



On the Way to
UTOPIA

**A small book
about our big problems**

Henning Jon Grini

On the Way to Utopia

By Henning Jon Grini

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Short Introduction to the mini-book

This book draws some historical lines as a contrast to today's challenges and problems. At the same time, it provides deeper insight into the causes of the challenges we face today, which we need to understand in order to move forward as a society. Most importantly, it offers a roadmap for how we can solve our problems, and the potential we humans have to transform society toward a world we would today call Utopia.

The opposite of selfishness is empathy.

More selfishness will destroy the world, while more empathy will save it.

- Henning Jon Grini

What is meant by Utopia, and is such a society realistic?

Utopia is the opposite of dystopia, which describes a nightmarish society. One of the reasons why dystopian books, movies, and series are so popular is the excitement and drama they portray. The genre also serves as a warning of what can happen if we do not change course as a society.

The unfortunate aspect of dystopian portrayals is that they draw attention toward negativity. What we focus on gets amplified. How we imagine the future helps shape it. There are far fewer portrayals of utopian visions, but there should be more. This mini-book is a small contribution to reversing that trend.

Some interpret utopia as something unrealistic. It's worth noting that people from the past would likely view the present as utopian, at least if they saw the best of what we have to offer.

However, we still have a long way to go to create a peaceful and prosperous society for all. The Utopia we long for today will, in the not-too-distant future, become a reality. This book is about the journey toward that future.

The present in a historical context

In Norway, people live like lords and ladies compared to the past. Historically, humanity has seemingly never had it as good as now, at least in the Nordic region and many other parts of the world. But only a few hundred years ago, running water and showers were almost non-existent. In tenement buildings, warnings were called out before people threw their waste onto the street below. Hygiene was poor, epidemics and diseases were rampant, and life expectancy was short. Unfortunately, today there are still vast numbers of people living in similarly miserable conditions, especially in developing countries, while the wealthy parts of the world struggle with issues like obesity, loneliness, and depression.

Things were, however, worse in the past. A few hundred years ago, there were far more wars, with all the suffering they caused. Many fortifications were built, sometimes surrounding entire cities. Castles were often constructed on mountain tops to be as impregnable as possible. On the other hand, there are now an alarming number of highly destructive weapons, such as nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction. Currently, a large-scale war is taking place in Europe, with Russia invading Ukraine. Additionally, the Israel-Palestine conflict reignited in the fall of 2023 and in the fall of 2024, Israel attacked Lebanon.

Most people used to live in villages in the past. People were not very informed. They knew little about what was happening in the big world outside. And when something did happen, it took a long time for the news to spread. Few had access to newspapers and books, and they were reserved for the wealthy and educated. Today, we have the Internet and mobile phones, and we can receive information from all over the world in an instant. The downside is all the misinformation, fake news, conspiracies, advertisements, brainless and meaningless programs, and the misuse of artificial intelligence. Additionally, social media takes up a lot of quality time from people, especially children and young people.

At the beginning of the 1800s, the world's population was around 1 billion. Now we are over 8 billion. Our impact on the planet is enormous. Climate change was not something people knew about before, and it is only in recent times that we have understood that human pollution is heating up the planet. This is a new problem of epic proportions that will only increase in the coming years. In the summer of 2022, drought was experienced on three continents simultaneously. North America, Europe, and China experienced a drought unlike anything seen in the past 500 years. In Pakistan, there was a flood that submerged one-third of the country. The year 2023 was the hottest year ever recorded globally, and many climate scientists believe that a 1.5-degree increase in global temperature since pre-industrial times is approaching dangerously fast. Our warming of the planet is causing serious climate changes, leading to uninhabitable areas and a wave of climate refugees as a consequence. We need a massive shift towards an eco-friendly and fossil-free world, and quickly.

Dark clouds

Today, we have tools that make life much easier. We have washing machines, dishwashers, excavators, electric shavers, and many other machines that free us from physical labor. In addition, we have robots that relieve us from much routine work, especially in industry. We also have computers that free up a lot of mental capacity, and artificial intelligence is rapidly making its way into society, bringing both advantages and disadvantages.

The paradox is that, despite all this, we haven't gained much more free time to live our lives, nor have we become much happier. Many people work long hours, and far too many are dissatisfied with their jobs, which can lead to stress, burnout, health problems, and depression, especially if the work feels meaningless.

There are other dark clouds looming. The enormous gap between the rich and the poor leads to absurd outcomes where the richest wallow in luxury, while the poorest barely have food on the table or a roof over their heads. This inequality gap is growing in many places, which contributes to the rise of populist leaders, fueled by frustration and anger over a cold system that also fails to provide equal opportunities for everyone. This results in far too many people being left behind in many ways. This is also one of the main reasons why democracy is under pressure in several parts of the world.

At the same time, there are other challenges, such as the destructive pursuit of profit, which leads to the exploitation of nature, animals, and people. We also have outdated religious dogmas that create significant problems for many, for instance, women in Afghanistan who are denied education or children who have been burdened with feelings of sin and shame that they struggle with in adulthood.

The problems in the world today are complex, and there is no quick fix. Even the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which aim to eradicate poverty, combat inequality, and stop climate change by 2030, seem far from being achieved within the timeframe. On the contrary, it seems that we are heading toward some very challenging years ahead, precisely because we are not making the necessary systemic changes. This is causing many societal structures to collapse.

The pursuit of profit creates personal and global crises

The pursuit of profit is a result of short-term thinking. This constant craving for more profit is the cause of numerous personal crises and global challenges that threaten humanity.

When the pursuit of profit becomes the primary measure for individuals, businesses, and societies, we all lose. We end up with more poor and homeless people. Society becomes more cynical and colder. We experience more worries, lifestyle diseases, and depression. Not only that, but we also get more frustrated and angry individuals, which creates fertile ground for dangerous populists like Donald Trump.

In many ways, one could say that selfishness is at play here. When self-interest overrides the common good, society deteriorates. People care less about their fellow human beings. A clear example of this is in the USA, where parts of the country resemble developing nations. The opposite of selfishness is empathy. More selfishness will destroy the world, while more empathy will save it.

If we look at businesses, their pursuit of profit has enormous negative consequences for humanity. When multinational companies outsource their factories to low-cost countries, it's because they can then get the cheapest possible labor. We call this modern slavery, where workers are underpaid with barely any rights. This is cynical treatment of people.

Mass quantities of low-quality consumer goods are produced, which are discarded after a short period of use. Many of these products, like light bulbs, are deliberately designed to not last long. Additionally, we are cutting off the branch we are sitting on with our pollution and destruction of nature and biodiversity.

The media's pursuit of profit results in too much focus on gossip, murder, conflicts, and sensationalism. The chase for viewers and clicks (profit) has gone too far. This creates a skewed view of the world and increases polarization.

It's clear that fundamental changes are needed. A paradigm shift is required, especially concerning our thoughts and attitudes that have created the predicament we are in. We must create a new foundation that thinks long-term, respects all life, and prioritizes humans and the planet.

Humanity has been ignorant

The world has reached its current dire state primarily due to our ignorance. We simply didn't know better before. Much of what we believed was wrong—we thought the Earth was flat, that women were worth less than men, or that smoking didn't affect our health.

At the same time, our arrogance, pride, and megalomania have led us into wars and other miseries. Additionally, religions have imposed much dysfunction on humanity, such as fear, shame, and the belief in hell.

It is the outdated mentality and attitudes of the past that have caught up with us and caused us great suffering, enormous climate changes, and other planetary and human challenges.

We are now living in the age of consequences because of this old-fashioned and outdated way of thinking. What we need is to deprogram this and adopt a new understanding of ourselves and the world we live in. We cannot live sustainably in a world that doesn't have a sustainable mentality.

Dumping plastic and toxic chemicals directly into rivers or the ocean, we now know, leads to poisoning of life, which eventually ends up in ourselves. Cutting down the rainforest is like destroying the lungs of the Earth, which in the end are our lungs, for we live in symbiosis with nature. Humans depend on the oxygen that trees produce, while trees depend on the carbon dioxide that we exhale.

Humanity would benefit from asking itself some introspective questions. Why are we cutting down the rainforest? Why do we wage wars? Why is there so much inequality? Why are we so cynical and greedy?

The real cause of the crises

The UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals are great, but they do not address the root causes. They say nothing about why these issues exist. They want less inequality, but then the question becomes: why is there inequality? They want gender equality, but why is there no equality? They want to eradicate hunger, but why are people still hungry today, and why haven't we eliminated it long ago?

The truth is, we need to dig deeper. Only when we tackle the causes of our problems can we address them so that they do not recur. What is the common denominator of all these problems? It is ourselves that we need to change. It is our consciousness that needs to evolve, and there is no avoiding this in the years to come.

The Gapminder Foundation is known for showing that we humans have outdated knowledge about the state of the world. We haven't really updated our understanding much since we were young. The same is true for our value system. It is old, outdated, and dysfunctional in too many cases. We need a new one that tells a different story. We need an update, much like an app on a smartphone.

We, and society as a whole, have been more or less indoctrinated by old thoughts and attitudes; this applies to all aspects of human life. Our value system, upon which society is built, is outdated.

New understanding and insights are necessary ingredients for change and development. We need a new perspective on ourselves and the world we live in. In other words, we need a new worldview, and a new value system will provide that.

What we humans believe in is what stands behind our values and thus our attitudes, morals and our behaviour. Very often, this is religiously influenced, and here lies the core of the problem. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Middle East, which is a melting pot of religions, where conflicts are currently ongoing. Most religions consist of very old texts written in a completely different time and with limited understanding than ours. This creates a dysfunctional society, and we need to free ourselves from it.

The new value system

Many people today have had enough of religions. This is understandable, considering all the terrible things that have been done in the name of religion, and which many religious people claim to be God's will. Thinking people also realize that something is wrong when God has been reduced to a vengeful being. It is obvious that humans have had a hand in shaping this. We have molded God in our image, not the other way around!

But it is possible to think outside the box. One can, for example, imagine something divine without involving religion. The problem with religions is all the dogmas and rules they bring. This can range from sin and shame to fear and hatred in the worst cases.

For those who are more scientifically or atheistically oriented, I have a small challenge here. I believe we can agree on the following: for something to exist, it must first be imagined. A mobile phone cannot just come into being on its own. I think we can all agree that the chance of that happening is zero. There has to be an intelligence behind it.

In my opinion, nature and the universe are too beautiful and grand, life is too ingenious and fantastic, and not least, humans and all other living things are too great a wonder for this to be a coincidence.

Additionally, there are things around us that we cannot see, from radio waves and Wi-Fi signals to protons, electrons, and neutrons. In other words, there is an enormous amount we cannot see with the naked eye. Not to mention feelings, which we also cannot see. There must be an unfathomable intelligence behind it all.

What could be interesting to investigate, and which may provide us with a new value system, are near-death experiences. In our modern times, many people have been declared dead, only to be revived by modern medical equipment. This has resulted in a flood of groundbreaking and incredible stories from those who experienced them. We are talking about millions of people worldwide.

If we use them as a guide, they tell quite a different story from what religions preach. What they tell us is that we are all eternal souls, and that hell does not exist, as it is a human construct used by religions to create fear and retain followers. Furthermore, they tell us that there is no death, that life continues for everyone, and that we have nothing to fear afterward. Quite the opposite: what awaits us when we finally say goodbye to this life is so beautiful and filled with love (it's not called heaven for nothing) that those who try to describe it cannot find words to adequately convey the magnificence of what they have experienced.

Those who have had profound near-death experiences can tell us that humans are much more connected to one another than we realize. In fact, so much so that there is essentially no separation. The separation we experience is, in reality, an illusion, but this is entirely intentional. To experience what unity and

love are, it cannot take place in a world where everything is unity and love, which is, after all, a description of heaven. One must go to a place where one experiences the opposite to understand what it is. Welcome to Earth!

Humanity is one big family; we are one with each other. This means that what you do to others, you also do to yourself, precisely because we are one. When this is understood and integrated, it will lead to a radical shift in attitude toward other people. I have spent a couple of years studying this phenomenon, and I discovered a fairly common question asked of those who had these experiences, which was: what have you done for your fellow humans?

What is also interesting is that many who have had these experiences do not differentiate between humans and what we call God, or everything else in nature or the cosmos, for that matter. This means that we are all aspects of God, or put another way, God experiences Himself through us. In other words, we are divine beings temporarily inhabiting a physical body.

Reincarnation is also a common understanding that many gain after such an experience. It becomes completely natural that life moves in cycles and that one has lived many lives. Many experience a feeling of peace, tranquillity, and completeness, and not least, the feeling of an absolute and unconditional love.

The new value system provides the basis for a paradigm shift

The value system described in the previous chapter is the foundation of consciousness that humanity needs to move toward a peaceful and empathetic world—or Utopia, if you will.

The well-known anthropologist Margaret Mead was once asked what she considered the beginning of a civilized society. Her answer was a bit unexpected. She explained that it was when someone helped another with a broken leg.

The question is, how civilized are we today? A civilized society should not have homeless people or individuals who freeze in their own homes because electricity has become too expensive. A civilized society should certainly not have people living in such poverty that they are at risk of starving in one of the world's richest countries.

Today, more than ever, it is important to help others—not out of obligation, but out of love for our fellow human beings. Because, in the ultimate reality, our

neighbor is essentially a part of ourselves. This understanding is what we need to integrate if we are to survive as a civilization in the future.

In many ways, we have drifted apart. Society has become more polarized. We are divided by what seem to be economic, political, and religious differences, as well as different races, genders and so forth.

But first and foremost, we are equal souls in a body. Just as we have vast numbers of cells in our bodies that, under optimal conditions, cooperate for our well-being, we are like cells in the great cosmic body that many call God. Why on earth should we then attack ourselves? In a human body it's called cancer, in the planetary body it's called war.

When this understanding is integrated, the differences will fall like dominoes. We are not separate from anyone or anything—not from our neighbor, nature, the cosmos, or the divine. We are not separate from the Earth we live on, which some call Mother Earth, while others refer to it as Gaia, seeing it as a self-regulating living system.

If we apply this new value system to our lives and decisions, our lives and those we touch will be enriched. When society does the same, the entire world will be enriched. We will realize that the old systems no longer work. This paves the way for a paradigm shift where new systems will render the old dysfunctional systems obsolete. Then Utopia will have become a reality.

Transformative solutions are needed to reach utopia

We cannot solve today's problems with the mentality of the past, or as Albert Einstein put it: "No problem can ever be solved on the same level of consciousness that created it."

Therefore, we need solutions based on a newer understanding and awareness than what we have had. We need something new to grasp if we are to let go of the old.

It is also much harder to fight against the old system and outdated solutions. It is far more effective to come up with solutions that render the old obsolete.

What is certain is that we cannot continue as before. It is no longer enough to patch up the old system. Significant fundamental changes are required in the

coming time if humanity is to survive. We need a paradigm shift. There is no other way.

I like to compare humanity to a caterpillar that turns into a butterfly. A caterpillar eats all it can, much like humanity has ravaged our planet, while a butterfly is both beautiful and gentle. Right now, I feel that we humans are in the cocoon, which is the birth stage before the caterpillar becomes a butterfly.

If we are to take care of the Earth so that we can all have a good life, we cannot simply focus on climate and the environment, for example. The recent wars have shown us this clearly. We must think holistically—that everything is interconnected. Therefore, all aspects of human life must be considered.

We humans are creatures of habit, and we might not be too fond of change, but now we need to accelerate the process of integrating good solutions. Many of these solutions are well known but are not yet widely implemented. Why aren't more people vegetarians when we know it's good for our health, the environment, and animals? Why don't we have more sharing culture and cooperation when we know it would make better use of our resources? Why haven't we introduced a guaranteed basic income when it would reduce bureaucracy and free individuals from many worries, and thus health problems? It would also unleash vast amounts of creativity and time that could be used more constructively. It is, in fact, a human right, and it should be self-evident that every person on this planet has their basic needs met. A guaranteed basic income would also solve several of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. The problem is that some solutions have met significant resistance, and we have not been ready for them, sufficiently informed, or mature enough.

We have already solved most problems somewhere in the world, though often on a smaller scale. What we need to do now is scale them up and make them known so that we can speed up development. We need to implement the best transformative solutions as quickly as possible. And they must be based on what works. In that case, it doesn't matter what political standpoint one has. It's difficult to argue against something that works.

What the world could benefit from now is establishing a dynamic and powerful *Global Solutions Center*. This is a proposed center for gathering and sharing solutions to our local, national, and global problems in all aspects of human life.

Even though things may seem dark at times and progress is slow, things can happen quickly once humanity picks up the pace. And if we succeed, a fantastic future awaits us. I have written a science fiction book called [Message from the future WE MADE IT!](#), which is also free. It provides a glimpse into such a possible future, which many today would describe as Utopia.

I am fundamentally optimistic about humanity. At our best, we are both creative, inventive, intelligent, and empathetic, and we can spread much warmth and love if we choose to.

A new world is emerging. It's not so easily visible, as it lies behind the scenes waiting, but it is our job to do what we can to bring it into the light and make it a reality.

We live on a jewel of a planet, and everything that lives on it should be treated as such—a fantastically beautiful jewel. And then there is no limit to what we can achieve and no limit to the joy and love we can express and experience.