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Small Scale Utopia: Fantasy of the Past

Walden Two encompasses B.F. Skinner's ideal of a utopian society. As a behavioral psychologist of the post World War Two era, Skinner believed the manipulation of behavior lied in structuring the perfect environment for child development. His dream involved a brand of human that was void of the ideas of struggle, heart break, and the negative implications and emotions involved with experiencing life.

Influenced by his own environment, Skinner believed that if one raised children in a proper manner, free of societal influences, he could mold them into "perfect people." This developmental process begins at birth. The concept of the nuclear family has been disposed of to create a communal family. The children are removed from their biological parents after birth. They receive no special treatment from their parents, or anyone else's for that matter. For example, if they are taken out on a special excursion, or anything else to that device, they are taken with a group, to avoid showing favoritism. Parents lose the ability to influence their children positively or negatively, eliminating the individualism that is created by family units. Creating a communal parent breeds camaraderie and does away with jealousy, for everyone receives the same amount of love and attention. This child rearing technique makes it easier to subjugate individually.

The developmental conditioning the people of *Walden Two* receive creates balance and enrichment in multiple aspects of life. These people are intelligent. Their schooling is done in a

way that avoids causing bias by their education. Their method of teaching is very similar to Thoreau's approach of excavating knowledge. They rarely teach curriculum from a text book. There is an emphasis on learning to properly think and gain knowledge by themselves rather than having information forced upon them. Consequently, they crave learning new information. Many of the children will spend their free time reading and studying. These are well rounded individuals. They are well versed in music, art, science, and they are in touch with nature. This society is set up for many hours of down time. During which, most are honing a craft and many have more than one. They frequently hold talent shows, plays, science experiments, and various other rewarding activities. What's more, they are also generally happy beings. One of the days Burris Skinner was visiting Walden Two he went from building to building, observing the residents, and he could find nothing negative about any of them, they did not even gossip. The ability to hate and feel jealousy has been removed from their reservoir of emotions. Furthermore, the efficiency of the place is a baffling spectacle. Each person only puts forth four labor credits in a day, about four hours of work. Their conditioning allows them to think of work as enjoyable. They get far more done at a faster pace than the average human. With all elements included, the overall production seems to verge on a modern Eden.

Frazier, the founder of Walden Two, gambles at a chance to play god and succeeds. He is the architect of his perfect little ant farm. The society has had every detail scrupulously planned out; it is equipped to make life as leisurely and efficient as possible. The world of Walden Two has been engineered to reduce discomfort to its most minuscule level. In case of weather the citizens of Walden Two are displeased by, they need not to fear, for the buildings are connected by tunnel. There is never congestion, as day-to-day events in these people's lives take place at intervals of time that are specific to the individual. The eating schedules provide a simple

example. There are also several locations for meals, each with different decoration and ambiance. Even the simple aspect of dining has been so thought out that the trays are transparent, to make the cleaning process more efficient. Additionally, the set up of the bedrooms in Walden Two is strikingly impersonal. They have minimal personal touch and are very thought out and planned. Levittown would resemble a personalized, homey neighborhood in comparison to the living arrangements of the residents of Walden Two. The adults' bedrooms are made to keep the peace between themselves and give comfort, whereas the children's rooms are made to be effectively cleaned and taken care of.

On the surface, this sounds like the perfect place to live. There is no tension between the people and they are more than accommodated for. They live better than most citizens of the United States. Yet, these people seem to be in an almost hypnotic state. Automatons who reproduce and work in the society like ants. They are not doing anything against their will, but they are taking life and the way it is presented to them without question. What makes people innately human and what puts us above the rest of the animals is our ability to ask "Why?" These people live a life full of leisure, and it is a great one, but they have lost their most precious human attribute--to think skeptically.

Burrus Skinner believes Frazier really has pulled off a miracle with his success at Walden Two. These people are selfless, loving, intelligent beings, but they are living life in the shallowest way possible. Their lives have been mapped out to ensure things such as discomfort, heartbreak, and all negative forms of emotion do not exist. Without ever suffering the hardships of life, and what those hardships do to people emotionally, how can these placid people ever truly know happiness, or what it even means to live. Living a shallow existence is not a bad thing but it is not a fruitful path to consciousness. Their life will be vanilla ice cream for all of their

days. The mystery of venturing off into the unknown and tripping a few times exposes you to the greater opportunities in life and it teaches you how to be appreciative, and that's something these people will not get to feel. They will skim on the surface level of existence. Their mindlessness takes away their want for purpose. They are merely systems of the Matrix.

Walden Two will never be John Winthrop's *City Upon a Hill* like Frazier so desperately makes it out to be. They do not really know what it is to slave over a goal, and finally accomplish it, in spite of the trials you face in every day life, because they have no concept of reward for labor in Walden Two. Their talent showcases are not competitive whatsoever. People who work tirelessly at their craft, or their job, do not get to reap the benefits of their labor. There is no reward for greatness. The benefits and rewards being recognition. Recognition being a state of being on a pedestal or people being more attentive to the work created by the individual. It is a reward in itself to express, or create, but the social attention that coincides with being spectacular greatly motivates people. People do things to reach out and help the masses, whether that be helping them understand their lives through art or science. These people crave attention because it means their work is being noticed, and understood, and effectively reaching people. So without recognition there will be those who partake in art and science, but they will be few and far to come by. People write for example to share stories. They have the compulsion to write, the physical need, but at the end of the day it comes down to sharing, and without that sharing it will fall by the wayside. History shows us that progression of a society, in the arts, science, medicine, and philosophy as examples, is placed on the shoulders of the few. A handful of great people lead millions to success. If one considers the American Revolution for example, or the advancements Albert Einstein accomplished in the scientific community, with regards to

Theoretical Physics. Treating everyone equally and “fairly” will create a stable environment, but it will not create a great one.

Frazier’s god complex is reflected by his ideas of education and life. He is Walden Two’s shepherd. Everything he does is done to ensure that the people do not think for themselves, or skeptically. He has to hope that the string fence he created will be enough to keep these people subscribed to his world. To ensure this he goes through just enough effort as to not draw attention to what he is doing. They are encouraged not to read history books. Frazier leads them to believe that history does not repeat itself and there is nothing to learn from the past--keeping them from knowledge. He is in no way a Deistic god. He actively takes care of his cogs and controls the rhythm in which they move. For Burriss Skinner and his friend’s sake, he loves to appear like he is doing nothing. That it truly is a seamless clock and he is just the watchmaker.

Skinner missed a vital detail in regard to this society. A downfall of his education, Burriss Skinner grew up and learned in a time where the debate about behavior, between nature and nurture, was heated and the proper resources and information had not evolved to make accurate judgment. There is little in the paradigm that does not subject it to criticism if we are to, by extension, infer that Walden Two represents a model for society on a larger scale. The problem with the success of Walden Two is the possibility of sampling error. Sampling error states that an experiment loses credibility with the smallness of its sample size and the lack of randomness in sampling the population. Walden Two is not a large or random sample of the population-at-large. The volunteers of Walden Two are reasonably assumed more likely to exhibit the behavior observed there and be more easily conditioned from their genetic predisposition--selection bias. These factors alone discredit the society’s success. What if Frazier has not actually accomplished the impossible? These people could be genetically predisposed to being easily influenced and

trained. But that is a big “if!” Then both genetically and statistically, it is only a matter of numbers before someone is born who cannot be trained or forced to think like the rest of the society. Burris Skinner believed personality was all nurture, the environment in which people are raised. He missed the fact that it takes the passing of many generations to genetically engineer and domesticate any race of animal.

Walden Two was a very interesting read. It brings about many really great questions in regard to the behavior of people; specifically as it pertains to personal motivation and their reactions to life. It fails in attempts to demonstrate that this society could be extended, to be successful, on a macro-societal scale. As all utopian societies eventually fail due to the failed notion of large societies predicated on a basis of altruism. People want to live and find meaning in life. They want to express their individuality and pursue their interests. A life fully realized is one cognizant of purpose. Living in a society where individuals basic needs are met would be the ideal. However, one has to consider the cost of eliminating individualism, of subjugating the need to create, of eliminating the rewards of work well done, to the advancement of, or perhaps even the entertainment of, progressive society. The world could end the Darwinistic atrocities that it faces everyday, but the people of the world are not ready for it. It would have to be a very slow change.