

Alton Hinson

Professor Vavra

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"Looking Backward" and All Around for Alternatives

"Looking Backward" by Edward Bellamy presents a utopian like society that isn't fully perfect. Dr. Leete within the novel modestly tells readers and Julian that the new society isn't perfect and is prone to change. In the following sections, alternatives for Bellamy's society will be presented to solve the problem of punishment. With this idea an accurate theme could be that "there is always a better way of doing something."

A problem arises in chapter nineteen with Bellamy's society that is extremely important to how his society functions. Chapter nineteen focuses solely on the prison system and how it has changed over the time. The problem is that all cases of crimes cannot possibly be handled as illnesses. This is both inefficient and unfair to victims. In "Imperfect Men in Perfect Societies: Human Nature in Utopia", Gorman Beauchamp comments on Bellamy's society on the grounds that their prison system is no different from the puritans by being completely uncooperative within man (290). This means that the system is bullheaded on the grounds that someone cannot see that sometimes problems cannot be solved by trying to remake someone to function within society when they may truly not wish to. Why would we send a serial killer to a hospital and release him or her just like that? There is a need for change or alteration in the disciplinary system in his society.

Variations that could serve as an alternative would be a pay reduction, paying a fine or the minimum for survival. As an alternative, a pay reduction, which would be associated with a

medium offense crime, would discourage crime, and wrong doing. Their share of the income that was reduced could be used for other things like education and healthcare. The next alternative which would be used for lowest offenses, paying a fine could not only hinder crime but also create jobs to manage and enforce these fines. Any profit made from this could also be used for education and healthcare. Finally, the minimum for survival refers to having to work but instead of receiving any income offenders would receive the bread and water that Dr. Leete refers to. This alternative would be used on highest level of crimes.

These variations of the pay reduction that would work in Bellamy's society because of a quote from Dr. Leete and moral justification. Dr. Leete says that you can still survive on even half the income, would mean that even having to pay a fine or a pay reduction wouldn't be too cruel or financially fatal; Dr. Leete himself also survives on less than the standard income. Finally, for moral justification, according to Angelo Corlett, "There is, in this view, no moral justification for the punishment of collectives since they lack sufficient freedom in a capitalist society" (208). This means that the lack of moral justification prohibits freedom but in this case the moral would be justified by those who judge crimes in Bellamy's society, to not prohibit freedom.

As for reinstating prisons, not having prisons could prove to be more trouble than benefit. The prison system would be tricky to implement in Bellamy's society because it tries to focus on freedom and equality. Also, in Bellamy's society much of the laws and regulations have changed, and some crimes have become obsolete. In this alternative, crime would be judged and given ranks or grades similar to the grading system already within Bellamy's society. The lowest grade can result in little or no time in prison that could be followed up with a follow up program much like that for atavism. Middle graded offenses would be sentenced to minimum time in prison

with a follow up program. Finally, the highest grade would receive a high sentence with a follow up program. These grades would not only discourage crimes but, also help prevent future ones to reoccur.

Reinstating prisons would work in Bellamy's society because of fairness and moral justification. Fairness refers to the system in which crimes are judged and is for both the criminal and victim. The system would be fair because neither judge would be biased and the victim can feel a bit of relief. Then for moral justification, similarly to pay reductions, this pertains to retaining freedom. In this system the grades would solve the problem of life sentences which would hinder the idea of freedom which is the main idea of Bellamy's society.

The theme, there is always a better way of doing something, suggests that even though something may seem flawless there is always something better, much like the grass is always greener on the other side. The alternatives presented aren't perfect, but would meet the desired effect and could always change. But, in both cases much like Bellamy's society could change to be made even better.

Outline

I. Introduction and Thesis: "There is always a better way of doing something."

II. Problem of disciplinary system

III. Pay Reduction Alternative

A. Variations of Pay Reduction

B. Reasoning

IV. Prison Reform Alternative

A. Prison/Law System

B. Reasoning

V. Conclusion

Work Cited

Beauchamp, Gorman. "IMPERFECT MEN IN PERFECT SOCIETIES: HUMAN NATURE IN UTOPIA." *Philosophy and Literature* 31.2 (2007): 280-93. ProQuest. Web. 15 Apr. 2014.

Corlett, Angelo J. "Collective Punishment and Public Policy." *Journal of Business Ethics* 11.3 (1992): 207-216. JSTOR. Web. 14 Apr. 2014.