Hythloday's Utopia and More's England: an Interpretation of Thomas More's Utopia

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THOMAS MORE'S *Utopia* is often considered to be a reflection on the conflict between the ancient (or medieval) and the modern worlds. If there is general consensus on *Utopia*'s central theme, noteworthy is the range of opinions concerning More's position in the controversy. Was he an "ancient" or conservative? A modern or socialist? Or was he joyously playing with both deficient and hence absurd positions?[1]

To address this question after so many scholarly studies have seemingly exhausted its possibilities requires justification.[2] This justification comes through our observation that no one has adequately read *The Utopia* as an independent and self-sufficient work,

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[1] The footnotes are integral parts of this study. Certain points are elaborated, and qualifications discussed essential to a proper understanding of the argument.

[2] H. Neumann, "On the Platonism of More's Utopia," *Social Research*, 33 (Winter 1966), 495-512; J.A. Gueguen, "Reading More's *Utopia* as a Criticism of Plato," in *Quincentennial Essays on St. Thomas More*, ed. M.J. Moore (Boone, North Carolina: Albion, 1978), 43-54; R.G. Stevens, "The New Republic in More's *Utopia*," *Political Science Quarterly*, 84 (September 1969), 387-411; C. Walsh, *From Utopia to Nightmare* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 22; R.W. Chambers, *Thomas More* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1935), 132-136; K. Katusky, *The Roots of More's Socialism*, trans. H.J. Stennis (London: A & C Black, 1927), 170; D.M. Bevington,

and as a philosophical dialogue, one of those comparatively rare theoretical works whose meaning is revealed when they are read as dramas. In our view, only by understanding the personal character of Rapheal Hythloday, the Utopian traveller, does Hythloday's utopian wisdom become clear.[3] If we follow this procedure, we can see that a correspondence is noticeable between Hythloday's personality, the political character of Utopia, and the character of modernity, tout court.

If such is the case, what does More think of Hythloday's character? If Hythloday is an intelligent and credible witness, we can assume that More is sympathetic to his political teaching. If, as indeed seems the case, Hythloday is not a credible witness, Utopia must be seen in an altogether different light.

Moreover, since the basis of Hythloday's utopian wisdom is a philosophical knowledge of the whole, the apparent "dramatic refutation" of Hythloday calls into question the very possibility of philosophy—especially the dogmatic philosophy he represents. In the absence of a philosophical knowledge of the whole, brought into question by the "refutation" of Hythloday, the dependence of political practice on political theory is broken. More apparently seeks to show that the medieval English polity he knew and loved could maintain the allegiance of even its philosophic citizens (once

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"The Dialogue in Utopia: Two Sides to the Question," in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Utopia*, ed. W. Nelson (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), 76; E. Barker, *The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle* (London: Methuen & Co., 1959), 527-528. For an opposing view see E. Surtz and J.H. Hexter, eds., *Utopia, The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, Vol. 4 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), xxiv (Quotations and page references from the *Utopia* and related works are from this edition.); P.A. Duhamel, "Medievalism of More's *Utopia*," in R.S. Sylvester and G.P. Marc'hadour, eds., *Essential Articles for the Study of Thomas More* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1977), 234.

[3] E.E. Reynolds, *Saint Thomas More* (London: William Brendon & Sons, 1953), 120; *idem*, *Sir Thomas More* (London: Longman's Green & Co., 1956), 12. "The First Book is a dialogue, and the Second a monologue or discourse by the fictional Hythlodaye; it is therefore as hazardous to deduce More's opinions from *Utopia* as it is to deduce those of Shakespeare from his plays." J. Steintrager, "Plato and More's *Utopia*," *Social Research*, 36 (Autumn 1969), 357-372; R.J. Schoeck, "A Nursery of Correct and Useful Institutions: On Reading More's *Utopia* as Dialogue," in Sylvester and Marc'hadour, 281-289; Shlomo Avineri, "War and Slavery in More's *Utopia*," *International Review of Social History*, VII (1962), pt. 2, 284-285. Bevington, 496-497. Gueguen, 49.

For a contrasting view see, E.M.G. Routh, *Sir Thomas More and his Friends* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), 68.

the limit of philosophy is made evident). *The Utopia* thus presents one of the best philosophical defenses of the existing theological/political horizon (based on an essentially skeptical Platonic perspective) in our literature. Of course, such a skeptical perspective challenges ancient, as well as modern, rationalism.

The logical starting point for our study would seem to be the greatest classical political dialogue, Plato's *Republic*. According to all the internal evidence in *The Utopia, The Republic* was More's conscious model and rival.

The Utopia and The Republic

The *Utopia* appears to be an imitation or "free adaptation of Plato's *Republic*." More's friend, Peter Giles, who played an intimate and probably instructed part in the original presentation of Utopia to an international audience said in a letter to Busleyden, "The other day, Thomas More, the greatest ornament of this age of ours, as you too can testify because of your intimate acquaintance with him sent me his *Island of Utopia*. It is known as yet to few mortals, but it is eminently worthy of everyone's knowledge as being superior to Plato's republic". (21) The justification for this claim is given in a poem by a certain Anemolius, Poet Laureate: "I (Utopia) am a rival of Plato's republic, perhaps even a victor over it. The reason is that what he has delineated in words I alone have exhibited in men and resources and laws of surpassing excellence." (21)[4]

Hythloday the narrator of Utopia is an admirer of Plato. From the greatest ancient philosopher he learned the two principles of his own life, political non-involvement and communism of property.

> Plato by a very fine comparison shows why philosophers are right in abstaining from administration of the commonwealth. They observe the people rushing out into the streets and being soaked by constant showers and cannot induce them to go indoors and escape the rain. They know that, if they go out, they can do no good but will only get wet with the rest . . . my dear More, to tell you candidly my heart's sentiments, it

[4] Eva Brann, " 'An Exquisite Platform': *Utopia*," *Interpretation*, Volume 3, Issue 1, 5. "The first Utopia is . . . a very 'witty invention' and subtle almost to the point of perversity." An example of the maddening detail is this: Anemolius, the apparent Poet Laureate of Utopia is reported to be Hythloday's nephew by his sister. This certainly does not fit with the understanding that Hythloday is a Portuguese expatriate and visitor to Utopia (21). It seems likely that the solitary creator of Utopia has peopled it with his forgotten family, suitably adorned and transformed by his imagination. Cf. Plato's *Euthyphro* for the fundamental parallel with Hythloday.

appears to me that wherever you have private property and all men treasure all things by cash values, there it is scarcely possible for a commonwealth to have justice or prosperity. (103)

Finally, Peter Giles completes the allusion comparing Hythloday to Plato himself. (49)

The extraordinary Hythloday certainly appears worthy of the praise implicit in such a comparison. At an early age, he says, he prepared himself for his life's journey by distributing his earthly goods to his family and friends. Since then he has roamed the world in search of wisdom, having sailed on three of Amerigo Vespucci's four voyages. On the last voyage, Rapheal Hythloday did not return, but went on to make discoveries far surpassing those of his famous captain. (21)[5] Such great success could not have been achieved, Rapheal believes, were it not for his conscious separation from all erotic attachments and parochial opinions standing between himself and "selfless pursuit" of knowledge.

Plato, in addition to teaching communism of property, was also the teacher of the supremacy of self-knowledge. One rightly expects that Rapheal's utopian wisdom will be founded, as it was for Plato, on a comprehensive insight into the relation of individual happiness to political justice. However, this expectation will not be fulfilled; More's utopian irony is complete. As shall be discussed more fully, Hythloday's "selfless pursuit" of knowledge is itself an expression of passionate desires wholly unknown to himself. The consequence of Hythloday's self-ignorance is a "wisdom" simultaneously impersonal and idiosyncratic.

Of course, if such proves to be the case, the problem will not be confined to Hythloday. Rapheal is the only person in the dialogue who has seen, professes to understand, and seeks to teach about the Utopians. In every sense, Utopia is *his* country. Following both Rapheal's and More's model, Plato's *Republic*, Rapheal is the Utopia "writ small," and conversely, the *Utopia* is Rapheal "writ large." The small features of his soul can be seen in the great institutions of Utopia. (*Republic*, 368ff, 548d) *The Utopia*, then, is not a philosophic treatise in which More speaks through the character of Hythloday; it is the best commonwealth conceived by someone like Hythloday.[6]

[5] As More knew, Vespucci's fourth voyage was probably fictional.

[6] More says Rapheal appeared to him like a ship's captain (49). The contemporary image of exploration is combined with the traditional Platonic image of ruling.

Is Hythloday a beast or a god? More indicates that he is not a genuine philosopher

More and Hythloday

The First Book of *Utopia* begins as follows: "The Best State of a Commonwealth, the Discourse of the Extraordinary Character, Rapheal Hythlodaeus, as Reported by the Renowned figure, Thomas More, Citizen and Sheriff of the Famous City of Great Britain, London." (47)

A key to the principle characters Hythloday and More is provided. Hythloday is the first figure, the spokesman of Utopia, otherwise he is unknown, identified only as an "Extraordinary Character." Hythloday has no political place; he is the transpolitical teacher of new Utopian modes and orders. In the dialogue in the garden at Burges, he is an exotic, "blown in," and following ancient wisdom; a man without a country is either a beast or a god. Which is Hythloday? The dialogue poses this question as a way of permitting us to judge the worth of this extraordinary man's Utopian Commonwealth.[7]

Thomas More, on the other hand, is realistically described as a "Citizen and Sheriff of the Famous City of Great Britain, London," and in contrast to Hythloday's anonymity, More is "Renowned." As a Sheriff, one sworn to uphold the laws—while pointing to his own Renown—More evinces a profound respect for the laws and opinions of his fellow citizens. In this way he fixes his "own" character in a clearly political context.

A more complete contrast between the two characters, Hythloday and More, could not be given in fewer words. The former is theoretical, innovative, universal, and impersonal. More is practical, traditional, and loyal to his family and friends, his England. (49, 50)

The contrast between the two is sufficiently great to suggest that they present different sides of the same soul. The persona More's political particularism represents More's profound attachment to the English regime, to his own, while Hythloday articulates that pursuit of new, general political principles characteristic of More's

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or "a god." Does he possess some of the characteristics of a beast? We see that Hythloday cannot moderate his opinions and passions in consideration for others, as one must naturally do in a community.

[7] More suggests that the names of Utopian things—beginning with Utopia itself (nowhere)—are too absurd to be literary inventions (251). Whatever one thinks of this observation, "Hythloday" means purveyor of nonsense or, more graphically, garbage.

theoretical aspirations. The *Utopia* is the work of More's imagination in the sense that he has constructed a "perfect society" from Hythloday's point of view: the point of view of someone animated by a sense of anger and resentment at the imperfect justice of current regimes, who follows a modern, theoretical approach to political justice.[8]

In the dialogue proper, Rapheal describes himself as a private man enjoying the pleasant pursuit of wisdom. As has been seen, he learned from Plato to avoid the brilliance of public life because the ignorance and vanity found there would surely cause all his efforts to promote justice to be both painful and futile. However, Hythloday is not dogmatic in the application of Plato's "apolitical principle." Book I is a recounting of Hythloday's advice to "John Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury, Cardinal, and at the time Chancellor of England." Indeed, *The Utopia* as a whole is Hythloday's advising or teaching More, the Sheriff of London and the representative of Henry VIII. Moreover, Hythloday is not simply a teacher of politics, he is a "philosophical" ruler masquerading as a teacher. He seeks first of all recognition of his superiority, especially honor, not the good of others, or the truth. More confirms this view of Rapheal in the following way. After Hythloday had stopped speaking, More thought of questioning him about his view of Utopia, beginning a dialectical conversation where only a narrative or epideictic had been.

> I knew, however, that he was wearied with his tale, and I was not quite certain that *he could brook any opposition to his views* particularly when I recalled his censure of others on account of their fear that they might not appear to be wise enough, unless they found some fault to criticize in other men's discoveries. I therefore praised their way of life and his speech and, taking him by the hand, led him into supper." (245; see 241, 243) (Emphasis supplied.)

Hythloday is the founder of a city Eva Brann has said is without philosophy. The absence of philosophy in Utopia is due to Hythloday's totally unphilosophical temper. As we see here, he cannot argue dialectically for he is self-certain. Since he has seen Utopia, a critical discussion of its merits would, in his opinion, result from a wish by the others to enhance their reputation for wisdom at his ex-

[8] Neumann, 496, note 3. In my view, the persona More, the Sheriff of London, represents More's most publicly defensible opinions. It would seem that the persona More stands nearer to, if he is not identical with, the author More in the most essential respects. But see infra, note 13.

pense. His inability to question his own opinions begins with his attempt to liberate himself from the influence of his homeland, family, friends, and property—all of those particular things of the "political cave" which essentially form human character—by "transcending" them. Hythloday is unphilosophic; he operates on the level of opinion, which seems wisdom itself to him.[9]

Although Rapheal is wrong in believing himself unpolitical, he is manifestly right in believing that his political activity would be fruitless. Rapheal's conversation with Morton and his company reveals the opposite of why he thought folly accompanies the attempt to counsel rulers. Morton appears prudent and just, Rapheal foolish and vain. Rapheal's proposed reform of English justice, based on the clear example of the Polylerites, ends in violence and injustice among the Cardinal's company. (75-85)

To compensate for his impolitic solitariness, Rapheal appeals to a higher ground than political power, that of new and just political principles. These principles are not the products of empty speech, but have been discovered in "reality" among the Polylerites, Macarians, Achorians, Alaopolitans, Nephelogates, Zapoletes, and, the Utopians themselves. But since Hythloday is the only one present who has seen these places and peoples, his wisdom must be considered a vision and he a visionary. His vision is different from that of ordinary visionaries. While it transcends the level of ordinary politics, it is not fundamentally about divine things, but the political salvation possible with the establishment of new modes and

[9] Brann, 24; Eric Voegelin, "More's *Utopia*," *Osterreichische Zeitschrift fur Offentliches Recht*, N.F. Vol. 3, N4, 455; Neumann, 497. L. Strauss, *City and Man* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1964), 89, 95, 100, 104-105. More compares Hythloday to an academic philosopher. (99) More's civil philosophy, in contrast, recognized that the human passions and their effects on political opinions made irony and other forms of rhetorical dissembling an indispensible means of leading souls to the philosophical mysteries. Cf. Thomas More, *A Dialogue of Comfort Against Tribulation*, ed. with intro. Leland Miles (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), xxviii. Miles suggests that More's simile of man's earthly imprisonment with God as the universal jailor (III, 21) is modeled on the Platonic cave allegory, *Republic*, 514-516. But there is no ascent from More's prison except death. Compare *Phaedo* 62, *Apology*, 40C-41C.

Unlike the abolition of the family in *The Republic*, the family appears to be an important institution in *The Utopia*. However, as one might expect from Hythloday's Platonic background, the status of the family is problematic. Consider pp. 127, 137, 191. These modifications of family autonomy can best be understood when Hythloday mentions that the whole community is considered one family (149). Compare, *Republic* 462 d-e.

orders. Rapheal is the teacher of universal political salvation, a secular saint. The vision of a real Utopia allows him to improve the speculative philosophy of Plato and the revealed teachings of Christianity because its truth does not depend, at least to Hythloday, on mere speech about perfect orders unseen.

Hythloday's Utopian Justice

The perfection of Utopian institutions begins and ends with the elimination of private property. (103) According to Hythloday, communism of property naturally ends pride, the source of injustice. The elimination of pride solves at one stroke the competing claims to justice of political classes and of excellent individuals. The problem of the one and the many, the city and man, which the classical and Christian tradition think impossible of solution, is perfectly solved by the Utopians. Utopia's natural perfection is further revealed by the fact that once people have learned Utopian customs the regime is incorruptible. Of course there are criminals. However, the perfection of their institutions is such that they may be punished and corrected without danger from new classes, or tyrants, or philosophers. Moreover, the Utopian empire of happiness appears easily able to dominate her neighbors guaranteeing her preservation from foreign danger.

Eva Brann argues that the Utopians are like mankind before the Fall. Without original sin, or an openness to human choice, they are neither tempted by unfulfilled desires, or curiosity about the legitimacy of their own order.[10] In this respect, the Utopians are also like men in a modern ideological society. "The possessor of the ideal (the just political order) loses the consciousness of his own *superbia* and in particular in political relations, of his own *pleonexia*."[11] In other words, the Utopians have not solved the problem of pride; they have transformed it into an even more characteristic phenomenon, self-righteousness.

As suggested, the Utopian moral obtuseness is most evident in their political relations. Defenders of moderation and the "higher" pleasures (175-181), the Utopians save their greatest contempt for the spirited and immoderate, the wedding of "Ares and Aphrodite"

[10] Brann, 12-13.

[11] Voegelin, 467; Ward Allen, "Hythloday and the Root of Evil." *Moreana*, Bulletin Thomas More, 31-32, November, 1971. Consider 225 and Brann, 13.

characteristic of martial peoples. The Zapoletes are such, and the favorite mercenaries of the Utopians.

> The (Zapoletes) are fearsome, rough, and wild. They prefer their own rugged woods and mountains among which they are bred. They are a hardy race, capable of enduring heat, cold and toil, lacking all refinements, engaging in no farming, careless about the houses they live in and the clothes they wear, and occupied only with their flocks and herds. To a great extent they live by hunting and plundering. They are born for warfare and zealously seek an opportunity for fighting. . . .They fight with courage and incorruptible loyalty for those from whom they receive their pay. . . .Forgetting both kinship and friendship, they run one another through with the utmost ferocity. They are driven to mutual destruction for no other reason than that they are hired by opposing kings. . . .What they get by exposing their lives they spend instantly in debauchery and that of a dreary sort. . . .The Utopians do not care in the least how many Zapoleteans they lose, thinking that they would be the greatest benefactors to the human race if they could relieve the world of all the dregs of this abominable and impious people. (207-209)

Even though the Utopians believe in the "natural fellowship of man" and pray for the least loss of human life in battle, they are indifferent to the deaths of the Zapoletes (a fiscally conservative policy, 209). Since the Utopians despise the Zapoletes' one (incomplete) virtue, courage, considering it a vice, no redemption is possible given the Zapoletes' obvious vices. Absolutely contemptible, they no longer share in the common humanity professed by the Utopians. Neither treated as friends, nor as enemies, these violent mercenary allies are cynically destroyed even though their existence in no way threatens Utopia.[12]

Though violent and looking for war, the Zapoletes are loyal to those for whom they fight; they are thus the instruments for others' designs of good or ill. Lacking the capacity for moral judgment makes them dangerous but not culpable in the usual sense. To use them, and then destroy them, indicates a singularly unattractive morality. This moral narrowness springs from the resentment and moral certitude demonstrated by Hythloday.[13]

[12] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, III 6-9. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. J.P. Mayer (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1966), 327-328. The enlightened Anglo-Americans had the same contempt for the laziness, ignorance, poverty, and barbarity of the Indians as the Utopians have for the Zapoletes.

[13] Both Avineri and T.S. Dorsch notice this murderous treatment of the Zapoletes. Avineri, 262-264, 284, and Dorsch, "Sir Thomas More and Lucian: An Interpretation of Utopia," in W. Nelson, ed., *20th Century Interpretations*, 92. However, Avineri, note 3, 287, concludes that, "Utopia is the utmost which may be achieved in the social, this-worldly, sphere." He reaches this conclusion because to argue that the *Utopia* was not as it appears, and was intended as a Dystopia—a position he finds per-

It would be difficult to justify the Utopian treatment of the Zapoletes even if the Utopians fought only just wars. (201) This claim is itself suspect based on the only reported conflict.

> Such was the origin of the war which the Utopians had waged a little before our time on behalf of the Nephelogetes against the Alaopolitans. The Neophelogetic traders suffered a wrong, *as they thought*, under pretence of law, *but whether right or wrong*, it was avenged by a fierce war. Into this war the neighboring nations brought their energies and resources to assist the power and to intensify the rancor of both sides. Most flourishing nations were either shaken to their foundations or grievously afflicted. The troubles upon troubles that arose were ended only by the enslavement and surrender of the Alaopolitans. Since the Utopians were not fighting in their *own interest* they yielded them into the power of the Nephelogetes, a people who, when the Alaopolitans were prosperous, were not in the least comparable to them. (201) (Emphasis supplied.)

After the claims of certitude made for the Utopians, one tends to overlook the lack of precision concerning the justice of this conflict. Was the war just or unjust? Did the Nephelogetic traders only *think* they suffered a wrong? The text does not say, revealing the characteristic callousness of the Utopians. Faced with this uncertainty, old verities probably apply—it is good to see a rich, powerful neighbor destroyed.

Of course, Hythloday asserts, the Utopians never fight except to defend themselves or help their allies. They do not directly benefit from warfare. In a changed context, Hythloday remarks,

> When the war is over, they do not charge the expense against their friends, for whom they have borne the cost, but against the conquered. Under this head they make them not only pay money, which they lay aside for similar warlike purposes, but also surrender estates, from which they may enjoy forever a large annual income. In many countries they have such revenues which, *coming little by little from various sources, have grown to the sum of over seven hundred thousand ducats a year.* (215) (Emphasis added.)

Unnoticed is the fact that seven hundred ducats converts to 327,000 English pounds, three times the *total* income of the crown under Henry VII, a handsome reward for aiding one's allies.[14] But

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suasive—does not square with the fact that Peter Giles, Erasmus and the translator, Ralph Richardson, all apparently considered it to be a genuine, if fictional, attempt to describe the best regime.

In addition to the playful falsehoods to be noticed in Giles' letter (25), one cannot overlook that the central disagreement between the persona More and Hythloday in Book I concerns the moral necessity of disembling.

[14] Henry VII was an unusually avaricious financier. More publicly opposed his fiscal policies and was planning to flee the country when Henry died. Reynolds, *Sir Thomas More*, 68.

the best example of the Utopians' moral/material imperialism is seen in their colonialization; they are oblivious to the rights of independence and claims of legitimacy of other peoples. To their neighbors, the Utopians are more dangerous than the Zapoletes.[15]

While the Utopian policy is self-serving, what should no longer be remarkable is the degree of unselfconscious hypocrisy surrounding it. Apparently believing in the universal perfection of their institutions, the Utopians never fail to gain material reward from the application of their justice. (137)[16]

The Theoretical Basis of Utopia

With one major exception Hythloday's Utopia is a thoroughly "modern" polity. Originating in a revolt against the ascetic inequalities of the ancient and medieval polity, it presents arguments similar to those of other modern thinkers.

Their condemnation of courage, pride, and honor (the dignity of one's own) indicates the Utopian superiority to classical virtue, the basis of the ancient polity. A similar separation can be seen between Utopian religion and Christianity, the basis of the medieval regime.[17] To the Utopians, Christianity is doubly irrational. Psychologically, it destroys individual happiness; no rational man would choose an ascetic life; and the Utopians believe that no God

[15] Brann, 14-15, does not recognize More's irony when she characterizes the Utopians as men without pride; they are filled with contempt for the Zapoletes and other non-Utopians. In the only reported speech of Utopians we hear the derisive laughter of a young child and his mother at the wealth besodden Anemolian ambassadors (155-157).

[16] Hythloday is a hedonist. While in the ascetic *Republic* a dinner is promised but not eaten, Rapheal's account of Utopia is begun and ended at table (109, 245). See supra, note 11, infra, note 20.

[17] M. Fleisher, *Radical Reform and Political Persuasion in the Life and Writing of Thomas More* (Geneve: Libraire Droz, 1973), 5. "The Utopian ideal of glory is the reverse of military glory. And, it may be added, nothing is so dishonorable to them as going to war to uphold one's honor. The ethics of the Utopians is consonant with the benefits of peace and inhumanity of war."

What about the conversion of the Utopians to Christianity? On this point More seems elusive and playful (because of the foibles of the Utopians?). One might suggest there are two types of Utopians seeking conversion. The first are those who are attracted to any new thing out of their great intellectual curiosity. Unfortunately, they tend to forget quickly what they have learned. Consider 181, 155, 219. The second kind of Utopia convert seems impressed with Christian martyrs. Unlike the Buthrescue, who confine their martyrdom to performing slavish deeds, this convert began aggressively proselytizing, leading the Utopians to permit him to complete his martyrdom in exile. (219)

would desire such human behavior. Secondly, their brief experience with the Christians converted by Hythloday's company illustrates the political dangers of the "empire of faith." (219) The Christian jealousy of other religious opinions generates a problem in Utopia where religion is essentially a civil and tolerant affair designed for the guidance of their "empire of happiness." Christianity is neither useful for the individual nor the community.

Hythloday offers a striking characterization of the negative Utopian view of ascetic piety. There is a group called the "Buthrescue" or "religious par excellence." This group is ". . . composed of celibates who . . . entirely reject the pleasures of this life as harmful. . . .They long only for the future life." (227) These men are considered holy by the Utopians; however, they are also considered irrational or insane. Their "holiness" results from their willingness to relieve their more rational brethren from those "rough, hard and filthy (tasks) that most are deterred from by the toil, disgust and despair involved." Further, "The more that these men put themselves in the position of slaves the more they are honored by all." (227) We must ask, would the leisure-loving Utopians speak so finely of religious ascetics who seek salvation in prayer? (135, 179)

The religion of the Utopians is animated by the same rational spirit seen in their other opinions. The immortality of the soul, for example, is a theological principle but, "Reason leads men to believe and to admit [it]." (163) No argument for this "reason" is offered other than the utilitarian claim that without this belief people would pursue base pleasures. (163, 225) The Utopians' then is a civil religion; the opinions about the immortality of the soul are designated only to serve this worldly human happiness.

The happiness of the Utopians results from their rational hedonism or political epicureanism. Utopia is the first of the modern regimes to develop epicureanism into a universal political principle.[18] While for Epicurus and Lucretius philosophy was the sine qua non, the vulgarization or democratization of their principles is evident in Hythloday's praise of bodily health. The Utopians may claim to value mental pleasures "as the first and foremost of all pleasures," but over nine-tenths of the section on natural pleasure is consumed by a discussion of bodily health as an absence of pain, and, hence the ground of pleasure. (173-179) "Who,"

[18] J.H. Nichols, *Epicurean Political Philosophy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1976), 181-185.

Hythloday asks, "is bound fast by such insensibility or lethargy that he does not confess that health is agreeable and delightful to him. And what is delight except pleasure under another name?" (173) Hythloday, the teacher of Utopia, delights more in verbal self-assertion and eating than in mental pleasure.

While the "new science" of nature appears in Utopia, it does so as a technical, not a theoretical, innovation. Science frees man from traditional prudence and aids in the promotion of political epicureanism. (53, 115, 161, 183) But the larger question of freedom, theoretical and moral, implicit in the scientific denial of final causality, is not present. As described by Hythloday, the Utopian view of rational nature is not founded on first philosophy (or revelation). (161) In other words, it is a formal opinion about reality, not requiring proof relative to the nature of things.

The reason why the problem of freedom presented by modern science is absent can be traced to Hythloday. In spite of his apparent learning, he is unphilosophic and exclusively oriented to practice. In this he represents the modern approach to knowledge per se; his science is directed by political epicureanism.[19] However, although not apparently aware of the moral issue presented by science—relativism—Rapheal's behavior illustrates that More is aware of the problem. Hythloday desires neither the Ithaca of Odysseus nor the heavenly, philosophic city of Plato, nor St. Augustine's City of God; his angry injustice is truly "rootless."

Hythloday in Utopia: Political Rule

The Utopia was said by one of More's closest friends to be "Hagiopolis" or holy city. It is not the "new Jerusalem" of other modern Utopias. Rather, like the "true and healthy" city of Plato's *Republic*, it is ruled "divinely." (*Republic* 372b) We have seen that in the dramatic play of the company, it is Hythloday who dominates and seeks to dominate the conversation. In other words, Rapheal, like the Utopians, is prideful. Pride, thought to have been vanquished with the abolition of private property (Hythloday "abolished" his property early in life), re-emerges, as we have seen, in a desire for personal, intellectual recognition.[20]

[19] "Let it be repeated that Utopia was a state guided by the unaided human reason; More followed this idea as far as he could, and showed us what results might be of reason divorced from revelation." Reynolds, *Saint Thomas More*, 112, supra, note 13.

[20] Rapheal's materialism is communistic. Therefore he is antagonistic to any view

Utopian education has failed with Hythloday; or, to put it in the proper order, an imperfect founder of a "perfect commonwealth" will recreate and magnify his imperfections within it. Therefore, to find the "rulers" of Utopia is to look for rulers (like Hythloday) masquerading as teachers; these rulers are the priests, the most powerful and the most honored, of all the Utopian magistrates.

The priests, who are few but carefully selected, are the educators or ideologues of Utopia. The "true political principles" issuing from the community of property are elaborated and sanctified by them.

To the priests is entrusted the education of children and youths. . . .They take the greatest pains from the very first to instill into the children's minds, while still tender and pliable, good opinions which are also useful for the preservation of their Commonwealth. . . .The latter never decays except through vices which arise from wrong attitudes.

The college of priests is also responsible for the reeducation of criminals.

They preside over divine worship, order religious rites, and are censors of morals. It is counted a great disgrace for a man to be summoned or rebuked by them as not being of upright life. It is their function to give advice and admonition. . . .If (the criminals) do not demonstrate to the priests their speedy repentance, they are seized and punished by the Senate for their impiety. (229)

The priests are not subject to trial even if they commit crimes.

The priests maintain the Utopian principles inviolate in the flux of events and generations. They teach, not on the basis of a philosophic insight or the revealed word, but on the rational principles of Utopia. Their education can never fail, Hythloday says, because of the truthfulness of its principles.

In addition to their educational power, the priests perform crucial official and ceremonial duties. They are the "divine mediators" on the field of battle, the keepers of the "religious mysteries," and instrumental in the selection and education of the other magistrates. They are also the most highly honored magistrates in a society thought to have eliminated pride and thus the need for honor.

As soon as the priest appears from the vestibule, all immediately fall on the ground in

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of honor which emphasizes individual perfection. In his view only persons and activities are honorable which are socially useful and compatible with equality. This outlook obviously creates a problem because he regards himself as a higher man worthy of respect. Voegelin, 445-467. Ward Allen, "Hythloday and the Root of All Evil." "More created Hythloday, a man who despised money but who still coveted personal glory."

reverence. The silence all around is so deep that the very appearance of the congregation strikes one with awe as if some divine power were really present. After remaining awhile on the ground, at a signal from the priest they rise. (235)[21]

The exceptional position of the priests is emphasized in the uniqueness and expense of their dress.

The people are clothed in white garments in the temple. The priest wears vestments in various colors, of wonderful design and shape, but not of material as costly as one would expect. They are not interwoven with gold or set with precious stones, but wrought with different feathers of birds so cleverly and artistically that no costly material could equal the value of the handiwork. (235; see 133)[22]

Moreover, in a regime where religious principles are reasonable, the priests' garments have a symbolic, apparently mysterious message. (235)

The Utopia is eternal, where Plato's *Republic* is not. The Utopia's superior stability results from the reliance upon naturally perfect institutions. The Platonic philosopher-kings, although perfect as rulers, are corruptible as men. (*Republic* 546) The Utopian institutions, maintained by priestly indoctrination, are eternal —no revolt against them on behalf of other principles can succeed. The Utopia, then, is the first description of a depersonalized and depoliticized mass society existing outside of, or at the end of, history, where "administration" attempts to replace rule.[23]

Hythloday's relation to the company in the garden parallels that of the priests to the Utopians. Like the priests, Hythloday rules in-

[21] Aristotle, *Ethics*, trans. W.D. Ross (New York: Modern Library, 1947) 1123b. "Desert is relative to external goods; and the greatest of these, we should say, is that which we render to the gods, and which people of position most aim at, and which is the prize appointed for the noblest deeds; and this honor; that is surely the greatest of external goods."

[22] The Utopians have discovered that material scarcity is an outgrowth of the idleness and superordinate demand typical of classed society. If everyone in Utopia works only six hours a day, they can provide not only an abundance, but a superabundance of all necessities and conveniences. The Utopians dislike work, preferring leisure. (135,179) (Political authority insures that everyone works hard at this craft (127).) Since this labor provides an abundance of goods, what is of highest value is labor itself. The priest's robes then represent the only true wealth, non-utilitarian labor.

[23] Bernard Crick, *In Defence of Politics* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1962), 45. The Utopians reduce politics to rational hedonism; the priests serve as the necessary locus of political practice. There is no religious need for religious faith. Because of their dedication to an ascetic utilitarianism (political hedonism) most features of Utopian life are drably uniform, e.g., their dress (127), houses (121), and cities (117).

directly, while professing that he does not seek to rule or that political rule is superfluous.[24]

More's Medieval Platonism

More's opposition to many if not most of the new, Utopian modes and orders has been amply addressed by others. Frequently his opposition has been discovered by comparing the *Utopia* with More's other works, a poor procedure.[25] Within the dialogue, it is difficult to say if More was a believer or advocate of anything Utopian. (245) Although he criticizes Utopia in his persona's name, (245) he adds, "There are very many features in the Utopian Commonwealth which it is easier for me to wish for in our countries than to have any hope of seeing realized." (247)

It does not seem unreasonable to think that More shared some of the practical criticisms of English society made by Rapheal in Book I. Further, he may have agreed with that extraordinary man that these evils were due to the excessive pride of the wealthy—without saying that he embraced Hythloday's understanding of the cause of that pride and therefore of the proper way to reform, or extirpate, it. The attraction of the *Utopia* on this level can be traced to the broad agreement possible when looking at the ills of any "contemporary" society, in particular the warfare between the few and the many.[26]

As we have argued, of greater significance is More's criticism of Hythloday's political "epistemology," his self-forgetting pursuit of general political principles, culminating in his mildly ascetic communism. More, on the contrary, points to the love and examination of one's own as the basis of both self-knowledge and political justice.

Before our education by More and Plato we would have believed that Hythloday was following the path leading to a theoretical knowledge of politics. It now seems apparent that it is exactly this image of the philosopher as transpolitical theoretician that More wishes us to examine. To use the familiar Platonic simile, Hythlo-

[24] The unique power of the priesthood has been noted, Stevens, 406, Neumann, 510, but the full implications of their activities have not been developed, nor has their identity with Hythloday. Consider Plato's *Laws*, Book XII. In one sense the parallel between Hythloday and the priests is not perfect. Apparently, the priests actually rule; Hythloday is too self-indulgent and opinionated to do so.

[25] Brann, 3-5, Dorsch, 88-99.

[26] However, even this criticism is muted by the fact that many of the problems articulated by Hythloday were reformed by the dramatic date of the dialogue.

day seeks to approach political truth by standing outside the "cave" of political opinion and looking directly at the "sun." He is the theoretician who does not know whether his neighbor is a "beast or god." More, on the contrary, reminds us of the Platonic Socrates' discovery that all reality is reflected in the opinions of men, because it is only through the human soul shaped in the light and shadows of the cave that we come to know or not to know what truth is. Only with the recognition that one's own experience is the necessary ground of political reflection can the pursuit of wisdom begin.

Hythloday's very impersonalism alienates him from a consideration of his own convictions, making a reasonable understanding of justice impossible. Where Hythloday points outward to the knowledge of universal human nature as the ground of the true and just political community, More shows that it is through self-knowledge that one can understand the basis and hence the end of the human quest for justice.

If Hythloday's utopian wisdom is so suspect, we can see that irony marks More's view of the possibility and desirability of the "best regime." But More's irony seems even more nearly complete than Plato's. While Plato's thought encompassed the claims of the religion and laws of Athens, and the necessary political limitations of philosophy, his condemned Socrates mocked Athenian justice and prophesied that his execution, which he had done not a little to promote, would further undermine those laws.[27] Such boldness suggests Plato's Socrates had some "Utopian" knowledge greater than merely human knowledge. There is nothing in More's thought to suggest such a radical posture toward the ecclesiastical, or even civil laws then obtaining.

More reverses Plato's priorities. While Plato knew that philosophy could not refute the laws of Athens, he believed it could liberate the philosopher to the point where he could see both the rational contradictions among the laws, and that the Athenian laws were but one among many laws, all claiming ultimate validity. A prudent man would infer that all known laws were equally invalid in their ultimate claims. More, for not un-Platonic reasons, rejected the philosophical inference dictating the rejection of the laws of the English polity. It seems, More would agree with the skeptical thought of a contemporary son of the English tradition: "If one can-

[27] Plato, *Apology*, 36b, 38b-39d, *Crito*, 50b.

not be sure about the answer to the most important questions, then tradition is the best basis for the practical life."[28]

More was politically "committed" in a way impossible to imagine of Plato, which does not mean that he may not have been conscious of grave objections, both theoretical and practical, to the "medieval synthesis." If so, he chose not to lay them bare in a manner analogous to the philosophically inspired Plato. On the contrary, the good Sheriff More actively defended that order itself. He opposed the philosophic comedy of Plato and the unconscious buffoonery of Hythloday, seeking human dignity in his own, medieval England. The exposure of the absurdity of the modern Hythloday can thus be seen as the necessary beginning for More's defense of the faith and the political morality he believed appropriate to it.

To be fully seen, More's Utopian irony must be considered in the context of More's insight into the direction of modern thought Hythloday represents. Aware of the increasing rationalism, egalitarianism, commercialism and materialism, technical innovation and exploration, More was too good an observer of his own situation not to see the necessity for new, secular, and democratic principles.[29] He shrewdly developed a modern Utopia only to emphasize its ultimate limitations through its childlike founder, Rapheal Hythloday, the political saint and extraordinary man.

More's understanding of his age as one of fundamental change created a dual perspective in *The Utopia*. On the one hand, *The Utopia*, as we have seen, reflects the orientation of his own life, the defense of the medieval English polity. On the other hand, for the increasingly numerous and influential followers of Hythloday, who escaped his strict law enforcement, and whose political passions limited their perception of his irony (245), More showed an understanding of their new utopian ideals sufficient for them to believe in both his prescience and friendship.

This dual intention reveals More's profoundest debt to Plato. The continuing position of *Utopia* as a celebration of the new order, written by a man canonized for his opposition to it, suggests that More learned from Plato the civil philosophy capable of saying different things to different men.[30] Unlike Hythloday, who thought

[28] George Grant, *Lament for a Nation* (Toronto: MacMillan Co., 1978), 96. Brann, 23.

[29] Voegelin, 455-463; Stevens, 338; Gueguen, 53; Schoeck, "A Nursery of Correct and Useful Institutions," 281-289. Tocqueville, 9-11.

[30] Voegelin, 455-456.

honor immoral, but secretly coveted it, More points to a philosophic rhetoric and politics worthy of the highest human respect. His beautiful and playful dialogic speech demonstrates in practice a knowledge of the erotic soul sufficient to assure his Renown.[31]

[31] Kautsky, 159. "His (More's) political, religious and humanistic writings are today only read by a small number of historians. Had he not written *Utopia* his name would scarcely be better known today than that of the friend who shared his fate, Bishop Fisher of Rochester. His socialism made him immortal." Voegelin, 451; Fleisher, 14, 169, 171, 172, 191.