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Thomas More's *Utopia*: Origins of Modern Images of Labor and Capital*

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Thomas More's *Utopia* is often discussed as a moral allegory. This article, however, argues for reading it as an economic allegory. This reading is supported by More's modern Christian humanist context, which both influences and is critiqued by More's image of Utopian society. From this perspective, *Utopia* reflects the tensions present at the time between the economic progress of the early modern era and the lingering values of its medieval Christian heritage.

Introduction

Thomas More's *Utopia* is as enigmatic and controversial today as it was when it first appeared in 1516. Born at a crossroads in European culture, More was witnessing the beginning of the end of feudal monarchies and the rise of both republican governments and the nation state. The temporal power of the Catholic Church was in rapid decline by the beginning of the sixteenth century; the Reformation and Enlightenment were on the immediate horizon; and most important to our purpose, *Utopia* appeared at the very birth of modern capitalism. It anticipated the deep transformation between work and property that was taking place in Europe, from highly personal fundamental human attributes with emotional and spiritual connotations into the highly institutionalized modern economic abstractions of labor and capital.

This article reflects on the contrast of human work and property with the economic abstractions of labor and capital by examining the underlying principles of the economic system provided by More in his fictional world of *Utopia*,[1] a work of literature that we contend is almost universally misunderstood in the modern

world. We argue that at one important level, *Utopia* is an extended allegory in which More reflects on the human qualities of work and property by going to the opposite extreme of dehumanizing them and detaching them completely from their foundation in human life. As such, *Utopia* is not so much a moral allegory, as is commonly argued,[2] as it is an economic analysis presented in allegorical form.

Certainly Thomas More, a recognized genius of the day, crafted his book at several levels and it was no doubt meant to be read, analyzed, and discussed at different levels. *Utopia* is also unique among More's other writings, which were much more spiritual and theological in nature.[3] There are, indeed, important sociological, political, humanist, and religious themes within *Utopia*, and these more obvious levels have been examined and dissected over the years.[4] Unfortunately, the economic themes of *Utopia*, grounded in the developing economic pressures of the day, have been almost completely ignored by commentators.[5] For example, Turner's commentary to the Penguin edition of *Utopia*,[6] as well as Miller's commentary to the Yale edition,[7] include detailed discussions of sixteenth-century political attitudes, historical events, and More's personal and literary companions, but are completely devoid of any economic context. In Cave, there is substantial discussion of the various translations and editions of *Utopia* over the centuries but barely a reference to economic topics.[8] Similarly, Wegemer provides a detailed analysis of *Utopia* within the civic humanistic context of peace, liberty, and self-government, but little mention is made of *Utopia's* system of labor management and optimal capital accumulation.[9]

The lack of analysis of the underlying economic debates in *Utopia* is particularly interesting since Thomas More was deeply involved in various economic policies of the time, including negotiating international trade deals with Antwerp merchants in 1509 and participating in an important English delegation sent to Bruges to correct a festering trade war in 1515.

It is our contention that More conceived his work not simply as a prototypical sociological and political commentary on sixteenth-century European society as many contend,[10] nor was he trying to develop some abstract image of an achievable or good end-state of society, another common belief that has forever established More's *Utopia* within the now so-called "utopian" and "dystopian" literature. Rather, in *Utopia*, More presented a sophisticated and intuitive understanding of the evolving tension between two powerful forces, Christian humanism and economic transformation—and it is this tension that is designed to raise the consciousness of *Utopia*'s readers.

Historical Context of Utopian Economics

Industrial age economic and management science is built on the understanding that economic wealth is the fruit of the productive use of labor and capital, and that economic growth requires ever new and increasingly productive combinations of labor and capital. Adam Smith (1723–1790) presented this argument in a manner so clear and convincing it has become, to a large extent, a western canon of economic behavior. However, these economic forces came into play much earlier in Europe.

Herlihy notes, for example, "In the late fifteenth and still more the sixteenth centuries, the growth of trade, the opening of the New World, and a new entrepreneurial spirit dissolved the manor, introduced a 'money economy' and gave birth to capitalism."[11] Likewise, in his analysis of sixteenth-century European economics, Gilbert notes that although capitalism had been emerging in many fields over the centuries, the process accelerated in the sixteenth century. Gilbert identifies the industries of shipbuilding, international trade, printing, mining, agriculture, heavy manufacturing, textiles, and finance as essentially capitalist industries by the sixteenth century.[12]

To this list of causal factors should be added, at least in More's England, the "enclosure" movement in which countless thousands of farmers who had worked small plots of land as their own for centuries in an "open field system" were dispossessed of their property, becoming simple laborers for the farming and herding enterprises of the land owners, or relocated to the larger population centers thereby expanding the pool of wage labor. The enclosure movement in early sixteenth-century England clearly impacted More's thoughts—he references the enclosure movement in book 1 of *Utopia*, and considered dedicating *Utopia* to Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, one of the most outspoken Church critics of the enclosure system.[13]

In the two decades immediately preceding the writing of *Utopia*, a fundamental change in how capital is organized was also taking place. The "regulated company" (a form of business partnership) had been developing in various parts of Europe since the fourteenth century; however, at the dawn of the sixteenth century, these companies were becoming self-regulating entities. For example, in 1499 King Henry VII granted "The Fellowship of the Merchant Adventurers of England" a private coat of arms,[14] and in 1505 a revised English charter was granted to the Fellowship with the clear authority to internally develop and enforce a set of bylaws, thus setting the stage for the principle of "corporate powers." Often formed by merchants for colonization and trade, by More's time in England these regulated companies were given "powers to make statutes and

ordinances for the better government of the body … and punish 'rationally' any subjects who disobeyed these rules."[15] With the 1505 charter, the Fellowship had the authority to confiscate the wares of merchants who defied their rights, to charge fines, and to imprison offending merchants.[16] For the first time, capital was being officially organized not solely for the purpose of wealth accumulation but also with quasi-governmental authority, including punishment powers and the right to develop monopolies—rights previously restricted to the civil and church hierarchies. Under King Henry VIII, the inevitable final transformation took place: the development of the "joint stock" company, where investors were provided a degree of limited liability for corporate actions. By the end of the sixteenth century the modern capitalist institution for organizing capital—the corporation—was essentially complete.[17]

The Allegorical World of Utopia

Book 2 of *Utopia*, which describes the Utopian community, makes extensive use of symbol and allegory. In the art of narrative, a symbol is the use of a realistic image to express an abstract concept. An allegory is the use of a fantastic image to express the same concept, an image whose "meaning is an abstract truth.… Often what happens in an allegory is not realistic or credible in terms of everyday experience. What it all means must be looked for on the abstract level of ideas."[18]

In modern usage, a "Utopia" is a perfect world or the effort to build one, but that probably was not More's meaning.[19] Utopia gained its modern meaning from Friedrich Engels's appropriation of the word to distinguish between "Utopian Socialism" and "Scientific Socialism." Although Engels distorts Thomas More's meaning to the modern mind, the distortion is highly ironic, because the word that truly describes More's *Utopia* is "Stalinist," complete with gulags.[20]

The substance of *Utopia* is a lecture delivered by a world traveler named Raphael Hythlodaeus to a scholarly English government official named Morus, the lecture elicited by a dispute over how to address the ills of society. It is this dispute between Hytholodaeus and Morus that provides the drama of *Utopia*. Hythlodaeus cites some brutalities of English life, attributes them to English economic structure and legal systems, and then concludes dogmatically that this state of affairs is due solely to the existence of private property. He states unequivocally that "there can be no fair and just distribution of goods (however justice is defined), nor can the business of human beings be conducted so as to ensure happiness, unless private property is utterly abolished."[21]

Morus briefly disputes this, stating that such a system cannot possibly work: first, because of economic failure due to the inevitable loss of personal produc-

tivity and, second, because of social failure due to the inevitable loss of respect and deference for authority resulting from efforts at social engineering.[22] In this brief exchange Thomas More cites the two points of a critique originating with Aristotle and, arguably, displayed in recent history with the failure of modern communist regimes. Hythlodaeus then seeks to convince Morus otherwise by lecturing him at length on the details of just such a system, one that Hythlodaeus has himself witnessed when shipwrecked in a land called Utopia at the far end of the earth. The fact that extreme social and economic arrangements can work is thus an empirical fact that Morus cannot refute.

Interpretations of Utopia

More's fictional land of Utopia is thus a deep enigma. Did More really believe the fictional society that he created to be an ideal one? Given its Stalinist characteristics, one would think not. The restrictions on lifestyle and personal morals are onerous and harshly enforced, often as capital crimes. The restrictions on work and property are equally onerous and also enforced with capital punishment. At the same time, however, More's Utopian society is undeniably rich, healthy, and peaceful—in fact the richest, healthiest, and most peaceful society in the history of the world—something that would certainly seem attractive to many readers given the upheavals in Europe during the prior fifty years (inflation of prices for basic goods, debasement of coinage, remnants of the plague, a number of destructive localized wars and peasant rebellions, increased population growth and mass migration to city centers, and dramatically increased income inequity).[23] It must be kept in mind, however, that in Utopia this is public wealth, public health, and public peace. There is no private property, there is no family or private life, and personal disobedience is harshly suppressed by means of unrestrained public violence and slavery. Is More stating that this is the *summum bonum*?

We suggest that More meant Utopian society to be neither an end-state, positive or negative, nor a parody, but rather an allegorical representation previewing the complex debates of modern economics. Like the more modern allegory, *The Pilgrim's Regress* by C. S. Lewis,[24] much of the difficulty in grasping Thomas More's meaning lies in his purpose and in the inherent difficulty of the allegorical method that he uses. We caution that any interpretation of *Utopia* that implies More's approval of Utopian society may misunderstand More the person—a deeply spiritual man—his allegorical literary style, and particularly the historical context of economics, trade, and spirituality that More stood within at the beginning of the sixteenth century. This is the double-edged nature of the allegorical method: It forces deep thought and reflection but does not offer a clear path of comprehension.

Another reason for the variety of interpretations of *Utopia* might lie in the fact that it was written in Latin. This fact had implications in More's day in that it shaped his potential readership and the impact of the work on the political environment. The implication in more modern times is that it adds the diversity of translator interpretation to that of reader interpretation.[25] In More's day, most highly educated people read Latin as virtually their first language, and More's Latin in *Utopia* is said by many translators to be beautiful and poetic. Thomas More was a leading member of a group of European intellectuals now called "Christian Humanists," whose common feature was admiration of Roman literature, particularly Cicero, in contrast to the Christian Schoolmen who were admirers of Aristotle and Aquinas, and who dominated the universities. A number of Christian Humanists, who did not all speak English, actually participated in the writing of *Utopia*, contributing several attachments in the form of letters.[26]

Utopia scholars certainly recognize that there are puns and double meanings in *Utopia*, beginning with the word *utopia* itself. *Utopia* is a Greek word that means "good place" in one form, but in another form it means "no place," and it is clear that More fully intended for either of these meanings to be used. Double meanings also extend to the two main characters. The word *Raphael* is Hebrew for "healer" and, due to a famous passage in the Old Testament book of Tobit, a learned reader of More's day would have taken the meaning to imply "healer of the blind." The word *Hythlodaeus* is Greek for "speaker of nonsense." The name of the major character of *Utopia* therefore implies that he would open the eyes of the blind by speaking nonsense. Translators often take the recipient of the lecture to be Thomas More himself, and they fashion their translation to reflect this. But the original Latin text simply calls the character "Morus," which is Greek for "fool."[27] Thus we have a speaker of nonsense lecturing a fool.

We suggest that Hythlodaeus is, in fact, a caricature of empirical reality and the rational philosophy that would come to underlie modern capitalism and that Morus is a caricature of the hapless adherent of medieval Scholastic philosophy in its attempt to maintain the dominance of the "natural" manorial economy. Hytholodaeus anticipates the triumph of classical economics in that Morus cannot reject the empirical reality of Utopia and can therefore find no grounds to reject the economics of Hythlodaeus, the "speaker of nonsense," other than to quietly protest that Utopian economics may not be natural to the happiness of the human person. The turgid and excitable thoughts of Hytholodaeus are placed in sharp contrast to the calm, restrained reason of Morus.[28]

A representative example can also be found in Utopian living arrangements and political structure. Utopia is an island of regular shape. The majority of the people live in fifty-four cities evenly spaced across the island, with each city

identical in every particular. Effort is made to keep the distribution of population stable. If population outgrows the regulated size of one city and declines in another, the excess population in the first city is moved to the second. If the population outgrows the regulated size in all Utopian cities, the excess is sent to the mainland in a compulsory migration to found colonies, enforced by war if the mainland country objects.

Travel between cities is restricted and punished by enslavement. Each district of the city is governed by a magistrate who is elected each year by the households of the district. The magistrates meet in assembly and elect one mayor for life. All affairs of state are handled by the mayor and ten chief magistrates after discussion in the assembly of magistrates, but there is no Utopia-wide executive branch. Utopia is thus a loose federation of city-states.[29]

Is a Utopian city a good place? The idea of representative government, radical in More's day, appeals to us today and might at first glance make us think so. But what about the rigid and monotonous living arrangements, restrictions on travel, forced migration, destruction of family, and absolute prohibition of political discussion? As argued above, much of More's meaning is at the mercy of translation, and a clue to his meaning here might lie in translation of the Greek and Latin constructions that he uses. He says that the elected magistrate was called a *syphogrant* in the old Utopian language and a *phylarch* in the new language. The chief magistrate was called a *tranibore* in the old language and a *protophylarch* in the new. These are not conventional words but instead are known to be More's constructions from various Greek roots. *Syphogrant*, for example, may mean "wise ruler," or it may mean "ruler of the pigsty." *Phylarch* may mean "loving ruler," or it may mean "lusting for power." *Tranibore* may mean "plain eater," or it may mean "chief glutton." It seems to be clear that More raises contrasting interpretations. Utopia could be an orderly democratic society ruled by wise, simple, and loving rulers; or Utopia could be a pigsty managed by swineherds who are gluttons for food (read: wealth) and power. More thus presents us with some interesting questions. Utopia is undeniably an orderly society, but does Utopian order require that we live as pigs, looking to our swineherds for order? Does the change in language imply something about power? When the titles change from syphogrant and tranibore to phylarch and protophylarch, and the imagery goes from swineherd and glutton to luster for power and chief luster for power, does this imply that social development is simply a process of going from lower level porcine vices to higher level economic and managerial vices?

Separation of Work from Property

The fall of the Florentine Republic in 1512, when Machiavelli's citizen militia bowed to the centralizing power of the Medicis, signaled the end of the medieval free-city experiment as a viable political entity. Along with the rise of central government power came an assault on the foundations of the medieval institutions that lay largely in the medieval church. The nation state being created in Thomas More's England was increasingly controlled by Tudor oligarchs who began to break up the old natural economy with a series of enclosures in which small property holders were replaced by larger economic establishments better suited to take advantage of the divisions of labor and capital. The large establishments were strikingly more productive in producing goods and services of measurable value, thus generating much higher tax revenue to feed the state. With medieval institutions no longer able to protect the individual worker and small property owner, the triumph of capitalism with its categories of labor and capital was virtually assured.

Schumpeter called this era the break-up of community,[30] and Marx called it an "epoch-making" revolution, where the "great masses of men are suddenly and forcibly torn from their means of subsistence."[31] When such a community is dissolved, the former members become isolated elements in an impersonal system.

Purpose is thus a major question posed by Thomas More. Hythlodaeus, if asked, would reply that it is for the purpose of the pursuit of happiness, and he confidently asserts that Utopians are happy. Indeed, Utopia is an immensely productive and therefore rich society, but it is not a tax state. The citizens have no individual wealth to tax. More's powerful allegorical device of a community with absolute communal possession of everything highlights the drama of separating human work from human property. There is no private property of any kind, neither real property nor personal property. People own no homes, no personal effects, and no clothes. All are provided by society in a communal form. There are no capital goods in private hands; everyone works for the community with community-owned tools. The extreme communism extends even to homes and children. No home life is permitted, and children are raised not by their natural mothers but by nursery laborers.

One of the most perplexing and hotly debated aspects of More's Utopia is its aggressive communism, an extreme version of communal ownership. Many authors, from Engels to Turner, argue that More must have been favorably inclined toward such a system in actual practice, and that the Utopian model should be taken at face value. But this seems unlikely, particularly within the context of Catholic economic theology of the time. Based on a logic of reasoning associated

with Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), a continuous series of great Catholic thinkers such as St. Bonaventure (1221–1274), Roland of Cremona (1178–1259), and Gabriel Biel (1420–1495) had established the moral acceptance of both private property and property rights as "natural law" by the end of the fifteenth century.[32] In his other writings, such as *Responsio ad Lutherum*, More was clearly aware of this developing Catholic theological stance toward property rights and private ownership in actual practice.[33]

Since humans are natural beings, property thus becomes a natural process of humankind; eternal law and natural law are not in conflict. In this Thomistic line of thought private property becomes fundamentally a conventional human arrangement, and thus by itself was accepted, if not endorsed in Catholic thought by More's time. But private property had to always be viewed within the context of man's stewardship, as part of life itself given the imperfection of mankind. This inviolable right to private property and ownership based upon natural law and Christian humanism was refined in Catholic economic theology by the mid-sixteenth century.

This perspective was also held by the influential humanist and Thomas More's close friend, Erasmus. Erasmus, like most humanists of the time, saw private enterprise properly applied under Christian stewardship as productive—the problem was the political system, with its inherent human greed and conflicts. As Mansfield notes, "In the *Institutio* and elsewhere [Erasmus] pictured cities built up and enriched by the enterprise and labors of private and productive citizens but then despoiled by rulers and their henchman."[34]

Far less discussed in the *Utopia* literature, but an important foundation for the present argument, is the spiritual component of work itself. In a natural order of society human work and human property are found together and are almost synonymous.[35] This characteristic is what is most human, what most clearly separates us from animals, more so even than the ability to organize and work in concert. The worker has his tools, the farmer has his land, the artist has his clay and paints, and the man and wife have their home and garden. Tied together in this way, work becomes a primary form of human expression and growth. More, for example, in both the *Remembrance of Death* and *Of Covetousness, Gluttony, and Sloth* (c. 1522) notes the importance of diligent labor and virtuous business to "a Christian man."[36] The emphasis here is on process, the living out of a human life in a natural manner. This had long been the natural order of society and the ideal of religion. When economic life changes from virtuous human endeavor to measured output and wage labor, then the old order breaks up and capitalism is born. When measured output becomes the standard of value, then it is inevitable that the effort to increase output will look to factor inputs (i.e., labor and capital),

with the intent to measure them, to increase their quantity, and to increase their impact on output. It is a major change from the human life process to the measured output of tangible economic goods.

If work and property are conceptually different and yet historically typically bound together in human consciousness and practice, any separation of the two must require extreme measures to make the distinction clear for the reader.[37] More's extreme model of communism would have provided a particularly dramatic warning to the readers of his day, and effectively creates a narrative designed to create a sense of dissonance.[38] In his letters and writing, More never really discloses his intentions with *Utopia*. His letters around the time of *Utopia* focus on simply getting the manuscript published, read, and distributed. However, in a December 1516 letter to his close friend Erasmus, in which More playfully describes a daydream where he would be "King" of the Utopians, he perhaps hints that the real purpose in writing *Utopia* is to create tension, and thus discussion. He writes, "Master (Cuthbert) Tunstall recently wrote me a most friendly letter … but his frank and complimentary criticism of my commonwealth has given me more cheer than would an Attic talent. You have no idea how thrilled I am; I feel so expanded, and I hold my head high."[39]

Readers of *Utopia* would have been familiar with two radically different models of a communal economic system. The first was the community-based Christian "cenobitic" monastic system introduced in the fourth century by St. Pachomius in Egypt, and refined later in the sixth century by St. Benedict of Nursia,[40] a model of common ownership within a highly charged spiritual setting and governed by the common purpose of seeking to live revealed Christian truth. More had a particular fondness for the monastic system; he had lived and studied within a monastic order as a young man and continued to wear monastic garb until his execution. The second communist model came from Amerigo Vespucci's *New World* (c. 1503) and *Four Voyages* (c. 1507), recording voyages and discoveries in South America between 1499 and 1504. These texts describe tribes that held everything in common with no private property, and yet they were a completely dehumanized society (cannibalism, torture of prisoners, poisoning spouses, and so forth) whose level of productivity, such as it was, was attained by the extensive use of slavery.

More certainly was inspired by Vespucci's writings.[41] To understand *Utopia* is to understand that the Utopian commonwealth is, in fact, a special form of a slave state. When viewed as a commodity, labor can be seen to be in three forms: free labor, wage labor, and slave labor.[42] Free labor is distinguished from the others by its relationship to capital. Free labor owns capital, making the provider of labor and the provider of capital one and the same person. This is the traditional form

of work and property, the family farm and the small business owner/operator. It is in contrast to both wage labor and slave labor, neither of which own capital and both of which are in that sense more similar to each other than to free labor. In Utopia there is no free labor and there is no wage labor, just slave labor and unpaid labor toiling under the threat of slavery.

Slavery is human life produced only for a profit, the complete separation of work from life and the antithesis of the Catholic economic thought of the time. Slavery did not exist in Europe when Thomas More was born in 1478, but Portuguese traders began about that time to deal in African slaves, with the first delivery of slaves to the New World recorded in 1502.[43] In fact, Morus points out that Hytholodaeus is a Portuguese adventurer. Slavery was rapidly adopted for use in the colonial economies being established in the New World, where immense economic wealth was created and the surplus value directed to fuel the growth of manufacturing in Europe. Within a century of More's writing in 1516, slave labor economies came to exist alongside wage labor economies. Once work became the commodity called labor it was difficult to resist the use of slavery to make an even larger profit. Kolchin states that there was a precondition for the rapid adoption of slavery: "the prevalence of a system of values compatible with its existence … the notion that it was wrong for some to live off the labor of others—even under physical compulsion—was virtually nonexistent."[44]

In *Utopia* these ideas are brought to the forefront for the reader. Utopia separates labor and capital from work and property; they are starkly presented in Utopian economics as Karl Polanyi's "fictitious commodities."[45] In *Utopia*, human economic existence, according to the prevailing Catholic economic theology of the day, has been stripped bare—labor, land, and capital have become separated from life itself. And slavery, the most basic separation between human life and the commodity called labor, is not only allowed but presented as a coercive threat to all Utopian workers. Insightful readers of *Utopia* at the time who were also aware of Vespucci's *New World* may have thought that the final step in the dehumanization process of human labor and capital would be the harvesting of humans themselves, that is, cannibalism.[46]

Productivity Requirements

The transformation of work and property into labor and capital permitted them both to become more specialized, setting the stage for both "division of labor" and "capital," the two pillars of capitalist wealth manufacture. On the first two pages of *The Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith states that a nation will be wealthy to the degree that it meets three requirements: (1) large pool of labor, (2) high labor productivity, and (3) high rate of capital accumulation. These three conditions are emphasized in *Utopia*.

Size of the Labor Force

The population of Utopia is quite large by the standards of the time, approximately six million.[47] In 1516, the population of England and Wales was approximately three million. As indicated above, Utopia manages its population strictly, making a great effort to keep the distribution stable. Travel between Utopian cities is restricted, and unauthorized travel is punished by enslavement.

Given population of a certain size, the size of the labor force is determined by the percentages of the population that are actively in the labor force, that are unproductive laborers, and that do not labor at all.[48] Hythlodaus also understands this and states emphatically that a major reason why countries other than Utopia are so poor is that "a large part of the population of other countries live their lives in idleness."[49] He holds this fact to be so important, he boldly points out the five guilty parties.[50] First on the list are women; fully half of the human race do not labor at all. Second are priests and religious. Hythlodaus is referring to the large religious institutions of his day, but it is clear from his description that he also means all that element of society who advise, counsel, teach, and guide the rest of society. This would probably include in the modern world the huge educational and political establishments with their bureaucracies, establishments that Adam Smith also denounced for their lack of productivity. Third and fourth are the nobility and their domestic staffs. Fifth are shirkers, those who successfully minimize their labor.

Of these five categories of unproductive laborers or those who do not labor at all, the modern world has addressed only the first with clear success. A large and increasing percentage of modern women labor along with men in the institutions of the capitalist economy, a modern accomplishment of which Hythlodaus would have approved. It is not clear, however, that the modern world has had success addressing the remaining four groups; in fact, they may be growing. The administrative establishment is large and expanding, and the service sector

is growing. In many cultures, people are laboring fewer hours and shorter work weeks, with more holidays, income support, and transfer payments.

Utopia deals successfully with all five of the categories. All women labor exactly like men. Their babies are left in the care of attendants, specialized laborers who raise all babies communally. There is no home life to require their effort because all people live in identical cubicles and eat communally in large dining halls. Women also fight in the ranks with men when war becomes necessary. Priests and religious are kept to an absolute minimum. There are only 702 priests in all of Utopia. There is no educational bureaucracy since all education is on-site job training, handled informally and on the job, and personal support efforts are expected to be provided informally to each other by all Utopians. There are no nobility and no rich; all are equal in their status and possessions. Since everyone lives simply and is expected to help one another, there is no need for service laborers. Finally, there are no shirkers. Everyone works with vigor in one way or the other, because anyone who does not labor with adequate vigor, who seeks to shirk, is enslaved.

Productivity of Labor

If wealth creation is to be maximized, labor must not only be applied in maximum quantity but also be highly disciplined. According to Moses Finlay, the disciplining of labor was a fundamental change from ancient to modern economies. For all of preindustrial history, people did not work for the purpose of the maximum accumulation of wealth, but rather at their own pace on things that interested and belonged to them while gaining a return that was high enough to provide for an adequate level of subsistence.[51] With the separation of labor from capital, and the attendant phenomenon of industrialization, came the need for labor discipline. Labor must be accommodated to the process of production if production is to generate maximum wealth. As Pollard notes in his analysis of early factories, "Men who were non-accumulative, non-acquisitive, accustomed to work for subsistence, not for maximization of income, had to be made obedient."[52]

Utopia exhibits the ultimate in labor discipline. Labor in Utopia is provided in two forms: in citizen labor and, very commonly, in slave labor, with both types highly disciplined. All citizens must labor, men and women equally, with no exceptions. All must labor six hours per day on a sharply defined and enforced schedule. All must labor at their assigned trade with little choice as to preferred trade. All citizens are rotated into the country to provide farm labor for a two-year stint. Citizens are also continually subject to temporary farm labor as most citizens are sent into the fields each year at harvest time to "get the harvest almost completely done in one day."[53]

All citizens labor diligently. After hours they are expected to follow programs of healthy living and self-improvement, and they are all rested and eager to labor on the morrow. To encourage them to live and labor productively, citizens are monitored constantly. "The chief business and practically the only function of the syphogrants is to take care and see to it that no one lounges around in idleness but rather that everyone practices his trade diligently."[54]

All citizens live a restricted home life in identical compounds and toil as unpaid laborers under the threat of slavery. Personal entrepreneurial behavior is strongly discouraged and penalized. The citizen labor force is augmented by a large pool of slaves, who differ from citizens only in that they are denied any form of home life. Most slaves are criminals, both Utopians and non-Utopians brought from other countries. Utopians find it irrational to execute perfectly healthy criminals and equally irrational to incarcerate them and thus allow them to sit around in idleness. Instead criminals are made to labor. The labor is vigorous and carefully prescribed and monitored for maximum productivity, but it is not cruel or particularly harder than that performed by citizens. Slave revolts are virtually nonexistent because, to forestall plotting, slaves are not allowed to associate with other slaves. If a plot comes to light, all are immediately executed, both those actively participating as well as those who merely had knowledge of the plot.

Another large source of slaves is from among Utopians who are not otherwise active criminals but who fall into any of three errors. First are adulterers; any confirmed adulterer is made a slave for the first offense, and for a second offence the adulterer is executed. The second cause of enslavement is unauthorized travel outside of the citizen's assigned area of residence. The third cause for enslavement is shirking. Anyone who does not work vigorously, live healthily, and labor with maximum discipline is ultimately converted into a slave. As Soviet Russia sent people to the gulag for activities undermining communist ideology—that is, political activity—Utopia sends people to the gulag for activities undermining labor discipline.

Capital Accumulation

Wealth creation and capital accumulation are key objectives in Utopian society, not for individual gain but for a common good. Along with a clear distinction between work and property to emphasize labor and capital, wealth creation needs to clearly distinguish between consumption and saving. If wealth creation is to be maximized and wealth is to grow at a maximum rate, the additional wealth created must be saved and invested, not consumed. Modern research in economic history demonstrates that a major reason for slow economic growth in the past

has been high consumption rates. A large segment of society often lived at a very high level of consumption by keeping capital investment to a minimum.[55] Thomas More appears to have thoroughly understood that maximization of capital accumulation requires the restriction of consumption. Since human nature does not appear to have an inclination to limit consumption voluntarily under most circumstances, a society can maximize wealth creation by forcibly restricting personal consumption. Utopia does this to perfection.

One example of low personal consumption can be found in housing. All Utopians live in communal housing described as comfortable but plain, meaning that there are no luxuries or amenities at all. All housing is identical and is allocated by lot. Even differences such as location are evened out over time by reallocating housing every ten years. There is no way to lock any house and thus people wander in and out, so there is nothing private anywhere.[56] Even if Utopians were inclined toward theft—which they are not due to the severe punishment for doing so—this would not cause any problems, because there is no personal property to steal. Pigs in their sties are again brought to mind, with clean and comfortable lodging well suited to all biological needs but with nothing personal allowed. Clothing is identical of unbleached wool, and other forms of consumption are carefully restricted.[57]

Maximization of saving also requires the minimization of government expenditures, which Utopia also does. An example can be seen in Utopians' attitude toward warfare. They presciently understand that warfare is the costliest of government expenditures, but even more costly is warfare's inevitable disruption of economic activity and the destruction of capital investment. This they seek to avoid by concentrating government effort and military expenditures on ensuring that wars are never fought in Utopia itself and by paying others to fight Utopia's wars on the mainland, either by forming alliances or by hiring mercenaries. Utopia is so rich it is easily able to do this and funds are put aside in anticipation of this need. When the need arises to pay for warfare, Utopia also manipulates and exploits the foolish and primitive noncommercial notions among mainland societies—notions such as patriotism, military glory, tradition, and moral principle. Utopia freely bribes rulers, recruits spies and traitors, assassinates leaders, and terrorizes civilian populations—all in the name of avoiding damage to Utopia and its system of economic production.[58]

Conclusion

In a call to ground management more solidly in classical scholarship and the liberal arts, Naughton and Bausch remind us that "all management theory presupposes various first principles concerning the human person, motivation, community, work, property."[59] The rise of capitalism during the time of Thomas More's life saw a radical transformation of the first principles of work and property, from highly personal fundamental human attributes with emotional and spiritual connotations into the institutionalized modern economic abstractions of labor and capital.

Utopia has the attraction "that history seems to revolve around it."[60] The history that revolves around *Utopia* is that of the degree and forms of sacrifice of personal liberty that humans would need to make to permit the ideal commonwealth. Mezciems laments that "it is hard to submit even in imagination, to the necessary totalitarian concept which begins in Plato's *Republic* (never to be realized) and has recently been rejected in communist states in the real world."[61] Thomas More's *Utopia* is a supreme work of the imagination and offers a thoroughly totalitarian society, posing as the ideal commonwealth that is so strange it rises to the level of allegory.

We argue that, at its highest level, *Utopia* can be interpreted within the context of early sixteenth-century economic conditions that were starting to force theologians and social philosophers to refine the notions of labor and capital within the context of human existence and morality. More, through the allegory of *Utopia*, showed a sophisticated and modern understanding of issues related to economic maximization and wealth accumulation, while also showing the dangers of separating man from his natural work, a dehumanizing process that can lead to secular materialism and, arguably, to tyranny and slavery.

The Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto[62] argues that our difficulty in understanding economic growth, particularly the lack of growth in the third world, is due to our failure to appreciate the true nature of capital and its source in human work. The industrialized West, he argues, actually just stumbled into its current state of highly productive labor and capital virtually by accident. This is a provocative idea, that modern economic and management science does not really understand capital, labor, and the relationship between them, and that capitalism developed by happenstance. Is there some difficulty in moving from the human concepts of work and property to the capitalist concepts of labor and capital? If there is indeed a disjunction between these concepts, then discussion of them can fruitfully draw us back to *Utopia*.

Thomas More meant for the name of his fantastic society to be ambiguous, a good place but also no place. One is tempted to interpret this to mean that this "good place" is a "no place" because it does not, indeed cannot, exist. But the ambiguity might also be interpreted in another way, one that is appropriate to More's allegorical method. "No place" might be interpreted to mean "negative" place, a place where "no" is said to some of the most fundamental human behavioral traits, however animal, a negation of human passions both lofty and base, a nullification of human creative energies. The power of More's allegory is his demonstration that this grand negation might be compatible with material wealth generation.

Of course, as a literary work, *Utopia* does not offer a solution to this dilemma, only a fascinating look at an early economist's dehumanized perfect world within the context of the important economic, philosophical, and theological debates that were starting to crystallize by the sixteenth century. Ultimately these issues laid the foundation for both Western industrialized economic development and the future conversations of whole economic traditions, such as the late-sixteenth century Spanish School of Salamanca, the Scottish economic and moral thought culminating in Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, and later, the Austrian economic advancements illustrated by the writings of Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich Hayek, and Joseph Schumpeter. It is within this context that *Utopia* can be seen as an allegorical diagnosis of a possible social trajectory in which wealth creation proceeds parallel to a progressive dehumanization.

Notes

* The authors would like to thank this journal's reviewers for their insightful comments and suggestions.

1. Book 2 of *Utopia* describes the Utopian commonwealth and is the primary focus of the present analysis, while book 1 represents more an analysis and criticism of the social system at the time.

2. H. W. Donner, *Introduction to Utopia* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1945).

3. More's historical work, *The History of King Richard the Third*, was published after his death.

4. Eric Nelson, "*Utopia* through Italian Eyes: Thomas More and the Critics of Civic Humanism," *Renaissance Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (2006), 1029–57; Dominic Baker-Smith, *More's Utopia* (London: Harper Collins Academic, 1991); Timothy Miller, *The Quest for Utopia in Twentieth-Century America* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1998); Gerard Wegemer, "The Utopia of Thomas More: A Contemporary Battleground," *Modern Age* 37, no. 2 (1995): 135; Gerard B. Wegemer, *Young Thomas More and the Arts of Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

5. One notable exception is an article by Samuel Bostaph, "Deepening the Irony of *Utopia*: An Economic Perspective," *History of Political Economy* 42, no. 2 (2010): 361–82. Bostaph sees *Utopia* as a critique of socialism in the tradition of Friedrich von Hayek and Ludwig von Mises. While agreeing with this argument, we make an argument that there was also a deeper purpose of Utopia, a warning in allegorical form of the forces of the upcoming industrial age and capitalism. James Park, "The Utopian Economics of Sir Thomas More," *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 30, no. 3 (July 1971), also discusses economic issues in his analysis of Utopian institutions, but from a different perspective than the present article.

6. Paul Turner, "Introduction," in Thomas More, *Utopia*, ed. and trans. Paul Turner (London: Penguin Books, 1965).

7. Clarence H. Miller, "Introduction," in More, *Utopia*, 2nd ed., ed. and trans. C. H. Miller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). Subsequent citations of More's *Utopia* will use this edition.

8. Terence Cave, ed., *Thomas More's Utopia in Early Modern Europe: Paratexts and Contexts* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2008).

9. Wegemer, *Young Thomas More and the Arts of Liberty*.

10. This is the major theme for Wegemer, "The Utopia of Thomas More: A Contemporary Battleground"; Wendel Bell, *Foundations of Futures Studies: Human Science for a New Era*, vol. 2: *Values, Objectivity, and the Good Society* (London, UK: Transaction

Publishers, 1996); Nelson, "*Utopia* through Italian Eyes"; Pentti Malaska, "A Futures Research Outline of a Post-modern Idea Progress," *Futures* 33, nos. 3–4 (2001): 225–43; Malaska, "About Utopian and Dystopian Thought in Futures Research," paper presented at the Vision Seminar, Turka, June 11–12, 2002.

11. David Herlihy, "The Economy of Traditional Europe," *The Journal of Economic History*, 31, no. 1, (1971): 153–64.

12. In his discussion of sixteenth-century economics, Gilbert defined capitalism as a system in which enterprises are not controlled by those who supply the labor. William Gilbert, *The Renaissance and the Reformation* (Lawrence, KS: Carrie, 1998), http://www.thefishersofmenministries.com/Renaissance%20and%20Reformation%20by%20William%20Gilbert.pdf.

13. Book 1 describes the enclosure issue in detail. See Mildred Campbell, "Introduction," in More, *Utopia*, trans. R. Robinson (New York: Walter J. Black, 1947), 33–34. The possible dedication to Cardinal Wolsey is mentioned in a letter from Thomas More to a Member of the Royal Court in January 1517. *Chronology of the Letters and Papers of Thomas More*, Part 1: 1478–1519, http://www3.telus.net/lakowski/Chronology1.html#MoreChronology1.

14. William E. Lingelbach, *The Merchant Adventurers of England: Their Laws and Ordinances with Other Documents* (Philadelphia: The Department of History of the University of Pennsylvania, 1902), xxvi, https://archive.org/details/merchantadventu00linggoog/page/n10.

15. C. E. Walker, "The History of the Joint Stock Company," *The Accounting Review* 6, no. 2 (1931): 98.

16. Lingelbach, *The Merchant Adventurers of England*, xxvi.

17. Walker, "The History of the Joint Stock Company," 102. The development of new ways of organizing the separation of capital from labor for the sole purpose of wealth accumulation and the bestowal on these entities of government-like "corporate powers" in the period right before the writing of *Utopia* has not been explored in prior Utopian analyses. Probably Thomas More would have been aware of the 1505 charter for The Fellowship of the Merchant Adventurers of England.

18. Thomas S. Kane, *The New Oxford Guide to Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 267–68.

19. In the Introduction to the 1965 Penguin translation, Paul Turner writes, "I am simple minded enough to believe, with certain qualifications, that the book means what it says, and that it does attempt to solve the problems of human society." Turner, "Introduction," 12. Later Turner writes, "I have yet to see any conclusive evidence that More did not mean what he said about communism in Utopia" (151).

20. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn also noted that More's Utopia anticipated the Soviet Gulag system. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich," in *Enslavement and Emancipation*, ed. H. Bloom (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2010), 173–74.

21. More, *Utopia*, 86.

22. More, *Utopia*, 87.

23. Philip T. Hoffman et al., "Real Inequality in Europe since 1500," *The Journal of Economic Issues* 62, no. 2 (2002): 322–55; Guido Alfani and Francesco Ammannati, "Long-Term Trends in Economic Inequality: The Case of the Florentine State, c. 1300–1800," *The Economic History Review* 70, no. 4 (2017): 1072–1102.

24. C. S. Lewis, *The Pilgrim's Regress: An Allegorical Apology for Christianity Reason and Romanticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958).

25. Ralph Robinson, an eager office-seeker of the Tudor government, translated in the opening line of *Utopia* a description of Henry VIII as "in all royal virtues a prince most peerless." Turner in 1965 translated this same phrase as "that expert in the art of government."

26. It is also recognized that the general public could have different interpretations, depending on region and level of sophistication in understanding the impending economic debates. See, e.g., Nelson, "*Utopia* through Italian Eyes."

27. Gerard B. Wegemer, *Thomas More on Statesmanship* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1996), 92.

28. Miller laments that this sentence structure is not possible in English. Clarence Miller, "Introduction," *Utopia*. xi.

29. Miller, *Utopia*, 58–59.

30. See the analysis of this issue in Joseph A. Schumpeter, "The Crisis of the Tax State," in *The Economics and Sociology of Capitalism*, ed. Richard Swedberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 109.

31. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (Penguin Books, 1976), 876.

32. A good analysis of the development of medieval thought regarding the relationship between property rights and "natural law," given the "imperfections of mankind," is found in Scott Swanson, "The Medieval Foundations of John Locke's Theory of Natural Rights: Rights of Subsistence and the Principle of Extreme Necessity," *History of Political Thought* 18, no. 3 (1997): 399–458; Hermann Chroust and Robert J. Affeldt, "The Problem of Private Property According to St. Thomas Aquinas," *Marquette Law Review* 34, no. 3 (1951): 152–82; and Philip Booth, "Property Rights and Conservation," *The Independent Review* 21, no. 3 (2017): 399–418.

33. More's (and other contemporary Humanists') attitude toward communism, given Catholic theology of the time, has been examined by several authors. See, for example, Edward L. Surtz, "Thomas More and Communism," *PMLA* 64, no. 3 (1949): 549–64. However, these authors cannot fully explain why More would offer such an aggressive form of communism in *Utopia*, including the clear antihumanist properties of slavery, executions, mercenary wars, and the destruction of family.

34. Bruce Mansfield, "Erasmus and More: Exploring Vocations," in *A Companion to Thomas More*, ed. A. D. Cousins and Damian Grace (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009), 155.

35. See, for example, George Holland Sabine, *A History of Political Theory* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), contrasting Jean Bodin and Karl Marx.

36. Thomas More, *The Four Last Things, The Supplication of Souls, A Dialogue on Conscience* (New York: Scepter, 2002).

37. Erasmus, who was instrumental in getting *Utopia* published, recommended that one should read *Utopia*, "If You Wish to See the Very Wellsprings of All Troubles in the Commonwealth," Letter from Erasmus to Guillaume Cop, February 1517, in *Chronology of the Letters and Papers of Thomas More*, Part 1: 1478–1519, http://www3.telus.net/lakowski/Chronology1.html#MoreChronology1.

38. In persuasion theory, cognitive dissonance theory explains "persuasion as a post-reactive response to inconsistencies in belief and actions." Marianne Dainton, and Elaine D. Zelley, *Applying Communication Theory for Professional Life: A Practical Introduction* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2004), 124. It seems reasonable to argue that book 2 in *Utopia* is designed to create extreme reader dissonance at the dawn of economic change. Mansfield suggested a similar objective in *Utopia*, arguing that the aggressive communism (which might appeal to the humanists of the day) combined with the nonhumanist aspects of slavery, mercenaries, and executions, was actually meant to challenge the humanist thinking of the day. Mansfield, "Erasmus and More: Exploring Vocations."

39. Ligeia Gallagher, *More's Utopia and Its Critics* (Chicago: Scott, Foreman and Company, 1964), 80.

40. St. Pachomius developed a large monastic community, ranging between 2,000 and 10,000 members (depending on the source) with a complex organizational structure that organized the members into villages, and included houses, which then formed tribes, which then formed monasteries, which then formed the "order." There was a clear division and specialization of labor, and the Rule of Pachomius emphasized work, restricted movement, and no private property. Many aspects of the Pachomian community seem similar to More's *Utopia*. Although the cenobitic tradition continued in the east, in the west it was replaced by St. Benedict's model of community-based monasticism, which corrected many of the organizational problems of Pachomius.

See Craig S. Galbraith and Oliver Galbraith, *The Benedictine Rule of Leadership* (Avon, MA: Adams Media, 2004), 28–30.

41. Alfred A. Cave, "Thomas More and the New World," *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 23, no. 2 (1991): 209–29; Marilyn Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism: From the Desert Fathers to the Early Middle Ages* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003), 25–30.

42. These forms were clarified and emphasized in the debates leading up to the American Civil War. Abraham Lincoln, for example, carefully noted these three forms of labor in an 1859 address. Abraham Lincoln, "Lincoln's Address to the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society, Milwaukee, WI, September 30, 1859," in *Abraham Lincoln: Selected Speeches and Writings* (Library of America, 1992).

43. Roger William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1974), 15.

44. Peter Kolchin, *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 31.

45. Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (New York: Anchor Books, 1967).

46. It is interesting to note that some contemporaneous readers appeared to be very selective in their reading of *Utopia*. The two most important letters describing contemporaneous readers' thoughts about *Utopia* are Jerome Busleyden's 1516 letter to Thomas More and Guillaume Budé's 1517 letter to Thomas Lupset (see L. Gallagher, *More's Utopia and Its Critics*, 81–89). All of these individuals were not only prominent Christian humanists at the time but also wealthy landowners. In their praise of *Utopia*, the authors, as good humanists, acknowledge the immorality of greed, the corruption of government, the benefit of democracy, and the silliness of hoarding gold, but completely ignore the antihumanist components of *Utopia*, such as slavery, forced labor, nonpublic capital crime executions, use of mercenaries, and the complete abandonment of family.

47. Estimated from descriptions in *Utopia* of family size, city size, and number of families and cities.

48. See Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (London: Penguin Books, 1979), 432.

49. More, *Utopia*, 62.

50. Smith also distinguished between productive and unproductive labor and identified roughly the same causes of unproductive labor; see Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 429–49.

51. M. I. Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

52. Sidney Pollard, "Factory Discipline in the Industrial Revolution," *European History Quarterly* 16, no. 193 (1986): 254.
53. More, *Utopia*, 55.
54. More, *Utopia*, 61.
55. M. M. Postan, "Investment in Medieval Agriculture," *The Journal of Economic History*, 27, no. 4, (1967): 576–87.
56. More, *Utopia*, 57.
57. More, *Utopia*, 65.
58. For More's discussion of warfare within Utopian society, see *Utopia,* 105–15.
59. Michael J. Naughton and Thomas A. Bausch, "The Integrity of a Catholic Management Education," *California Management Review* 38, no. 4 (1996): 122.
60. Jenny Mezciems, "Introduction," in Thomas More, *Utopia* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), ix.
61. Mezciems, "Introduction," ix.
62. Hernando de Soto, *The Mystery of Capital: Why Capitalism Triumphs in the West and Fails Everywhere Else* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).