and in this case a leader for every social unit no matter how small because with out rulers society would apparently crumble and fall. The political environment is essentially democratic but in a United States of America kind of way as the ruler is chosen by the 200 delegates of each district who are in turn chosen

by the people. The fact they a vote for the " Prince" is strange but could be argued to be necessary. Another important factor is the fact that political matters are not to be discussed outside of the senate, which would put an end to public discussion, which is a terrible thing, by all standards (Fernando, 2012).

Thomas Moore set out to create the perfect society and he set forth a solid and believable social structure with democratic elections and the pursuit of happiness as the guiding light but yet again like other authors of the genre he assumes too much about human nature. It is unrealistic to think that people would be happy pursuing simple pleasures and be content with what they need. That is truly a thought for the ideal utopian and that is also the biggest reason for why his work is hard to consider as a possible society.

3.4 New Atlantis

Sir Francis Bacon puts forth an incomplete example of a utopia, because he was so focused on the importance of science that the social order of things kind of fell by the wayside. His focus is very much like Plato's on knowledge but this time through scientific discoveries rather than philosophy (Dragomir, 2011). Before going into the social order of things it is important to get an image of the central piece in the society which is the league of scientists who are regarded as the elite of the society. These individuals are shrouded in secrecy as is the whole society to the outside world and the scientists from the common people (Deveci, 2006). Infused into all of this are Christian values and everyone are faithful to these values but still you have a society which is built on paternal hierarchy but with the scientists reigning on top and regarded with almost a religious status (Deveci, 2006).

In the story a self-made king who possessed the knowledge that was to be preserved set the laws, we do not get to hear to much about these laws but aside from keeping the

knowledge on the island and securing the importance of knowledge and science its aim is to keep the inhabitants happy. But it is clear that there is a great divide between the to classes we are presented with and the scientific society is really a society of its own inside the other society very much a part of the society as a whole but also very capable of standing on its own. The common people follow ritualistic rules and the paternal hierarchy to the extreme and honor, respect and obedience is provided through the Christian values set forth by the old king. The secrecy over all aspects of the scientific community keeps the common people ignorant and respectful to the elite who control them through published research and scientific discoveries (Deveci, 2006).

This all means that the ignorance of the common folk keep them as slaves to the elite and the older people of the island. The ruling class, the scientists have made themselves indispensable to the rest so their position cannot be threatened. Some might argue for New Atlantis as a dystopia but the society seems to be working whether or not I agree with the social structure. Also the work is described as a utopia and there might be found arguments along the lines that ignorance is bliss but none the less this is a society based on authority of science which gives individuals power. The fact that the whole society seems built around giving the scientific elite peace to do their work in secrecy does seem to be in conflict with how we view the role of governments in our society and how important transparency is in a modern days government.

3.5 Leviathan

At last we come to Leviathan by Thomas Hobbes. He had perhaps the most controversial ideas for us who call ourselves modern citizens but his work was well argued and assumed much in contrast with the other utopias in way that humans are very flawed and left to our own devices we would never amount to anything.

A crucial aspect in the reason for Hobbes's theory is the nature of humans and the importance of entering a social contract. When this contract has been entered into you need a government entity with absolute authority to rule over the state. The people of the state most show complete obedience to the rules and laws set forth by the government entity and only resist when those rules set themselves in danger (Lloyd and Sreedhar, 2014).

This entity that should have this complete authority should according to Hobbes either be one man or an assembly (a. Hobbes, 2016). He names 3 types of sovereign power, monarchy which is one individual, aristocracy which is an assembly but not everyone are eligible to take part or democracy which is very similar as to what we know today in many if not most countries. He says this after having proved that men cannot rule themselves and therefore need capable individuals to do that for them (b. Hobbes, 2016). The people having signed over some of their freedom to do what ever they want therefore owe the ruling entity loyalty and obedience. The decisions must be obeyed and he is free to do whatever he deems necessary to keep the peace and safety if the people (b. Hobbes, 2016). So we begin to see the structure of the system with the all powerful head on top, he is then free to appoint who he deems capable of enforcing his rules on every stage of society, government, law or military. They are responsible for keeping people in line and by that securing the continuing of the state and keeping it from falling into chaos (d. Hobbes, 2016). Although this seems harsh it is not so that the people are powerless. We will focus on what Hobbes called sovereignty by consent which means a majority vote for an individual or an assembly that will gain full control (b. Hobbes, 2016). This should secure a capable ruler, liked by at least the majority of the people and the prosperity of the state is his concern and that fully includes the prosperity of its people.

So we have a totalitarian rule, which can impose almost what ever rules or laws on their citizens. Apart from those that may injure or endanger the people of the state. The sovereign is free to call on whatever council they want to help them make good decision but theirs is the final say in the matter and in all matters. The sovereign appoints whom he wants and deems capable of holding office to enforce his rules but they do not receive his power to enact what they deem just or fair they have to go by the laws set by the sovereign power. The beauty of it is its simplicity where there is no debate needed, no delay on decision that affect the state and its citizens. But again the utopian theories are often assuming many things, like a good monarch for example, although Hobbes argues that no matter the nature of the monarch, people should follow his rules. But in a utopia you would be hoping for a good and just leader and in this system there are high risks for abuse of power. Hobbes is describing a utopia but many things in his theories resemble the modern day society so it seems as though Leviathan is the most plausible utopia.

4 The dystopias

The dystopias are in a lot of ways similar to the utopias. They describe a society that has evolved a certain way, often in the direction of the governing systems of the utopias. But they show the darker side of these societies. Where the flaws are and what can go wrong with to much government authority for example. So it is important to look at them in a way not to undermine the value of the other theories but to become aware of the pitfalls and where the lines have to be drawn.

4.1 1984

George Orwell wrote the thought provoking book and it is a real look into a world of totalitarian power. Nothing and nobody can be trusted and conformity is the only way to escape punishment. It is a great story, which we will not go too much into but the social structure and government is so extreme and brutal in many ways that it deserves a place on the list of dystopias.

The ruling class in 1984 has complete totalitarian power and they control everything. From 24-hour surveillance, to the changing of the language they seek to control the population through any means necessary (Huneke, 2016) (Frost, 2013).

The social structure is essentially made of 3 classes. At the top we have the Inner party. 2% of the population the small number that control the majority. They make the policies, decisions and govern the state as a whole. As a whole they seem not to be a part of the society but rather rose above it. They are segregated from the rest, living in luxury and enjoying perks that the common people can only dream of. But even they are not immune to the scrutiny of Big Brother so they behave according to the rules just like the rest only

the rules seem to be turned off like the surveillance screens occasionally for them (Shadow, 2013).

The outer party is perhaps, depending on your perspective, the most unlucky ones. These are the middle class educated people. They are intellectuals who do administrative work and enforce the rules filtered down from above. They live under constant surveillance and fear of punishment for breaking the rules. They are expected to follow in blind loyalty to the state and go about their business as mindless drones (Shadow, 2013).

Lastly we have the proles, the lowest class. Again depending on perspective they could be considered the unlucky ones. Working in labor, poor and uneducated they are kept there by the authorities. Addicted to entertainment and substances these people account for 85% of the population. Everyone showing some intellect is immediately taken away and "vaporized". But they do have freedoms that the other classes do not have. Judged to unintelligent to matter, almost like animals the rulers deem them not worth spying on as long as the stay in their place (Shadow, 2013).

At the top of this social structure sits Big Brother. The ever-present, all-knowing, all-seeing model ruler. He is the one that is supposed to be watching every move of the population and is used as a scare tactic to keep everybody in line at all times. Whether he is real or a genius mass controlling, propaganda tool is unclear but his as an ever presence in Oceana and the reason for the fear that keeps the common people in check (Watson-Jones, 2015).

So there we have it, an extreme class division resulting in jealousy and insecurity of everyone. A ruling class with total power that exacts punishment on anyone who disobeys and go to extreme lengths to trick people into breaking the law just to make an example out of them. No individualism, no privacy at least for those who matter according to the

state. The freedom has been taken away and replaced with false safety and rules to ensure total domination.

4.2 Brave New World

In Brave new world, Aldous Huxley painted a picture of a futuristic society that had embraced the scientific, none emotional way to look at things. Many have talked about the de-humanizing aspects of the book and how it shows popular social themes like capitalism in a bad light.

The World state is divided into classes or castes. Alphas, Betas, gammas, Epsilons and deltas are the groups that people are divided into from birth and they decide the quality of life each individual is going to have in his lifetime. Higher classes mean better jobs, more perks and more luxury (Huxley, 2002). The alphas and the betas are the leaders and intellectuals, they enjoy these additional perks like more sex, more drugs and more freedom to move around. The lower classes, gammas, epsilons and deltas do the menial jobs and could be described as slaves to the upper classes (Huxley, 2002). The society revolves around consumption and work to drive even more consumption so it is capitalism in its clearest form but the minor classes are oppressed and restricted with gene manipulation and drugs to keep them happy in their place as menial workers. They are restricted intellectually and physically as early as in the womb to make sure they are best suited for their role in society (Ahmed, 2015).

But the most troubling aspect of the book is the readiness of people to discard what makes us human, keep our emotions down and engage in casual relationships and never getting our feelings up on the surface. Instead they their slogan "Community, Identity, Stability". This is a huge loss in the art world for example where you cannot get a decent outlet for your emotions.

There we have another society based on class division where the higher classes get all the perks and the lower classes get whatever falls overboard. Not only that but the higher classes decide how the society functions and as usual that is a very low percentage of the population. Although the motives seem like often in these utopias or dystopias to keep the peace and make everybody feel safe, it is easy to think like that when you as a higher class are reaping all the benefits.

5 Similar traits

These societies seem to have similar traits all over, if it is because of influences from each other I do not know but it is hard not to notice them when looking at them all together.

➢ Class division

➢ The need for a ruler or a leader

➢ Ignorance of the masses

➢ Functional specialization / Stick to what you know

➢ Capable individuals are the most important individuals

➢ Humans should be socially evolved enough to do the right thing

➢ Religious values

Most of them depend on class division and in many cases extreme class division where the higher classes not only make the decisions but also reap most if not all the benefits. They all seem unanimous about people needing a leader or a ruler because otherwise things will fall apart and I tend to agree with that assessment. Another one of the similarities is that the higher classes seem to prefer to keep the lower classes ignorant, the whole ignorance is bliss and the need for capable individuals to run the show but again it also works as a tool to hold on to their place at the top while at the same time preventing the lower classes from gaining a foothold in society. Everybody should stick to what they know and not everybody is fit to hold knowledge and rule other people. Most of them also seem to take it as fact that people, ranging from the top to the bottom will be socially evolved enough to do the right thing. The right thing meaning what is best for the society as a whole, discarding human nature as a factor that could potentially break down the perfect society. Well all of them except The Leviathan. There you get a clear picture of how human nature could and would destroy the society of we let it roam free. As an

addition to all of this we have the dystopias, which show us how wrong some of these ideas can go. Extreme class division is a dangerous thing as it could hold the majority of any population down in poverty, keep them uneducated and prevent them from seeking out opportunities in life. And then there is also the question of religion and it's role in society. Most of the utopias mention the importance of faith and holding on to those values that are celebrated in most notably the Christian faith.

5.1 Importance of Utopias and dystopias

The importance of both these phenomena might be quite similar but there is a slight difference. The utopias are not only ideal places that do not exist but perhaps they are places that should exist. At least to some degree they exist as a critic on our own society and what people might perceive could go better. We should always shoot for the stars, dare to dream and other catch phrases because making the world a better place is constant improvement, what is good today is not good enough Tomorrow (Ollman, 2005). Humans are imperfect but that only means we can always do better. The dystopias share many of these aspects, they are often a critic on our own societies but also red flags about where our society is heading in certain aspects like for example government control. They are a great tool for counter arguments for the utopias and show us to a great degree what the dangers can be with certain Ideologies (Dobry, 2015).

6 The questions

After having gone through the utopias and the dystopias we see a pattern emerging regarding what it takes to make them work. The utopias will always have an appeal to us because we always want to do better in all things and societies are no exceptions. We look to the literature, the thinkers and those we look up to for ideas, but are the utopias possible? I want the opinion of the people on the elements of the utopias, in order to bring me closer to the answer to my research question. There are many essays and articles that chronicle the zeitgeist of the times as well as the opinions of the people. But I think it is necessary to go straight to the source to get the viewpoint of real people. This is a vital part to answer my question and so I put together a list of questions to find out how the people really feel.

6.1 The questionnaire

The questionnaire was put together with a specific goal in mind. I wanted to get an idea about how people felt about some of the aspects of the utopias but mostly if they wanted a change. What do people think about our society and where it is going? These answers are the most important thing to me in reaching a conclusion in my search for the plausibility of utopias. First there where the usual questions nr. 1-3, which dealt with gender, age and education. These questions are important because they show how diverse the participation is. It is best to get people from all walks of life to engage in this so there is no particular bias to one side or the other, for example if a much larger portion of the participants where male that might move the conclusion to a certain male minded road and that would not be ideal because I want to here all the voices of the public sphere and not be influenced by

one view or the other. The questionnaire was placed on Facebook and shared around by many people so I am confident of a diverse group of participants.

6.1.1 Question 1

There where 186 participants in the questionnaire and of those there where 97 women and 89 men. I was very happy that the participants where split to almost exactly 50/50 because that guaranteed a varied opinion and a more accurate answer to my conclusion, as women are often less heard and disadvantaged in society.
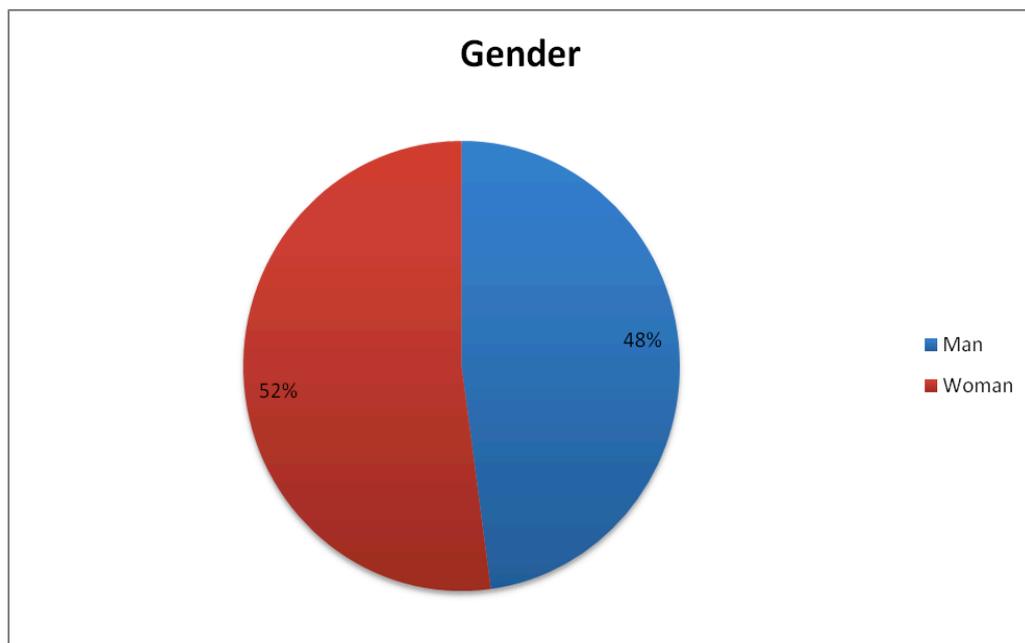

Figure 1. Gender

6.1.2 Question 2

The second question was about age. There was a certain group that became much bigger than the rest and that was the 26-35 years of age group. That is understandable given that the questionnaire was conducted on Facebook and my age being 30 years I know a lot of people in that group. That being said there were people that took part from all age groups and in some noticeable numbers. All age groups had at least 10 people in them so it is clear that there are people from all levels of society that took part.
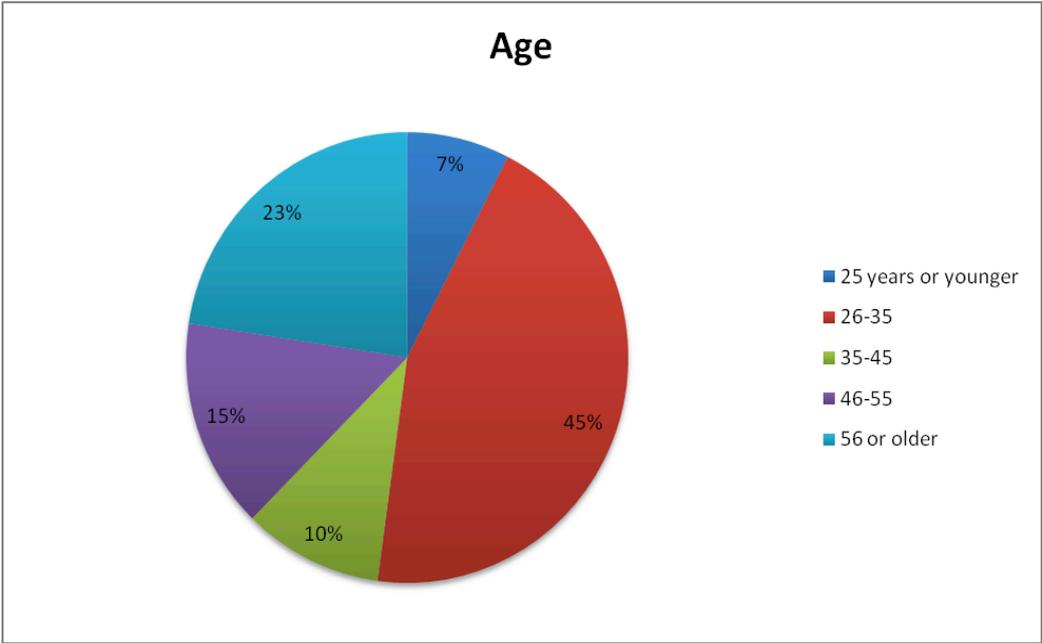

Figure 2 Age

6.1.3 Question 3

The third question was about education. Here the same logic applies as it did with the age groups. I want diversity in my participants and although almost half of them had an education at a university level and there are arguments to be made about knowledge is power and how important that is to understanding the world a little better, I am after the experience and views of all levels of society because there would be no change with out unity and to achieve unity all perspectives need to be taken into account.
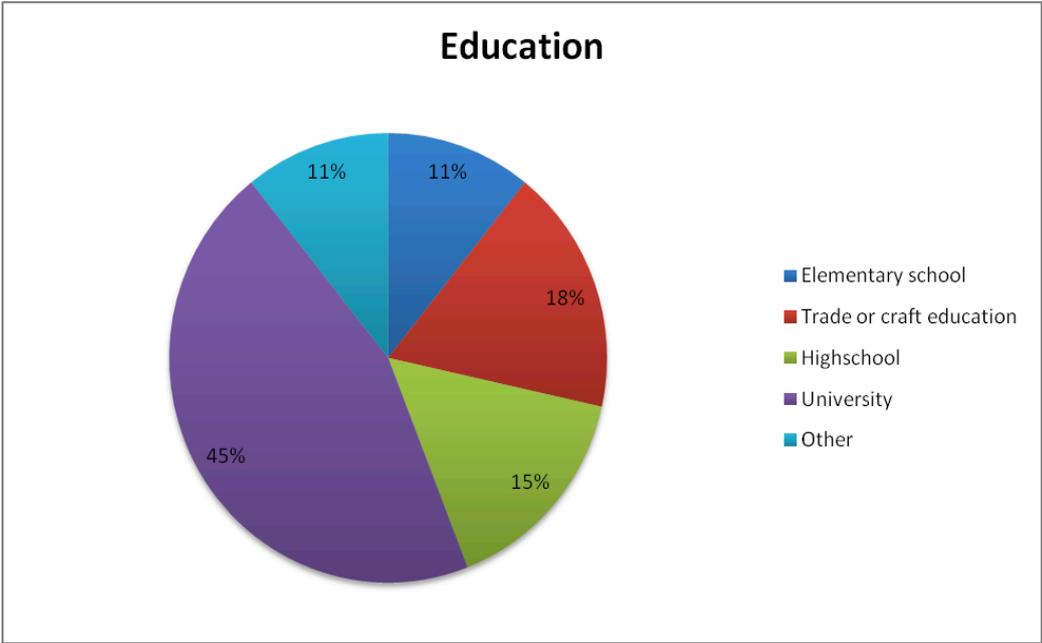

Figure 3 Education

6.1.4 Question 4

This question was about the importance of democracy and especially how important people view it as a part of our society. The importance of it is how we perceive democracy, how it seems to give us the common people, power to control at least who controls our state and to elect someone who we trust to govern our society (c. Merriam-Webster, 2015). This question gave me not only a look into how vital a part democracy plays in our lives but also because of the overwhelming majority that answered it with a yes we see how difficult it would be to change this system and also that people might not be very open to changes in our governing system. At the very least it is clear that the democratic procedure would need to be incorporated into any new governing system.
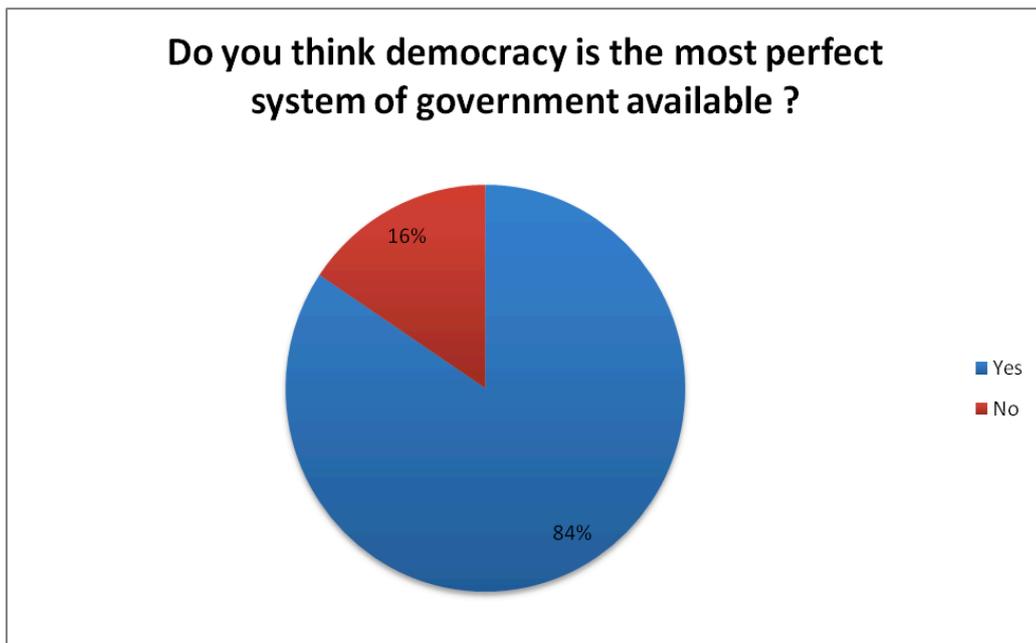

Figure 4 Do you think democracy is the most perfect system of government available?

6.1.5 Question 5

With the 5th question I wanted to see what people thought about dictators and one person having absolute power (d. Merriam-Webster, 2015). The results where quite overwhelming with 72% saying they do not trust dictators, proving that people do not trust individuals with do much power. It is easy to see why with the likes of Hitler and Stalin being the role models for dictators in all media for decades. But the fact is that there have been good dictators who worked for the people. One such is a little known dictator in Burkina Faso. His name was Thomas Sankara and he ruled Burkina Faso from 1983-1987. Under his rule the people of Burkina Faso reclaimed their land from chieftains, he banished forced labor, improved healthcare and promoted women's rights. All the while he himself lived in modesty, but of course he was not perfect and made his mistakes and it is kind of ironic that he was killed being overthrown by the people who gained the least from his rule. So you see there are examples of dictators who do good for the society as a whole and are concerned with equality but we do not get to hear much about them and so we cling to the negative image of dictators and it shows in the participants of this questionnaire.
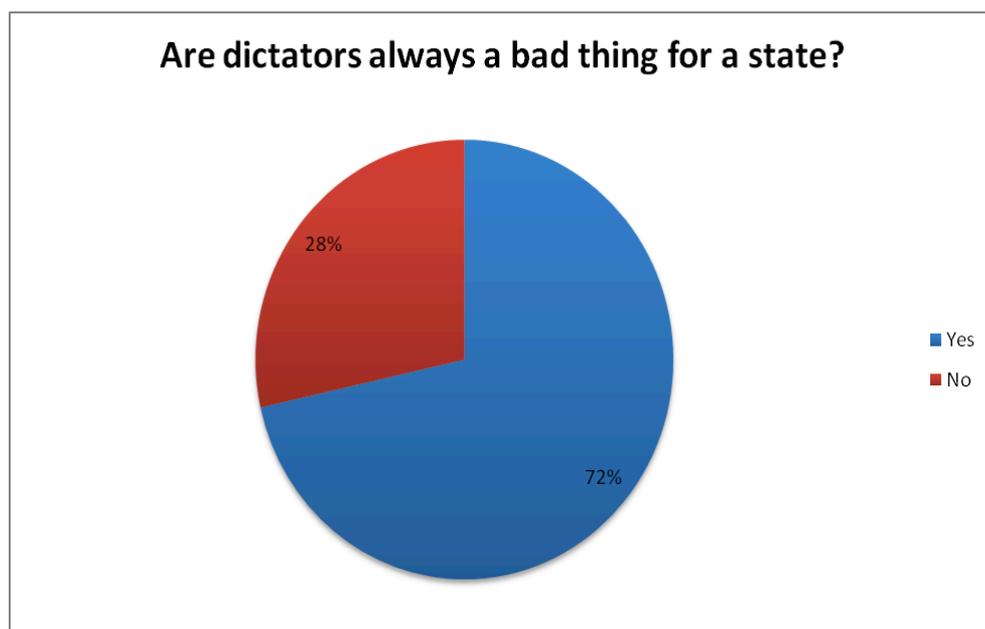

Are dictators always a bad thing for a state?

28%

72%

■ Yes
■ No

Figure 5 Are dictors always a bad thing for a state?

6.1.6 Question 6

The 6th question was very similar to the 5th, asking almost the same thing. But the difference was in the wording, replacing dictator with individual. The point I wanted to find out was if the " dictator " label had any effect on how people felt about one individual holding absolute power but also to see from the perspective of Thomas Hobbes if his theories of an all powerful monarch would gain some support. I must say that the results surprised me because of how entirely one sided they were. With 87% saying they would not trust an individual with that much power really cemented the notion that people do not trust any one individual to possess too much power.
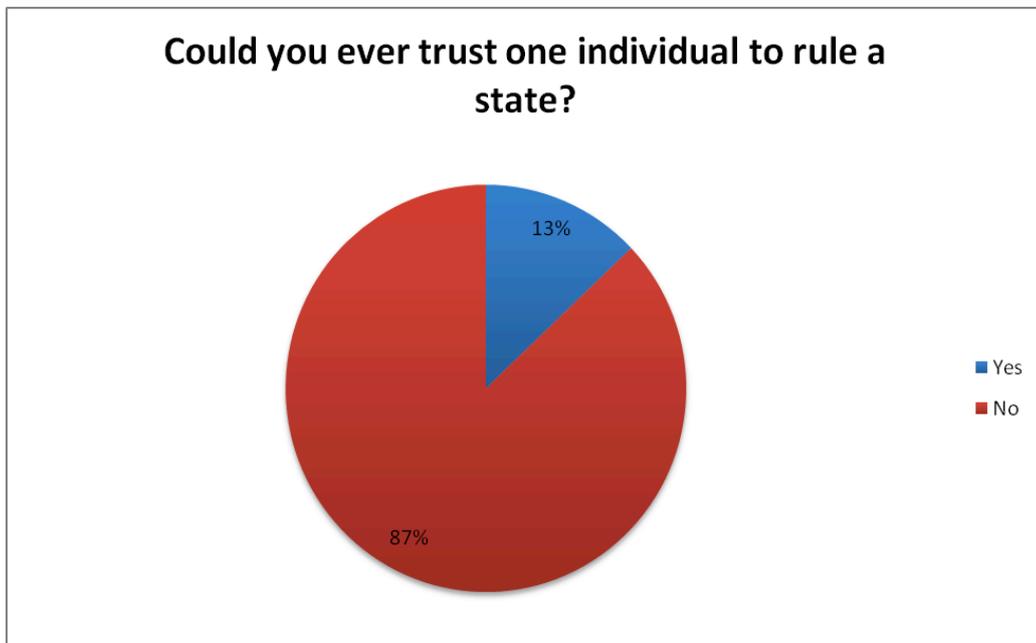

Figure 6 Could you ever trust one individual to rule a state?

6.1.7   Question 7

This question kind of got straight to the point, at least in connection to my original research question. Are utopias possible, meaning the perfect and just society? The results were kind of at odds with the rest of the questionnaire, here people expressed a possibility of utopias to exist but granted there was no mention on how that might be achieved. That being said and compared to the rest of the questions this statistic seems to be wishful thinking. People tend to believe and hope for something better so given the opportunity for a perfect and just society they are going to vote in that way.
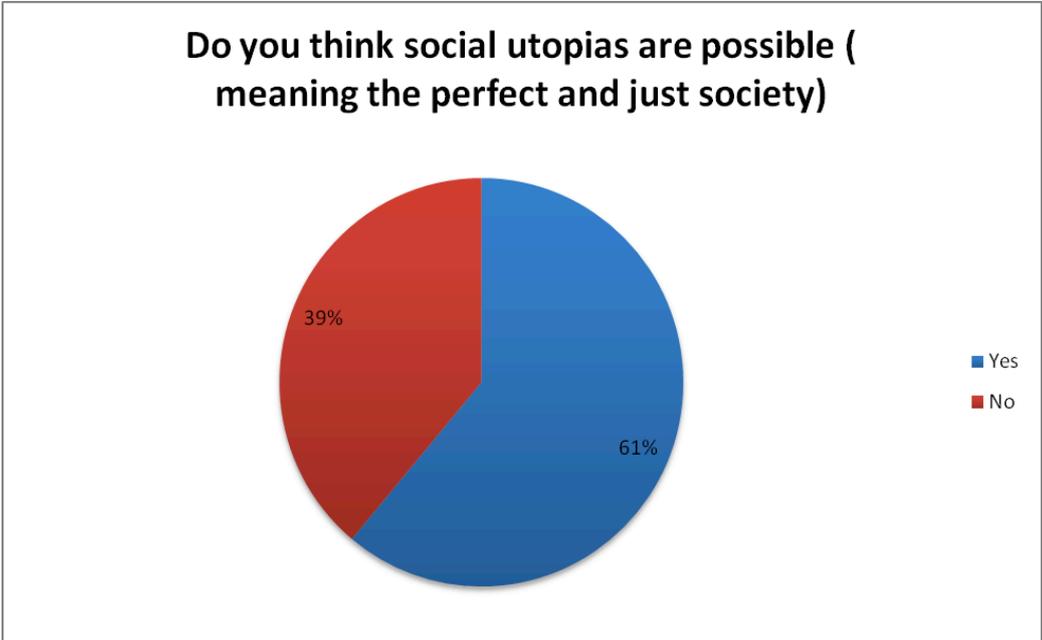

Figure 7 Do you think social utopias are possible?

6.1.8 Question 8

The question of freedom vs. safety is old but always relevant. To create the perfect society there have to be restrictions to keep everybody safe but people will not stand for losing too much of their freedom. An example that is highly publicized is the battle for gun control in the U.S.A. Following the latest mass shootings officials have been pushing for stricter gun control laws and that upsets those who feel their 2nd amendment in the U.S. constitution protects their rights to own firearms but is does not limit what kind of firearms and being drafted in the late seventeen hundreds it is hard to pinpoint what is protected and what isn't. A simpler example is that living in a society we have to protect the citizens and so you take away some of their rights or freedoms. People can't go around doing what ever they want or feel like so we have laws and police to enforce them. By establishing this we realize that sacrificing some freedom we gain that much more safety. But there has to be a balance so that we reach that perfect and just society.
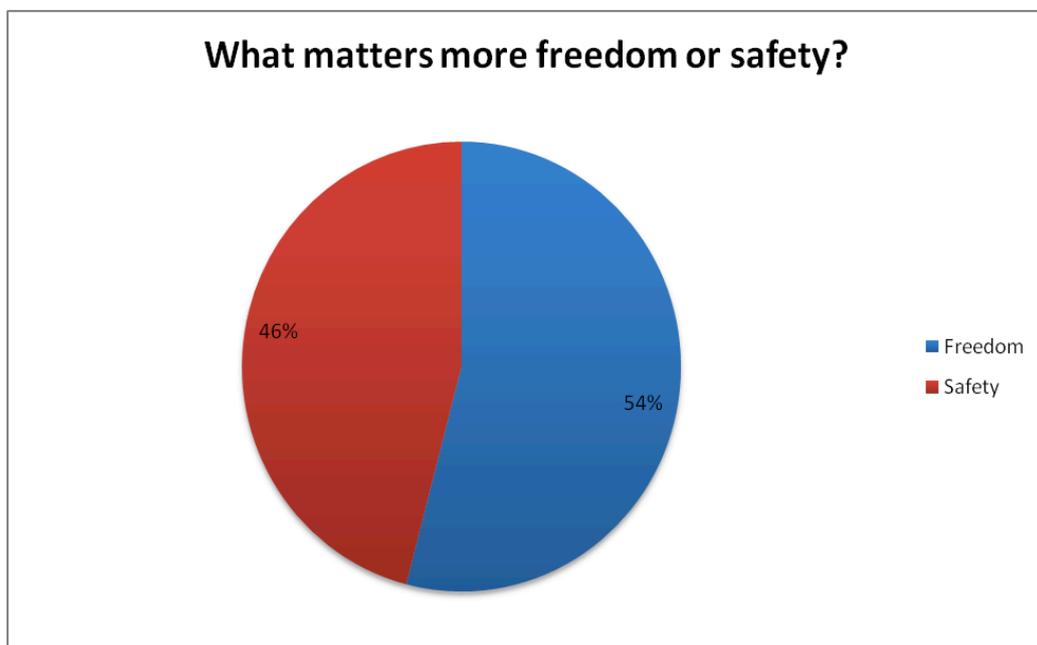

Figure 8 What matters more freedom or safety?

6.1.9 Question 9

This question came as a follow up to question nr. 8. It is not only important to know which matters more to people, freedom or safety. It is more important to know if the people are willing to sacrifice some freedom to gain more safety. As a first step towards change in any social structure the willingness of people to change is of paramount importance. Here we see that the split is almost 60/40 for the yes group and that is a significant result indicating that people would be open to change, at least a majority and in a democratic society that is what counts. So with any change there is a high probability that some changes to freedoms would have to be made to secure safety for everybody and by gaining more safety people would hopefully give them more freedom to enjoy life in the end.
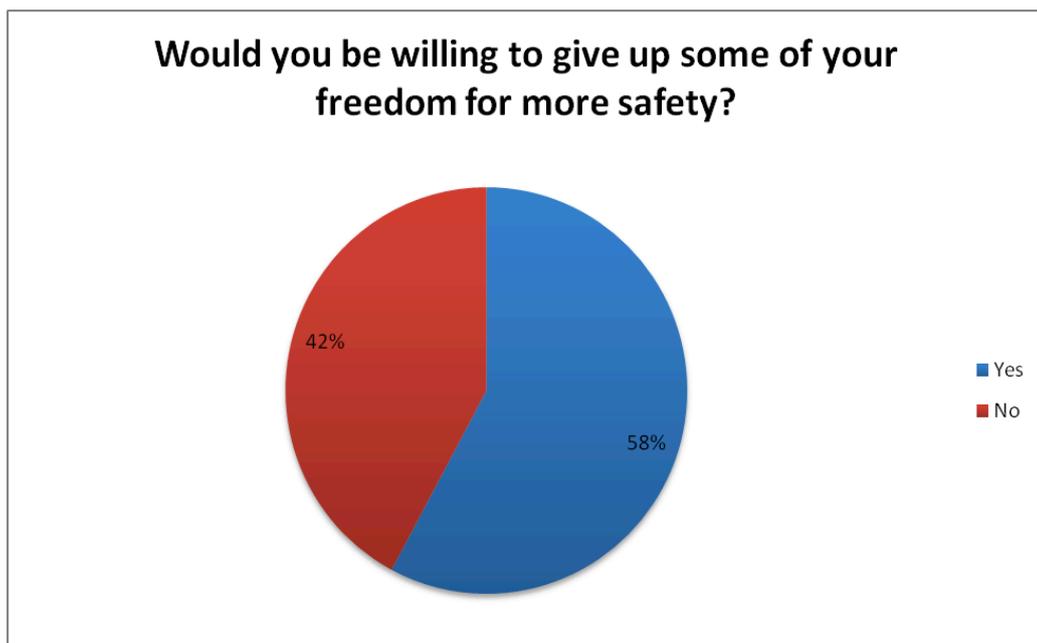

Figure 9 Would you be willing to give up some of your freedom for more safety?

6.1.10 Question 10

The question of faith has always been a difficult one to answer when it comes to its role in society. Many people uphold the religious values as being the cornerstone of society but upon closer inspection they are to discriminating to many groups of a modern society and so the values become out dated and not useful in the modern society. The result of my question is in accordance with how the zeitgeist has evolved over the last decades. There is a significant rise in atheism and just in Iceland there are 10% of the population that declares itself as atheists and another 31% do not hold any religion at all. Not only that but there is a connection between how religious nations are and how poor they are is frankly frightening, in countries like Ghana and Fiji where 90% of the people are religious, the religious amongst the poor are 17% higher than those who do not hold any religion (Rúv, 2013). The fact that almost 70% of participants in my questionnaire say that faith does not have to be a part of society does not come as shock when you consider these facts.
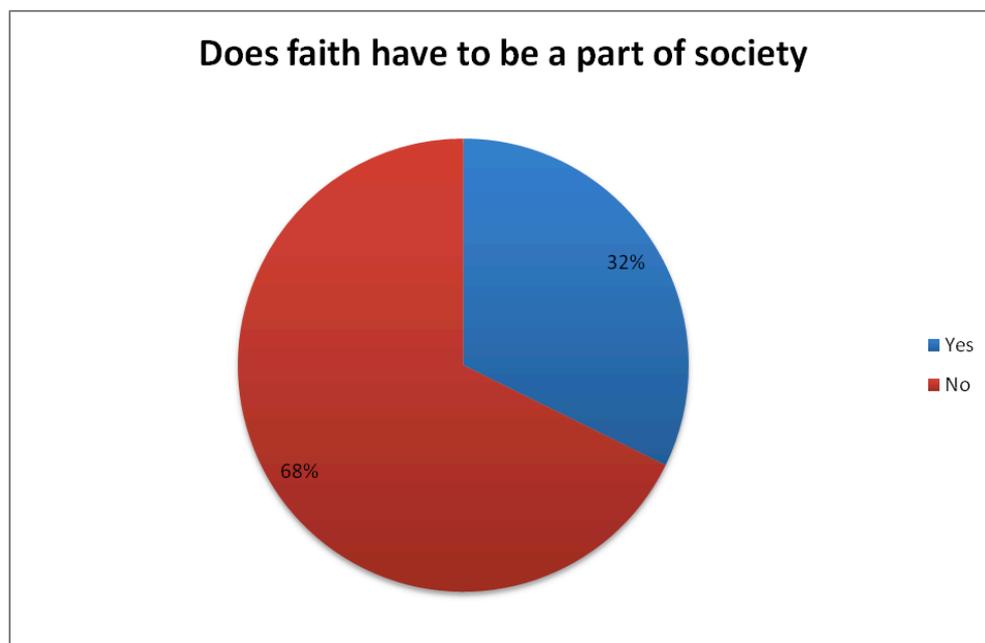

Figure 10 Does faith have to be a part of society

6.1.11 Question 11

The nature of human beings is a crucial aspect in how good of a society we can actually build. If we are not able to live together in harmony then all experiments regarding finding a utopia are futile. That is why a utopian society must be tailored to how our nature responds to certain things jealousy and greed are two bad things that make us resent each other or even go to war with one another. 60% of participants felt that those two things were inherent in humans and so we must find a way to live with them and make them not matter. Regarding our utopias, this fact excludes class division or at least extreme class division. With extreme class division on the rise we are heading for trouble. In Iceland the top 1% richest individuals of the population owns 25% of the wealth and the top 10% owns 75% of the wealth (Rúv, 2015). This is a development that cannot continue if our goal of equality is to be achieved.
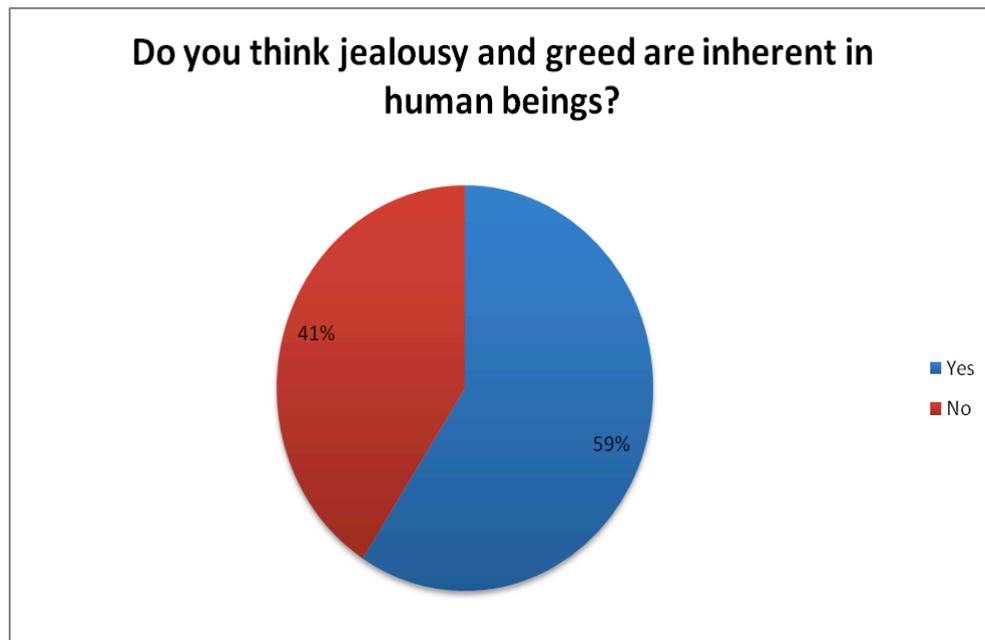

Figure 11 Do you think jealusy and greed are inherent in human beings?

6.1.12 Question 12

This was one of those follow up questions where I wanted to affirm or deny the supposed element that came before. In this case it was confirmed, 70% believe that human beings are not socially evolved enough to be content with what they have. Here the jealousy and greed aspects play a role in how we see others and how we see ourselves. But it is a double edged knife as acknowledging the problem is the first step in fixing it at gives you hope that by creating a social awareness about it this view could change. On the other hand it makes our utopias less plausible as one of their criteria is that people are socially evolved enough to appreciate their place in society.
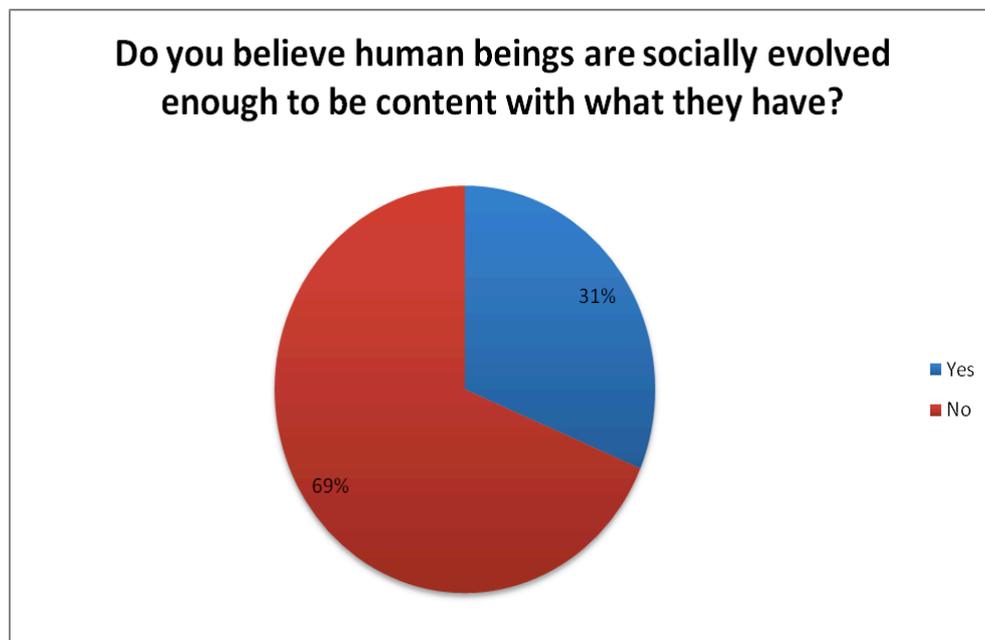

Figure 12 Do you believe human beings are socially evolved enough to be content with they have?

6.1.13 Question 13

This question was a part of a setup to start building the first pillar of our theory. It seems as though people are not happy with the society, a just society is a fair society with equality and the same opportunities for everyone. For some reason people do not see the society (in Iceland) as a just one, they do not see society as treating people with fairness. An almost 70% of those who took part in my questionnaire thought that our society was not evolving into a more just society and that is not what I expected but it sets up the next question perfectly.
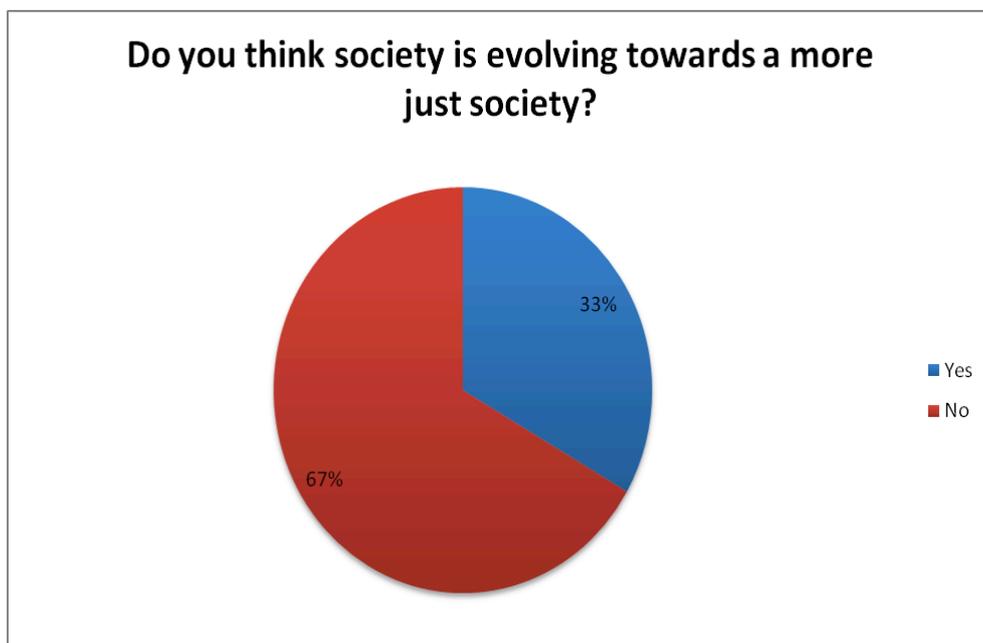
Figure 13 Do you think society is evolving towads a more just society?

6.1.14 Question 14

The last question and the most important one for my theory. I set it up, as a fairly open question so there would be no bias or leaning towards any pre-determined destination. Most notably people are not happy with the way our society is evolving, we are not getting better at how we treat each other or how we see one another. This leaves an opening for our most important pillar in my theory. The majority or 66% are not happy and so we must

seriously look into another way to govern and conduct ourselves in our society. But on the bright side now we have something to write about.

Do think society is evolving in the right direction?

34%

66%

Yes
No

Figure 14 Do you think society is evolving in the right direction?

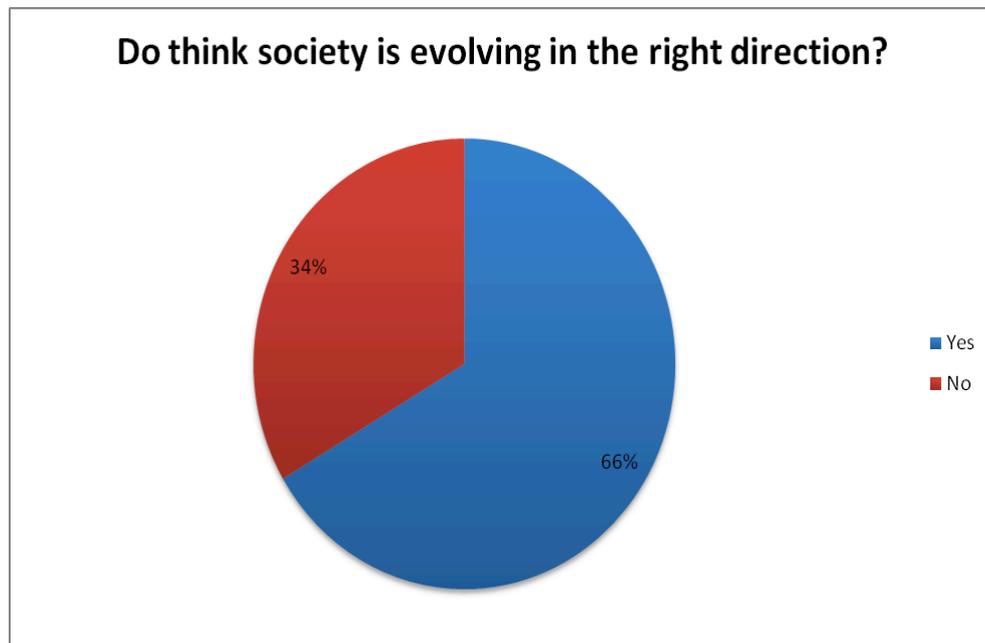## 6.2 Questionnaire summary

To figure out how this is all relevant to the research I want to clarify the key points I have gathered from the questionnaire. The people do not see a replacement for democracy. That being said if there was to be any change to the social or governing structure some of the democratic aspects would have to be incorporated. People want to at least feel like they have some power and that is what the democratic system gives them. That means also that dictators are not an appealing idea to most people and although there are examples of good dictators they are nowhere near as famous and the infamous dictators throughout history. Not only that but there is no trust in one individual holding absolute power.

But on the other hand people want to believe in utopias, a perfect and just society where freedom and safety are equally important as ideas but when asked to choose people value

safety more than freedom or at least some of their freedom and they are willing to give up some freedom for safety.

Faith and religion is not an important part of society and their values are not vital to building a good society. Instead we have to be realistic about our human nature and adapt our society to those basic feelings and emotions but as of now we are not socially evolved enough to fit into the utopian mold. Our society is not just and not even evolving towards a more just society, when it comes down to it our society is not even evolving in the right direction so there are obviously things that need to be addressed and figured out before we continue on the path towards hopefully a better society. The questionnaire was conducted within an Icelandic society but the things we are talking about are universal and should be considered on a grander scale for the betterment of human beings.

6.3 How do the utopias measure up?

The important thing is to look at what elements of the utopias might connect with the key points revealed in the questionnaire. They all have some points that are mirrored in the opinion of the people. Democracy is important or at least the idea of democracy and tyranny is not a desirable notion. It comes down to Leviathan and the dystopias having most in common with the views of the people. Where democracy is important but still the nature of man is a problem and safety is more important than freedom, or at least some freedoms. But Moore's Utopia is the one that people seem to wish for or hope for. Given that we manage to evolve enough socially to achieve that standard but as for being a possible alternative for governing a society it is not possible at this time.

7 Conclusion

Are utopias plausible? This was the question I set out to answer and not only that but are the existing utopias plausible. From this question I set out a perimeter in two pillars that needed to be answered in a positive manner. Do the people want change and does our human nature allow for these changes in our society.

To put the utopias to the test I listed their similar traits as criteria for them to be achieved. I then proceeded to put out a questionnaire to find out about the pillar questions and also how the traits of the utopias would align with the will of the people. That made for an interesting comparison. The similar traits in the utopias were a few and firstly I want to mention class division. Most of the utopias and also the dystopias had class division but in the utopias the class division was built on knowledge, age or even capability, where the capable individuals are the most important ones. In todays society we have an extreme class division but it is centered around wealth and money. With the largest portions of the wealth divided between fewer and fewer people (Rúv, 2015). So the class division criteria does not seem to be getting closer to equality and in the questionnaire people seem not to think of the society as a just society.

The need for a ruler was apparent in the utopias either by one individual or an assembly, well the people do not trust any individual to hold too much power and the negative image of a dictator is too great to think that people would want to make those kinds of changes in our society.

Ignorance of the masses was something to be relied upon to keep the social order, if you take into account the Internet and the endless access to information, and how fast it is growing and improving it is hard to imagine ever being able to rely on ignorance of the masses. But that is also based on the knowledge to look for the information. This

knowledge comes from education that should teach children independence and desire to make informative decisions. Although there are arguments about how we use the internet and also how easy it is to provide false information through the internet it still stands as a way to get information and make decisions based on much more reliable information than before, if you know where to look.

Functional specialization is another trait but I came to realize it is closely connected to people being socially evolved enough to do the right thing. The right thing is to keep society going and do that you must be happy in the society, the society must adapt to try and make as many as possible happy with their participation in it. In the questionnaire it seems that we are not socially evolved enough to just be happy and content to do only what we are suited for. Not only that but we seem to be getting further from happiness in our society.

Lastly many of the utopias were tied up in religious values and in connection with the ongoing zeitgeist of the modern society we are moving away from the religious ties to our society. This was further confirmed with my results that showed that a majority of people does not see religion or faith as an important part of society.

Now the pillar questions were by my first estimation the linchpin to the whole question of whether utopias were plausible or not but I think it is clear by just looking at the traits of the utopias and the results from the questionnaire that the utopias are not plausible. Apart from Leviathan, which describes almost exactly how our society works, excluding a monarch because of the obvious negative reactions to the idea of an individual with absolute power. So Leviathan was more than plausible, it turned out to be a sort of reality. On the other hand as people are not happy with how our society works and is evolving I say it is not a utopia anymore but a society in the process of hopefully getting better. But this leaves us with the conclusion that our utopias, written by great men are not plausible.

So does the conclusion end here? Well not in my mind. Because we still have the pillar questions left to answer. If we start with the second one, does our human nature allow for changes towards a utopian society, the answer is no. According to my findings we are not socially evolved enough to fit into the given utopian mold of the writers and in fact are not on our way there. We might actually be on our way towards a kind of dystopia. Take for example the Panama documents where high officials were filtering money away from Iceland and many more places to Panama for safekeeping. A more extreme case is that of Edward Snowden who made public documents that showed the NSA (National Security Agency) spying on millions of regular Americans (BBC, 2014). There we see a terrible example of government actions getting out of control and intruding on the lives of its citizens. The greed for control and complete authority is blinding those that have the responsibility to protect us.

But the answer to the second pillar question is much more interesting. Because in my findings I found out that people want change. They are not happy with the way things are going. People believe in the idea of a utopian society that is perfect and just. Sure there would need to be a democratic aspect incorporated into the utopian society but they are willing to make a change. That is further more demonstrated with the fact that people would offer up some of their freedom for safety, which with the correct balance could make for a beginning of a utopia. If adapted to our human nature we could very well see a utopia in the future. Not one of those I have described but perhaps a new one. A better utopia.

8 Final words

When starting this essay I was hopeful that a utopia was a possibility but as I progressed it seemed to become a long shot. I was swinging from side to side at so many points of the essay that I was never quite sure where I was going to end. I was quite sad at first when I realized that the utopias were not a plausible option for a change in society. I am always hoping for a glimmer of hope in a society that seems always on the verge of devouring itself. And just then it showed itself, people want a change. That is perhaps not news to many because you hear these dissatisfied voices all the time but this time I was sure because of the variety of people I had answer my questionnaire I really believed it. There is always hope for a new utopia. Almost like in the movies where you wait for the happy ending I guess I am just waiting for the right scholar to come up with the social structure that would move us forward in our evolution.

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Amendment

Amendment A - The questionnaire

1. What matters more Freedom or safety X

2. Would you be willing to give up some of your freedom for more safety X

3. In your view is monarchy always a bad thing X

4. Does faith have to be a part of society X

5. Do you think jealousy or greed are inherent in human beings. X

6. Do you believe human beings are socially evolved enough to be content with what they have

7. Do you think social utopias are possible X

8. would you trust one person to govern a state X

9. Do you think democracy is the most perfect system of government X

10. Do you think society is evolving towards a more just society X

11. Do you think society is evolving in the right direction