

## Essay

# Imagining Paradise & World Peace

Alex Vary\*

## Abstract

I review our anticipation of entering a transcendent paradise - where soul and consciousness triumph over their mortal embodiments and find perennial peace - removed from the clamor, chaos, and rubble of earthly existence. In the transcendent paradise of my imagination there is pleasing discovery, excitement, elation, and permanence of all that you are capable of creating, assembling and enjoying. It is unlike mortal life which is impermanent and all too quickly crumbles to dust. The transcendent paradise that I imagine is a realm that offers the permanent peace not found in the fractured and fragmented physical world. Yet, given the option, many adventurous and creative souls prefer to repeatedly re-engage in the excitement and turmoil of mortal life, overcoming its mixed alloyed blessings, yearning to create paradise on the Earth.

**Keywords:** Utopian paradise, transcendent paradise, world peace, spirit world, social engineering.

## Introduction

Look around the cosmos and you will see it is cold and unfriendly, except in its most minuscule parts, as on the Earth. Even here it is human-friendly only within a thin layer having a thickness of less than one thousandth the globe's diameter. Even that virtual soap bubble film is not a totally placid venue because of floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis, tornados - and some unpleasant hostile people. Throughout its immensity, the rest of the cosmos is a vacuum - filled with bursts of fierce radiation and roiling turbulent masses of gas, dust and stars - and the intervening space is extremely cold, cryogenic, near absolute zero.

There is scarcely any place in the Cosmos where one can set foot, enjoy a tasty meal, or take a casual stroll through a pleasant verdant countryside teeming with flowers and luxuriate in their fragrance carried by sweet fresh air. Our bodies, our environment, consist of elements manufactured in roiling, turbulent stars as they evolve and explode. Those explosions are the novae and supernovae that produce the elements and dust from which planets are formed and upon which terrestrial habitats form. Apparently, an immense life-hostile cosmos is needed to produce the scantily dispersed life-supporting zones like our minuscule earthly abode.

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\* Correspondence: Alex Vary, PhD, Retired NASA Scientist & Independent Researcher. Email: [axelvary@wowway.com](mailto:axelvary@wowway.com)

Our spirits, embodied as mortal beings, reside on these minuscule specks of relative safety - these clumps of temperate soil, water and air. We should, and many of us do, thank God for the privilege of becoming mortal to enjoy these delicate and scarce arenas of God's largesse. The span of time we live as incarnate beings on this *terra firma* should be savored - the joys, pleasures and, yes, sorrows and pains are all part of the deal. We suspect that after our corporal experience, we and our immortal souls return to a permanent safe haven - the transcendent domain from whence we came. But, while here, many try to imagine and create to the best of their abilities earthly pockets of paradise which together all may enjoy.

## **Groundhog Day**

You may decide that the mundane material world is all there is and that it suffices as your existential paradise; until you return to the inanimate dust from which you assume your essence sprang. Or, you may metaphorically relive your earthy life as in *Groundhog Day* the 1993 movie depicting an egocentric TV weatherman during a hated assignment covering the annual Groundhog Day event celebrated on February 2, each year, in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. He unhappily finds himself reliving the same day over and over again. Desperately attempting to break the troublesome time loop, he indulges in outrageous behavior, hedonism and several 'successful' suicides. Still, our weatherman character finds that nothing has changed - he reawakens at precisely 6:00 a.m. on the morning of February 2. His girlfriend, to whom he confides his predicament, suggests he take advantage each day's new experience to improve himself. Inspired, he endeavors to learn more about those close to him, building upon the knowledge he gains each repeated day. He uses his reawakened experiences to help as many people around town as possible. Eventually, he is able to befriend almost everyone he meets, and using his cumulate knowledge, to save lives, help townspeople, and to get closer to his girlfriend. He wakes one happy morning to find that the seemingly impossible loop is broken. It is now February 3 and he is delighted, enlightened and can freely claim and realize his miniature, transient paradise here on Earth. This is the lesson of *Groundhog Day*.

## Yearning for Paradise

A vague remembrance, imbedded deeply in our consciousness, compels us to yearn for return to what seems like an immanent, presumably attainable and accessible paradise, the ‘country’ of our soul’s origin. Va’ Pensiero, known as Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves, is the stirring chorus from the third act of *Nabucco* by Giuseppe Verdi. It recollects the dream of Jewish captives of Babylon after the loss of the First Temple in Jerusalem. The chorus gains greater strength than that achieved in Verdi’s opera when viewed from the perspective of all humans wishing to escape the bondage of earthly life. Listen to the chorus passionately sung - hear it in the context of the soul’s yearning to be free of mundane shackles that restrict and bind it. Can you hear the chorus of souls seeking to reclaim their transcendent paradise?

*Fly, thought, on wings of gold; go settle upon the slopes and the hills, where, soft and mild,  
the sweet air of our native land smell fragrant!*

Verdi composed *Nabucco* at a difficult moment in his life. His wife and small children had all just died. He had contracted with La Scala to write another opera and the director forced the libretto into his hands. Returning home, it happened to open to Va’ Pensiero and seeing the phrase he heard the words singing. He immediately set himself to the task of composing the music. At its first rehearsal the stage hands shouted their approval, then beat on the floor and the stage sets with their tools to create an even noisier demonstration. Verdi struck a chord that harmonized with the dreams of paradise shared by all who reject abject enthrallment of earth-bound life.

## Imagining Paradise

Starting with noble aspirations and intentions in one’s heart, on the imagined road towards paradise one too often finds the road washed away by torrential downpours of tyranny, callousness, indifference. John Lennon dreamed of a paradise in his song *Imagine*, upon which the following dialog is paraphrased [1]. Mortal John dreamed of the country Samuel Butler named

*Erehwon* (it is 'nowhere' spelled backwards). Astral Joan, a sympathetic spirit, addresses John and describes 'heaven' as a supernal stratum where all that Mortal John dreams is possible:

Astral Joan: I hear that you're a dreamer and not the only one.

Join us here in heaven where all souls can be as one.

Mortal John: I can't imagine heaven no matter how I try.

And way up above me I'm sure there's only sky.

Astral Joan: Then, what do you imagine? Please tell me if you can.

I'm an amorphous spirit, I need to hear from mortal man.

Mortal John: I can imagine no more nations, it isn't hard to do,

No reason to be soldiers, and no religions too.

Astral Joan: You have some neat ideas, so go on, please don't cease.

Mortal John: I also dream that people can all live their lives in peace.

Astral Joan: Can you imagine no possessions, a brotherhood of man?

Mortal John: Where everyone shares everything, yes indeed, I can!

Astral Joan: You have a keen imagination, I'll tell you what it's worth.

What you dream is found in Erehwon, not upon your Earth.

Mortal John: I'd love to hear much more about your Astral plane,

Please tell me more about it and what there is to gain.

Astral Joan: Imagine no more working, sweat dripping off your brow,

No need to earn a living, not even learning how,

Imagine souls rejoicing, doing as they please.

Imagine no more pain or fear, it isn't hard to do

But give up your ego, all mortal pleasures too.

Imagine being radiant, sublimely at your ease.

Just remain a dreamer, know you're not the only one,

If you wish to join us, just claim your soul dear one.

Mortal John: I don't want possessions, no thing to own or crave,

I don't need a body that enthrals me like a slave,

I want to be with other souls, share everything I have.

I know I am a dreamer, and not the only one,

I want to be an Astral basking in a spiritual sun!

Astral Joan: You are welcome, John, to join us,  
But you first must pay your dues.  
Build your dreams while you are living,  
Then, bring here what you choose.  
Elaborate your paradise with your imagination,  
There is ample opportunity to improve on your creation.

We long for the communal association enjoyed in the spiritual consciousness superstratum were all is shared. When we emerge into the material world we lose that and gain something. We gain individuality and our primary possession - our corporeal bodies. Then, we strive to protect and enhance that possession and are selective about sharing it and reluctant to part with it. We luxuriate in it and all that the martial world provides. We demand and acquire more possessions and attempt to exploit and at times to enslave others. This leads to conflicts that we sometimes succeed in resolving by self-discipline and mutual governance. But it is never the same as in that spiritual realm where there is no need for profane individuality nor the material monomania that go with it.

## **Spirit World Exploration**

I have surveyed the literature on the near-death experience (NDE), the out-of-body-experience (OBE), and lucid dreams. I choose to accept the documented accounts of them on their face value because they ring true and because they corroborate one another. I classify accounts of these experiences as revelatory evidence of a higher consciousness and an alternate reality. I refuse to dismiss ebulliently earnest accounts of NDE and OBE recollections reported and corroborated by a growing community. I hold to the corollary notion that these experiences provide insight - perhaps a guide towards preparation for paradise - in a transcendental spiritual mesostratum existence beyond incarnate material life [2]. I imagine that purposeful living here on Earth helps build resources and faculties that benefit one upon ascending to that ultimate realm. It pays to imaginatively exercise initiatives and pursue prerogatives to conceptually and concretely construct on earth things worthy of the ultimate paradisaal realm.

Psychiatrist Carl Jung, who himself had a profound NDE when he was nearly seventy years old, was an ardent proponent of exploring the spirit world. In his celebrated memoir, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, he exhorts his readers as follows: "A man should be able to say he has done his best to form a conception of life after death, or to create some image of it - even if he must confess his failure. Not to have done so is a vital loss." I am reminded of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's question,

*What if you slept, and what if in your sleep you dreamed,  
and what if in your dream you went to heaven  
and there plucked a strange and beautiful flower,  
and what if when you awoke you had the flower in your hand?  
Ah, what then?*

Neither I nor to my knowledge anyone else has plucked and returned from a spiritual journey or lucid dream clutching a beautiful flower. The ethereal reality of that journey, albeit intensely experienced, is merely a memory recalled, perhaps embroidered by embellishments and expectations. Even the corroborative testimony by another who can claim being a companion traveler is subject to skepticism. These testimonies rest solely on the word of the person who claims to have had or shared such experiences. Lacking experimental corroboration, these reports must remain inconclusive from a scientific point of view. Let us just say, then, that the spirit world has been communally dreamed into existence and is an artifact of a collective consciousness. After all, we are speaking of exploring alternate realities in a supernal domain.

## **Noble Savages and Reptilians**

Jacob Needleman in his exploration "*What Is God?*" invokes the notion of a metaphorical awakening to the presence of ". . . the invisible mountain around which light curves so that the mountain is invisible and untouchable - until . . . the mountain chooses to touch us, to draw us toward itself only because we wish to find it . . ." In his journey from atheistic 'godlessness' to 'experiencing God' Needleman awoke by directing his attention inwards. Needleman cautiously asserts that, "we are on the verge of saying, knowing, the shocking truth that God needs not just man, but awakened man, in order to act as God. Without this conscious energy on the earth it may

not be possible for divine justice, mercy, or compassion to enter the lives of human beings.” It seems clear from this view that awakening means emerging from a ‘sleepwalking’ self-centered state and engaging oneself with the supernal consciousness that resides within each human being.

Can a paradise be realized on the Earth? Was it ever realized? Jean-Jacques Rousseau, philosopher of the Enlightenment whose political ideas influenced the French Revolution, saw a fundamental divide between society and human nature. Rousseau contended that man was good by nature, when in the state of nature - the state of all other animals - the condition humankind was in before the onset of civilization and society. But, Rousseau’s *noble savage* is corrupted by society. Terms such as ‘justice’ or ‘wickedness’ are inapplicable to the pre-political societal noble savage as Rousseau understood it. Noble savages may act with all of the ferocity of an animal, but they, by Rousseau’s definition, are good because they are self-sufficient and thus not subject to the mores and politics of society. He viewed society as artificial and held that the development of society, especially the growth of social *interdependence*, has been inimical to noble savages.

Rousseau’s got it half right - the second half, with respect to social interdependence and social interactions involving domination and control of the many by the few. These ‘few’ are those who through cults, cliques or religious, political, business and similar institutions exercise their individual *will to power* by dominating their peers. Eventually, each of these ‘few’ gather about themselves a group that they transform from peers to subordinates from whom they demand subservience. These ‘few’ are the ego-driven, god-pretenders whom I call the *reptilians* because at their core they behave with self-centered, instinct-driven ferocity. They are genetically programmed to survive and to satisfy all base instincts without regard to morality or justice. When Rousseau said ‘man was good by nature’ he was, perhaps, referring to remnant naive people who, though large in number, easily and usually through blind trust fall prey to the reptilians.

When I say reptilians I do not mean creatures with alligator scales or slitted irises instead of round

pupils. Nor do I mean aliens masquerading as humans that stealthily prepare to take over the world and enslave or devour humans. I'm referring instead to a humanoid bio-mechanism that survives and thrives on earth - an automaton bent on self-gratification in the human world.

Rousseau apparently refused to recognize that - with the exception of hermits, loners and ascetics - people naturally tend to huddle and congregate and form social groups. The Amish people are modern examples although I imagine there are some mellow reptilians among them too. Rousseau was obviously right when he observed that as people organize groups there will be fragmentation, corruption and cruelty. Even when non-reptilian individuals assume power to maintain social order, the power can corrupt them. Consider the eagerness with which reptilians will grasp power and wield it exclusively for their own personal benefit. We are now speaking of what can be observed in contemporary civilized society. We can readily observe the will to power exercised by a 'religious' priesthood, self-empowered tyrants, socialist dictators, and all too often by career 'politicians' who's prime ambition is to perpetuate their hold on their subjects, power and wealth.

Rousseau's thesis about the corrupting powers of society become evident when one considers that forming an institution to solidify some 'great cause' immediately plants and nourishes the seeds of its own corruption. Societal institutions become hierarchical in order to function and thereby create convenient niches for parasitic bureaucrats and opportunistic tyrants. With institutions come specialization that allows even the most mediocre specialists to fit symbiotically into the societal organism.

## **Revoluting Masses**

Spanish essayist and philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, in *The Revolt of the Masses*, explains the consequences of burgeoning populations of automatons aggregating and becoming elements of a societal body. They comprise the societal 'masses' that Ortega y Gasset describes. Ortega y Gasset' disconsolately extrapolates the notion of a mass entity that mindlessly transcends just simply following a pattern of survival and replication: "The mass crushes beneath it everything that is different, everything that is excellent, individual, qualified and select. Anybody who is not like everybody, who does not think like everybody, runs the risk of being eliminated." - it is the



history of the Roman Empire, the Soviet Union and Islam.

Ortega y Gasset observes, “The most radical division that it is possible to make of humanity is that which splits it into two classes of creatures . . . those who make great demands on themselves, piling up difficulties and duties; and those who demand nothing special of themselves, but for whom to live is to be every moment what they already are, without imposing on themselves any effort towards perfection.” He then asserts that the mass-persona of today has two fundamental traits: “the free expansion of his vital desires, and therefore, of his personality; and his radical ingratitude towards all that has made possible the ease of his existence.”

Because of specialization and compartmentalization, even the sciences, according to Ortega y Gasset, “. . . progressed thanks in great part to the work of men astoundingly mediocre, and even less than mediocre. That is to say, modern science, the root and symbol of our actual civilization, finds a place for the intellectually commonplace man and allows him to work therein with success. . . . Previously, men could be divided simply into the learned and the ignorant, those more or less the one, and those more or less the other. But your specialist cannot be brought in under either of these two categories. He is not learned, for he is formally ignorant of all that does not enter into his specialty...”

### **Bertrand Russell Paradise**

Bertrand Russell advocated social engineering and epigenetics to evolve a utopian paradise. Russell reviews the prevailing human condition and outlook in his 1923 book *A Free Man's Worship*:

That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought or feeling, can preserve a life beyond the grave; that all the labors of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system; and the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins . . . all

these things, if not quite beyond dispute . . . are yet so nearly certain that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation be safely built.

In his 1952 book *The Impact of Science on Society* Bertrand Russell reviews a variety of methods that have been and could be used to reduce the burgeoning population of the world to a more manageable size - and effectively overcome the 'revolting masses'. He proposes the concept of a managed population size and a managed society through the practice of eugenics. To be more precise, the practice of dysgenics for the commoners and eugenics for the aristocracy. Commoners will be bred to create a 'submissive and docile disposition' while the aristocracy will be bred for much different qualities.

If there is not to be an endless succession of wars, population will have to become stationary throughout the world, and this will probably have to be done, in many countries, as a result of governmental measures. This will require an extension of scientific technique into very intimate matters. . . Sires will be chosen for various qualities, some for muscle others for brains. All will have to be healthy, and unless they are to be the fathers of oligarchies they will have to be of a submissive and docile disposition. Children will, as in Plato's Republic, be taken from their mothers and reared by professional nurses. Gradually, by selective breeding the congenital differences between rulers and ruled will increase until they become almost different species. A revolt of the plebs would become as unthinkable as an organized insurrection of sheep against the practice of eating mutton.

Thus, would emerge a Bertrand Russell utopian paradise from the ancient ash heap.

Various amateur versions of the Bertrand's paradisaical plan have been tried before in hierarchical societies -typically resulting in insufferable inbred royalties, sub-sophisticated aristocrats, bumbling bureaucrats, and dictatorial arrogant tyrants. Of course, the advantage of dictatorial societal management and culling of commoners is that, when things go sour and millions die, dictators like Mao Tse Tung and Josef Stalin need not explain or apologize. The disadvantage is

that the natural emergence and success of a 'John Galt' as described by Ayn Rand in *Atlas Shrugged* is suppressed. John Galt serves as an individualist counterpoint to the collectivist social and economic structure depicted in *Atlas Shrugged*, in which a utopian society is based on oppressive bureaucratic functionaries and a culture that embraces mediocrity in the name of egalitarianism.

## **Infrastructure of Paradise**

A worldly paradise needs infrastructure, virtually any infrastructure will suffice: a village or city, a room full of friends, a meadow, a forest, a wilderness - or sailing a yacht on a sea or living in a castle on a hill. But, one person's paradise may well be another's entrapment, one's utopia may be another's hell on earth, one's prized colleagues may be another's antagonists. Paradise needs not only to be imagined and created, but needs to be implemented and maintained. This depends on the intellectual ingenuity of an individual not only to savor and appreciate it but to share it. Persian mathematician, philosopher, poet Omar Khayyam wrote,

*A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,  
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread - and Thou  
Beside me singing in the Wilderness -  
O, Wilderness were Paradise enow!*

A modern earthly paradise without appliances and conveniences would be unacceptable as would be one without personal services and servants. Indeed, servants, which Socrates in Ancient Greece declared would eventually be made obsolete by machines. A modern paradise without music, cell phones, computers, and the internet would be unthinkable. I can imagine a pocket paradise with all these combined in a splendid palace with heating, air conditioning, elevators and many high tech amenities. But, as depicted in Figure 1, the pocket paradise may be paralleled, and usually is, by pockets of discontent, depravation, and suffering.



Figure 1 - Higher Consciousness endeavors to Imagine Paradise in the Real World.

Instead, most desirable of all would be the evolution of orderly and peaceful societies - egalitarian, perhaps self-contained and insulated. In his time, Confucius was concerned with an individual's pragmatic interactions within an orderly societal infrastructure which he considered needed to establish the basis toward a utopian society. Confucius saw that an orderly society was needed so that an individual being might perfect its relation with its soul - as an antecedent to realizing a paradise. For Confucius human *societal intercourse* is the most vital aspect of the soul's physical life, its supporting mortal interpersonal infrastructure, "The superior man does not neglect his neighbors." Acknowledging that we encounter good and bad, Confucius says, "Have no friend who is not your equal," and declares: "The superior man honors the worthy and tolerates all men. . . ." - these are indispensable obvious hallmarks of a worldly paradise as conceived by Confucius.

In agreement with Confucius' ancient teaching, Albert Schweitzer in *Reverence For Life* vehemently rejected the notion that ". . . the only sensible line of conduct for a man is to withdraw entirely into himself and to concern himself solely with the deepening of his inner life . . . He has nothing to do with what may become of human society and of mankind. The deepening of one's inner life, as Indian thought interprets it, means that a man surrenders himself to the thought of 'no more will to live,' and by abstention from action and by every sort of life denial reduces his earthly existence to a condition of being which has no content, beyond a waiting for the cessation of

being.” Schweitzer abhors being without content. Being alone in paradise is no paradise, but being with others and sharing requires the achievement of ‘inner peace’ - which should be understood as spiritual peace which in turn assures social harmony and a peaceful worldly paradise - arguably, to be accomplished by combining some form of system dynamics with societal and self -management [3].

## Conclusion

Ultimately, paradise is realized individually but is meaningless unshared. Creation of a utopian paradise on the Earth is worth pursuing but its realization is invariably stymied by human nature, by reptilian tyrants, by mindless revolting masses, by bureaucratic social engineers. The best course seems to be preparation for a transcendent paradise by the achievement of inner peace through identification with and sharing one’s higher consciousness in a spiritual realm [4]. Nevertheless, a growing worldwide movement is demonstrating some progress toward what might be cautiously deemed the realization of expanded pockets of earthly paradise. It is not entirely unrealistic to imagine the global coalescence of these into a world of peace.

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