SHLOMO AVINERI

WAR AND SLAVERY IN MORE'S *UTOPIA*

Habent sua fata libelli

The formal structure of Thomas More's *Utopia* is simple and well known. It consists of two books, the first of which contains, in the form of a dialogue between More and an imaginary traveller, Raphael Hythloday, a sharp criticism of English social conditions, the enclosure movement, the penal code and the existing pattern of international relations. The second, in the form of a lengthy tale related by Hythloday, is a description of the social, economic, political and religious conditions of the Isle of Nowhere, Utopia.

No less widely known is the culmination of More's social criticism, stating that "where possession be private, where money beareth all the stroke, it is hard and almost impossible that there the weal-public may justly be governed and prosperously flourish." [1]

It seems, however, to be far less appreciated that at least two spheres of Utopian life look as if they were far away from being an ideal state. The first is the sphere of social life, where in spite of rigid egalitarianism Utopian society does make use of slaves. The slaves in Utopia are either foreign prisoners-of-war or, more frequently, criminals who according to the Utopian criminal code became state-slaves in the way of punishment.[2] If this does mar the "idealness" of Utopia, it may be argued with some justification that as More criticizes the contemporary English usage of executing felons even for petty thefts, turning them into slaves is certainly more humane, and does not, after all, differ much from the modern concept of a life sentence.[3]

If this could be explained by referring to existing standards of punishment in More's own period, the same could not be said in defence of what More has to say about the way the Utopians wage war, and the whole chapter "Of Warfare" is rather difficult to square with a ny notion of an ideal society.

[1] Thomas More, *Utopia*, Robinson's translation, ed. J. Warrington (Everyman's Library, London, 1955), p. 50. All subsequent references to *Utopia* are to this edition.

[2] Ibid., p. 97-98.

[3] Ibid., p. 30-33.

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The opening sentence of this chapter seems to have led most observers astray. More starts by saying that "War or battle as a thing very beastly, and yet to no kind of beast in so much use as to man, they (the Utopians) do detest and abhor." [1] With such an opening it would be safe to assume that the subsequent chapter would deal with the ways in which the Utopians prevent war.

But actually the chapter is nothing of this sort. What follows is one of the most detailed and abhorring expositions ever to be written in a tract on political philosophy about the technique of war, and *prima facie* the chapter seems to be worthy of a Machiavelli, if not a Treitschke. The obvious question arising out of this chapter is how could this have been possibly ever conceived as a recipe for an *ideal* state.

It goes without saying that the Utopians wage war in order to defend their own territory: they would have been foolish had they done otherwise. But More immediately adds that they wage defensive war also "to drive out of their friends' land the enemies that have invaded it." [2] Further, they indulge in wars of liberation, setting oppressed peoples free from bondage. When, however, More remarks somewhere else that those liberated people choose Utopian citizens as their rulers,[3] some suspicions creep in whether we are not facing here a phenomenon all too well known from modern Cold War casuistry.

But it seems that the Utopians not only come to the help of their friends, but also definitely encourage them to find reasons to attack their neighbours on pretexts of ancient injuries: "They send help to their friends, not ever in their defence, but sometimes also to requite and revenge injuries before done to them." [4] This is being done on one condition: that the allies accept the Utopians' decision whether to wage any particular war or not as final.

The so-called "friends" are thus dependent nations, not equal allies. Utopia appears as a center of a loose yet well-ordered community of nations, *not sharing the Utopian social system*, but being utterly dependent upon Utopia in their foreign policy and having Utopians as their rulers. "These people which fetch their officers and rulers from them, the Utopians call their fellows. And others to whom they have been beneficial, they call their friends." [5] The very historical association

[1] Ibid., p. 107.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid., p. 104.
[4] Ibid., p. 107.
[5] Ibid., p. 105. Those allies are also like 'so many nations in their (the Utopians') debt' (p. 111).

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expressed by the usage of these terms of *socii* and *amici* seems suggestive more of the Roman Empire than of anything else, and when More goes on to relate how the Utopians proclaim war if one of their own or their allies' merchants is being ill-treated somewhere abroad,[1] it is difficult to refrain from thinking about the Saguntines and the Jugurthan Wars.

When More mentions that the Utopians, on conquering a country "do not waste nor destroy . . . or burn up their enemies' corn . . . thinking that it grows for their own use"[2], one gets the first suggestion that the Utopians may be waging wars for the economic benefits arising from them. This suspicion may grow into an alarm; when one reads further on that the Utopians send to the conquered countries "some of their citizens as lieutenants to live there sumptuously like men of honour and renown", the picture of proconsuls and veteran colonies comes again to one's mind. This Utopian *imperium* could not be even supposed to have grown by the absence of mind; it is based on a preconceived, premeditated plan of securing for Utopia absolute security and eventual hegemony.

It seems only natural for More to mention that the Utopians prefer diplomacy to war. But when it transpires what More means by those methods of "craft and deceit", the image of the ideal commonwealth gets a bit tarnished. Immediately after declaration of war (and now we know that this may happen quite often and for various and sometimes trivial reasons) the Utopians proclaim that "they promise great rewards to him that will kill their enemy's prince, and somewhat less gifts, but them very great also, for every head of . . . those whom they count their chief adversaries, next unto the prince." [3] The prize is being doubled on delivering the proscribed persons into the Utopians' hands alive. The people who thus betray their own country and leaders also get extra remuneration – and the necessary protection – in the form of "lands of great revenues lying in most safe places among their friends." [4] More adds that the Utopians consider this custom of buying and selling adversaries among other people "much praiseworthy", though it may be generally felt to be a "cruel act of a base and a cowardly mind". The moral justification for this policy of subversion and political assassination is given "that they count it also a deed of pity and mercy, because by the death of a few offenders the lives of a great number of innocents, as well as of their own men as

[1] Ibid., p. 108.
[2] Ibid., p. 116.
[3] Ibid., p. 109.
[4] Ibid., p. 110.

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also of their enemies , be ransomed and saved." [1] One wonders what crimes cannot be perpetrated under such pretexts.

If this "fifth column" tactics do not work, then the Utopians "raise up the people that be next neighbours and borderers to their enemies, and them they set in their neck under the colour of some old title of right, such as kings do never lack. To them they promise their help and aid in their war; and as for money, they give them abundance." [2] A better formulation of *divide et impera* could hardly be improved upon.

The Utopians do not, however, rely on their friends and allies alone: they have their mercenaries as well, a people called Zapoletes, "hideous, savage and fierce" who fight for whomsoever it be at the highest bidding. The Utopians make use of their services in the same way as they are being used by any other nation, and even promise the highest rewards. Yet, luckily, they do not always have to pay them, because the Zapoletes are "being put into great jeopardies, whence the most part of them never cometh again to ask their reward." [3] With what surely seems more than a usual amount of cynicism, More adds that this is not only a sound business arrangement, but consists also of the highest moral qualities, as the Utopians are really satisfied that causing so many Zapoletes to be killed not only keeps their coffers full: they do mankind a service and favour as well, "for they believe that they should do a very good deed for all mankind if they could rid out of the world all that foul stinking den of that most wicked people",[4] – which is, one has to admit, the nearest any political theorist ever came to conscious genocide.

That Utopian ethics is not based on a universal basis is evident also from the fact that while the Utopians have no qualms about sending the Zapoletes to their doom in their service, "of their own citizens they send to their friends' help few or none, whom they make so much of and love so entirely, that they would not be willing to change any of them for their adversaries' prince." [5] Some people seem to be more equal than others.

The Zapoletes are not, however, the only category of people which are dealt with by the Utopians as *Untermenschen*, or, perhaps more precisely, as *Unmenschen*. In another chapter More explains that the continuity of the blessed state of the Utopians is being vouchsafed for by meticulous control of the size of the population. Once, however,

[1] Ibid.
[2] Ibid., p. 110-111.
[3] Ibid., p. 112.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid., p. 111.

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population is expanding too fast for Utopia to contain all her citizens and still preserve her social equilibrium, "they build up a town under their own laws in the next land, where the inhabitants have much waste and unoccupied ground, receiving also of the same country people to them, if they will join and dwell with them." [1] Suppose, however, that the unhappy inhabitants of the underdeveloped country would resist those encroachments? More's answer could serve as a model for any people in quest of *Lebensraum:* if the "natives" refuse to live along with the enterprising and go-ahead Utopians "to the great wealth of both the peoples", the Utopians "drive them out of those bounds which they have limited and appointed out for themselves. And if they resist and rebel, then they make war against them." This is not just the crude right of conquest, as Machiavelli would perhaps satisfy himself in his simple-mindness. It serves higher morality, it is the manifest destiny of a civilized people, "for they count this the most just cause of war, when any people holdeth a piece of ground void and vacant to no good or profitable use, keeping others from the use and possession of it which notwithstanding the law of nature ought thereof to be nourished and relieved." [2]

The quest for empire and colonisation is thus elevated into a law of nature, and fighting against the Utopians becomes tantamount to fighting against nature itself. If one adds to this, that on the rare occasions when the Utopians fight their wars with their own citizens, women fight along with men [3] – we get here, *prima facie* at least, a picture of a modern, total and rationalized war. It is being waged in utmost cynicism with all possible means, without any regard for ordinary ethics and morality, justifying ruthless expansion, genocide, subversion and political assassination, along with the unscrupulous use of allies which are really utterly dependent. If Utopia is a paradise for its own inhabitants, it is causing life to be very much like hell to all other nations.

II

It has to be admitted that the surprise at finding such descriptions in More's *Utopia* is possible only if the book is conceived as a description of an *ideal* commonwealth, depicting More's *summun bonum*. To be

[1] Ibid., p. 70.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid., p. 113.

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sure, this is the most current and prevailing opinion, and the *Utopia* is presented in most general textbooks on political theory not just as *Nowhere*, but also as a *desideratum*,[1] and this is difficult to square with the chapter on war, which seems to run the dream into a nightmare.

But is this interpretation of the *Utopia* the right one? Did More really suggest, by comparison with existing conditions, a desirable society in his book? This seems to have been the way his intention was understood by his own contemporaries. Erasmus, who resided with More while he was writing the first book of *Utopia* and who should know what was in More's mind, tells a correspondent in February 1517 that if he had not read *Utopia*, he should do it, "if ever you want to see the sources from which almost all the ills of the body politic arise." [2] In his long letter on More to Ulrich von Hutten Erasmus reiterates this claim, saying that More "published his *Utopia* for the purpose of showing what things create mischief in commonwealths, having the English constitution especially in view." [3]

Another of More's friends, Jerome Busleiden, takes the same opinion, saying, in so many words, that they all eagerly await the advent of *Utopia*. He considers it obvious that if all states behaved according to Utopian standards, the millenium would be at hand.[4] Some eighty years later, Thomas Nashe, in his *Unfortunate Traveller* said much the same: "He (More) concluded with himself to lay down a perfect plot of a common-wealth or government, which he would entitle *Utopia*." [5]

It would be safe to assume that this contemporary reading of More's intention was mainly responsible for what may be called the "tra-

[1] To quote just two recent examples, from both sides of the Atlantic, cf. G. H. Sabine, A History of Political Theory, Revised edition (N.Y., 1953), p. 435-437; J. Bowle, Western Political Thought, New edition (London, 1961), p. 263-269.

[2] The Epistles of Erasmus, trans. by F. M. Nichols, II, 503.

[3] Erasmus to von Hutten, 23.7.1519, cited in Campbell's edition of the Utopia (N.Y., 1947), p. 200. Erasmus here obviously refers to Book I, but his remark may be extended to cover the whole book.

[4] Busleiden to More, November 1516, in: The Correspondence of Sir Thomas More, ed. E. F. Rogers (Princeton, 1947), p. 82-84: "Quod et si alias semper praestare contenderis, tamen id maxime es nuper mira felicitate adsecutus, scilicet pomeridiano illo sermone abs te in literas relato. Quem de recte et bene constituta (ab omnibus expectanda) Utopiensium Rep. aedidisti . . . Quas quidem insigneis clades, vastationes, euersiones, caeterasque belli calamitates, nostrae (si quae sint) Resp. facile evaserint, modo ad unam Utopiensium reipublicae normam sese adamussim componentes, ab ea ne transversum quidem, ut aiunt, unguem recedant."

[5] Quoted by A. L. Morton, The English Utopia (London, 1952), p. 35.

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ditional" approach to the interpretation of *Utopia*.[1] This approach sees *Utopia* as either a humanistic or Christian ideal come true, and as the chapter of war does not neatly fit into this pattern, it is mostly tacitly overlooked. The amazing feature of the "traditional" school is that it hardly ever mentions the fact that More wrote anything about war. As both humanism and Christian orthodoxy hardly imply, or even condone, community of property, this school sometimes also tends to ignore the advocacy of communism implied in the *Utopia*.

Perhaps the most characteristic and surely the most influential of the "traditional" interpreters is Frederic Seebohm, and much Victorianism is read by him into More. In his book More is being connected with the humanist Oxford reformers; his strictures against the war as practiced in contemporary Europe in Book I are explicitly directed against Henry VIII – in short, More is almost the first Whig, to use Acton's language concerning Aquinas.[2] Seebohm refers to the opening sentence of the chapter on war in Book II – but leaves it at that, and does never actually refer to the contents of the chapter itself. Utopia is "the ideal commonwealth",[3] and true to Victorian fashion communism is not mentioned at all, though there seems to be a passing reference to a "true community" which implies a lack of disproportionate differences in wealth.

This interpretation is confined neither to England nor to the Victorian period alone. A German scholar, Georg Thomas Rudhart, says much the same at the beginning of the 19th century: according to him, the ideal state of Utopia is based on three principles: tolerance, anti-absolutism and the moral and religious virtues of the inhabitants.[4] *Utopia* itself testifies as to the extent by which More was permeated with the ideas of classical humanism.[5] As for war, Rudhart, like many others, seems to be satisfied with the opening phrases of the chapter "Of Warfare", without bothering to delve more deeply into its perplexing contents: the Utopians wage only defensive wars and wars intended to protect their friends.[6]

Emile Dermenghem, writing almost exactly a century later in

[1] It is interesting to note that no study about the history of the interpretation of More's Utopia really exists. Professor Gerhard Möbus' lecture "Macht und Menschlichkeit in der Utopia des Thomas Morus" (Schriftenreihe der deutschen Hochschule für Politik, Berlin, 1953) covers only part of the ground, nor is it intended to be a substitute for such a study.

[2] F. Seebohm, The Oxford Reformers of 1498 (London, 1867), pp. 279-280.

[3] Ibid., p. 282.

[4] G. H. Rudhart, Thomas Morus (Nuremberg, 1829), p. 141.

[5] Ibid., p. 119.

[6] Ibid., p. 132.

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France, does not alter this verdict very much. For him, More combined Plato and Saint Augustine, reason and revelation, in a superb synthesis in which religion, by being coeval with natural theology, brings out all that is living in Christianity, and thus More's communism is also a re-statement of evangelic poverty.[1] Though he does not mention the passages on war, the existence of slaves is mentioned by him, but Dermenghem satisfies himself that this is just a relapse into influences derived from More's English background: forced labour seems to be a typical English vice (v. Australia, etc.) and one should not attach too much importance to this, as it is not central to the theme. After all, Thomas More *was* an Englishman, and some allowance should be made to certain barbaric traits which might have been left over in him.[2]

Another French-writing author arrives much at the same conclusions, though without the gibe at across the Channel. Edmond Privat, writing in the 1930's, goes even to the length of explicitly praising the Utopians for their total pacifism: "Tous les moyens leur paraissent meilleurs que la guerre pour obtenir justice ou délivrer un voisin attaqué. Les sanctions économiques leur sont familières."[3] Once more it seems a safe guess that the crucial chapter on war was not too deeply studied and scrutinised.

In England itself, the "traditional" approach was re-iterated in Potter's influential biography of More. To the Platonic and Christian influences Potter adds the civic spirit of the Low Countries as a formative force influencing More's description of Utopia.[4] This may explain why some of the reforming regulations advocated by More have a typically restrictive character; they originate, according to Potter, in the strictly-regulated atmosphere of the Flemish towns, with their emphasis on public function rather than on individual personal liberty. This may be so, but even Potter's acknowledgement of slavery [5] does not change his mind that *Utopia* was meant to convey a description of an ideal society. He even admits that the Utopians wage wars in rather unconventional methods and "even assail the enemy by every device that craft and deceit could suggest, including

[1] E. Dermenghem, Thomas Morus et les Utopistes de la Renaissance (Paris, 1927), p. 97: "Ces grands érudits, fervents d'hellénisme et de patristique, se plaisaient à voir dans l'Utopie les influences combinées de Platon et de saint Augustin, l'incarnation même de cet humanisme chrétien qu'ils s'efforçaient de faire triompher . . . Héritière légitime de *la République* et de *la Cité de Dieu* . . ."

[2] Ibid., p. 144.

[3] E. Privat, Le Chancelier Décapité: Saint Thomas More, Henri VIII et la République des Utopiens (Neuchâtel, 1935), p. 64.

[4] G. R. Potter, Sir Thomas More (London, 1925), p. 89-90.

[5] Ibid., p. 113.

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the offer of enormous bribes to assassins" [1] – but once again he does not go further to analyse any possible implications this may have either on the general nature of *Utopia* or on our understanding of it.

Fundamentally, the socialist interpretation of *Utopia* is a variant of the "traditional" approach. It only adds the further insight which suggests that the abolition of private property is the key issue of More's advocacy of a brave new world.

It is of some interest that the socialist interpretation was not carried out by Marx or Engels themselves, though they coined in their *Communist Manifesto* the term "Utopian socialism". They did not, however, have much interesting things to say about *Utopia* itself. In their joint *German Ideology* More is just mentioned, along with the Levellers and some 19th century radical thinkers, as one of the "founders of English Communism",[2] and in a newspaper article Marx mentions More as the first voice raised against the enclosure movement.[3] Engels refers to More in an essay directed against the Young Hegelian Karl Grün, in which he criticises the way in which Grün understood More, but does not offer his own views on the subject.[4] Incidentally, Grün himself used More to show how social reforms could be achieved without revolutionary means: according to him, English 19th century social legislation, by humanising the penal code and abolishing some of the worst excesses of the industrial system, carried peacefully into practice many of the reforms advocated by More; 19th century England is Utopia come true.[5] That Engels could not stand such "Utopian nonsense" goes without saying.

It was however left to Karl Kautsky to read More as a socialist prophet, unhappily living several centuries ahead of his age, and thus producing a book which had to remain stillborn, a Utopia, Cloud-cuckoo Land. Though economically speaking More represents the interests of the rising city bourgeoisie, in his outlook he is "far ahead of his generation", which could not understand him and therefore relegated his *Utopia* into the limbo of entertaining *jeux d'esprit*, an intellectual essay in imagination.[6]

[1] Ibid., p. 102.

[2] K. Marx & F. Engels, Werke, III (Berlin, 1959), p. 448.

[3] New York Daily Tribune, No. 3687, 9.2.1853. Similarly, Marx's remarks about *Utopia* in *Das Kapital* are confined to the enclosures only. Cf. Das Kapital (Berlin, 1960), I, pp. 648-649.

[4] F. Engels, "Deutscher Sozialismus in Versen und Prosa", Deutsche Brüsseler Zeitung, No. 94, 25.11.1847 (Werke, IV, p. 227).

[5] K. Grün, Über Goethe vom menschlichen Standpunkt (Darmstadt, 1846), p. 225.

[6] K. Kautsky, Thomas More and His Utopia, trans. by H. J. Stenning (London, 1927), pp. 126, 159, 161.

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Kautsky maintains that More deserves immortal fame not because of his religious or humanist tracts, but on account of his *Utopia*. Furthermore, his religious teachings do not make much sense in light of his communistic fervour. Kautsky does not explicitly say it, but he probably felt that More became a martyr for the wrong cause. "It is sometimes debated whether the honour of having inaugurated the history of Socialism should fall to More or to Münzer, both of whom follow the long line of Socialists, from Lycurgus and Pythagoras to Plato, the Gracchi, Catilina and Christ."[1] This patristic list surely makes curious reading, but the gist of what Kautsky tries to convey is obvious: socialism is humanism brought to its logical conclusion.

Kautsky does, however, face some problems, and the most obvious and odious is, of course, the existence of slaves in the Utopian community. Less than two pages in a book of more than 250 are devoted to the unenviable task of trying to square slavery with socialism. Unfortunately, Kautsky's *apologia* is necessarily feeble: slavery "is a concession to the backwardness of the contemporary mode of production", the slaves constitute a "class" and not a "caste", and, after all, their position is not hopeless, as they may be pardoned and restored to the condition of freedom.[2]

Regarding war, Kautsky is even less satisfactory: in a rather short passage he brushes aside all doubt and uneasiness by stating that the chapter "Of Warfare" is "nothing than scorching satire upon the war spirit of his time."[3] We shall later return to another version of this way out of the difficulty, but suffice it to say at this stage, that stating this categorically in the way done by Kautsky leaves the question wide open. How do we *know* that this is satire? In Book I Hythloday is obviously criticising the prevalent usages of war in contemporary Europe, and this criticism, which is direct, is on basically different counts from the habits ascribed to the Utopians in Book II. Moreover, how can we relegate a whole chapter, containing a factual description about what the Utopians allegedly do to mere satire? If so, how can we ever be possibly sure that the chapter on community of property is not satire as well? Do we possess any criteria by which we can know when a description *advocates* something and when it *criticizes* and *satirizes* it? This will later prove to be a crucial problem, but Kautsky certainly did not give any satisfactory answer to it. Indeed, the problem of finding a proof to his contention that this is satire is never raised by him.

[1] Ibid., p. 1.
[2] Ibid., pp. 212, 200-201.
[3] Ibid., p. 232.

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Among the different varieties of the "socialist" approach, only two examples need to be added, as the tone of this interpretation usually follows Kautsky very closely.[1] The first is Karl Vorländer, who emphatically states that More is a socialist, whose ideal state is based on communistic foundations.[2] Though Vorländer himself admits that More has some doubts about the possibility of achieving this state, this does not naturally detract from the "idealness" of the society suggested by him.[3]

Vorländer does, however, come to grips with the chapter on war. As a scholar who based his own concept of socialism on Kantian premises, Vorländer necessarily confronts here a serious problem. But his way out seems to obviate the difficulties in too facile a manner: he says that those are "trivial, secondary matters" (*Nebendinge*), which do not bear any influence on the basic principles of More's idea. More is and remains "an idealist socialist".[4] Vorländer does not make his predicament any easier by stating in the same passage, that the basic criterion for examining the true nature of a socialist country is its relation to the non-socialist world, and he illustrates the dilemma by referring both to Fichte's *The Closed Commercial State* and to the practice of Soviet Russia. He does not, however, seem to feel how much this cuts under his own apology for More as an "idealist" socialist: Vorländer seems here a victim of the projection of his own idealist socialism on More's *Utopia*.

A much less painstaking effort which, however, deserves to be mentioned is A. L. Morton's study of English Utopianism, undertaken from a strictly marxist point of view. More is once more conceived as a neo-Platonist in the humanist vein. If Plato's *Republic* may seem philosophically better argued, then this is because More "takes the principles for granted and presents us with a living picture of such a commonwealth in full working order." [5] The fact that the closing passage of *Utopia* is "touched with melancholy" is accounted for by the fact that, after all, More was a Utopian in the marxist sense and realized that his Eden could not be realized under present conditions.[6] Nothing, however, is being said by Morton about slavery or about war.

[1] M. Beer, History of British Socialism (London, 1919), I, ch. I-IV; H. W. Laidler, Social-Economic Movements (N.Y., 1944), pp. 22-39; A. Voigt, Die Sozialen Utopien (Leipzig, 1906), pp. 55-64.

[2] K. Vorländer, Von Machiavelli bis Lenin (Leipzig, 1926), p. 21: "Mit einem Worte: More ist der erste grundsätzliche Sozialist der neuen Zeit."

[3] Ibid., p. 27.

[4] Ibid.

[5] A. L. Morton, op. cit., p. 41.

[6] Ibid., p. 44.

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III

A rather violent turn in the general direction of the understanding of More occurred in the early 1920's and it was centered round the chapter "Of Warfare". If the "traditional" and "socialist" approaches have tended to overlook or to explain away the passages on war, the new school saw in them the very key to the understanding of More's intention. No longer was he conceived to be a humanist, devout Christian or socialist dreamer; he was proclaimed to incorporate a super-Machiavellian technique of politics, a mastery of *Realpolitik*, cunning and craft. Even the very year of 1516 was brought out into relief as the *annus mirabilis* linking together the Florentine Second Secretary with the English Lord High Chancellor.

It does not seem purely accidental that this interpretation flourished and became prevalent in post-Versailles Germany.[1] When Germany was branded as a war-monger and imperialist, enough motivation was existing to show and prove that *perfide Albion* had a long tradition of moralistic cant, hiding its ugly imperialist face behind the cloak of a saint. The British Empire was *Utopia* come true, postulating each gun-boat manoeuvre as Armageddon.

This approach, which suddenly brought to light the obscure passages on war in More, was voiced for the first time in 1922 by Hermann Oncken in an address to the Heidelberg Academy of

[1] It may be of some interest to note that the first time a parallel was drawn between Machiavelli and More it happened not in Germany and in a completely different context. The Russian Populist Yury Galaktionovich Zhukovsky wrote in 1861 in the journal "Sovremennik" that "the people, the workers deprived of land and capital, have found in writers such as Machiavelli and More, who are able to see the falsity of all juridical interpretations and their dependence on the ruling force their true defenders" (cf. Zhukovsky's essays, St. Petersburg, 1866, p. 157). Another early reference to a possible connection between More and Machiavelli comes from Aharon Shmuel Liebermann, who under the pseudonym of Arthur Freeman published in Vienna in 1877 the first Hebrew socialist paper, Ha-Emeth (The Truth). In an essay on More Liebermann sees the author of Utopia as a reformer who bases his concept of the social order on the interpretation of the power elements in politics. More is a necessary sequel to Machiavelli, and both start their teachings with a look at the existing concrete political systems of their respective countries. Both have a quest for power, and institutionalize it in one man or one organ. The main difference between the two is that Machiavelli understands power in a purely political context, whereas More recognizes its economic origin. Liebermann goes on to suggest that the reason for this difference may lie in the fact that Machiavelli still had to get hold of the realities of power in his divided Italy, wheras More found the political structure of power ready and available in the Tudor monarchy. Thus economics appears as the clue to the question how power should be wielded, and to what purpose. Cf. Ha-Emeth, No. 2 (Vienna, 1877), p. 31; also A. S. Liebermann, Ktavim (Works), ed. M. Berkowicz (Tel-Aviv, 1928), I, pp. 1-62 (in Hebrew).

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Sciences.[1] Here Oncken touches upon a crucial question: how is the problem of power to be treated in a rationalistic Utopia? The crux of the problem lies in the difficulty that one just cannot write the problem off as belonging to the irrational sphere of accidentality, as a state cannot be isolated in the same way as a specimen in a chemistry laboratory can, because one of the vital aspects of the state is its relation to other states.[2] This is a heavy problem facing every author of a *Utopia*, as once *Utopia* enters into any sort of relation with other states, it enters the non-Utopian realm of reality. How is it to behave? As a sheep among wolves? As a more cunning – because more rationally-organised – wolf than the others? Both alternatives are self-destroying.

But Oncken does not rest at this oblique criticism of Utopian thinking: he goes on to question the very basis of the "traditional" and "socialist" approach to More. It is inconceivable, he argues, that the future Lord Chancellor of Henry the Eighth, already at the time of the writing of his *Utopia* a man of affairs, would write a book completely divorced from reality; or should we perhaps try to find the imprint of reality in his writings?

Oncken finds this imprint in the dialogue between More the "realist" and Hythloday the "idealist" about the question if a humanist scholar should enter the service of royalty, as presented in Book I of *Utopia*.[3] More, the realist reformer, maintains that urging princes to follow an abstract rational recipe is useless. "But there is another philosophy more civil which knoweth, as ye would say, her own stage, and thereafter, ordering and behaving herself in the play that she hath in hand, playeth her part accordingly with comeliness, uttering nothing out of due order or fashion. And this is the philosophy that you must see." [4] Oncken suggests that this *philosophia civilior* is what Book II of *Utopia* represents: this is "civil", i.e. political, practical philosophy. It is less an idealised version of a humanist-Christian paradise, than a sober, *realpolitisches* programme, due to be put into practice by the man who might become English Minister of the Crown on the next day. "Alles atmet Wirklichkeit." [5]

[1] H. Oncken, Die Utopia des Thomas Morus und das Machtproblem in der Staatslehre (Sitzungsbericht der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse, Heidelberg, 1922, 2. Abhandlung).

[2] Ibid., p. 6. Cf. my "The Problem of War in Hegel's Thought", Journal of the History of Ideas (N.Y., 1961), XXII, pp. 468-9, for a different nuance in the treatment of the same problem.

[3] Utopia, p. 38-47. [4] Ibid., p. 47.

[5] Oncken, op. cit., p. 10; Oncken is aware of the fact Book II of Utopia was written prior to Book I, and that the exposition of Utopian life is done by Hythloday, wheras the reference to the *philosophia civilior* is by More himself. But this does not seem to influence his judgment.

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More's strictures against the impoverishment, moral corruption and human degeneration caused by European continental wars, as portrayed in Book I of *Utopia* [1], are, according to Oncken, genuine and true, because the Utopian concept of war is wholly different, as it is insular. More wrote a real *anti-Machiavel*, and intended to keep his *Utopia* out of war by the device of complete insular isolation. Everything is as rationalised in Utopian praxis as theory could possibly conceive, and such a state, Oncken argues, "could not be anything but a peace-loving one. Still, the characteristic trait of Utopia will be, that matters tend to develop in a different way and events will flow, in spite of all isolation, in a different direction." [2]

The first instance where this ideal isolation breaks down is when the Utopian population rises quickly and there is the inevitable quest for *Lebensraum*.[3] Oncken points out that Plato faced the same problem, but by regulating copulation he thought he could achieve a planned and restricted population. As this method is out of question for More because of the nature of Catholic sexual ethics, the realm of reason comes to clash with the province of reality and power: the Utopians have no way out but to colonize, and Oncken sees in More's justification of colonisation the justification of a possible expansionist policy towards Ireland, perhaps towards newly-discovered America.[4]

Thus, if More condemns war, Oncken sees this not as a condemnation of *all* war, but of a certain, historically and geographically conditioned type of continental war. Armed with the Augustinian concept of *bellum iustum* More extends this so far as to include every conceivable war which might be profitable for an insular, commercial state. *Utopia is Tudor England*, Oncken argues, and More's teaching tends, in spite of himself, to be morally even more objectionable and reprehensible than Machiavelli's: for whereas Machiavelli only emancipates politics from ethics and religion, More constructs a code of rational absolutist ethics which enables him to argue that a war which is being waged by the Utopians is by necessity a just war, as *Utopia* is, by definition, *the* ideal state, living in splendid isolation among the other states which are relegated to the Valley of Darkness.[5] Moral casuistry, leading to cant, is as typical for More's *Utopia* as it is

[1] Utopia, pp. 23-28, 39-44.
[2] Oncken, op. cit., p. 13.
[3] Utopia, pp. 69-70.
[4] It is not wholly without interest to point out that More's brother-in-law John Rastell was involved in a commercial-naval venture to settle New Foundland in 1517, and that More looked after his family and affairs while he was away. Cf. A. W. Reed, Early Tudor Drama (London, 1926), pp. 11, 187.
[5] Oncken, op. cit., p. 17.

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for England, and the intention of the would-be saint is to propose a working hypothesis in practical politics for the would-be Lord Chancellor.

There seems to be much that is questionable in Oncken's reading of the *Utopia*. Its anti-British bias is overshadowing and is mainly responsible for Oncken's difficulty to decide whether the paradox of war is an immanent trait of political Utopias or just a particular vice, historically determined by England's insularity. Bringing in the Opium War, as Oncken does, as an example of English cant to prove a thesis related to Tudor England is, to put it mildly, open to serious doubts. Still one has to admit that historical research owes it to Oncken that the historian's attention has been drawn to this rather difficult problem.

If in his Heidelberg address Oncken intended to lay low the English Gog, his preface to Ritter's translation of the *Utopia* adds to this another intention, probably not less conditioned by the *Zeitgeist*, of exorcising the Bolshevist Beelzebub. The Communist ideal state, Oncken tries to show, is not founded on any egalitarian premises. Having slaves reveals the communist Utopia as a class-ridden society, and all its socialist ideology comes to naught in the sphere of foreign relations; then Utopia behaves like the worst power-hungry state, and More should be congratulated on showing the irreconcilable dichotomy between the concept of the welfare state and the immanence of power. Arcadia is logically impossible.[1]

From the pedestal of the founder of a dream, More was thus pulled down by Oncken and relegated to a niche in the edifice of power. If some of the historical evidence was sometimes far-fetched, the picture was gradually improved upon later. Thus Michael Freund analyses the structure of power in Tudor England and concludes that because of England's insular security and the peculiar nature of social stratification there, the Crown could never become absolutist in the continental, French fashion. If there were nuclei of absolutism in England,

[1] H. Oncken, Einleitung zu "Klassiker der Politik", Bd. I, Utopia (Berlin, 1922), p. 37. This double-edged, anti-British and anti-Communist reading of the Utopia became very popular among the German political right wing during the Weimar Republic. Moeller van den Bruck in his Das Dritte Reich, 3. Aufl. (Hamburg, 1931), p. 41, says that Versailles was the incarnation of More's Utopia: a self-appointed pacifist nation won a war by the help of mercenaries and colonial people, corruption, deceit and propaganda, and without actually occupying the vanquished turned them into a veritable people of slaves toiling and working for the pious pharisaical victors. Van den Bruck's book was written within a year of the publication of Oncken's studies.

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they were confined to the maritime sphere, where the hereditary forces who had a stake in the country did not possess a voice in the policy.[1] Thus the first encroachment on the part of the Crown on the traditional liberties and privileges of Englishmen naturally stemmed from the widening of maritime superiority of the King in the form of the Impositions. This, Freund argues, is also the premise of More's *Utopia*: Utopia is an island, and its insular position is artificial and premeditated, as the channel separating it from the continent is an artificial one.[2] If for Oncken this insularity is the outcome of rational speculation, trying to achieve conceptual isolation in reality, for Freund it is mainly a device of practical defensive policy. Thus Albion-Utopia is able to influence world politics not through the wasteful means of warfare, but through commercial, mercantilistic imperialism, tempered by the existence of a mercenary army always stationed abroad, leaving the internal territory of Utopia free from the horrors of war and consequent absolutism. Warfare is further being mechanized and rationalized, any chivalrous associations it may have are being taken out of it and it is left as a crude, naked instrument of power to be used strictly abroad. *Rule Britannia* has always been, as the Senior Service itself, a weapon which could not be used within the country.

Freund is well aware of the fact that though all those elements may have emerged at a later stage of English history, they are dismally absent in Henry VIII's England. He therefore differs from Oncken in seeing More not as a conscious protagonist of British Imperialism, but as a perhaps not fully conscious observer of a historical process, who suceeded in penetrating into the future by amplifying existing trends into dominant traits: "Much derives from forces beyond More's own personal will and control, and much which was originally far from his intention is still active in historical actuality. We confront here the perpetual secret of how historical forces are working even within the texture of the most lofty and pure spirits." [3]

We are thus left with a Hegelian puzzle, with one more case of the cunning of reason manifesting itself in history.

But the "German" power-approach to *Utopia* does not necessarily lead to such esoteric conclusions alone. Another German study dating from the twenties, by Oscar Bendemann, accepts Oncken's method while drawing completely different implications from it: More

[1] M. Freund, "Zur Deutung der Utopia des Thomas Morus – Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Staatsräson in England", in: Historische Zeitschrift, Vol. 132 (1930), p. 224.
[2] Utopia, p. 56.
[3] Freund, op. cit., p. 276.

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condemns only the "wasteful, senseless and futile feudal warfare",[1] but there seems to be another art of war, where fighting rises to become the "necessary armed self-expression", and More advocates and approves it. More has nothing in common with the chimera of perpetual peace, war is not left by him in its naturalistic nakedness, but in accordance with the "pagan-republican patriotism of Antiquity gains its beauty and ethical value".

This romantic proto-Nazism ascribed to More is certainly the most extreme and possibly the most absurd of all the various interpretations More's *Utopia* was subjected to. The author sees in More the "renaissance of the military virtues", and even the rather obviously repulsive statement about the Zapoletes who fight for the Utopians and whose death they do not bewail because the "rid out of the world all that foul stinking den of that most wicked and cursed people" – even that phrase has its advocate in Bendemann who contends that, though it has a very bad ring, "rightly understood it is however heroic and inspiring".[2]

Now obviously we are ourselves too close to Auschwitz and Belsen not to be utterly shocked by any implications of this sort. The point, however, is that Bendemann did not invent those phrases, worthy of a Goebbels, about "that foul stinking den": they are More's own language, and though Bendemann's interpretation is obviously nonsense the phrase itself cannot be squared with any image of More we may possess. As a consequence, any conceivable re-interpretation of *Utopia* will have to take those odious phrases into account. No image of *Utopia* could now be correct which left those phrases out, and if that be a burden, then historical interpretation generally is one, and will always be.[3]

Ritter, who was the translator and editor of the German edition of *Utopia* for which Oncken wrote his already mentioned Preface, did not himself enter the field about the Utopian argument till much later,

[1] O. Bendemann, Studie zur Staats- und Sozialauffassung des Thomas Morus (Berlin, 1929), p. 61.

[2] Ibid., p. 71 ("heroisch und schwungvoll").

[3] The English public was presented with a modified version of the "German" view in a lecture read before the London Society for the Study of Religion in March 1923 by Ernst Troeltsch, subsequently published as an essay by the name of "Politics, Patriotism and Religion" in his "Christian Thought – Its History and Application", transl. by Baron F. v. Hügel (London, 1923). Troeltsch concludes that Utopia represents "a sincere endeavor to preserve the moral and religious standpoint", but "at the same time it leaves notable openings for political realism (*Realpolitik*) or the doctrines of raison d'état, by means of which all the theoretical problems and practical applications of Machiavellism are able to penetrate into his system" (p. 148-9).

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though the fact that it was his edition which gave hospitality to Oncken's views might primarily suggest that he generally concurred with them. He expressed his own views, however, only in his *Die Dämonie der Macht*, published in *Germany* in 1940, several times reprinted during and after the war, and subsequently translated into English in 1952. The revised English edition, as well as those German editions published after 1945, differ widely from the original one of 1940, and it is left to the reader's imagination and inner judgment what the ultimate reasons for the difference in tone and emphasis might be.

Ritter's subtlety is none too helpful in solving the dilemma of More's meaning. He generally seems to agree with Oncken: "However sincere, our moralist has not evaded the daemonic aspect of power",[1] and this reads very much like an implied condemnation of English cant. On the other hand, however, Ritter maintains that "political struggle for More remained a struggle for legal rights", but he adds that "the daemonic character of power was hidden behind the mask of justice." [2] Is Ritter praising More for his legalistic attitude, or is he condemning him for his perfidious hypocrisy? This surely is baffling.

Thus the riddle does not resolve itself. On one hand Ritter maintains that More's moralistic politics is in sharp contrast to the power politics of Machiavelli, but on the other hand the term "moralistic" is enigmatic in itself. For Oncken it meant a term of utter abuse and condemnation, being euphemistically synonymous with "cant". Is it a term of approval for Ritter? His concluding passage leaves one in deepening doubt: "All one can say is that even the peaceful welfare state of the Utopians stood revealed, at close inspection, as a state based on power . . . However thick the veil of moral ideologies behind which the daemonic Gorgon's head had been hidden, it remained there, an awful sight. And those who lift the veil are not less frightened than those who try to meet the direct stare of hard reality, namely those who trace the features of political reality as manfully and as frankly as did Machiavelli." [3]

The intention of the book is avowedly to show why the moralistic attitude should be preferred to the "Machiavellian" concept of power.[4] The closing phrase cited above may suggest something else. Be it as it may, Professor Ritter's image of *Utopia* could not be envisaged had not Oncken raised the question, and on final weighting it seems

[1] G. Ritter, The Corrupting Influence of Power, trans. by F. W. Pick (Hadleigh, 1952), p. 78.
[2] Ibid., p. 80.
[3] Ibid., p. 89.
[4] Ibid., Author's Preface to the English Edition, p. xiii.

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that Ritter tends to agree with him perhaps more than he would like to admit in post-Nazi Germany. Here as in other instances, the image of *Utopia* is inseparably bound up with the image the author has of his own political *mores*.

IV

There is no doubt that even if the German "power interpretation" has not been widely accepted, and was certainly not popular – or even widely known – in England, it created some uneasiness about wheter the "traditional" interpretation was wholly satisfactory. It was only natural that the Roman Catholics were perhaps mostly disturbed and troubled by the insinuations against the moral basis of More's teaching. As More was beatified by Pope Leo XIII in 1886 and subsequently canonized by Pius XI in 1935, the preparations for the canonization coincided with the spreading of the "German" approach, and the Church was in danger of finding a Machiavellian saint on its hand. Thus a marked revival of the interest in More, mainly among Roman Catholics, is to be noted in the 1930's and afterwards.

As a matter of fact, the Catholic Church was always a bit wary of More, and its attitude to the *Utopia* in particular was anything but ambivalent; it was sometimes difficult to square More's martyrdom with his advocation in *Utopia* of several arrangements, such as community of property, divorce [1] and even suicide, [2] which were in open contrast with official Church doctrine. Thus Catholic writing never fully accepted *Utopia* as a fully-fledged ideal state, always pointing out that not everything in *Utopia* should be literally taken, as after all there is much of a *jeud'esprit* about the book or, alternatively, that because of the nature of the book as a dialogue, we never fully know when More is voicing his own ideas or is, perhaps, satirizing prevalent notions.[3]

This "dialogic" reading of *Utopia*, always in the background of Catholic rendering of the book, now becomes the main theme of the neo-Catholic, or "dialogic" approach.[4] The tentative approach, leaving the ultimate aim of More in some doubt, could not be sustained under the impact of the "German" onslaught on the very moral

[1] Utopia, p. 100-101.

[2] Ibid., p. 98.

[3] Thus, mainly, Father Thomas E. Bridgett, Life and Writings of Sir Thomas More (London, 1891); also Warrington in his Introduction to Everyman's edition of Utopia (London, 1910), p. xi.

[4] Though most of those who based themselves on the "dialogic" nature of Utopia were Roman Catholics, some were not; therefore it would perhaps be more accurate to call this approach the "dialogic" rather then the "neo-Catholic".

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basis of More's teachings. The martyr in process of canonization and the author of the *Il Principe*, whose books were on the *Index*, had to be definitely separated from the forced fellowship imposed on them by the German scholars. Furthermore, the existence of a communist Russia did also call for a clarification of More's advocacy of the abolition of private property.

The dialogic nature of More's *Utopia* thus became the key issue in the interpretation of his intention. It was pointed out that the narrative description of the Isle of Nowhere does not come from More, but from Hythloday; furthermore, More himself voices several objections against some particular arrangements of the Utopian commonwealth.[1] Thus, it was maintained, the dialogue in *Utopia* is not just a literary *medium*, but a real *argument* between an advocate of Utopia (Hythloday) and a sympathetic yet sceptic observer (More), who is never fully convinced, nay, becoming even less and less sure of the feasibility and desirability of the Utopian arrangements, explicitly voicing doubt as to the ways of war and the community of property.[2]

According to this neo-Catholic approach, the argument between Hythloday and More is not accidental and trivial, as between two people who happen to disagree on a particular point, but cuts deeper, down to fundamentals. According to Christopher Hollis' biography of More, it is one more variant of the classical argument about Reason and Revelation.[3]

According to this approach, Hythloday and the Utopian Commonwealth represent not More's own ultimate ideal but the maximum which human reason, unaided by divine revelation, can ever achieve. Surely it is much, but it is, by its very nature, limited and incomplete. Thus slavery and the immanence of war may represent those aspects of human life which cannot be overcome by secular reason alone. Utopia is thus the picture of a secular-rationalistic ideal, based on the "cardinal" classic virtues of reason, fortitude, temperance and justice, lacking, however, the Christian virtues of Belief, Hope and Love, and thus always imperfect.[4]

The Utopians' Natural Theology is consequently no more viewed as the humanist's vision of a rational religion: it is depicted as a serious handicap towards ultimate salvation. Far from criticising revealed Christian tradition and the visible Church, More is re-

[1] Utopia, p. 135: "Many things came to my mind which in the manners and laws of that people seemed to be instituted and founded of no good reason."

[2] Ibid.

[3] C. Hollis, Sir Thomas More (London, 1934), p. 75.

[4] F. Brie, "Machtpolitik und Krieg in der Utopia des Thomas Morus", Historische Jahrbücher, Vol. 61 (1949), p. 117 passim.

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iterating the demand for an institutionalized mediation of revealed grace. *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus.*

Some of the neo-Catholic versions run to the length, possibly under Cold War stress, of denigrating any social philosophy based on human reason: W. E. Campbell characterizes Hythloday as a "theorist, inexperienced, impatient and impractical. More, on the other hand, after a life of severe self-discipline, had gone far along the path of political commonsense and of social virtue." [1] More objects to Hythloday's Communism because of its obligatory and coercive "étatistic" nature, and prefers the voluntary communism of the Church. The argument, according to Campbell, is between "compulsory communism" and "Christian voluntarism", this voluntarism being "*fons et origo* of Catholic social philosophy".[2]

Communism turns out thus to be not a desired end, but a criticized secular ideal, exposed in its limitations in the light of divine revelation.[3] If Campbell does not explicitly state that the description of warfare can be interpreted in the same way, other neo-Catholic authors see in it one more incidence of its imperfection, due to its God-less state.[4]

More's *Utopia* thus "just means 'nowhere', not a desired place." [5] It does not seem exaggerated to argue that the neo-Catholic approach, based on the dialogue, turns the *Utopia* into a veritable *anti-Utopia*, almost into a 16th Century version of *1984*.

In a similar sense the most extensive and still perhaps most useful biography of More, that by Chambers, presents his intentions in writing *Utopia*: "When a Sixteenth-Century Catholic depicts a pagan state founded on Reason and Philosophy, he is not depicting his ultimate ideal." [6] But, whereas according to the neo-Catholic writers it follows that More's intention was to refute the possibility of a merely secular humanistic ethics, Chambers, who does not write from the Catholic point of view though he accepts the "dialogic"

[1] W. E. Campbell, Erasmus, Tyndale and More (London, 1949), p. 92.

[2] Ibid., p. 94.

[3] It is often shown in this connection that in his Dialogue of Comfort More strongly opposed community of property.

[4] E. E. Reynolds, Saint Thomas More (London, 1953), p. 124. For other versions of the neo-Catholic "dialogic" school cf. A. Cecil, A Portrait of Thomas More: Scholar, Statesman, Saint (London, 1937); D. Sargent, Thomas More (London, 1937).

[5] Reynolds, op. cit., p. 125. This way of seeing Utopia as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the chimera of an "ideal" state was also accepted, without necessarily relying on the "dialogic" approach, by J. W. Allen, A History of Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century (London, 1957), p. 159: "More knew that his *Utopia* was nowhere and proved nothing. He had declared in effect, that men being what they are, there is no conceivable remedy for social evils except, at all events, one that cannot be adopted; and as to that one, that it is doubtful what, in any case, the result of the adoption would be."

[6] R. W. Chambers, Thomas More (London, 1935), p. 128.

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approach, sees More's intention in another direction: "With nothing more save Reason to guide them, the Utopians do this; and yet we Christian Englishmen, we Christian Europeans . . .!" [1] *Utopia* is thus a sermon while being at the same time also a protest "against the new idea of the autocratic prince to whom anything is allowed." [2] This certainly bears out well the ultimate cause of More's martyrdom: he refused to accept the Machiavellian divorcing of politics from morals and the establishment, by the Acts of Supremacy, of Thomas Cromwell's idea of the superiority of the secular power and the total subservience of the Church to it. It may be of some significance, that even the *Utopian* "naturalistic" clergy is free from state interference.[3]

It would be of some help to note that this sort of interpretation brings out a strong Augustinian influence in More: if it is correct, then his *Utopia* is equivalent to Augustine's *civitas terrena*, "which does not live by the faith, (yet) seeks an earthly peace, and the end it proposes, is the well-ordered concord of civic obedience and rule." [4] Though this Earthly City does possess its own peace and morality, it is only a very limited and necessarily relative moral order, far inferior to the ideal state of revealed grace, where "those who live by faith look for those eternal blessings which are promised." [5] More's *Utopia* is thus another milestone in the history of the dualism inherent in Christianity, opposing reason to revelation, yet, dialectically, basing its concept of grace on rational pre-suppositions: the order of grace transcends reason, thus incorporating it by the very act of overcoming it.

As to war, this does not altogether do away with the difficulties, as the characterisation of war in *Utopia*, though it obviously may be shown to be non-Christian, does not, after all, depict even a secular-rationalistic ideal: it offends any rational concept of secular morality as well. Thus Chambers does not mention the German criticism more than in passing, does not analyse the chapter on war at all, and as to the passage on colonisation concludes that "the Utopians only settle where there is much waste land and unoccupied ground" and admit to full citizenship any of the inhabitants who care to join them. "It would have been well if all Sixteenth Century colonisation had been equally humane." [6]

[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 131.

[3] Ibid., p. 134. Another variety of this interpretation is the one offered by G. Möbus, op. cit., who sees More's intention as writing a tract against abstract thinking in politics which overlooks man's imperfect condition (p. 23).

[4] St. Augustine, The City of God, trans. by M. Dodds (N.Y., 1950), Bk. XIX, ch. 17, p. 695.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Chambers, op. cit., p. 142.

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This does not seem altogether satisfactory, as Chambers fails to mention that those of the "natives" who do not feel like living under the newly imposed Utopian rule are being either driven out of their country or subdued and eventually exterminated. To call this "humane" is certainly to beg the question.

Another attack on the "German" view came during World War II from H. W. Donner. Basically, Donner agrees with the neo-Catholic argument: Utopia is "a picture of a state of society to which man can attain without revelation." [1] But he does not accept the neo-Catholic contention that *Utopia* could be mechanically divided, through the medium of the dialogue, into what should be considered as More's own views and into what should be seen as views ascribed to Hythloday to which More takes exception. "With characteristic optimism (Donner writes) More left it to his readers to decide which parts of his book were seriously intended and which were spoken 'in sport' . . . And if some of his readers were deceived, this could only add to his amusement." [2]

This is, though Donner obviously does not admit it, a total surrender: he really says, "we can never know", voicing a total despair of the critic's rational faculties. It is tantamount to radical subjectivism, where there is no possibility ever to ascertain whether a given reading of *Utopia* may be correct or fallacious. Ingenious as this interpretation suggested by Donner may seem, it is the final abdication from any attempt at an interpretation.

Whereas the neo-Catholic approach has, at least, an objective criterion – the identity of the speaker in the dialogue – to indicate how a given idea is to be related to More's own views, Donner chooses quite freely. When it comes to the chapter on war, Donner says much the same as was already maintained by Kautsky: "The description is obviously ironical and such a tangible parody of contemporary European warfare that it seems well-nigh incredible that it should have ever been misunderstood . . . His argument against the Zapoletes only drives home his vigorous argument against mercenaries in the first book. More's detestation is obvious. This is no part of his ideal." [3]

[1] H. W. Donner, Introduction to Utopia (London, 1945), p. vii; cf. also p. 78, where he says that "The most elevated pagan philosophy could only be a preparation for the revelation of Christianity and the first rungs of Jacob's ladder." Donner holds much of the same opinion about *philosophia ancilla theologiae* as expressed by More in his earlier study, "On the Utopia of St. Thomas More", in Studier i modern Språkvetenskap (Uppsala, 1943), pp. 93-200, which covers much the same ground.

[2] Donner, Introduction to Utopia, p. 17.

[3] Ibid., pp. 44-5.

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The description of Utopian colonisation, however, is, according to Donner, an integral part of More's ideal, and one wonders whether there is any criterion, save whim and arbitrariness, which may suggest how Donner made the choice. Donner adds that "the expansion that takes place is not made at the expense of anyone else" [1] – which is simply in contradiction to More's own most explicit language in that passage. Donner is thus branding as satire those passages whose contents seems objectionable to him, while considering as "seriously intended" those with which he happens to agree. One wonders whether he feels that this selective process would also "add to More's amusement".[2]

If, however, generally speaking the neo-Catholic "dialogic" approach makes of the *Utopia* either an anti-ideal or a merely secular "second best", a still more recent study by Paul Huber suggests that *Utopia* is pure eschatology. More, living on the threshold of traditionalism and modernism paints his Utopia as an absolute thither-wordly (*jenseitiges*) ideal. This is shown by the facts that the Utopians are being referred to as *ultra-equinoctiales*.[3] This interpretation, however, does not have much new to say about the dilemma of war.

V

The variety and wealth of the different and often conflicting interpretations of the meaning of *Utopia* surely allow this book a place among the most controversial and enigmatic tracts on political and social thought: along with Plato's *Republic* and Machiavelli's *Prince* it would certainly rank high among the books subjected to highly diverging interpretations.

Trying to find one's way in the maze of detail and exegesis, one seems to be on sure ground to maintain that the "traditional" approach (be it humanist, Christian or socialist) suggesting that the *Utopia* is an ideal pure and simple, would not suffice. It leaves wide open the dilemmas of war, colonisation and possibly slavery as well,

[1] Ibid., p. 63.

[2] It is to be regretted that J. H. Hexter, in his otherwise excellent monographical study More's Utopia: The Biography of an Idea (Princeton, 1952), while questioning much of the accepted notion about Utopia refers to the problem of war as satisfactorily dealt with by Donner (p. 13). Another recent study by a member of the Society of Jesus, E. Surtz, The Praise of Pleasure: Philosophy, Education and Communism in More's Utopia (Cambridge, Mass., 1957) emphasizes the Christian origins of More's Communism and the fact that Utopia is necessarily limited by its secular humanistic ethics, but does not, however, refer to the problem of war.

[3] P. Huber, Traditionsfestigkeit und Traditionskritik bei Thomas Morus (Basler Beiträge zur Geschichtswissenschaft, No. 47, Basel, 1953), p. 108.

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and really begs the question as to the extent to which More could actually consider a commonwealth as ideal, which practised the art of warfare in the manner suggested in his book.

The "German" approach, even shorn of its anti-English bias and intensive malice, has to be credited with questioning the simplicity and even naiveté of the "traditional" schools, but does not seems to offer an explanation which could be considered adequate. By its own definition, it makes use of so much hindsight and *a posteriori* speculation that it really cannot supply an answer which could be historically sustained as to the meaning of a book published in 1516. Granted that British Imperialism did sometimes behave in a way similar to some of More's suggestions, the conclusion does not necessarily follow, that the British Empire was consciously modelled on the Utopian pattern, nor that More intentionally set down a blueprint for imperial expansion. It was Michael Freund himself who saw this anachronistic incongruence and suggested a dialectical insight on More's part, a "cunning of reason". This may be so, but then one cannot reach any conclusions as to the *conscious* aims of More, if the only significant passages of his book are those which represent, *unconsciously*, the hidden hand of the historical forces, simultaneously working in More's mind and in British history. That there might be a convergence of this sort between More and subsequent English history does not explain much as to More's own theory, as history is not, under normal circumstances, read backwards.

It could be argued that the neo-Catholic, "dialogic" approach does possess a way out of the predicament. Its conclusion that *Utopia* does not represent More's own ideal, but a rational-secular *Vernunftstaat*, intrinsically imperfect, seems to be amply sustained by More's own remark in the closing passage of the book, that "many things came to my mind which in the manners and laws of that people seemed to be instituted of no good reason, not only in the fashion of their chivalry and in their sacrifices and religions and in other of their laws, but also, yea, and chiefly, in that which is the principal foundation of all their ordinances, that is to say, in the community of their life and living without any occupying of money." [1] Communism, war and expansion are thus the destiny of the imperfect state of people living outside the fold of the Church, and *Utopia* seems to be not a scholar's ideal, but a polemic against the emancipation of politics and social life from revealed religion, trying to prove the impossibility of achieving ultimate perfection without salvation.

[1] Utopia, p. 135.

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It has to be admitted that this approach has its obvious attractions, but it may not be altogether watertight. If this was More's intention, one would surely expect him to be understood in this way by at least some of his contemporaries, but this was not the case. We have already seen that Jerome Busleiden in his congratulatory letter to More expressed his hope that all states should behave like Utopia. It may be that Busleiden misunderstood More, but the fact that More had Busleiden's letter printed in the 1518 folio Basel edition of *Utopia* suggests that Busleiden did not wholly misrepresent him.[1] Moreover, Peter Giles (Petrus Aegidius), to whom the *Utopia* was practically dedicated and who appears in the dialogue in Book I, writes himself to Busleiden recommending the *Utopia*, and there is nothing in his letter to suggest that *Utopia* is meant as anything else but an ideal.[2] Giles' letter was also printed in later editions of *Utopia*, with More's approval, and once more it would be difficult to suggest that More willingly subjected his book to such an interpretation, unless it was his own.

Of less value, but of some indication, is Ralph Robinson's Introduction to his translation, written in the form of a letter to William Cecil. Though More was of course dead at that time (1551), and there is much twisted sycophancy in Robinson's letter, there is no reason to suppose that he had to cloak his understanding of the very nature of *Utopia*. He puts it in a straightforward manner: *Utopia* is "containing and setting forth the best state and form of a public weal." [3] Though all this is no ultimate proof, it is, to say the least, inconceivable that practically all the people connected with the publication and translation of *Utopia*, some of them More's most intimate personal friends, misunderstood him so completely without the author putting them in the right.

Furthermore, there seems to be no reason why More, if he wanted to write a tract against the secular-rationalistic fallacy in politics, did not do it in a more overt and explicit way. Coming to the analysis of the dialogue in *Utopia* (upon which so much of the neo-Catholic argument is founded) one discovers that whenever there is a real argument, as in Book I, about the possibility of giving sound counsel to kings, the dialogue itself is a real one, but in Book II, setting forth the Utopian arrangements, there is hardly any dialogue, or argument, at all. When More wanted to write a real dialogue, representing a real clash of opinions he did it explicitly, as in his "*Dialogue Concerning*

[1] Cf. More's Correspondence, p. 81.
[2] Giles to Busleiden, 1.11.1516; cf. Utopia, pp. 131-9.
[3] Ibid., p. 2.

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Comfort Against Tribulation": there Antony and Vincent really fight it out very clearly. If More intended to bury Utopia, and not praise it, then he certainly did it in a most incompetent manner, and if all his friends seemed to misunderstand him, one would expect him to try and show them their errors. But More's own letters to William Warham, Antonio Bonsivi and others, mentioning *Utopia*, do not convey any "ulterior" motives or hint at a "dialogic" meaning.[1]

The antinomy of Reason vs. Revelation is not altogether borne out by the language of *Utopia* itself. In the already cited reference where More voices his doubts about certain Utopian arrangements, the language he uses is that those laws "seem to be instituted and founded of no good *reason*", and surely this is a rather inadequate way of expressing criticism of the secular-rationalistic nature of Utopia from the point of view of *revealed religion*. Furthermore, it seems that Hythloday himself, while acknowledging Utopian religion as natural theology, sees in the institution of communism not a merely rational solution, but an arrangement directly emanating from "our Saviour Christ",[2] further adding that the reason for the non-acceptance of the Utopian way of life all over the world is due to "the princess and mother of all mischief, Pride". If it is *superbia* which prevents the world from living according to Utopian rules, then those rules themselves have to be based on *humilitas*, i.e. on Christian ethical grounds. Utopia is thus not a merely secular state, but has the Christian virtues as well.

The antinomy between secularism versus grace seems thus to be read *into Utopia* without having much foundation in the text or in More's handling of the problem. The criticism More obliquely voices in the closing passage of the books seems more in the nature of a literary device, or perhaps it was intended to register a certain *reservatio mentalis* about arrangements which More suggested but about which he was still open-minded in his views. To attribute this criticism, feeble as it is, to More's caution, if not cowardice, is no less missing the mark: his real criticism of the English penal code, of the enclosure movement and social injustice in Book I are anything but veiled, and there he is on much more dangerous ground.

The question thus remains as much unanswered as it was before the neo-Catholics entered the field. In the remaining pages of this paper it will now be suggested to try and solve the problem of war and

[1] Correspondence, pp. 85-88.
[2] Utopia, p. 134.

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slavery by looking more closely into the general nature of Utopian society.

It has perhaps been too often overlooked that if one were to classify Utopian society according to the accepted criteria of sociology or comparative government, it would surely fall, along with Plato's *Republic*, into the totalitarian category. This totalitarian nature comes out in many instances of Utopian life: the reglementation of daily life, the intellectual indoctrination, the monotonous and uniform daily routine, the strict control of marriage and divorce, the need for special permits to move about the country,[1] the standardization of leisure – all add up to a massive structure of a social system, within which the individual is so much interwoven into society that the dichotomy between society and the individual, as between freedom and coercion, totally disappears. It may be immaterial for our interest to analyse whether the origins of this train of thought are Platonic, Christian-chiliastic or influenced by the corporative system of the Low Countries.[2] The significance of the totalitarian aspect is that it seems to be inseparable form the quest for Utopia itself, from the search of the ideal, perfect society.

To put it in another way: Utopia is, by definition, the country of the utmost attainable political ideal.[3] Thus every positive trait in human nature has to be maximized, and this maximization is to be perpetuated by a permanent and rigid institutionalization. The ordinary Christian idea of an "eternal Pilgrimage" implies the imperfect present conditions as well as the hope for a progressive change for the better:[4] here it has to be overcome. Once the wordly and social *summum bonum* has been achieved, no change is permissible, as it could only be a change for the worse. Hence the rigid, static and implicitly boring character of the description of Utopian life.

This is the paradox of perfectionism – when perfection does not mean a faculty, a potential perfectibility, but an *achieved* state. The other side of this paradox is the one that is concerned with the seamier side of

[1] Ibid., p. 75.

[2] For the last possibility, cf. Russel Ames, Citizen Thomas More (Princeton, 1949), p. 87.

[3] That it is not, and could never be, the *ultimate* ideal for a Christian thinker like More is self-evident even if one does not accept the neo-Catholic version: for the ultimate kingdom is never of this world. Yet Utopia is the utmost which may be achieved in the social, this-worldly sphere.

[4] St. Augustine, The City of God, Bk. XIX, ch. 17, p. 695: "The families which live by faith . . . use as pilgrims such advantages of time and of earth . . . that aid them to endure with greater ease, and to keep down the number of those burdens of the corruptible body which weigh upon the soul." The pilgrim's *progress* is implied in the *aeterna peregrinatio*.

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human nature. Utopian thinking never really maintains that the *given* human nature is perfect: on the contrary, it has to be purged and cleansed from its intrinsic evil. Thus, if the positive traits are being isolated and consequently enlarged, hypostatised and institutionalised, the evil side has to be banished, exorcised and relegated to a sphere outside the confines of the ideal state. Thus Utopias never can be universal, as evil has to reside somewhere outside the blessed realm.

Thus, committing a felony which causes the person to fall from his state of earthly perfection into a state of sin, is a dangerous occurrence for all, as it contaminates all society, by making it unclean, tarnished and imperfect. The felon has thus to be banned from the civic bond, excommunicated from communion with his fellow-citizens: his is the lot of a moral *pariah*, and the condition of slavery has less social than moral significance. More himself goes to some length to explain that Utopian slavery does not aim at an economic goal, nor are the slaves badly treated. Slavery is just a moral stigma, signifying the state of a person who notwithstanding "being so godly brought up in virtue in so excellent a commonwealth",[1] did not attain the state of perfection. "Thy camp should be clean": the slave is the moral outcast.

The dialectics of perfection thus creates, nay, necessitates, a condition of utter despondency and degeneration outside the confines of the ideal commonwealth. If in any ordinary society holiness and corruption live side by side, are being judged by the same criteria and are subject to the same regulations, Utopian thinking has to divorce the saints from the villains and keep them apart. In the case of More's *Utopia*, the separation is even physical, as King Utopus caused an *artificial* channel to be dug, thus making Utopia an island, clearly set apart from the world as it is.[2]

Thus Utopia is the gem in the morass of human evil. More, as a deeply devout Christian, could not banish sin altogether from the phenomenal world: it could, however, be relegated abroad, into the confines of other nations. By an extraordinary feat of vicarious salvation, Utopia can persevere in her purity and perfection, because all the dregs have been taken out of her realm and stored somewhere else.

This may explain the paradox of war: it is not just an accident, happening without the obvious wish of the Utopians. More knows only too well, that "for war . . . you never have (it) but when you will

[1] Utopia, p. 98.
[2] Ibid., p. 56.

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yourselves." [1] Those people, who are outside of the Utopian establishment of perfection, are, by definition and nature, base and wicked: had they been otherwise, they would necessarily become part of Utopia. Thus if they refuse the Utopians' offer to live with them in one commonwealth they may be exterminated, as their very unwillingness to accept membership in the perfect republic attests to their moral corruption. When it thus comes to a fight between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness, no moral restraints are put on the Saints. As, however, fighting itself tends to corrupt, More prefers to have the allies and the totally corrupt Zapoletes to fight for the Utopians: as we have seen, the Utopians themselves fight only *in extremis*, as it is far safer not to contaminate oneself in the din of battle. And as those people who do this fighting for the Utopians are by necessity utterly corrupt, there is no harm if they perish by the sword themselves: it is only one more act of cleansing.

Utopia, thus, can do no wrong. Whenever it finds itself in war – though the Utopians "truly detest and abhor it" – they are by necessity right. Being what they are, they *could not* be wrong. The true paradox is, that there is no real contradiction between the Utopians' total detestation and abhorrence of war and the way they wage their numerous wars. The wars fought by the Elect are not ordinary wars, and their ultimate aim is not to be found in the normal motivation for warfare: their wars are the wars of the righteous, acts of mercy and even salvation.

This is the tragic side of the paradox of perfection. If one starts with the assumption that a certain social group is perfect, because it commits no crime or sin, the circle tends to be closed very soon by saying that it does not commit sin *because* it is perfect. Perfection thus is no longer a descriptive achieved state of a given social organisation, but becomes the very nature and essence of its existence. This total blending together of perfect essence with empirical existence – so much divorced in the phenomenal world – is responsible for the paradox which enables More to create the Utopians in God's image, while leaving the rest of the world in a defenseless, Godless state, with a perpetual Cain's mark on its forehead. It turns out that life in Utopia could be eternal bliss, only because anywehre else it is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.

* * *

The history of More's *Utopia* reads like an incredible Odyssey. Its mage was changed from generation to generation, each period reading

[1] Ibid., p. 25.

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into it its own problems, hopes, desperation and dreams. This, however, seems to be true of most historical writing and is probably the deepest meaning history may possess. But because More is reaching to the depth of some of the most fundamental and crucial problems of social life, his book has been turned upside-down more than the average turnover of historical interpretation would generally require.

It may be argued that the interpretation offered here is in itself as much influenced by our *Zeitgeist* as all the others have been found to be moulded by their own. The author would be the last to deny this accusation. But perhaps because our age is in so many respects similar to More's in the violent clash of old traditions with newly emerging forms and ways of thinking, we may have touched upon at least some essential elements in More's intentions.

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