

0.1 Chapter 1: capitalism: Utopia

0.2 Utopia

1 Utopian Celebrity Culture

Serious people are used to thinking badly of celebrity culture. This is deeply irresponsible. The impulse to admire and have heroes is an important part of human nature. Ignoring or condemning it won't kill it off; it simply forces it underground, where it lurks undeveloped, prone to latch on to inappropriate targets.



Rex

Human beings need role models. We therefore shouldn't complain about or eradicate celebrity culture. We need to improve it, bringing a better kind of person to the fore of public consciousness: we need better celebrities rather than no celebrities.

Alexander Lukashenko is an old-fashioned dictator of Belarus. He is often described as the last dictator in Europe. This doesn't mean that he doesn't care in a way about making his country a better place.

Recently, he has run a nationwide competition to find a new raft of celebrities.



Elena is very good at milking cows. On her best ever day, she pumped over 1,100 litres from the herd into the tanks. And recently her prowess has been recognised by the government of Belarus. She has been named officially the Best Milkmaid of the Slutsk region, which lies just south of the capital Minsk. Its like winning a major talent competition on TV in the West. Elena travelled to the capital to pick up an award from the President himself. Shes been in all the papers.



Sasha, too, has been honoured. He held the 2015 title of Best Welder of the Republic.

All countries, of course, stage competitions. We regularly award prizes for excellence at the long jump or in throwing darts at a board. These things are recreational, though, rather than focused on jobs or the ordinary activities of everyday life. In Belarus, the ambition is quite different. Elena and Sasha are national celebrities, the equivalent of hosts of television chat shows, supermodels and tycoons in other lands. They are seen as embodying ideals to which all should aspire.

Meanwhile, young couples are encouraged to revere the example set by two other prize winners: Natalya and Konan, who have been awarded the prize for Belaruss Best Couple in Love.



The public are requested to pay attention to how well they listen to each other, to admire their mutual trust and respect and to be touched (and inspired) by the delight they take in one another's company.

And, to come to another prize, prospective parents will be invited to look up to Olga, winner of The Best Mother of a Large family of the Smorgon region.



The awards handed out in Belarus are not ashamed to stress the virtues of very ordinary people. The winners become famous, but don't at all look the way we have come to think that famous people should. Most people in the UK or Germany don't look sufficiently smart or fashionable to be able to become famous. But Belarus has focused entirely on how good a person is at doing something basic and useful like bringing up a family, working in a dairy or helping make tractors. These are the country's only criteria of fame.



It is very unfortunate if we associate these kinds of awards which bestow celebrity status for excellence in ordinary things just with oppressive regimes.

In fact, the good idea behind such awards is universal. It belongs as much in fact, more so in liberal states.

The core point is that a lot of things we should care about, and need to take seriously, are not currently well treated by the media machine that creates celebrity culture. But that's no reason to despair of the idea of celebrity. We should take more seriously the task of creating good celebrities, good in the sense that one would be honouring people who demonstrate with particular clarity virtues that need to be more prominent in society. As part of this new venture to create **Better Celebrities**, one might for example set up prizes for:

The introvert who most successfully managed to communicate what he/she felt to their partner

The child who most generously forgave their parents

The worker who most intelligently defused infighting at the office

And, the biggest prize of all: **The Husband who best Learned to Control his Temper and Say Sorry.**