While a Hegelian dialectic and even a Thoreauvian disobedience, a given historic utterance is the context that defines Miller and allows the Caulfield and the Yossarian within him to profess to students a new value for them to embrace. Miller was a small figure on the edge of a rye field knowing full well what was planted in that field. But he became an individual because of his deliberate consciousness that helped students see the fabric of the field and the reality of the edge.

Colapietro, similarly, is that Caulfield and that Yossarian who reminds us, through the Millers and the Potters of the fateful images of freedom of individuality between the authoritative field of society and at the nihilistic edge of what makes that field, that social structure, real. Individuality and life itself comes at this edge—the interface of some known world and the precipice of the unknown.

Thank you, Vincent, for preventing the precipitous loss of Miller within a modernity that prohibits uniqueness, or a post modernity that prohibits the fabric.

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The combination of pragmatism and utopia seems to have all the ingredients for a good oxymoron. The intimate connection between thought and action that is so central to pragmatism is wholly absent in the grand products of contemplation that characterize the classical utopists. Plato’s Republic, Moore’s Utopia, Campanella’s City of the Sun, Skinner’s Walden Two, and Le Corbusier’s City for Three Million all excel in abstract perfection, as do the dystopias of Orwell and Huxley. They are all arm-chair products. Pragmatists, in contrast, tend to focus on concrete real-life issues and how to resolve them practically.
In *The Task of Utopia*, McKenna shows that such a view is too restrictive. There are more ways to address our future in an utopian spirit than the detailed descriptions of presumed perfect societies. McKenna begins with a discussion of two quite different models: the end-state model (chapter 2) and the anarchist model (chapter 3). Utopian writers of the first type seek to create a future by developing a blueprint, which tends to make them totalitarian. Free initiative is allowed only where it serves the blueprint (and even then reluctantly). In addition, the fallibility of their designers quickly shows the end states unfeasible and dangerous even to be used as guides.

In McKenna’s view, anarchist models emerged largely in response to the criticisms of end-state utopias. Emphasizing individual autonomy and freedom, they radically reject the tenet to succumb all and everybody to a prefixed plan. In fact, defenders of the anarchist model say little if anything about what the end-state will be like. Instead, they focus on the conditions requisite to bring a perfect society into being. In McKenna’s view, anarchist models have at least two defects. First, they rely heavily on individual autonomy and freedom, putting high demands on the individual, but without a clear indication how these demands are to be met or whether meeting them is at all possible. Second, they require a revolution, generally violent in nature, which causes a radical break with the present and is supposed to put us immediately on the right track. The combination is deadly. Advocates of the anarchist model rely too much on an overly optimistic view of mankind, making their visionary schemes as unlikely as those of the end-state utopists and their call for a revolution irresponsible.

In the second part of her book McKenna develops a model that avoids these pitfalls. This third model, which she calls the process model, is based on a pragmatist perspective modified by feminist insights. In McKenna’s view, pragmatism can keep the utopian spirit alive by making it an ongoing task rather than prefixing the result in a blueprint or calling for a radical destruction of existing institutions. Mckenna’s process model, which is the subject of chapter 4, is centered around Dewey’s notions of democracy and community. In McKenna’s view, Dewey subscribed to the utopian premise that we should actively seek to make our future fit our desires. However,
in sharp contrast to the previous two models, the conditions of such futures are already contained in and limited by the present, and we should use creative intelligence to transform the present by making what is found possible actual. In Dewey’s view, gaining optimum control over our future requires a democratic society where people are fully engaged in the experience that constitutes their lives. Lived experience should inform us on what course to take, not bookish reveries on ideal societies or absolute freedom.

Lamenting the lack of integration and excessive individualism of contemporary society, Dewey envisioned a Great Community that would replace the fading institutions of family, village, and church. It is here that Dewey and McKenna part ways. Following in the footsteps of the feminist philosopher Iris Marion Young, McKenna rejects Dewey’s nostalgia for community life and his idea of a Great Community that comes out of it. Taking this route will most likely perpetuate the biases that so long shaped these communities. McKenna agrees with Young in arguing that the model should not be that of the village with its close-knit community, but that of the city where people can freely explore their uniqueness and still participate together, often through fluid, task-oriented alliances formed for very specific purposes. It would be a mistake, however, to reduce the pragmatist-feminist perspective to a call for further urbanization. However, the message is clear that when we examine the possibilities and limitations we are faced with today, city life has most promise for a better future. In an odd twist this brings the "task of utopia" back to the city planners (like Campanella or Le Corbusier), albeit that they should breathe a pragmatic rather than an a priori spirit. For one thing, it is quite evident that the city life aimed for is unlikely to emerge and flourish in the vinyl graveyards of American suburbia. Not all cities are signposts to a better future.

McKenna’s *The Task of Utopia* is on all counts an inspiring book that should be read widely. It should be read especially outside of philosophy and outside of academia. The book is easy to read and well suited for undergraduate classes. A nice feature is that McKenna, faithful to Dewey’s emphasis on lived experience, included discussion of several utopias by women science fiction
writers such as Ursula LeGuin, Sally Miller Gearhart, Sheri Tepper, and Marge Piercy.

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