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**Cohort**: Francom

*In what follows, reflect on your learning and personal growth at this point in our course. Consider this week’s readings, multimedia sources, presentations, discussions, activities, etc. To your best ability attempt to integrate these experiences into our own developing understanding of the ‘Good Life’.*

To start, as always, a reflection on the reading: I went into Weiner’s chapter on India quite skeptical at first, especially considering how the country’s cultural and historical complexity is often reduced to flat stereotypes in Western culture. However, learning about Weiner’s history reporting in the country put me at ease, and I was additionally pleased by his decision to live in both an ashram and an artist’s retreat during his visit. I feel that these intentional circumstances helped elevate Weiner’s assessment of India to a level of analysis unrealized elsewhere in the book; whereas other chapters revolved entirely around Weiner getting his bearings and interviewing assorted residents, his prior experience with India allows him to take on more culturally specific + significant endeavors and question his relationship to the country more deeply.

Although I was unable to attend class for the first segment of this week’s programming, I find that I was quite fascinated by the focus on utopias and communes and wish I could have attended the first lecture covering the subject! I don’t love how the history of these organizations often leans into the absurdity or violence of the most infamous examples, but as a study of how and why we humans form societies, they are incomparably intriguing cases. Within our podcast listening, I was especially drawn by the distinction made between the ideas of a “cult” and a “commune”, and what it reveals about how the connotations of society can vary opinions on otherwise similar concepts.

I found it personally difficult to conceptualize my own ideas of a utopian society; perhaps I’m more of a follower in that respect? I enjoy taking on leadership roles in pre-existing structures, but I find the idea of reinventing the wheel of civilization more daunting than invigorating. I think there’s a lot of hubris involved in taking on that level of systematic responsibility, but I can empathize with the passion that leads people to do it. I’ve also observed that there tends to be a lot of unearned stigma directed towards members of these communities, present or former, for perceived naïvete or ignorance. Overall, though, I found this treatment of the subject to be very insightful both in looking at historical organizational patterns and the varied rhetorics behind creating each utopia.