

**Early Modern Utopian Writings and the Just Commonwealth**

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## Abstract

This thesis sets out to examine the interplay between utopian theory and political practice through close readings of three key texts in the early modern Western utopian tradition, Thomas More's foundational *Utopia* (1516), Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1626) and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). It argues that early modern utopian literature offers two competing approaches to the imagining of an ideal society: the practical-oriented approach initiated by Bacon, and the moderate, sceptical approach inspired by Plato's *Republic* and Ciceronian civil philosophy, which is here represented by More and Swift. Modern utopias are widely understood as blueprints for social reform by scholars such as Karl Popper (1945), Krishan Kumar (1987) and Ruth Levitas (2009). This thesis argues, instead that this modern concept of utopia emerges when utopias adopt the Baconian approach and break away from the classical heritage. More broadly, this thesis aims to recover the value of the rich intellectual tradition of early modern utopian thinking; this includes its sceptical engagement with the project of utopianism. We can only understand our own desire for civic reform with a fuller understanding of this tradition.

In Chapter One, I argue that More's *Utopia* is a cautionary tale against the passion for the ideal society. The description of utopia is preceded by a dialogue on whether philosophers should adapt to political reality or uphold their idea of justice without compromise. The dialogical form, with its openness, encourages critical assessment of the zealous character Hythlodæus who longs for Utopia, and his position is further undermined when his monologue on the best commonwealth becomes fraught with difficulties and contradictions. Chapter Two argues that Bacon turns utopian literature into an applicable blueprint for political reform and his *New Atlantis* thus marks a turning point for utopian literature. Concerned about the religious conflict in his day, Bacon advocates a religiously tolerant and charitable utopia. For the first time, utopia is conceived as a solution to a specific problem instead of the best commonwealth. In Chapter Three, I argue that *Gulliver's Travels* criticizes the Baconian approach for abandoning the topic of the best commonwealth while simultaneously reappraising the Platonic ideal. Despite his apparent endorsement of the classical tradition, Swift is in fact deeply sceptical of whether the return to a Platonic approach is feasible when the understanding of man and society has been radically reshaped by modern science.

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## Introduction

This thesis investigates the relationship between theory and practice in early modern utopian literature. It is focused on three case studies, namely: Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627), and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). Utopian literature enjoys a unique significance because it connects with the deep human desire to imagine a better state and address existing social evils. Utopian studies scholars such as Fátima Vieira prize this desire and consider it a valuable asset as a drive for social reform.<sup>1</sup> However, the categorization of utopian longing as 'impulse' by Gregory Claeys highlights its inherent irrationality: it can be both a constructive and destructive force once unleashed.<sup>2</sup> The idea of the perfect society and its possible gruesome realization raises the question of how utopias are meant to inform political action and the relation between theory and practice in general.

In approaching the theme of theory and practice, this study places special emphasis on how the classical tradition, most notably the works of Plato and Cicero, influences and helps form the sceptical outlook of early modern utopian literature on the practicability of utopian projects, without diminishing the longing for a better state. Both classical authors tried to restrain and guide the utopian impulse by upholding justice as the highest political principle. And their reflection on justice led to the conclusion that the best political society is either impossible to achieve or has essential limitations, thus rendering the utopian pursuit suspect. Plato reveals the paradoxical requirement of the best commonwealth: the best commonwealth is to be ruled by philosophers but philosophers, who prefer contemplation, must be forced to rule by none other than the people who consider contemplative philosophers to be politically useless.<sup>3</sup> In *De officiis*, Cicero juxtaposes the justice of philosophers ('investigation of truth and despise and think worthless those things that most people vehemently desire and fiercely struggle') with the justice of political community (that is, contribution to communal good), showing that the good of political society does not constitute the sole criterion of human life.<sup>4</sup> Philosophical life even appears to be more lofty, as in *De legibus* Cicero praises philosophical activity as the richest, most illustrious and preferable gift given to

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<sup>1</sup> Fátima Vieira, 'The Concept of Utopia', in *Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 3-27 (p. 23).

<sup>2</sup> Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent, 'Introduction', in *The Utopian Reader*, ed. by Gregory Claeys and Lyman Tower Sargent (New York: New York University Press, 1999), pp. 1-6 (p. 2).

<sup>3</sup> Plato, *Republic*, II 368d-369b; V 473d-e.

<sup>4</sup> Cicero, *De officiis*, 1. 28-29. Translation quoted from Cicero, *On Duties*, trans. by Benjamin Patrick Newton (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016).

human life by the gods.<sup>5</sup> By showing the impossibility or the limits of the idea of the best political society, both philosophers maintain a fundamental tension between theory and practice, between contemplation and action. Through the case studies of More, Bacon and Swift, I intend to show that a sympathetic appreciation of classical political philosophy restrained the utopian impulse embodied by the character Hythlodæus in *Utopia*; a departure from that tradition may give rise to the practice-oriented utopia exemplified by Bacon's *New Atlantis*; and a return, albeit an incomplete one, to a Platonic ideal in *Gulliver's Travels* highlighted the pitfalls and limits of practical utopias in the wake of Bacon's deviation from the classical conception of contemplation and action.

## 0.1 The Chinese Background of the Present Study

The three utopian texts, *Utopia*, *New Atlantis* and *Gulliver's Travels*, as well as the classical political philosophers referred to in this thesis are all well established in the Western canon, but their importance in the West is only part of the reason why a Chinese student pursues the present research. Two additional Chinese factors have significantly influenced how I came to choose the subject of the study – utopian theory and practice – and the theoretical framework, classical political philosophy. These factors are the recent surge of interest in classical Western political philosophy in China and the historical heritage of the Cultural Revolution.

The Chinese interest in classical Western political philosophy began to rise in the early 2000s with the introduction of the work of Leo Strauss and his disciples, who tried to revive classical political philosophy as represented by Socrates and Plato. Two scholars, Liu Xiaofeng (刘小枫) and Gan Yang (甘阳), are the forerunners and leaders of this movement and they have influenced a number of others who have turned to Western classics to reflect on modern thought.<sup>6</sup> Liu sees an antagonism between classical Western political philosophy and modern concepts such

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<sup>5</sup> Cicero, *De legibus* 1.22.58: 'Mater omnium bonarum rerum est sapiential...a quoius amore Graeco uerbo philosophia nomen inuenit, qua nihil a dis immortalibus uberius, nihil florentius, nihil praestabilius hominum uitae datum est.'

<sup>6</sup> Liu oversees the book series 'Classics and Interpretation' ('经典与解释') in China, which comprises hundreds of volumes of translation and studies on Western classics and is considered widely influential in China, see Xu Jian, 'The Nobel Contest', in *The Context Between the Ancients and the Moderns and Cultural Consciousness*, ed. by Xu Jian (Shanghai: Eastern China Normal University Press, 2010), pp. 1-29 (p. 5). Gan wrote the long introduction to the Chinese translation of Leo Strauss' *Natural Right and History* and is now the head of Xinya College (a liberal art college) of the prestigious Tsinghua University. Scholars influenced by Liu include Xu Jian (徐戡), whose research covers phenomenology and the origin of modern science from the perspective of Greek philosophy; Lou Lin (娄林), whose focus is Nietzsche and Plato; Chen Jianhong (陈建洪), whose focus is Leo Strauss, the interaction between Biblical and Greek philosophical traditions.



as liberal democracy and enlightenment. Following the opinion of Strauss, Liu believes that the modern concept of liberalism has its roots in Machiavelli, who deliberately deviated from moral considerations and turned to realism to study politics scientifically. Given a choice between classical political philosophy that sympathizes and improves ‘simple, commonsensical morality’ (‘简朴的到的观点’) and modern political thought that can be ‘scientifically and academically amoral’ (‘学术化的非道德’), Liu prefers the former.<sup>7</sup> The moral dimension, however, does not exhaust Liu’s interest in classical Western political philosophy. According to Liu, modern China ‘has lost its spiritual inheritance’ (‘心灵流离失所，丧失了自己的家园’).<sup>8</sup> Thanks to the introduction and prevalence of modern Western political thought, even traditional cultural icons such as Confucius and Zhuang Zi have been recast in a new light: ‘Confucianism is reinterpreted as a teaching in conformity with democracy and [...] Zhuang Zi is considered a great fighter for liberalism’ (‘儒家重新解释为“不悖于民主”[...]把庄子说成伟大的自由主义志士’).<sup>9</sup> A simple return to tradition is impossible unless the stranglehold of liberalism on Chinese culture is removed, and classical Western political philosophy can help the Chinese shake off their recently acquired, yet deeply ingrained, prejudices.

Like Liu, Gan Yang’s interest in classical Western political philosophy is intertwined with his concern for Chinese tradition. In the general preface to the book series ‘Rereading the West’, Gan notes that modern Chinese intellectuals are much too occupied with introducing modern Western political thought and have the tendency to ‘regard China as the sick man and the West as the pharmacy’ (‘把中国当成病灶，而把西方则当成了药铺’).<sup>10</sup> The correct way of understanding the West is not to seek medicine for Chinese problems but to analyse the development of Western thought, including ‘the conflict between the two sources of Western civilization (Greek and Hebrew), the conflict between Western classical and modern thought’ (‘西方文明两大源头(希腊与希伯来)的冲突，西方古典思想与西方现代思想的冲突’). Contrary to seeing China as the sick man, Gan argues that China has proved its power ‘in terms of the economy, external-material factors, and international relations’ (‘中国崛起现在已是一个在经济层面上、在外在层面上、在国际政治层面上的不争事实’). Yet despite the rise of China, ‘the

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<sup>7</sup> 刘小枫，《施特劳生的路标》(‘*The Road Signs of Strauss*’), 北京：华夏出版社，2013，343页。All translations from Chinese are my own.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 355.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 356.

<sup>10</sup> 甘阳，《文明·国家·大学》(‘*Civilization·Nation·University*’), 上海：生活·读书·新知三联书店，2012，70页。

rise of Chinese culture has barely begun' ('中国的崛起在文化上至多现在才刚刚开始').<sup>11</sup> According to Gan, the Chinese still largely consider traditional Chinese culture to be inferior to modern Western democratic culture, with its traditions of political thought, yet in the West there are repeated reflections on and even criticisms of modern political thought from the perspective of their classical heritage: in Gan's example, during the 80s, the communitarian reaction against John Rawls's individualistic understanding of community in *A Theory of Justice* had recourse to Aristotelian political philosophy ('我们去看[罗尔斯政治哲学]的后果, 整个美国八十年代政治学界的基本讨论时所谓群体和社会主义的变化, 那么, 整个返回到哪里呢? 就是又返回到古希腊, 整个一个回顾点事回到亚里士多德的问题').<sup>12</sup> Armed with an understanding of classical Western political philosophy, Chinese scholars can better combat modern Western thinking, overcome their inferiority complex and help rejuvenate traditional Chinese culture.

It is not surprising that Liu and Gan's efforts can be seen as politically motivated. Shadi Bartsch has written that the study of the Western classics in China 'can be used to bolster one form of nationalism, one derived from the sense that China has its own indigenous intellectual traditions which are not only valid, but validated by the ancient traditions of the West as well.'<sup>13</sup> Shadi may have overemphasized the nationalistic factor, for Liu vehemently attacks the nationalistic understanding of Chinese culture and views the tension between Chinese tradition and modern Western ideologies as part of the general conflict between 'Ancients' and 'Moderns'.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, she is right in drawing attention to the fact that neither Liu nor Gan views classical Western political philosophy or, more generally, classics in Western antiquity as of mere academic interest. Liu sees his introduction of classical Western thought as succeeding but also subverting a century-old tradition of importing Western classics aimed to reshape Chinese society. Gan emphatically says that the study of Western classics is not about 'knowledge of Greek things' but it should help one 're-evaluate China and the West' ('把古典西学的研究服务于一个比较强的问题, 也就是说去重新看待中国, 去重新看待西方').<sup>15</sup> What unites their effort is the concern that the Chinese intellectual world has been dominated by modern Western thought in the past century. While Gan is primarily involved in rethinking the Chinese education system and how it

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 356.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Shadi Bartsch, 'The Ancient Greeks in Modern China: History and Metamorphosis', in *The Reception of Greek and Roman Culture in East Asia*, ed. by Almut-Barbara Renger and Xin Fan (Leiden: Brill, 2018), pp. 237-58 (p. 253).

<sup>14</sup> 刘小枫, 《重启古典诗学》(*Reviving Classical Poetics*), 北京: 华夏出版社, 2010, 6页:“透过中西之争看到古今之争” (“understand that the contest between the ancients and the moderns underlies the contest between China and the West”).

<sup>15</sup> 甘阳, 《文明·国家·大学》, 356页。

should adapt itself to the inheritance of both Western and Chinese classical thought, Liu turns to reflection on the Western intellectual tradition for answers.

Liu is especially dissatisfied with the proliferation of Western ‘isms’ in China: feminism, post-colonialism, structuralism and most prominently, liberalism. What underlies those politically charged ‘isms’ is the unique modern fusion of philosophy with active politics. Liu emphasizes that contrary to modern political thought, classical political philosophy is contemplative: ‘even political philosophy which reflects on political things is first and foremost philosophy, not a theory of practical politics’ (‘即便是反思政治的政治哲学，也首先得是一种哲学，而非政治实践性的论说’). In this way, Liu’s thinking on the Chinese intellectual world dominated by modern Western thinking comes into contact with a key issue in the Western tradition: the relationship between contemplation and action. By restoring the primacy of contemplation, and by separating what Liu believes to be the conjunction of contemplation and action since the Enlightenment, Liu can uproot the intellectual foundation of modern ‘isms’, so that China can ‘stop its century-old zealous and blind pursuit of various Western “isms”’ (‘摆脱百年来对西方现代的种种主义盲目而热烈的追逐’). Liu’s effort contributed greatly to alerting Chinese scholars to the pre-modern Western tradition, and while his focus is on the post-Enlightenment Western intellectual world, his work has prompted me to study early modern utopian writings that engage with the classical political philosophy.<sup>16</sup>

The present study does not concern itself with the revival of Chinese tradition. It is, however, inspired by Liu’s efforts to highlight both the problematic relationship between contemplation and action and its apparent role in causing the differences between modern and classical Western political philosophy. Building on an engagement with classical thinkers such as Plato and Cicero, this thesis focuses on how early modern utopian literature tackles the classical problem of contemplation and action, and how this, in turn, affects their outlook in utopian theory and practice. Yet there is an additional and important reason for my interest in this topic. Unlike other political theories, utopias ostensibly aim to achieve the ideal or perfect society. For one coming from a Chinese background, the attempt to ‘achieve the ideal society’ brings to mind the haunting memory of the Cultural Revolution. This specific background means that the present study of utopian theory

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<sup>16</sup> It is understandable that Liu’s hostility towards Enlightenment and Post-Enlightenment thinkers aroused push-backs from Chinese intellectuals. Perhaps the most famous came from Deng Xiaomang (邓晓芒). In his article 《评刘小枫的“学理”——与刘小枫〈如何认识百年共和的历史含义〉一文商榷》(‘On Liu Xiaofeng’s “scholarship”: Considerations on Liu’s article “How to Understand the Historical Significance of a Century of Chinese Republicanism”’)学术界, 2013.000(011):104-126页, Deng accused Liu of resurrecting the legitimacy of traditional Chinese emperors and attacking democracy.

and practice is more than a purely academic enquiry. Rather, it follows, albeit indirectly, a tradition of reflecting on and criticizing the Cultural Revolution initiated by a generation of Chinese scholars whose lives were shaped by the event. In this sense, while in terms of the theoretical framework, this thesis follows the pathway of Liu and Gan, in its historical heritage, the Cultural Revolution is an undeniable influence.

In 1966, Mao started the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-76) to eradicate the capitalist model and to advance China towards his socialist ideal. On 16<sup>th</sup> May, 1966, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party issued a notice, warning that ‘capitalists, who are revisionists and anti-revolutionary, have infiltrated the Party, the government, the military and the cultural world. When the time is ripe, they will seize power and turn the proletarian dictatorship into a capitalist one’ (‘混进党里、政府里、军队里和各种文化界的资产阶级代表人物，是一批反革命的修正主义分子，一旦时机成熟，他们就会要夺取政权，由无产阶级专政变为资产阶级专政’).<sup>17</sup> Meanwhile, Mao sent to Lin Biao, his then close ally, a note depicting his dream society. This note was published in the People’s Daily on 1<sup>st</sup> August, titled ‘The Whole Country Should Become a School of Mao’s Thought’ (‘全国都应该成为毛泽东思想的大学校’), and praised in the editorial for showing the way to establish communism. According to Mao’s vision, the People’s Liberation Army would assist in production, while workers and farmers were to receive education in socialism, politics, military matters and engage in criticism of capitalism. This would turn the entire country into a ‘revolutionary school that is both agricultural and industrial, both civilian and military’ (‘亦工亦农，亦文亦武的革命化大学校’) and create ‘millions of new socialist members who are highly politically aware’ (‘有高度政治觉悟的亿万共产主义新人’).<sup>18</sup>

Mao’s attempt to propel Chinese society towards his vision ultimately proved a failure, and the Cultural Revolution plainly and bleakly illustrates the destructiveness of an unrestrained utopian impulse. Recently-published Party history describes Mao’s ‘blueprint for his ideal society’ (‘他所向往的理想社会的蓝图’) as being ‘divorced from the realities of China’ (‘严重脱离中国实际’).<sup>19</sup> Representing what is now the official position, the key document known as the *Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the People’s Republic of*

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<sup>17</sup> 中国人民解放军国防大学党史党建政工教研室编，《“文化大革命”研究资料》(‘*Cultural Revolution: a Sourcebook*’)，上册，北京：1988，4页。

<sup>18</sup> 中共中央文献研究室编，《建国以来毛泽东文稿》(‘*Documents of Mao Since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China*’)，第12册，北京：中央文献出版社，1998，53-4页。《“文化大革命”研究资料》(‘*Cultural Revolution: a Sourcebook*’)，上册，61-2页。

<sup>19</sup> 中共中央党史研究室，《中国共产党历史，第二卷：1949-1978》(‘*A History of the Chinese Communist Party: 1949-1978*’)，下册，北京：中共党史出版社，2010，779页。

*China* (《关于建国以来党的若干历史问题的决议》) (1981) presents the Cultural Revolution as responsible for ‘the most severe setback and the heaviest losses suffered by the Party, the state and the people since the founding of the People’s Republic’ (‘使党、国家和人民遭到建国以来最严重的挫折和损失’).<sup>20</sup> Widespread political persecution and upheavals that bordered on civil war had catastrophic consequences. According to Su Yang, 27.2 million people were politically persecuted during the first five years of the Cultural Revolution.<sup>21</sup> Estimates of deaths vary due to the limited accessibility of official data, but it is likely not an exaggeration to say that a million perished.<sup>22</sup> Intellectuals were subject to persecution.<sup>23</sup> The Cultural Revolution created a genre of literature in China – ‘scar literature’ (‘伤痕文学’) – that records the consequence of the decade-long suffering and moral decay, and these topics still feature prominently in the works of important contemporary Chinese writers such as the Nobel Prize winner Mo Yan.<sup>24</sup>

It is only natural that a disaster of such magnitude, caused by a leader’s desire for the ideal society, should attract, if not occupy, the mind of any Chinese citizen studying utopian theory and practice. Yet looking back at history, the distant subject of early modern utopian literature was hardly among the chief concerns of Chinese intellectuals who lived through the Cultural Revolution with horror and revulsion. What they experienced and witnessed first-hand was the attempt to turn the entire country into a ‘school of Mao’s thought’, the ruthless collectivism, the humiliation and inhuman treatment of people accused of harbouring anti-revolutionary thought, and, understandably, such experiences have led to a concerted attempt to retrieve and protect the human dignity of the individual. It is this unique starting point that connects a number of Chinese intellectuals in the 1980s to modern Western liberalism. What they find appealing in liberalism is not the comprehensive system of politics and economics, but its focus on the individual and human

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<sup>20</sup> Translation quoted from ‘On Questions of Party History’, *Beijing Reviews*, 24.27 (1981), 10-39 (p. 20).

<sup>21</sup> Su Yang, *Collective Killings in Rural China During the Cultural Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 52

<sup>22</sup> R. J. Rummel gives the number of 1.6 million, J. K. Fairbank thinks the number ‘hover around a million’ and Su Yang estimates a total death toll of 1728000 from his study of available documents. See R. J. Rummel, *Death by Government* (New Brunswick: Transaction Press, 1997), p. 89; John King Fairbank and Merle Goldman, *China: A New History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 2006), p. 402; Su, *Collective Killings in Rural China During the Cultural Revolution*, p. 38.

<sup>23</sup> Prominent figures who were killed or committed suicide include: Lao She (老舍, Chinese writer), Jian Bozan (翦伯赞, Chinese historian), Wu Han (吴晗, Chinese historian), Fu Lei (傅雷, translator, father of the pianist Fou Ts’ong), to name but a few. When Deng Xiaoping returned to the government after the Cultural Revolution, he considered improving the treatment of intellectuals to be of high priority; it is said that Deng never used the phrase ‘bourgeois intellectuals’, a denigratory term that became popular during the persecution of intellectuals. See, Ezra F. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 2011), pp. 95, 199, 201-2.

<sup>24</sup> Regarding the scar literature, see *The Cambridge History of China*, ed. by Denis Twitchett and John K. Fairbank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978-), XV: *The People’s Republic, Part 2: Revolutions within the Chinese Revolution 1966-1982*, ed. by Roderick MacFarquhar and John K. Fairbank (1991), pp. 611-7. For depiction of Cultural Revolution in important contemporary works that have been translated into English, see, for example, Yu Hua, *Brothers*, trans. by Eileen Cheng-Yin Chow and Carlos Rojas (New York: Pantheon, 2009); Mo Yan, *Big Breasts and Wide Hips*, trans. by Howard Goldblatt (New York: Acarde, 2011).

dignity. Therefore, one finds that the most influential Chinese intellectuals who identified themselves as liberals, or who sympathized with liberalism in the 80s were not academic political scientists, but literary and cultural critics. Liu Zaifu (刘再复) was known for emphasizing centrality of individual man, or what he calls the ‘subjectivity’ in literature. Wang Yuanhua (王元化) worked on Lu Xun, Shakespeare and the Chinese literary theory classic *Dragon-Carving and the Literary Mind* (《文心雕龙》). Even Li Zehou (李泽厚), who is now known as an intellectual historian, burst onto the stage as a scholar of aesthetic theory.

Each of these scholars brought a unique perspective to the criticism of the Cultural Revolution but they were united in emphasizing the centrality of the individual and humanity. In the influential essay ‘On the Subjectivity of Literature’ (《论文学的主体性》) (1986), Liu argues that literature should ‘place human subjectivity at its centre’ (‘把人的主体性作为中心’), and this means literature should depict human beings as ‘acting according to their own soul and logic, not puppets’ (‘按照自己的灵魂和逻辑行动’); he also argues that one of the greatest threats to this subjectivity is ‘class’ (‘阶级’): ‘Man is seen as a symbol of class, a screw on the “class” machine, ordered to completely adapt and devote himself to class struggle, so that the notion of class completely erases his individuality’ (‘把人视为阶级的一个符号，把人规定为阶级机器上的螺丝钉，要求人完全适应阶级斗争，服从阶级斗争，一切个性消融于阶级观念之中’).<sup>25</sup> ‘Subjectivity’ was by no means a new literary theory, but Liu’s emphasis found wide sympathy precisely because it resonated with people whose ‘subjectivity’ became insignificant during the prevalence of collectivism and class struggle in the Cultural Revolution. Years later, in 1995, Liu further elaborates on this subject and he divides modern Chinese history into three stages: the stage of ‘nation-state’ (‘民族-国家’), ‘individual’ (‘人-个体’) and ‘class’ (‘阶级’), and he argues that it is important to restore individual liberty, depicted in J. S. Mill’s *On Liberty* and prevent the tragedy of class struggle.<sup>26</sup> Unlike Liu, Wang’s focus was on traditional Chinese culture. He sees Chinese tradition as anti-individual: it forms ‘social morality’ (‘社会道德’) to restrain individuals and deprive them of their subjectivity. The Cultural Revolution inherited and radicalized this trend

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<sup>25</sup> 刘再复, 《文学的反思》(‘*Reflections on Literature*’), 北京: 人民文学出版社, 1986, 70页。I have translated ‘主体性’ literally into ‘subjectivity’. It is to be noted that Liu’s definition and use of the term ‘subjectivity’ is informed by the Chinese context, although his discussion of ‘subjectivity’ bears some resemblance to Western usage. For example, in one of the definitions given by Louis Althusser, subjectivity is understood as ‘a centre of initiatives, author of and responsible for its actions.’ See Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, trans. by G. M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2014), p. 269.

<sup>26</sup> 李泽厚, 刘再复《告别革命》(‘*A Farewell to Revolutions*’), 第五版, 香港: 天地图书有限公司, 2004, 285页。

with slogans such as ‘never let the thought of selfishness linger for even a second’ (‘狠斗私字一闪念’). What results from this is not improvement of morality but ‘its bankruptcy’, for ‘if the individual is without value, so too must be the collectivity that is made up of such individuals’ (‘不能想象群体的绝大多数个体都是无价值的，而由他们所构成的群体竟会是有价值的’).<sup>27</sup>

Like Liu and Wang, Li looked into Chinese history to discover the reason for the suppression of the individual and came up with a widely influential interpretation. According to Li, the history of modern China is the interaction between two intellectual currents: ‘enlightenment’ and ‘national survival’ (‘启蒙与救亡’). This interaction began in the 1910s. The New Cultural Movement (新文化运动) (1915) introduced Western traditions such as democracy, science as well as Marxism to ‘radically denounce traditional Chinese culture and embrace total Westernization’ (‘激烈否定传统、追求全盘西化’) when Chinese culture was then seen as one of the reasons for China’s backwardness in the face of Western powers. Li believes the New Cultural Movement essentially trumpets the value of the individual, for the founder of that movement, Chen Duxiu (陈独秀), aimed to alert the Chinese to the Western ideals of ‘freedom, independence and equality’ (‘自由、独立、平等’) and to replace ‘Chinese feudal collectivism with Western individualism’ (‘以西方个人主义取代中国传统的封建集体主义’).<sup>28</sup> However, with the Sino-Japanese War and the Chinese Civil War between the Nationalist Party and Communist Party, the effort to enlighten the Chinese by emphasising individual rights ultimately gave way to problems concerning ‘national survival’. Those military conflicts demanded ‘obedience to order, unified will and collective power’ so in comparison, the individual ‘becomes insignificant and is glossed over’ (‘个体的我在这里是渺小的，它消失了’).<sup>29</sup> With the triumph of the need of ‘national survival’, revolutionaries ‘left little space for enlightenment and freedom of thought’ (‘挤压了启蒙运动和自由思想’) and this ultimately led to the tragedy of Cultural Revolution.<sup>30</sup>

Li, together with Liu, is highly critical of the revolutionary thinking in China. While they acknowledge that revolutions may have had some legitimacy in times of national crisis, both think it should be substituted by moderate reforms. Liu points out that many Chinese, even before the Cultural Revolution, have worshipped the notion of revolution as an object of religion (‘革命拜物教’). They prefer those radical measures over ‘solving individual problems’ and the process of

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<sup>27</sup> 《王元化集》(‘Works of Wang Yuanhua’), 卷六, 魏天无等编, 武汉: 湖北教育出版社, 2007, 112页。

<sup>28</sup> 李泽厚, 《中国现代思想史论》(‘On the History of Modern Chinese Thought’), 北京: 东方出版社, 1987, 10, 16页。

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

reforming society overtime with hard work. (‘忽视用艰难功夫去解决、改良一个一个具体的问题’). Li contrasts revolutionaries who ‘only need passion and the will to sacrifice’ (‘只要一腔热血视死如归就行了’) with reformers who ‘have to engage in dialogue, negotiations and reach compromise with the people they do not like’ (‘需要与自己憎恶的人对话、协商、妥协、退让’). According to Li, the present mission of China is no longer revolutions but ‘gradual reforms in areas of politics, economics and culture’ (‘在政治、经济、文化关系逐步进行改良’).<sup>31</sup>

The effort of Li, Liu and Wang was supplemented by other contemporaries, most notably Wang Ruoshui (王若水) and Zhou Yang (周扬), who acknowledged an interpretation of Marxism that emphasizes humanity instead of class struggle. Zhou maintained that it is important to ‘restore the dignity of man’ (‘恢复人的尊严’) and that ‘class struggle and the dictatorship of the people are not ends in themselves’ (‘阶级斗争、人民民主专政本身也不是目的’).<sup>32</sup> Wang Ruoshui, similarly, is deeply sympathetic towards ‘humanism’ (‘人道主义’), which he defines as ‘prioritizing human value, human dignity, human good and happiness and human development and freedom’ (‘人的价值、人的尊严、人的利益或幸福、人的发展或自由’) and argues that this kind of humanism is not capitalist in nature and is compatible with Marxism.<sup>33</sup> Despite the combined popularity of Chinese liberals and Marxist-humanists, evidenced by the fact that they created the phenomenon known as ‘the Cultural Fever’ (‘文化热’) of the 80s, this liberal-leaning movement ultimately failed. Wang Ruoshui was expelled from the Party in 1987 and on 4<sup>th</sup> June, 1989, the protesters who occupied Tiananmen Square to seek radical democratic changes were suppressed. Li Zehou went into exile; other liberals became silent. When Chinese liberals partially regained their voice during the 90s, they had to moderate their stance and engage in discussion of more mundane topics such as Chinese market reform when China entered the World Trade Organization. With this, the most influential and vocal reflection on the Cultural Revolution in China suffered a serious setback.

The response to the Cultural Revolution by liberal-leaning Chinese intellectuals and their subsequent unsuccessful endeavours prompt me to consider the utopian impulse from a new perspective. The event on 4<sup>th</sup> June, 1989 showed that despite the reform and opening-up, the ruling party remained essentially hostile towards liberalism and would not budge when it came to

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<sup>31</sup> 李泽厚, 刘再复《告别革命》(‘*A Farewell to Revolutions*’), 66-7, 70页。

<sup>32</sup> 《周扬近作》(‘*Recent Works by Zhou Yang*’), 顾骧编, 北京: 作家出版社, 1985, 248-9页。

<sup>33</sup> 王若水, ‘为人道主义辩护’, 《中国新文学大系1976-2000》, (‘*Chinese New Literature Series, 1976-2000*’)第一集, 卷一, 54-67页 (56-59页)。



Western-style democratic reform. In addition to its political weakness in China, liberalism also lacks the support of traditional Chinese culture. As Liu pointed out, Chinese culture based on Confucianism has never provided the soil for the development of liberal democracy (‘儒教礼制思想[...]难以开出自由民主宪政’), for Confucianism is not about individual right but about how to become a ‘sage’ (‘圣人’) to ‘benefit the world and rule with virtue’ (‘德化和救济天下’).<sup>34</sup> The political and cultural weaknesses undermine the Chinese liberals’ proposed solution to the Cultural Revolution. To address the Chinese utopian experience requires a new approach that does not rely on the Western liberal tradition, which Liu and Gan note has dominated the Chinese intellectual world. Against the background of the Cultural Revolution, the problem of theory and practice raised by Liu becomes particularly relevant. While Liu focuses on the fusion of contemplation and action in post-Enlightenment philosophers and their separation in classical Western political philosophy, those two topics are also key in important early modern utopian literature that predate the Enlightenment, including More’s *Utopia*. By investigating how early modern utopian literature responds to the problem of theory and practice and how different writers address the tension between contemplation and action inherited from the works of Plato and Cicero, this thesis can open up new avenues for exploring the utopian impulse and potentially supplement reflection on the Chinese utopian experience that occupied the Chinese intellectuals in the 80s.

In this way, the two Chinese factors – the Cultural Revolution and interest in classical Western political philosophy, have shaped the theoretical framework of this thesis and they also loom large in my selection of the trio of texts I have chosen to focus on. The recent revival of interest in classical Western political philosophers has brought to my attention utopian writers who engage closely with the works of Greek and Roman authors. The selection of texts is also a conscious deviation from the predominant interpretation of ideal states in China. In Marxist China, the discussion of ideal states is intimately bound with socialism and consequently, those ideal states are neatly divided into imaginary socialist states (‘空想社会主义’) such as More’s *Utopia* and the superior scientific socialist state (‘科学社会主义’) based on the correct application of Marxism. The practicality of those ideal societies is graded according to the extent they adhere to historical materialism. In starting from More’s *Utopia*, this thesis begins from what is considered in China the prime example of an ‘imaginary socialist state’ but one that plots a course away from the line drawn from imaginary utopia to Marxist socialism. In doing so, it aims to contest the predominant

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<sup>34</sup> 刘小枫, 《儒教与民族国家》(*Confucianism and Nation State*), 上海: 华东师范大学出版社, 2007, 95, 172页。

Chinese interpretation of ideal societies, the implied preference for practical ideal society and reiterate the essential tension between theory and practice present in early modern utopian literature.

These considerations dictate the choice as well as exclusion of texts for case studies in this thesis. Departing from the Chinese Marxist tradition, this thesis looks into pivotal cases where the tension between utopian theory and practice is most prominent and where authors of utopian texts engage or wrestle with classical political philosophers on the topic of contemplation and action. The authors of the three utopian texts studied in this thesis were all intimately familiar with the Graeco-Roman philosophers. More's *Utopia* imitates Plato's *Republic*, and the imitation is preceded by important discussion of the role of the philosopher in politics and civil philosophy, topics prominent in Cicero's moral-political writings such as *De officiis*.<sup>35</sup> Bacon's desire to create an ideal society in *New Atlantis* based on the advancement of science and technology leads him to a twofold clash with the classical tradition: he confronts Aristotle to free natural philosophy from scholasticism, yet more importantly Bacon criticizes the classical understanding of contemplation and action with the Christian notion of charity.<sup>36</sup> Swift satirizes the idea of utopia based on natural science by contrasting it with the Platonic ideal commonwealth in Book III and IV of his *Gulliver's Travels* and draws upon his own engagement with the classical tradition since his early work, *The Battle of Books* (1704). The genre of writings included in the canon of early modern utopian writings is much wider than this 'trio' of texts, of course, and I recognise that each of them has a contribution to make to utopian thinking; but they are not studied in this thesis because of my specific concern to entangle the tension between theory and practice. For example, Tommaso Campanella's *City of the Sun* (*'La Città del Sol'*), written in 1602, treats such topics as the religious belief, science, social customs and political arrangement of the ideal society. However, it lacks the important discussion of the innate difficulty of bringing an ideal society into being so important to *Utopia*. Likewise, James Harrington's *Oceana* (1656) is thoroughly practical, aiming to restore the republican liberty, uncovered by Machiavelli, of the Graeco-Roman world and as a result he did not ruminate on the question of the ideal, just commonwealth and the difficulty of its realization.

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<sup>35</sup> Cicero, *De officiis*, 1.28. Also cf. *De officiis* 1.114 with Thomas More, *Utopia*, ed. by George M. Logan and Robert M. Adams, rev. edn, where both emphasizes the need to adapt to the circumstances as actors adapt to plays (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 34-5.

<sup>36</sup> Francis Bacon, 'The Advancement of Learning', in *Major Works*, ed. by Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 120-299 (p. 246)

## 0.2 Utopian Impulse: From Chinese Context to Western Relevance

The choice of texts and the theoretical framework of this thesis is deeply influenced by Chinese concerns. However, the theoretical question underlying the thesis is not limited to a Chinese context. Ultimately, the Chinese background pushes the issue of the utopian impulse to the fore. China cannot rely on the safeguard the West can take for granted, where a tradition of liberal democracy stands between the utopian impulse and its revolutionary realization. Instead, it has to go beyond the preventive measures offered by Western democracy, look more closely at the root of the utopian impulse and think through the problem of theory and practice in the Western classical and modern tradition. In this process, the Chinese background provides a new angle: the turn to classical Western political philosophy points to inadequacies in, and offers alternative perspectives to, influential Western thinking on utopia, including criticisms of utopia that juxtapose liberty with totalitarian utopian projects.

The relevance of the Chinese background to Western utopian thinking is further substantiated by the fact that Chinese liberal-leaning intellectuals' criticism of utopian revolutions bear strong resemblance to those of their Western counterparts. When Liu and Li argued in favour of reform over revolution in 1995, a similar idea was already fully developed in the work of Karl Popper, a key Western critic of utopian totalitarianism. In his *Poverty of Historicism* (1957), written before the Chinese Cultural Revolution, Popper attacks 'utopian social engineering', or 'remodelling the "whole society" in accordance with a plan or blueprint'. Popper notes that those endeavours employ 'radical methods', often extend 'the power of the state' and aim at controlling 'the historical forces that mould the future of the developing society'.<sup>37</sup> He finds this utopianism is dangerously allied with Marxist historicism, which supplied 'the true aims or ends of "societies"' and 'historical tendencies' of social development to utopian planners.<sup>38</sup> To uproot the theoretical basis of this alliance, Popper argues that it is impossible to study the society as a whole and discover holistic laws regarding social evolution. For to study a thing scientifically, he argues, 'we are bound to select certain aspects of it'. For example, to study a melody we consider its individual aspect such as 'pitch', 'strength' and 'rhythms'. 'Wholes' understood as 'the totality of all the properties or aspects of a thing, and especially of all the relations holding between its constituent parts' can never be the 'object of any activity, scientific or otherwise'.<sup>39</sup> There cannot be scientific laws

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<sup>37</sup> Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, new edn (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 67, 74.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 71-5.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 76-77

governing the whole social evolution, and utopian engineering claimed to be based on those laws must be an illusion and is doomed to fail. By contrast, Popper prefers what he calls ‘piecemeal’ reforms. Not believing in ‘the method of re-designing [the society] as a whole’ as the utopian engineer does, the piecemeal reformers achieve his or her goals ‘by small adjustments and re-adjustments which can be continually improved upon’.<sup>40</sup> And in doing so, they avoid the totalitarian utopian social planner who moulds ‘men and women to fit into his new society’.<sup>41</sup>

This preference for reform over revolution is also found in James Simpson’s *Reform and Cultural Revolution* (2002). Highly critical of the totalitarian tendency of utopias, Simpson takes a different approach that bears important similarity to the political theory of Edmund Burke. In his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), Burke shows that an efficient way to prevent the concentration of power is to recognize and allow various ‘opposed and conflicting interests’ which exist in society. Those conflicting interests make ‘all changes a subject of compromise’ and render ‘all the head long exertions of arbitrary power, in the few or in the many, for ever impracticable’.<sup>42</sup> Likewise, Simpson contrasts the ‘simplified and centralized jurisdiction’ of the early modern period with a pre-modern ‘jurisdictional heterogeneity’, seeing the former as the paradigm of revolution and the latter an example of reform.<sup>43</sup> Believing that literary history should contribute to the ‘history of liberties’, Simpson sees in early-sixteenth-century England a ‘large concentration of power’ sweeping away the ‘bedevilling complication of lines of authority’, where the competition ‘between state and household’, between ‘the Commons and the king’ creates a kind of proto-constitutionalism, constraining all parties and thereby giving room to freedom and consent.<sup>44</sup> Within this historical context, the eerily uniform social conditions in More’s *Utopia* is the cultural product of the political centralization of his time, and Simpson sees in *Utopia* a literary representation of a ‘moment of massive centralization’ of power that imposes rational social order.<sup>45</sup>

These criticisms of utopian totalitarianism are not without their own difficulties in the West. Supporters of utopias are quick to point out the fallacies of their liberal democracy opponents, including how their ideal of freedom is based on dubious foundations. Barbara Goodwin and Keith Taylor note that with the strict adherence to scientific and empirical methods, the criticism of

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>42</sup> Edmund Burke, *Revolutionary Writings*, ed. by Iain Hampsher-Monk (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 36-7.

<sup>43</sup> James Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, The Oxford English Literary History, II (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 2, where Simpson talks about ‘highly segmented set of jurisdictions’ that ‘speak to’ and ‘check’ each other.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 31, 211, 214.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 236-37.

Popper on utopia comes at the price of ignoring ‘alternative possibilities’ beyond the existing social condition. ‘Empiricism can carry [one] no further than the existent’, and may endorse ‘justifications of the *status quo*’. Additionally, the freedom cherished by liberals does not always lead to rational good, but allows people to pursue their perceived ‘apparent good’, at the risk of being misled by ‘ignorance, delusion or corruption’.<sup>46</sup> Supporters of utopias further claim that utopian texts allow one to ‘access people’s fears and desires’, offer ‘political critique and alternatives’, and give ‘the political a sense of direction’.<sup>47</sup>

Those criticisms voiced by supporters of utopia reveal important limits of Western liberal criticism of utopia. The two camps are in a deadlock, with one side warning utopian totalitarianism and the other side praising the utility of utopia in making political improvements. In this context, the Chinese turn to classical political philosophy after the failure of liberalism in China may provide a meaningful alternative to this deadlock. Unlike the approach informed by classical political philosophy that is keenly aware of the tension between theory and practice, the opposition between supporters and liberal critics of utopia is based on the following consensus: the primary purpose of utopian writings is to construct in fiction the ideal commonwealth to inform political practice. Vieira considers utopias to be ‘by essence dynamic’: ‘their scope of action is not limited to a criticism of present [society]’; they aim to ‘put forward projective ideas that are to be adopted by future audiences, which may cause real changes.’<sup>48</sup> Edward Rothstein argues that utopia is not ‘an impossible place’, but is, instead, ‘a place that can conceivably exist – and, in the teller’s view, a place that should exist.’ Utopias represent ‘an ideal toward which the mundane world must reach.’<sup>49</sup> Even Ruth Levitas, who identifies utopias less as a concrete blueprint for social reform than an expression of a desire for human improvement, argues that utopian thinking allows us to ‘develop alternative possible scenarios for the future and open these up to public debate and democratic decision’.<sup>50</sup>

This line of argument has important ramifications for the study of the utopian impulse. Firstly, seeing utopias as essentially practical, several important studies aim to discover seeds of modern utopias by reading classical writings, most notably Plato’s *Republic*, against the grain. Popper’s *Open Society and its Enemies* (1945) considered Plato to be a prototype of Karl Marx

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<sup>46</sup> Barbara Goodwin and Keith Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia, a Study in Theory and Practice* (Bern; Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 100-4.

<sup>47</sup> Lucy Sargisson, ‘The Curious Relationship between Politics and Utopia’, in *Utopia Method Vision, the Use Value of Social Dreaming*, ed. by Tom Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini (Bern; Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 25-46 (p. 41).

<sup>48</sup> Vieira, ‘The Concept of Utopia’, p. 8.

<sup>49</sup> Edward Rothstein, ‘Utopia and Its Discontents’, in *Visions of Utopia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 1-28 (p. 8)

<sup>50</sup> Ruth Levitas, *Utopia as Method, the Imaginary Reconstitution of Society* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 18-19. *The Concept of Utopia* (Bern; Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 209-11.

because Popper believed that Plato attempts to create ‘a system of historical periods governed by developmental law’ and this attempt foreshadows Marx’s expectation that ‘history will bring us a revolution which will completely re-model the whole “social system”’.<sup>51</sup> Yet Plato clearly signals that his ‘system of historical periods’ is fictional by placing the non-existent city ruled by the philosopher-king as the starting point of his cycle of regimes.<sup>52</sup> A similar tendency to assimilate classical political thinkers to modern ones can be found in Kumar’s *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (1987). Kumar argues that Plato’s *Republic* is more akin to the works of Thomas Hobbes as a systematic, scientific political writing, although Hobbes himself, following Machiavelli, rejected the Platonic commonwealth as too fanciful and not scientific and prefers a new political science based on laws that conform to how human realistically acts.<sup>53</sup>

These problematic interpretations of the classical political philosophy lead to a second, more important issue. The three early modern utopian works studied in this thesis all display close engagement with the classical tradition. Without considering the problem of action and contemplation prominent in classical political philosophy, the ambiguities of the relationship between theory and practice inherited by these early modern utopian writings from the Graeco-Roman thinkers can often be overlooked. As a result, a number of scholars have approached early modern utopian literature with a spirit alien to its inception. Despite More’s claim in his *Utopia* that the institutions of Utopia do not provide any truly useful measures of reform, J. C. Davis nonetheless groups it among utopian writings that address social problems ‘by reorganisation of society and its institutions, by education, by laws and by sanctions’, and he considers More to be among the more realistic of utopian thinkers who seek a solution to social evils by devising a ‘set of strategies to maintain social order and perfection in the face of deficiencies, not to say hostility, of nature and the wilfulness of man’.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, Krishan Kumar argues that More’s *Utopia* is infused with the conviction that ‘humanity is perfectible’, a typically modern belief that contrasts with the Christian notion of sin, even though the characters in *Utopia* often emphasize the incurability of human folly and that one cannot expect that ‘all men are good’, an idea that resonates with the notion of Sin as well as the position of classical political philosophy.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Karl Popper, *Open Society and Its Enemies*, 2 vols (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1945), I, pp. 33, 145

<sup>52</sup> Plato, *Republics*, 543a-547d.

<sup>53</sup> Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), p. 25.

<sup>54</sup> J. C. Davis, *Utopia and the Ideal Society, a Study of English Utopian Writing, 1516-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 37-38. Cf. Thomas More, *Utopia* ed. by George M. Logan and Robert M. Adams, rev. edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 12, where More distinguishes *Utopia* from the discussion of customs from which ‘our own cities, nations, races and kingdoms might take lessons in order to correct their errors’. All translations of *Utopia*, unless specified, are quoted from this edition.

<sup>55</sup> Krishan Kumar, *Utopianism* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1991), p. 29. Cf. More, *Utopia*, p. 35.

In light of those problems, it is crucial to excavate the complex relation between theory and practice in early modern utopian literature to retrieve a more authentic view of those works. This excavation, informed by the Chinese background of the Cultural Revolution, can potentially offer alternatives to the deadlock between the supporters of utopia and their liberal-democratic opponents in the West. The early modern utopias in More's *Utopia* and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, influenced by the classical tradition, do not go against Levitas's notion of utopia as 'develop[ing] alternative scenarios', yet they differ in that the focus is not on the reform of society. This, in turn, means that those utopias avoid the pitfall of encouraging revolutionary measures to reform society, a danger of which the liberal opponents of utopia are keenly aware. By actively creating in literary form the best society and simultaneously warning against the desire of realizing it, those early modern utopian writings tread a middle way between revolution, which invites concentration of power, and defence of the 'status quo', which refuses to see deeply rooted political problems. They manage to combine a radicalness in theoretical thinking with a moderation in practice.

### **0.3 Classical Political Philosophy and Rethinking Early Modern Utopias**

To understand how utopias can combine theoretical radicalness and practical moderation and address the concerns of both supporters and opponents of utopias, it is necessary to look into the classical heritage that helps shape them. The tension between theory and practice is most distinctively set forward in Plato's *Republic*, and is explicated as the argument and 'plot' of the dialogue that unfolds. Out of desire for political glory, Glaucon and Adeimantus are encouraged by Socrates to collaborate with him in the establishment of the perfect commonwealth, but they eventually arrive at the conclusion that only when philosophers and political power coincide can the ideal commonwealth come into being. This condition proves to be impossible as philosophers do not want to rule, as they are absorbed by their contemplative activities and truth, nor can anyone coerce them into doing so.<sup>56</sup>

The reason why the perfectly just commonwealth cannot come into being, and one of the key problems of the theory and practice dynamic, boils down to the fact that political life and contemplative life are not compatible. Contemplative life has truth as its goal, wisdom as its prize,

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<sup>56</sup> Plato, *Republic*, II, 368d-369b; V, 473d-e.

and is private in nature, in contrast to active, political life.<sup>57</sup> This, of course, does not mean that a philosopher cannot be a politician, as examples such as Cicero, Seneca, and More show. Rather, the philosopher is not obliged to make the ideal commonwealth real, nor does he have the resources to do so. In the *Republic*, the philosopher is obliged to rule only when the city in question is the ideal city, namely, a city that sets its highest goal as the education of future philosophers and where the philosopher himself is educated.<sup>58</sup> The philosopher's duty in the ideal city reveals another dimension of his justice and it has a goal totally different from justice generally understood: justice generally understood requires one to care for fellow citizens, while philosophical justice requires the philosopher to care for other philosophers.

By grasping the nature of philosophical justice, one can understand the reason for the depiction of the commonwealth as an ideal even though it cannot be realized in reality. The ideal city is to serve as a pattern in the heavens, and as such, it contrasts with all existing regimes – regimes whose goal is not the education of philosophers but instead, honour, wealth and freedom. By looking at the heavenly pattern, the potential philosophers will, as it were, receive an education they cannot receive in the real cities of this world, and thus liberate their thoughts from the shackles of corrupted customs and look at the true goal of human life: the contemplation of truth. In depicting the ideal city in his dialogue, Plato's Socrates is fulfilling the same role as the philosopher who is compelled to rule in the ideal city: they are both performing their duty and philosophical justice in caring for other potential and actual philosophers. It is no coincidence that in the beginning of the *Republic*, Socrates says that he 'goes down' ('*katebên*') to Piraeus, echoing the 'going down' of philosophers in the ideal commonwealth from the light to the 'cave' in order to rule.<sup>59</sup>

This brief account of a key argument in Plato's *Republic* leads us to the following conclusion regarding the tension between theory and practice: the ideal commonwealth cannot be put into practice due to the duality of the active and contemplative life; further, the ideal commonwealth is not strictly speaking meant to be put into practice. By proving the impossibility of the realization of perfect political justice, Plato's *Republic* mitigates the desire for utopia; yet paradoxically, the work itself embodies a practice of philosophical justice – for its didactic function

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, V, 475b-c. Plato's Socrates says that the defining feature of philosophers is that they desire the entirety of wisdom and are insatiable for learning. Aristotle juxtaposes political art with theoretical wisdom, and argues that the political art is superior to theoretical wisdom only if human beings are the best beings in the cosmos, which is false as the things which comprise the cosmos is more divine than human beings. See *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1141a20ff.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, VII, 540a-b.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 327a. All translations of *Republic* are quoted from Plato, *Republic*, trans. by Allan Bloom, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (New York: Basic Books, 1968).



will serve the good of other philosophers who look to the ideal of utopia and liberate themselves from social corruption in their mind. The ideal city does not need to be realized to fulfil this function.

The teaching of Plato's *Republic* is followed up by Cicero. In his own *Republic*, he identifies that the main purpose of Plato's *Republic* is to foreground knowledge of political principles, and he never regards Plato's ideal commonwealth as something to be realized.<sup>60</sup> In his *De oratore*, Cicero ridicules the notion of introducing the Platonic commonwealth into the common political discourse. The Platonic commonwealth contains principles of justice 'completely in contrast with everyday life and the customs of human communities'.<sup>61</sup> Instead of philosophical teachings, Cicero prefers 'middle duties', a term borrowed from the Stoics that signifies a kind of moral duty that is accessible to every human being and not to the wise alone.<sup>62</sup> In this way Cicero distances himself from what he deems philosophical madness and appears to be an advocate of common sense and moderation.

Nonetheless, Cicero is acutely aware of the incompleteness of the common-sensical understanding of moral duties and often points towards a morality that transcends political community and resembles the philosophical justice in Plato's *Republic*. This is mostly clearly seen in his *De officiis*, a work which purports to provide sensible moral teaching to his son. According to Book One of *De officiis*, the bond of humanity consists of reason and speech ('*ratio et oratio*'). The narrower bonds are those of the same language and the same city. Yet there is another bond between human beings: the bond of kinship and blood. Human beings, like other animals, naturally procreate. Thus, there is the bond of marriage and a bond with offspring. This, according to Cicero, is the beginning or the principle of civil society ('*principium urbis*'). Civil society comes into being through two principles: the higher principle of speech and reason in human beings and the lower principle of family. Political society cannot do away with self-love, exhibited in love of family and patriotism. By contrast, reason and speech do not favour what belongs to the self or the fatherland but only favour what is true, just and good, transcending any given society.<sup>63</sup> The people who live according to reason live in the 'city' of nature governed by natural laws alone, while those who live in the earthly city live according to positive law or custom. The truest fellowship of mankind is not between any two human beings, but between wise men who live according to the natural

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<sup>60</sup> Cicero, *Republic*, 2. 52.

<sup>61</sup> Cicero, *De oratore*, 1. 52. 225.

<sup>62</sup> Cicero, *De officiis*, 1. 8; 3. 15; *De finibus* 3. 58-60.

<sup>63</sup> Cicero, *De officiis*, 1. 50-55.

law.<sup>64</sup> Cicero says that the bond between the best human beings is the most excellent and firmest (*'nulla praestantior [...] nulla firmior'*), while the bond between citizens and families is the weightiest and dearest (*'nulla gravior, nulla carior'*).<sup>65</sup> By pointing towards a community that transcends nation, city and family, and calling it the most excellent, Cicero is reminding his more sophisticated readers about the kind of philosophical justice that Plato's Socrates is practising in the *Republic*.<sup>66</sup>

The discussion of the dualism of theory and practice and the complex nature of justice in classical political writings provides a crucial framework for the way this thesis approaches three early modern utopian literary texts. In the first chapter, I argue that More's *Utopia* depicts a misunderstanding of the intention of Platonic commonwealth by a pseudo-philosopher, Raphael Hythlodæus. The boundary between theory and practice is blurred when Hythlodæus advocates and genuinely desires to reside in his ideal commonwealth based on Christian principle such as charity and peacefulness. More mitigates the charm of Hythlodæus' Utopia by preceding its description with a dramatic dialogue, in which More pitches a character called 'More' against Hythlodæus in a debate on whether philosophers should adapt their ideal to reality or uphold their ideal without compromise. The dialogic form, with its openness, encourages critical assessment of Hythlodæus' position, and it also allows More to unravel the character of Hythlodæus, whose desire for Utopia is revealed to stem from his zealotry for justice which makes him incapable of bending his rigid principles. More traces Hythlodæus' zealotry to his desire to imitate Christ in truth-telling, subtly cautioning that manifestation of religious zeal in politics may facilitate a misunderstanding of the classical presentation of the dualism of theory and practice. Steeped in humanist learning, More counters this tendency with the argument of Cicero's civil philosophy, encouraging active participation in politics and, with it, a less dogmatic attitude towards justice. This effort is reinforced by Hythlodæus' problematic presentation of Utopia which is filled with contradictions that reveal the untenability of the attempt to imagine the perfect Christian society. By disapproving Hythlodæus's way of advocating the state of Utopia and pointing out the fallacies of Hythlodæus's ideal commonwealth, More warns his readers against the desire for Utopia and

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<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 1. 158; 3. 38, 45, 67-69. Even Epicureans who deny that human beings are social animal, and thus depreciate political communities, grant friendship a very high position: Cicero, *De finibus*, 1. 65-70. This contradiction can be solved by the philosophical friendship which does not belong to ordinary political associations.

<sup>65</sup> Cicero, *De officiis*, 1. 50-57. Additionally, Cicero says that the bond between the best human beings are the most excellent, while the bonds of family is judged by spiritedness (*'animus'*) to be weightiest. Earlier in Book One, Cicero has already linked 'spiritedness' to the love of one's wife, children and all who he holds dear. If one judges by 'spiritedness', he is naturally led to the conclusion that favours the love of wife, children and all who he holds dear. The excellence of bonds of family, and in extension, fellow citizens, becomes a circular argument that does not need the support of reason. *Ibid.*, 1. 12.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 3. 45. See also 1. 12, 56-57, 148; 3. 17, 44. Cicero forbids 'us', or ordinary citizens to imitate Socrates, but also says Socrates possesses a divine goodness. Cicero's 'double standard' shows that he is treating virtues on two different planes.

reappraises the moderate, civil discourse of Cicero. In this way, More adapts the classical heritage to a Christian setting. Instead of being the pioneer of utopian writing, *Utopia* is a work infused with the Greco-Roman spirit, alive to the difficulties of application.

If More still retains the classical understanding of the purpose of the best commonwealth, Francis Bacon instead modifies it in such a radical fashion that it truly becomes a blueprint for social reform and revolution. The second chapter of my thesis argues that Bacon's utopia in *New Atlantis* aims to solve a specific problem which occupied Bacon for decades: the cruelty and inhumanity caused by the conflict between Protestants and Catholics. This concern about religious zealotry is most prominently reflected in his *Advertisement Touching a Holy War*, which offers arguments in favour of humanity towards people of different faiths. Against this background, Bensalem, the utopia in *New Atlantis*, emerges as a tolerant society that embraces people of different faith by focusing on the universal, worldly needs of mankind. In order to pave the way for this utopia, Bacon both upholds and modifies the Christian notion of charity so that it encourages the active participation of philosophers in politics and focuses on the value of secular 'goods' such as pleasure and propagation. This is achieved, in his *Advancement of Learning* and *Essays*, through the subtle shift of emphasis in the conception of charity, from God to man, from pure contemplation to practical science, and from the knowledge of God to scientific knowledge most useful to societies. Based on his preference for closely uniting theory and practice, Bacon departs from More's civil philosophical approach that maintains the tension between Christianity and political reality. Instead, Bacon interprets Christian notion of charity in such a way that it aligns with human needs and is eminently practical. Resting his hope on the new natural science and the role of charitable philosophers in shaping the ideal commonwealth, Bacon becomes the engineer of the modern utopia and achieves the marriage of theory and practice. This achievement, however, is not without its flaws, for Bacon has tacitly forsaken the original purpose of utopia – the investigation of the best commonwealth, and, in doing so, ignores the crucial subject of justice and its relation to the best way of life.

In the third and final chapter of my thesis, I examine how Swift responds to Bacon's novel approach to utopia. Swift displays an early interest in the conflict between ancient and modern learning in his *Battle of Books*, and in *Gulliver's Travels* he contrasts the modern utopia and Baconian scientists with the sublime Houyhnhnms, who are – as far as Gulliver is concerned – an idealized version of Socrates. In doing so, he satirizes the modern utopia achieved through natural science and offers a complex reappraisal of the Platonic ideal. Like the ideal commonwealth in Plato's *Republic*, Gulliver treats the land of the Houyhnhnms as an educative utopia that targets the

potential philosophers rather than the people in general, and aims to free rational thinking from the corrupting influence of the so-called moderns, like Bacon, who, by deserting the moral ideal of the ancients, are held to contribute to the moral decay that culminates in the Yahoos. By abandoning the lofty moral compass of the perfect commonwealth, and focusing solely on what people actually do instead of what they ought to do, the new utopian projects give rise to petty citizens and politicians that pale in comparison with those in Roman Republic. Comparing the ‘Senate of Rome’ with a ‘modern Representative’, Gulliver says that ‘the first seemed to be an Assembly of Heroes and Demy-Gods; the other a Knot of Pedlars, Pickpockets, Highwaymen and Bullies’.<sup>67</sup> If the Houyhnhnms appeared to be overtly rational and inhuman, their inhumanity is justified by Gulliver as vengeance against modern corruption. However, while Swift’s Gulliver appears to be a partisan of the ancients, the very fact that it is gullible Gulliver who tells this tale makes the reader keenly aware of the many difficulties of this line of interpretation. The achievements of modern science (not least Gulliver’s own training as a doctor) make a simple return to the scenarios of classical heritage problematic. Whether one can live well blissfully ignorant of the discovery of modern science like the Houyhnhnms is a question that lurks within *Gulliver’s Travels*, and this problematizes the Houyhnhnms as ideal and pessimistically complicates the relation between theory and practice.

In analysing the three utopian writings, attention will be paid to the way in which those three authors utilized specific literary devices such as the first-person narrative, satire and irony, to convey scepticism of or support towards utopian projects. More and Swift distance themselves from the ideal commonwealths by having unreliable narrators (‘Hythlodæus’, babbler of nonsense; ‘Gulliver’, gullible) give unqualified praise of utopias. At the same time, they expose the inner inconsistencies and extremeness of those ideal commonwealths and thus satirize the utopian effort. By contrast, Bacon’s practical utopia features a narrator who gradually emerges as the most capable leader of the group that discovered Bensalem in *New Atlantis*, and appears to be chosen as the messenger to bear the news of the scientific utopia to Europe. The use of first-person narrator and satire thus closely mirrors the authors’ attitude towards the tension between theory and practice.

In addition to the literary aspect, the three chapters of this thesis trace three authors’ different responses to such classical political thinkers as Plato and Cicero and how this affects their thinking on the topic of the relation between theory and practice. I shall argue that the emergence of utopian writing as a blueprint for the ideal society is a conscious and considered decision to part

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<sup>67</sup> Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 182. ‘The Battle of Books’, in *Major Works of Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Angus Ross and David Woolley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 1-22 (p. 2).

with the classical heritage. Due to the theoretical framework of this thesis, I will investigate the classical references More, Bacon and Swift make in their works. In addition, I complement my analysis of their utopian works by studying other writings by those authors that illustrate their thinking on theory and practice and their indebtedness to classical tradition. This thesis includes discussions on topics such as contemplative life, active life, civil philosophy and the role of philosophers. Those topics were familiar to More, Bacon and Swift due to their close association with the classical tradition, but no longer occupy a central position in utopian studies today. More, Bacon, and Swift may differ fundamentally on their view of the classical tradition, but it is their close engagement with those topics that shapes the outlook of these early modern utopian writings. Their creative approach to the problem of theory and practice based on their adaptation of and reaction to classical heritage provides alternative intellectual resources that go beyond liberalism. As such, those Western utopian writings not only help to open new avenues that avoid the opposition between liberalism and utopian supporters in the West, but also point to ways to restrain the utopian impulse in countries that lack liberal-democratic traditions, such as China.

# Chapter 1. Thomas More's *Utopia*: the Civil Philosopher's Satire of the Ideal Commonwealth

## 1.1 Introduction

In his *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*, Krishan Kumar argues that the genesis of utopian literature depends on a break from Christianity so that the concept of 'sin' no longer inhibits people's imagination of the best commonwealth and that Thomas More's *Utopia* was the first such work.<sup>1</sup> Few dispute the connection between utopian literature and modernity, and fewer still dispute that More's *Utopia* inaugurates this modern genre. It is the purpose of the present chapter, however, to make the case that More's *Utopia* is not utopian literature in the modern sense, namely, a depiction of the ideal commonwealth, which is meant to imitated. Rather, the dialogical setting and the ambiguities of this text constantly undermine the attempt of its protagonist, a character called 'More', to set forth and imagine the best commonwealth, and these formal elements help shape a sceptical, if not critical attitude towards the desire for such a commonwealth. *Utopia* does not inaugurate the modern genre of Utopian literature; rather, it bears greater similarity to the traditional approach to the best commonwealth exemplified in Plato's *Republic*, where the ideal is proved to be impossible to realize.

This chapter sets out to argue that instead of the presentation of the ideal commonwealth, what propels both the dialogue in Book One and the monologue in Book Two of *Utopia* is the problem of how philosophers ought to participate in politics. In Book One, More presents the basic alternatives: either through civil philosophy, a compromise that acknowledges the legitimacy of the existing states and general opinion on justice, or a radical departure from them in the form of the Utopian state. Through the difficulty Hythlodæus encounters when articulating the Utopian state in Book Two, More exposes the inevitable absurdities of this endeavour, and in doing so he vindicates the less radical approach of civil philosophy. In the last section of this chapter, I will examine the vernacular translations of *Utopia* and the modifications that translators made to More's text, and I will argue that it is partly through the recreation of the texts by the translators that *Utopia* becomes more akin to the modern conception of utopian literature: the early history of the book of *Utopia* is a process in which the question of civil philosophy is

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<sup>1</sup> Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times*, p. 17.

gradually buried and the ideal state takes the centre of the stage.

This reading presupposes that the two parts of *Utopia* belong together as a unified whole, each illuminating the other. It goes against the classic interpretation offered in J. H. Hexter's *Utopia, an Autobiography of an Idea*. Through his meticulous reconstruction of the composition history of *Utopia*, Hexter argues that the book is written in two instalments: the conversation in Book One and the description of Utopia in Book Two. In writing those two parts, More is occupied by different considerations, namely, whether to participate in politics and the best state of a commonwealth. The two topics are not logically connected. Yet, contrary to his thesis, the text itself seems to suggest unity rather than division: More emphasized that the dialogue in Book One leads to the discourse of Utopia in Book Two.<sup>2</sup> In addition, while the book may have been written in two parts, there is no reason why More could not have made sure that the two are connected logically. Indeed, there are several interpretations that have departed from Hexter's conclusion.<sup>3</sup> Yet the emphasis has always been put on the contrast between the Utopian state in Book Two and the present state of Europe in Book One as the link that ties the whole together. The present study is aware of the literary function of *Utopia* as a social satire and a criticism of the social ill prevalent in More's days. Nonetheless, I intend to show that these readings do not exhaust the interpretative potential of the text, and that as a deliberation on the choice between civil philosophy and the supposedly ideal state of Utopia, it offers a rich reflection on the topic of the theory of the best commonwealth and its practical import. With this study, I hope to restore More's perspective on this crucial topic, and argue that while his *Utopia* may have given rise to the genre of utopian literature, he himself remained a profound critic of the Utopian project.

## 1.2 Book One of *Utopia*: Civil Philosophy or the Ideal State?

Whoever reads *Utopia* inevitably finds a key question that needs addressing: is Utopia, the best

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<sup>2</sup> More, *Utopia*, p. 12: 'first recounting the conversation that drew him into speaking of that commonwealth.'

<sup>3</sup> J. H. Hexter, *Utopia, an Autobiography of an Idea* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965). Hexter's thesis on the composition history of *Utopia* is widely accepted, see, for example, George M. Logan, *The Meaning of More's Utopia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 11-17; Brendan Bradshaw, 'More on Utopia', *The Historical Journal*, 24.1 (1981), 1-27; Dominick Baker-Smith, *More's Utopia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), p. 33. For studies that accept the composition history of *Utopia* but still maintain the unity of the work, see, for example, Quentin Skinner, 'Thomas More's Utopia and the Virtue of True Nobility', in *Visions of Politics*, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), II, 213-44; George M. Logan, 'The Argument of More's *Utopia*', in *Interpreting More's Utopia*, ed. by John C. Olin (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), pp. 7-36. Joseph M. Levine, 'Thomas More and the English Renaissance: History and Fiction in *Utopia*', in *The Historical Imagination in Early Modern Britain: History, Rhetoric, and Fiction, 1500-1800*, ed. by Donald R. Kelley and David Harris Sacks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 69-92.

commonwealth according to the protagonist Hythlodæus, to be accepted as a solution to political problems? And if the answer is negative, as the title ‘no-place’ seems to suggest, why does More take the trouble to create a commonwealth, replete with detailed description? These questions lead readers to the important debate on whether philosophers ought to participate in politics in Book One, which serves as the introduction to the discourse on Utopia in Book Two. The character of ‘More’, reprising the position of civil philosophy of Cicero, argues for political involvement, despite the inevitable compromises as a consequence of this choice. Hythlodæus, the traveller to and the proponent of Utopia, counters that philosophers ought to abstain from politics and live as he does in Utopia itself, a commonwealth which he thinks should be propagated everywhere.<sup>4</sup> The desirability of Utopia, then, hinges on the debate on the relationship between philosopher and politics. In this section, I will argue that through the presentation of the debate, More reveals the fundamental reasons for the aversion to politics in the character of Hythlodæus, and articulates a strong case for the philosophers’ participation in politics in a reserved manner against the proponent of Utopia. In doing so he prepares the readers for a more critical stance towards Hythlodæus’s ideal commonwealth in Book Two.

The topic of the relationship between philosopher and politics is not in itself new, and can be found in various writings by classical authors as well as writers in the sixteenth century. Cicero, popular in the Renaissance, criticized philosophers absorbed in contemplation for failing to carry out their civil duties in his *De officiis*.<sup>5</sup> More than a decade after the publication of *Utopia* in 1516, Thomas Starkey revisits the topic in *A Dialogue between Pole and Lupset* (likely written between 1529-32), where Lupset, the champion of civil duty, is juxtaposed against Pole, who maintained that ‘knowledge of God, of nature, and of all the works thereof should be the end of man’s life’.<sup>6</sup> Around the same time, Thomas Elyot made his translation of Plutarch’s *Education or Bringing Up of Children* (1533). Plutarch advises a balanced mix of contemplation and action: ‘The active life, lacking philosophy, is of little purpose, and is in sundry errors enshrouded’, while the ‘contemplative life (concerning man) if hit be not joined with the active, hit is of none effect or profit’.<sup>7</sup> One can find an abundance of similar arguments in *Utopia*, where ‘More’ advises Hythlodæus to forsake his commitment to philosophical solitude and ‘to assist kings

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<sup>4</sup> When referring to the dramatic personae in *Utopia*, I have placed the names within quotation marks in distinction to the real person, although this does not necessarily imply that More the author and ‘More’ the literary persona hold different views on some key matters.

<sup>5</sup> Cicero, *De officiis*, 1. 28-29.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Starkey, *A Dialogue between Reginald Pole and Thomas Lupset*, ed. by Kathleen M. Burton (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948), p. 23.

<sup>7</sup> *Four Tudor Books on Education*, ed. by Robert D. Pepper (Gainesville, Fla.: Cholar’s Facsimiles & Reprints, 1966), p. 27.



with [his] counsels';<sup>8</sup> or where he depicts the civil philosopher adapting to the circumstances as an actor adapting to the play at hand.

Despite those similarities, More's treatment of philosophy and politics is different from Cicero, Plutarch and Starkey in one crucial aspect. In *De officiis*, Elyot's translation of *Education or Bringing Up of Children* and Starkey's *Dialogue*, the competing perspectives are that of the citizen and that of the contemplative philosopher. The issue is whether contemplation should distract the citizen from devoting themselves to the common good. More, however, is unique in associating this topic with the ideal commonwealth expressed by Hythlodæus, a character motivated, almost excessively, by morality and religion. This shifts the focus from contemplation and action to the contest between moderate civil philosophy and moral-religious zeal for the best commonwealth. In this way, More's discussion of the traditional topic of politics and philosophy touches on a new, modern phenomenon – the desire for the ideal commonwealth or utopian impulse.

To see how More weaves this new element into the traditional discussion of politics and philosophy it is necessary to see how the argument unfolds in Book One in *Utopia*. The debate on whether philosophers ought to participate in politics undergoes three phases. Initially, impressed by Hythlodæus's experience and shrewd observations on the customs of countries he has visited, 'Peter Giles' suggests that Hythlodæus enlist himself in the service of kings, and 'More' further adds that this political activity befits Hythlodæus's 'noble and truly philosophical nature'.<sup>9</sup> Hythlodæus's response is that he would be exchanging his contemplative leisure for political activities, and even with this sacrifice he would achieve nothing in a court filled with arrogant and corrupt counsellors. Neither can he, without 'interest or ability' in the 'art of war', be of use to princes who are more intent on acquiring additional territories than ruling well what they have. 'More', however, remains unconvinced, and in the second phase of the debate, he and Hythlodæus both resort to the authority of Plato to support their respective positions. 'More' argues that Plato's famous statement that states will only be happy when philosophy and kingship coincide supports a philosopher's participation in politics: 'no wonder we are so far from happiness when philosophers do not condescend even to assist kings with their counsels'. Hythlodæus counters that a correct interpretation of Plato's position is that 'unless kings became philosophical themselves the advice of philosophers would never influence them'. Plato's failed attempt to reform the tyrant Dionysius is a prime example of the failure of a philosopher to be of

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<sup>8</sup> More, *Utopia*, p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13

political use.<sup>10</sup> The debate then develops into its third phase, where ‘More’ argues that philosophers participate in politics through civil philosophy and not in a bookish, ‘academic’ manner: philosophy must adapt itself to the real political environment. Hythlodæus, by contrast, argues that Utopia and the state in Plato’s *Republic* should be openly advocated taught: civil philosophy only helps to compromise morality and allows room for evil to grow. Instead of compromise, he would rather follow the example of Christ and preach Utopia from rooftops. Yet because these commonwealths are regarded by people as absurd, one should follow Plato’s advice and ‘keep away from public business’.<sup>11</sup>

Through the development of the debate, More excavates the root of Hythlodæus’s aversion to politics and his preference for Utopia. By exposing the genealogy of Hythlodæus’s political approach, More allows his readers to judge Hythlodæus’s position not only in light of the arguments of ‘More’ the literary persona, but also with those of Hythlodæus’s authorities: Plato and Christ. In this way, More offers a two-pronged attack on Hythlodæus’s position that takes place not only on the textual level but also on the intertextual level. Together, these attacks render Hythlodæus’s political position doubtful and reinforce the civil philosophy of ‘More’. No less important than these arguments is More’s employment of irony to intimate his position: the name ‘Hythlodæus’, meaning ‘babblers of non-sense’, already arouses suspicion from the readers on the reliability of his position. This is accompanied by a more subtle but more substantial irony on Hythlodæus’s misuse of his religious and philosophical authorities as the debate unfolds.

The first authority that is responsible for the formation of Hythlodæus’s Utopian approach is the Greek philosopher Plato. In Hythlodæus’s account, he learns from Plato that philosophers ought to aspire to realize the ideal commonwealth, and he is disappointed that this aspiration is constantly thwarted in the court of princes. His position on the relation between philosophy and politics is most clearly seen in his primary example of philosophers engaging in politics: the experience of Plato with the tyrant Dionysius. Plato did not simply go to Syracuse to become a political advisor to the tyrant. According to letters attributed to Plato, he went to Syracuse thanks to the encouragement of Dion, who saw in Dionysius a strong candidate for the ‘union, in the same persons, of philosophers and rulers of great cities’.<sup>12</sup> In Plato’s words:

If anyone ever was to attempt to realize these principles of law and government [i.e., of

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28,

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34-37.

<sup>12</sup> Plato, *Seventh Letter*, 328a (Translation by Glenn R. Morrow).

the best commonwealth], now was the time to try, since it was only necessary to win over a single man and I should have accomplished all the good I dreamed of. This, then, was the ‘bold’ purpose I had in setting forth from home.<sup>13</sup>

Yet as soon as the authority of Plato is introduced during the debate on whether philosophers ought to participate in politics, the readers are immediately thrown into doubt as to whether Hythlodæus’s position is truly supported by the venerable ancient philosopher. More achieves this by having both ‘More’ and Hythlodæus cite Plato as the authority that teaches their respective political positions.<sup>14</sup> According to ‘More’,

Your friend Plato thinks that commonwealths will be happy only when philosophers become kings or kings become philosophers. No wonder we are so far from happiness when philosophers do not condescend even to assist kings with their counsels.<sup>15</sup>

Hythlodæus takes this statement to mean that philosophers ought to give straightforward admonishment to princes. Therefore he imagines that in the court of the French King, he would stand up against its treacherous policies against England and advocate peace, and that in another imaginary court he would openly condemn an anonymous king for impoverishing his subjects even as he fills up his own coffers. This radical approach culminates in his statement on Utopia:

Perhaps my advice may be repugnant and irksome to them, but I don’t see why it should be considered outlandish to the point of folly. What if I told them the kind of thing that Plato imagines in his republic or that Utopians actually practice in theirs? However superior those institutions might be (and they certainly are), yet here they would seem alien.<sup>16</sup>

By contrast, ‘More’ sees Plato’s advice that philosophers should become kings as leading to the

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 328b-c. Also similarly in *Laws*, 709e-710e: ‘The best city emerges out of tyranny, with an eminent lawgiver and an orderly tyrant, and that the city would be transformed most easily and most swiftly from such a situation’. (Translation by Thomas L. Pangle)

<sup>14</sup> Skinner has argued that Plato represents a tradition that is contrary to the civil philosophy of Cicero: the Greek philosopher represents the contemplative model that abstains from politics while Cicero encourages direct engagement in civic life. However, that ‘More’ offers an interpretation of Plato in the vein of civil philosophy makes it questionable whether this statement is simply true, or whether Plato, upon closer inspection, is in fact an opponent to the likes of Hythlodæus. See Skinner, ‘Thomas More’s Utopia and the Virtue of True Nobility’, p. 214-24.

<sup>15</sup> More, *Utopia*, p. 28. Plato, *Republic*, 473c-d.

<sup>16</sup> More, *Utopia*, pp. 35-36.

only possible and realistic option: civil philosophy. Philosophers ought to learn to compromise and adapt their teaching to the real political world rather than delivering blunt but indecorous speeches.

The two diametrically opposite interpretations of Plato on the way philosophers participate in politics prompts the readers to look into the statement about the philosopher-king within the context of Plato's *Republic* so that they can better decide between the positions of 'More' and Hythlodæus, between civil philosophy and Utopia. The statement makes its first appearance in Book Five of *Republic*. After Socrates claims that philosophers ought to become kings so that the best commonwealth can be realized, he is immediately questioned by his interlocutors: Adeimantus is not persuaded by the teaching of the philosopher-king because he observes that those who practice philosophy become 'queer', 'vicious' or 'useless to the cities'.<sup>17</sup> The discussion of the philosopher-king in *Republic* allows Socrates to challenge the common misconception, voiced by Adeimantus, that philosophy makes people unqualified to rule.<sup>18</sup> Yet the philosopher who merely 'delights in and loves that on which knowledge depends' is plainly insufficient for this political function and therefore cannot remove the prejudice against philosophy.<sup>19</sup> To counter Adeimantus' objection, Philosophers must themselves engage in activities other than contemplation, become political and acquire the relevant virtues and abilities, including learning about the art of war – an art which Hythlodæus, by contrast, shows no interest in.<sup>20</sup> By placing the statement on the philosopher-king within the context of the dialogue that takes place in *Republic*, the reader finds that Plato's Socrates is asking philosophers to involve themselves in politics and move away from the pure contemplative life.

In addition to Plato's support for civil philosophy, it turns out that Plato's Socrates never intends for the ideal commonwealth depicted in *Republic* to be conceived as serious political advice. He states that the reason for the construction of the just republic in speech is to better find the 'idea' of justice, since a city is bigger than an individual and 'there would be more justice in the bigger [city as opposed to the individual] and it would be easier to observe closely'.<sup>21</sup> In this

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<sup>17</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 487d.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 480a. Roslyn Weiss distinguishes two kinds of philosopher in *Republic*: the purely theoretical philosopher at the end of Book Five and in Book Six, and the hybrid, political philosopher in Book Seven, see Roslyn Weiss, *Philosophers in the Republic: Plato's Two Paradigms* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), pp. 1, 14, 51, 216-17. However, Weiss's conclusion is that the first, rather than the second, is the true philosopher. By contrast, More's civil philosopher can be the first type of philosopher in private but the second type in public.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 521d. Also cf. Epicurus's ridicule of Plato's followers as flatterers of Dionysius. Given that none of the existing states measure up to the ideal commonwealth and all pursue a different end than philosophy, philosophers entering into politics and serving as citizens can be, in a way, compared to flattering 'Dionysius' – the non-philosophical kings. (Diogenes Laetius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophes*, x. 9)

<sup>21</sup> Plato, *Republic*, 368e-369a.

pursuit, the justice of the individual is always placed side by side with the justice of the community, and therefore the dialogue on the ideal commonwealth in *Republic* not only has a social-political dimension but also a private dimension. The parts of the city correspond to the part of the individual soul. The ‘city was just because each of the three classes in it minds its own business’, and so, too, for each individual, ‘the one within whom each of the parts minds its own business will be just’.<sup>22</sup> More importantly, the dialogue on the ideal commonwealth ends with the admonition that one establishes a good order within oneself rather than create an ideal society.<sup>23</sup> The desire for justice culminates, not in social reform, but in creating the right order within the soul. Hythlodæus proves to be a questionable interpreter of Plato: by focusing solely on the social-political aspect of the best commonwealth in *Republic*, he neglects its crucial function as a guide for the individual soul.

The authority of Plato serves as the first blow to Hythlodæus’s position. A closer look at Hythlodæus’s source reveals that he is standing on flimsy ground when he tries to use Plato to defend his political approach and his preference for the Utopian state as a revolutionary solution. ‘More’ has called Hythlodæus the friend of Plato at the beginning of the discussion, and it appears now that this appellation is alloyed with a subtle, Socratic irony.<sup>24</sup> Like Plato’s Socrates who praises others’ ‘wisdom’ to expose their ignorance, ‘More’ goads the apparently ‘Platonic’ Hythlodæus with the problem of philosophy and politics only to reveal how much Hythlodæus has deviated from Plato. It turns out ‘More’ is more Platonic not only in respect to understanding Plato’s *Republic* but also in imitating the irony of Plato’s hero.

This first, ‘Platonic’, criticism is supplemented by the second criticism presented by the persona ‘More’. Both ‘More’ and Plato insist that philosophers should not be occupied by truth alone but learn to engage more closely with politics. ‘More’ considers that Hythlodæus’s straightforward way of counselling a prince smacks of ‘academic’ (*scholasticae*) philosophy and is impractical at best and damaging at worst, and that in its place philosophers ought to practice a more civil philosophy:

It is true [...] that there is no place for this school philosophy which supposes every topic suitable for every occasion. But there is another philosophy, better suited for the role of a citizen, that takes its cue, adapts itself to the drama in hand and acts its part neatly and

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 441d-e.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 592b: ‘But in heaven [...] perhaps, a pattern is laid up for the man who wants to see and found a city within himself on the basis of what he sees’.

<sup>24</sup> More, *Utopia*, p. 28.

appropriately. This is the philosophy for you to use. Otherwise, when a comedy of Plautus is being played, and the household slaves are cracking trivial jokes together, you come onstage in the garb of a philosopher [*in proscaenium prodeas habitu philosophico*] and repeat Seneca's speech to Nero from the *Octavia*. Wouldn't it be better to take a silent role than to say something inappropriate and thus turn the play into a tragicomedy?<sup>25</sup>

'More' contrasts how civil philosophy and the philosophy of Hythlodæus fare in politics. The comparison between a philosopher who is similar to Hythlodæus and a tragic actor who intrudes into a comedy by Plautus aims to show that blunt truth will only fall on deaf ears when 'listeners are [...] firmly convinced of opposite opinions'.<sup>26</sup> But the criticism of Hythlodæus' philosophical practice goes deeper than the rhetorical surface: the victim of indecorum of speech is primarily the philosopher himself or even philosophy. Not only will he fail to persuade, but worse still, high rational discourse in court betrays a lack of political experience, and the philosopher runs the risk of becoming an embarrassment. By spurting out blunt truth, he is also doing a disservice to philosophy, associating philosophy with 'the school' and thus bookishness. By contrast, the civil philosopher who knows how to hold their tongue, according to 'More', is much more prudent, and likely to be more successful. He understands that it is preferable to 'adapt [philosophy] to the drama in hand and acts its part neatly and appropriately'. By doing so, he at least preserves the image of philosophers as conversant in worldly affairs. This favourable image will help philosophers to be more useful in the actual political world and perform their roles as citizens, and this in turn will make sure philosophy will not be sneered at and lose its dignity and value. The argument of 'More' thus closely mirrors the intention of Plato in defending philosophy against the accusation of being politically useless. By presenting the argument in favour of civil philosophy, 'More' appears not just as a Ciceronian humanist but also as an ally of Plato in their joint opposition to Hythlodæus's misapplication of the ideal commonwealth.

The criticism from the perspectives of civil and Platonic philosophy concludes the first stage of the criticism of Hythlodæus on the rational-philosophical level. Hythlodæus is shown to have misunderstood the political meaning of the ideal commonwealth: that it is not an example to be put forward but rather an encouragement for philosophers to step into the actual political world and render their service so that philosophy does not become obsolete and sneered upon.

Nonetheless, the rational-philosophical arguments from both Plato and 'More' do not fully

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 34-5.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

settle the dispute between Hythlodæus and 'More' and the desirability of Utopia. Right after 'More' presented the argument in favour of civil philosophy, Hythlodæus has recourse to another authority who is not grounded in the philosophical tradition. This transition is signalled when Hythlodæus contrasts his way of speaking with that of philosophers who may endorse the practice of lying. 'Whether it's the business of a philosopher to tell lies, I don't know, but it certainly isn't mine'. His straightforward speech ultimately imitates the example of Christ, who, unlike the philosophers, does not 'dissemble' his view.<sup>27</sup> According to Hythlodæus, the exposition of Utopia and the Platonic commonwealth in the court of princes is comparable to Christ's teaching of religious truth:

People who have made up their minds to rush headlong down the opposite road are never pleased with the man who calls them back and points out the dangers of their course. But apart from that, what did I say [regarding the ideal commonwealth and Utopia] that could not and should not be said everywhere? Indeed, if we dismiss as outlandish and absurd everything that the perverse customs of men have made to seem alien to us, we shall have to set aside, even in a community of Christians, most of the teaching of Christ. Yet he forbade us to dissemble them, and even ordered that what he had whispered in the ears of his disciples should be preached openly from the housetops.<sup>28</sup>

Christ's way of speaking, which refuses to distinguish between the teaching whispered to the few 'disciples' and to the public, contrasts with the philosophical way of adapting teaching to the occasion.<sup>29</sup> Hythlodæus's preference for Christ's way of teaching is supplemented by moral indignation. This indignation is, formally, reflected in Hythlodæus's manner of speaking, which Gerard Wegemer considers to be 'blunt' and involves '*ad hominem* arguments to sharpen the effect of his rather virulent attacks'.<sup>30</sup> Hythlodæus accuses the preachers of following the civil philosophy of 'More' ('following your advice, I suppose') and adjusting the teaching of Christ to the way people actually live, the result of which is that they 'make people feel more secure about doing evil'. By criticizing civil philosophy for making room for corruption in the world, and in religious matters especially, Hythlodæus opens a new front against the approach of 'More'. He

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>29</sup> Matthew 10. 27.

<sup>30</sup> Gerard Wegemer, 'The Rhetoric of Opposition in Thomas More's *Utopia*: Giving Form to Competing Philosophies', *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 23.4 (1990), 288-306 (p. 293).

accuses civil philosophy of providing a way for ‘crafty’ preachers to modify Christ’s teaching ‘as if it were a leaden yardstick’. The problem of civil philosophy and religious corruption is all of a piece for Hythlodæus, and it is against what he sees as political and religious corruption that Hythlodæus finds Christ’s way especially attractive and civil philosophy lacking.

Hythlodæus’s desire to speak the truth animates his preference for Utopia. In praising this ideal state, Hythlodæus highlights that Utopia, through the abolishing of private property, manages to free ‘the largest and the best part of the human race’ from the ‘distressing and inescapable burden of poverty and anxiety’ (*‘egestatis & erumnarum anxiam atque ineuitabilem sarcinam’*).<sup>31</sup> Hythlodæus’s compassion encompasses two groups of people: the ‘largest part’ and the ‘best part’ of the human race. Poverty is indeed a heavy burden for the ‘largest’ part of human beings, but the ‘best’ human beings do not necessarily lack material wealth. It is likely that Hythlodæus considers the anxiety for the best part of human beings to be leading a life they abhor and compromising their standards in politics. A wise man who does not have the good fortune to live in Utopia, in Hythlodæus’s opinion, must be torn between principle and reality.

Unlike the debate that revolves around Plato, ‘More’ does not offer a direct argument against Hythlodæus’s new authority and his Christianized rhetoric, nor does Hythlodæus’s longwinded speech give space for any intervention.<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless, ‘More’s’ description of civil philosophy has provided sufficient material to allow readers to compare it with Hythlodæus’s zealotry in advocating Utopia. ‘More’ is not unaware of the ‘weakness’ of civil philosophy and the reasons behind Hythlodæus’s opposition to it. By practising civil philosophy, the philosophers not only act in a manner more befitting a citizen, but they also pay a price. To return to the comparison between the civil philosopher and the silent actor in a comedy, the philosopher who merely holds his tongue is not really useful. While he feels a distaste towards corrupt opinions on politics and keeps silence so as not to endorse any of the evil suggestions put forward by the ‘household slaves’, he still gives up the possibility of reforming the ‘slaves’ and runs the risk of having the king become the victim of scheming, as the masters in Plautus’ comedies often do, although they are not always blameless. Even when the civil philosopher acts to mitigate

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<sup>31</sup> More, *Utopia*, p. 38.

<sup>32</sup> Given Hythlodæus’s zealotry, it is almost impossible to persuade him. The debate between ‘More’ and Hythlodæus, once the topic of Christian truth-speaking is introduced, looks similar to a seldom discussed incident in Book One of *Utopia*. The incident is said to have happened at the table of Cardinal Morton between a friar and a parasite, who likes to play ‘the fool’ (*‘qui uideri uolebat imitari monrionem’*) – ‘Morus’, incidentally, is the name of ‘More’, the literary personae. As soon as the friar is provoked by the fool, he begins fervently quoting Biblical passages to support his position, and upon this occasion Morton tells him that even though he acts with holy feeling, he should ‘act if not in a holier at least in a wiser way’. This comic incident, in which Hythlodæus is unsure what it is proper to say, turns out to be especially fitting for the overall portrayal of the debate between him and ‘More’, and the similarity between Hythlodæus and the friar is not flattering.



social evil, 'More' shows that this effort may not always succeed. He compares the relation between a civil philosopher and a commonwealth to that between a sailor and a ship, and advises Hythlodæus not to 'give up the ship in a storm because you cannot hold back the wind'.<sup>33</sup> Yet this analogy also highlights the limits of philosophy: for no matter how deftly the philosopher handles the ship of the commonwealth, the winds, or the evil that rocks the commonwealth, may still overpower him.

Nonetheless, the civil philosophers accept this price without feeling a burning moral indignation like Hythlodæus: it is significant that 'More' compares the court to a comedy. A zealous moralist who sees only ill to be eradicated in the political world does not know how to crack a laugh and ruins the play by turning it into a 'tragicomedy'. By contrast, to have a comic perspective means taking certain pleasure in human folly and accepting its inevitable existence. As 'More' puts it, 'it is impossible to turn everything good unless all men are good, and that I don't expect to see for quite some years'.<sup>34</sup> Publicly, the civil philosopher will still try to use an 'indirect approach' and 'strive and struggle [...] to handle everything tactfully' so as to at least make things 'as little bad as possible'.<sup>35</sup> Yet the civil philosopher is also aware that exchanges of undiluted speech on truth can only take place privately among friends and not in the court: the philosopher can reveal himself when he comes off stage. Civil philosophy is an encouragement to participate in politics, but it also concerns the double facade of philosophers: privately truthful but publicly flexible, or even publicly silent. The civil philosopher's public-spiritedness is tempered by the knowledge of the limits of public-spiritedness. He knows that philosophical perfection belongs to the minority and can only be enjoyed in private and among friends. Therefore, he does not care about coming onstage 'in the garb of a philosopher': while as citizens philosophers are subordinate to politics, as philosophers they enjoy inner freedom and private truth. This sober understanding of public life is the basis of civil philosophy.

The comparison between civil philosophy and Hythlodæus's moral-religious zeal allows us to see that the disagreement between 'More' and Hythlodæus in their political approach stems from different attitudes to social evil. The civil philosophy of 'More' accepts the limited role of reason within politics and is content that the truth and the right way of life belong to the few. A civil philosopher does not aspire to cure social evil entirely nor considers it feasible to do so. He is thus characterized by moderation in politics and is willing to lie. By contrast, Hythlodæus,

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35

eager to condemn those who twist the Christian truth to fit the way people actually live, shows a moral zeal to combat social corruption. For Hythlodæus, Christ's way of speaking is no different from that of Plato in describing the best state of the commonwealth in *Republic*. Plato does in political matters what Christ does in religious matters: he speaks the plain, undiluted truth, regardless of how 'outlandish and absurd' this might seem to 'us'. It is by thinking about the Platonic commonwealth from a moral-Christian perspective that Hythlodæus formulates his unique approach to political things – teaching Utopia. By doing so, Hythlodæus jumbles together religion and politics, Plato and Christ, and leaves no room for civil philosophy.

With the exposition of the respective positions of civil philosophy and Hythlodæus's Christian rhetoric, the debate on how philosophers should participate in politics reaches a deadlock. The unsettled difference between 'More' and Hythlodæus regarding their respective political approach haunts Hythlodæus's attempt to present Utopia as simply desirable. While the debate has not reached a definite conclusion, Hythlodæus is shown to be misguided in thinking that his ideal commonwealth is supported by the ancient authority of Plato; in addition, More has made a case for civil philosophy against Hythlodæus's Christian rhetoric by placing side by side the sober attitude towards politics and Hythlodæus's own moral zealotry. In doing so, More has prepared his readers to resist the siren song of Hythlodæus's ideal commonwealth: they are encouraged to view it with a critical attitude, as a political approach favoured by someone who has mishandled the legacy of Plato and who introduces religious fervour into politics. Moreover, by linking Utopia with the political position of its proponent, Book Two of *Utopia* takes on an additional meaning: the desirability and feasibility of Hythlodæus's ideal commonwealth will reflect back on the merit of his politics. Book Two is predominantly a monologue by Hythlodæus: the readers are invited into the garden where the dialogue takes place, and to listen in silence with 'More' and 'Giles' to assess Utopia. More specifically, by settling the dispute on the philosophical level but not on the religious level, More directs the readers' attention to the connection between Utopia and Hythlodæus's Christian rhetoric. Utopia must be considered in the light of Hythlodæus's resolution not to distort Christ's teaching.<sup>36</sup> The standoff between civil philosophy and Hythlodæus's Christian rhetoric, which is not settled in Book One, is meant to be resolved in Book Two, depending on how successfully Hythlodæus delivers the commonwealth based on a Christian ideal.

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<sup>36</sup> In accordance with this, all the arguments against the traditional Platonic commonwealth is dealt with in Book One. 'More' counters Hythlodæus's praise of communism with the traditional argument from Aristotle against Plato's *Republic*: 'It seems to me that people cannot possibly live well where all things are in common. How can there be plenty of commodities where every man stops working?' Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 1263a21-b14.

### 1.3 Book Two of *Utopia*: Utopia, the Imperfect Ideal

Book One of *Utopia* ends with the unresolved dispute about how philosophers ought to participate in politics between ‘More’, the civil philosopher, and Hythlodæus, the teacher of Utopia who follows the example of Christ. This section argues that Book Two indirectly settles the dispute in favour of civil philosophy. More gives Hythlodæus free rein in the argument by having him deliver a description of Utopia in the first person, yet the effect of his siren song will be limited on the readers who arrive fresh from the debate between ‘More’ and Hythlodæus. Mindful of Hythlodæus’s failings in Book One, they will subject the description of Utopia to scepticism. What emerges from this reading experience of Book Two of *Utopia* is not simple admiration of the ideal commonwealth but a judicial assessment of its merits and defects. And as I shall show, those defects highlight that Hythlodæus’s ideal is far from being unambiguously desirable and feasible. As a result, Utopia is exposed as a ‘no-place’ rather than the best state, and the only sensible choice that remains for philosophers is the indirect approach of ‘More’.

Hythlodæus’s affiliation with the example of Christ in truth-telling and his admiration for the Platonic commonwealth determine that his ideal state will not adjust the teaching of Christ ‘to the way people live, as if it were a leaden yardstick’. Unlike ‘More’ who opposes the abolishment of private ownership, Hythlodæus will follow through the Platonic ideal of shared property.<sup>37</sup> In Utopia he has evidently but unsuspectingly found a republic that measures up to his standard. As Dominick Baker-Smith points out, the abolition of private property allows the Utopians to do away with ‘social obligations’ which ‘demands that we maintain our property’. And instead of ‘curtailing our charity to preserve the integrity of our estate’, Utopians can devote themselves exclusively to the ideal of ‘charity’.<sup>38</sup> Utopia, according to Hythlodæus, is the commonwealth that comes closest to implementing the Christian way of life:

I have no doubt that every man’s perception of where his true interest lies, along with the authority of Christ our Saviour (whose wisdom could not fail to recognise the best, and whose goodness would not fail to counsel it), would long ago have brought the whole world to adopt the laws of this commonwealth, were it not for one single monster, the prime plague and begetter of all others – I mean Pride.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> More, *Utopia*, p. 36.

<sup>38</sup> Dominick Baker-Smith, *More’s Utopia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), p. 141.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

The manifest confidence Hythlodæus shows towards Utopia and its success in combating social evil contrasts with his attempt to set out his best commonwealth that is fraught with difficulties of which he himself is not always aware. Stephen Greenblatt has observed a pattern that is ‘repeated again and again in Hythlodæus’s account: freedoms are heralded, only to shrink in the course of the description’.<sup>40</sup> While freedom is not the key theme of Utopia, the way Utopian freedom is treated applies equally to other aspects of Utopian life, and can be said to form a feature of Hythlodæus’s discourse: the initial impression of perfection and desirability, upon closer inspection, is gradually shown to be self-contradictory and illusory. Hythlodæus says that the Utopians show unbreakable spirit in battles, but he also tells us that Utopians place the timid among the brave during the fighting so that the former will be ashamed to display their lack of manliness. He tells us that Utopians observe treaties and never violate them, but later says that Utopians do not enter into treaties at all.<sup>41</sup> The same contradictions, as we shall see, are to be found in Hythlodæus’s discourse on the Utopian state as a whole. These contradictions can be broadly divided into two types: the inconsistencies found in Hythlodæus’s description of the internal workings of Utopia, and those found in its interaction with foreign countries. These two types of contradiction point to two difficulties in Hythlodæus’s attempt to set out the best commonwealth: firstly, the attempt to articulate an ideal commonwealth cannot help but contain flaws and absurdities that will undermine its feasibility; secondly, when his ideal state interacts with other countries, and steps, as it were, from idea into reality, Utopia quickly becomes infested with the moral problems which Hythlodæus has set out to avoid. These difficulties conspire to undermine the desirability of Utopia as a solution to social problems and together they form a critique of Hythlodæus’s political approach.

The internal inconsistency that is especially pertinent to Hythlodæus’s political approach is its concern with ‘communism’, which Hythlodæus sees as an approximation to the Platonic commonwealth and the good, charitable community imagined in Christian teachings. The difficulty that Utopian communism encounters can be traced to its conflicting basic principles. In Hythlodæus’s account, Utopians have managed to abolish private property and operate a moneyless economy. The households work for a set number of hours and then bring their product to the marketplace, where the head of the household fetches the things according to what is

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<sup>40</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning from More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), pp. 40-41.

<sup>41</sup> More, *Utopia*, pp. 84-85, cf. pp.89-90, 92.

needed in the family. Hythlodæus assures his listeners that no one will be motivated by greed and take the lion's share, 'for why would anyone be suspected of asking for more than is needed, when he knows there will never be any shortage?'<sup>42</sup> Richard Halpern argues that the Utopian economy embodies 'the ascendancy of use value over exchange value', and the production of goods in Utopia 'aims at satisfying needs rather than extracting profit'.<sup>43</sup> However, the principle of 'need' only accounts for half of its moneyless economy, and an additional variable, namely, honour, quickly complicates the operation of Utopian communism. Right after Hythlodæus speaks of the allocation of goods according to needs, he mentions that during communal meals, the food is divided fairly among the families, but 'special regard is paid to the governor, the high priest and the tranibors [high ranking officials in Utopia], as well as to ambassadors and foreigners, if there are any.'<sup>44</sup> It is not surprising that foreigners, who are not brought up under Utopian communism, expect distinction during communal dinner. Yet even when they are absent, the higher officials of Utopia still enjoy privileges, although political position does not have a necessary connection with need. Hythlodæus's passing mention of the presence of foreigners and their treatment highlights the following difficulty: the desire for distinction, which is supposed to be 'foreign' and 'un-Utopian', is still at home in Hythlodæus's ideal commonwealth. Even with the abolition of private property, Utopians still cannot achieve equal possession of goods, which he seems to be convinced that communism will bring.<sup>45</sup> It is the nature of honour that it is a 'private possession' and cannot be shared. To allow the free reign of the pursuit of honour, then, is to create distinctions which will further compromise Utopian equality. This tension between equality and honour permeates Hythlodæus's description of his ideal state and his monologue in Book Two is, in a way, a tale of Utopian struggle against honour and how the Utopians barely suppress it with problematic institutions. Their success is often dubious, and always accompanied with moral consequences. These setbacks complicate Hythlodæus's unequivocal approval of Utopia.

The suppression of the topic of honour is in part achieved through their moral philosophy.<sup>46</sup> Hythlodæus considers the Utopians 'too much inclined to the view which favours

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>43</sup> Richard Halpern, 'Rational Kernel, Mystical Shell: Reification and Desire in Thomas More's *Utopia*', in *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation: English Renaissance Culture and the Genealogy of Capital* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 136-75 (p. 145).

<sup>44</sup> More, *Utopia*, pp. 55-56. Also cf. p. 44 and 59: the goods are allocated to different cities in Utopia according to need. Although Amaurot is the most worthy city in Utopia, it does not, for this reason, get more provisions.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37-38: 'I doubt whether such equality can ever be achieved where property belongs to individuals'.

<sup>46</sup> While Utopian moral philosophy has received various interpretations it is generally compared with Epicureanism. Stephen Greenblatt argues that More removes the danger of Epicureanism by attaching a religious clause to it, while Giulia Sissa detects a similarity between Hythlodæus and Erasmus in their shared preference for living as one pleases, linking this with Epicurus and

pleasure [over virtue], in which they conclude that all or the most important part of human happiness consists'. According to him, Utopians divide pleasures into two categories, that is, bodily pleasures and pleasures of the mind, and the latter are further divided into the pleasure of intellectual activities and the pleasure of having a good conscience. The human soul is held to be immortal, and 'by God's beneficence born for happiness', and after this life 'rewards are appointed for our virtues and good deeds, punishments for our sins'. Utopians are said to value the pleasure of the mind most, and hold that the pleasure of good conscience is the 'foremost mental pleasure'.<sup>47</sup> What is peculiar to the Utopian moral system is that they believe 'you would have to be actually crazy to pursue harsh and painful virtue, give up the pleasures of life, and suffer pain', should there be 'no reward after death'.<sup>48</sup> Utopians cannot conceive the good of virtue without bringing in the religious argument. In arguing thus, Utopians have clearly overlooked a pleasure that is especially closely related to virtue, namely, the pleasure of praise and honour. John Boyle notes that among 'the classical options for human happiness', wealth and honour are not mentioned in the Utopian moral system – wealth being useless in Utopia. The omission of honour cannot be due to More's negligence, given writers as prominent as Aquinas and Augustine, whose *City of God* More had lectured on, mention honour as among the most important goods held by pagans.<sup>49</sup>

Utopians can steer their moral philosophy away from the pleasure of honour because 'they never discuss happiness without joining to the rational arguments of philosophy certain principles drawn from religion'. Utopian religion comes into play so that the most important pleasure and the fulfilment of human happiness are located in the reward of the afterlife. In this way, Utopian religion serves as the civil theology of the state in two ways. On the one hand, it encourages the public-spirited actions and helps to maintain Utopian customs. 'So long as [the laws] are observed, to pursue your own interests is prudent; to pursue the public interest is pious'.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, having God distribute all rewards, Utopian religion prevents people

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the Utopian carefree attitude. While the pleasure-oriented philosophy does seem to resemble Epicureanism, in this discussion I have nonetheless tried to avoid aligning Utopians with any Roman school of thought but tried instead to see how it functions within the whole of Hythlodæus's account of Utopia. As van Malsson points out, More never uses the term 'Epicurean' to describe the Utopians. Giulia Sissa, 'Familiaris reprehension quasi errantis. Raphael Hythlodæus, between Plato and Epicurus', *Moreana*, 187 (2012), 121-150. Stephen Greenblatt, 'Utopian Pleasure', in *Cultural Reformations*, ed. by Brian Cummings and James Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 305-320.

<sup>47</sup> More, *Utopia*, pp. 66, 73.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>49</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *De Regimine Principum*, I.viii. St. Augustine, *The City of God*, V.xiii.

<sup>50</sup> More, *Utopia*, p. 68. Also cf. p. 78-79 on the Utopian custom of suicide. Utopians are allowed to perform suicide to avoid suffering from terminal disease, but all suicides must be performed when the priest is present. Otherwise suicide is deemed shameful. Unlawful suicide, not supervised by the priest, may be due to the desire to escape punishment after committing crime, and thus betrays a hidden atheism and disbelief in the punishment in afterlife. The presence of the Priest reminds one of divine punishment and reward.

ving for recognition in this life. However, by supporting their morality with religion rather than honour, Utopians inadvertently make it impossible for anyone to pursue virtue for its own sake. Virtue must always be perceived as the pursuit for the pleasure of the afterlife, a means rather than an end. To use George Anastaplo's characterization of Utopian morality, it is a 'cold, calculating approach to life'.<sup>51</sup> The pleasure of honour lies not only in the admiration of others but also in the recognition of one's own excellence, and the latter does not require support from any reward in the afterlife.<sup>52</sup> This self-appreciation has the tendency to seek to be confirmed through outward reward and recognition and thus can become ground for a desire for distinction.

This result of Utopian moral philosophy makes one question whether the Utopians are sacrificing too much to combat honour. Hythlodæus concludes his discussion of Utopian moral philosophy with the following remark:

In all this, I have no time now to consider whether they are right or wrong, and don't feel obliged to do so. I have undertaken only to describe their principles, not to defend them. But of this I am sure, that whatever their principles are, there is not a more excellent people or a happier commonwealth in the whole world.

This conclusion, while reflecting Hythlodæus's apparent appreciation for the Utopians, intimates the danger of simply adopting his optimism: before one can say Utopians are excellent and live in the best commonwealth, one must weigh carefully the right and wrong of their moral philosophy and its consequence. Utopians think that human reason can attain 'no truer conclusions' than their principles, yet they are unaware that their social arrangement already constrains their understanding of virtue. Hythlodæus's conclusion highlights the collective gain from this moral philosophy, but while the 'commonwealth' and the 'people' are the beneficiaries, individual virtue and excellence are suppressed. This situation becomes doubly ironic when we consider that neither 'More' nor Hythlodæus appears to be motivated by the desire for pleasure in the afterlife to combat social evil. Viewed from the Utopian perspective, their pursuit of the public good is no different to 'madness'. Hythlodæus is homeless not only in the real political world but also in Utopia.

While Utopian moral philosophy is problematic, a more serious difficulty is how to

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<sup>51</sup> George Anastaplo, *The Christian Heritage* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), p. 83.

<sup>52</sup> Thomas I. White notes that More defines pride as 'an high estimation of ourselves' and 'delite and lyking of oure selfe'. Thomas I. White, 'The Key to Nowhere: Pride and *Utopia*', in *Interpreting Thomas More's Utopia*, ed. by John C. Olin (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), pp. 37-60 (p. 45).

implement it effectively. Since Utopians never divorce their discussion of happiness from religion, their moral philosophy and the smooth operation of communism, in the last analysis, require the support of piety. This seriously taxes the feasibility of Hythlodæus's ideal state: the tangible economic system depends on the intangible belief, and the latter, being necessarily private, eludes strict enforcement. As Hythlodæus's account delves into religion, contradictions multiply and the reliability of his account increasingly comes into question.

On the surface, Hythlodæus's description of Utopian religion, the cornerstone of the Utopian state, is even more panegyric compared with his account of Utopian moral philosophy. If in describing Utopian morality, Hythlodæus shows a shadow of doubt regarding their overt concern with pleasure, as regards to their religion, he is all praise. In his account, Utopia appears to be an extremely pious state and has perhaps attained the religious perfection that is possible within the confines of human reason. While some of the Utopians still worship heavenly bodies and great men of the past, most of them have 'forsake[n] this mixture of superstitions and unite in that one religion which seems more reasonable than any of the others', a religion whose God is 'a single divinity, unknown, eternal, infinite, inexplicable, beyond the grasp of the human mind, and diffused throughout the universe'. Almost all the Utopians 'are absolutely convinced that human bliss after death will be enormous'. Their priests are of 'extraordinary holiness', and no one is 'more honoured among the Utopians than the priest'. Their religion also finds support from public laws, which allow for diversity in religion. There is, however, a 'solemn and strict law against anyone who should sink so far below the dignity of human nature as to think that the soul perishes with the body or that the universe is ruled by blind chance, not divine providence.' Anyone who does not hold these views 'is offered no honours, entrusted with no offices, and given no public responsibility'. Utopians do not compel these quasi-Epicureans to dissemble their belief, but forbid them to voice their opinion among the common people. Instead, they are allowed to argue in favour of their view 'in the presence of priests and other important persons [...] For they are confident that in the end [their] madness will yield to reason.'<sup>53</sup>

This picture of general piety, a state devoted to safeguarding religion, the gradual progress from superstition to rational theology and even the conversion of atheists, upon closer inspection, betrays various inconsistencies. The existence of a 'solemn and strict' law forbidding heretical views such as the mortality of the soul or divine indifference already casts doubt on whether the Utopians are unanimously pious and earnestly hold the official views or do so out of fear of

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<sup>53</sup> More, *Utopia*, pp. 93, 95-96, 99.



punishment. The existence of such a law, and the fact that those who do not adhere to religious teachings are not assigned any office or honour, are likely to prompt heretics to hide their views. Since no one can probe the hidden thoughts of others, and since there are enough incentives for heretics to hide those thoughts for the sake of personal gain, it is difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish them from the believers. As a result, the Utopians cannot meaningfully implement the policy that the heretics should meet the priests and argue themselves out of their immoral belief. Moreover, the priests are the ones who choose the learned class, from whom tranibors, ambassadors and governors are elected.<sup>54</sup> Anyone who confesses to the priests about their unbelief is tantamount to committing political suicide.

In addition to the unenforceable nature of religious belief, one witnesses that Utopian piety is not strong enough to direct their thought on human happiness fully to the pleasure of the afterlife. This problem is most clearly seen in their supposedly most religious men, namely, the priests. According to Hythlodæus, the religious among the Utopians are divided into two sects. Both devote themselves to hard work and public good, and they do so out of the determination to ‘earn happiness after death’. Those of the second sect ‘don’t despise the comforts of marriage’, and avoid no pleasure as long as it does not interfere with their labour. The Utopians believe that the first sect is holier while the second is more prudent. At this juncture, one might expect that Utopian priests, since they are – in Hythlodæus’s words – of ‘extraordinary holiness’, should be more akin to the first rather than the second group, yet one is surprised to find that the male priests are all married to the ‘finest’ (*selectissimæ*) women in the state.<sup>55</sup> According to the Utopian marriage tradition, ‘the woman is shown naked to the suitor by a responsible and respectable matron; and similarly, some honourable man presents the suitor naked to the woman.’ The Utopians do so because they think it unwise that in choosing the spouse one leaves the ‘body covered up with clothes’ and judge the attractiveness from a ‘mere handsbreadth’ of the person, namely, the face alone. Even the wise among the Utopians ‘appreciate the gifts of the body as a supplement to the virtues of the mind’.<sup>56</sup> Yet the attraction of the naked body pertains especially to sexual pleasure, and in undergoing this process and selecting the most outstanding women as their spouses, Utopian priests show that they are far from the kind of person who is solely dedicated to the public good and eagerly awaiting the reward of afterlife but are entangled with

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>55</sup> One may object that the adjective ‘finest’ may refer to the excellence of women and not bodily beauty. However, More could have easily avoided any misunderstanding by simply substituting ‘the finest’ with ‘the most virtuous’, but he does not choose to do so.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

worldly pleasure. The priests, we are told, are in charge of ‘the education of children and youths’, and they ‘take the greatest pains from the very first to instil into children’s minds, while still tender and pliable, good opinions which are useful for the preservation of their commonwealth’.<sup>57</sup> It goes without saying they are teaching principles derived from Utopian moral philosophy that favours the bliss of the afterlife. Their deeds, however, show the limit of this moral philosophy and the religion that supports it. The Utopians’ choice of an earthlier type of religious person to be their moral and spiritual teacher bespeaks the earthliness of the state. It is hard to ignore the possibility that, given the immediate benefit of priesthood, some desire the position not out of religious devotion but solely in order to become the most honoured among the Utopians and enjoy the finest of spouses.<sup>58</sup>

As Hythlodæus’s description of Utopian communism unfolds, it becomes more and more apparent that the abolition of private property on the ‘institutional’ level alone does not resolve the conflict between honour and equality. Utopia requires the support of a flawed moral teaching, and this moral teaching must be supplemented by religious belief. While Utopian religion is supposed to be the last piece of the puzzle in Hythlodæus’s overall exposition of his ideal state, it turns out to be the Achilles heel.

Utopian communism is precariously held together. It is therefore not surprising that one finds that the Utopian state enacts rather extreme laws to preserve its regime:

The tranibors meet to consult with the governor every other day, more often if necessary [...] The tranibors always invite two syphogrants [officials that preside over thirty households] to the senate chamber, different ones every day. [...] It is a capital offence to make plans about public business outside the senate or the popular assembly. The purpose of these rules, they say, is to prevent governor and tranibors from conspiring together to alter the government and enslave the people.<sup>59</sup>

These drastic measures tell a different story than Hythlodæus’s depiction of the Utopians as the happiest people. The extreme laws against political schemes rather intimates the discontent,

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>58</sup> Marriage in Utopia presents a special impasse for Hythlodæus. Utopia imitates the moneyless economy of Plato’s *Republic*, but failed to imitate the sharing of wives and children (*Republic*, 449c). The sharing of wives destroys the institution of marriage, which Christianity considers a lawful outlet of bodily desire. The conflicting views on the sharing of wives between Plato and Christianity becomes a dilemma: in preserving marriage, Utopia reintroduces the privateness that has been abolished by communism, and the possession of gold as distinction is replaced by the possession of the finest women.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 48.

especially of the ruling class, towards a regime that strives purportedly for equality. The contradictory nature of Hythlodæus's discourse is a caution to the readers against an unequivocal belief in finding a solution to human problems once and for all through the creation of an ideal commonwealth, even if the said commonwealth practices moneyless economy. This problematizes his faith in Utopia as an imitation of the Christian way of living.

In dealing with Utopian communism, moral philosophy and religion, More, through Hythlodæus's monologue, touches upon the internal problems of the state, and exposes the difficulty of constructing in speech a commonwealth that most resembles the Christian ideal in terms of its abolishment of private property. More deepens his criticism of Hythlodæus's approach by having Hythlodæus place Utopia within a real world where it has to deal with the threat of war. In the process, readers perceive that even if Utopian communism is realized, it will nonetheless be plagued by the very same problems that Hythlodæus tries to avoid, and, worse still, create additional moral dilemma unbeknownst to Europe.

Hythlodæus's description of Utopian war practices is paradigmatic of this difficulty. In Book One, Hythlodæus has shown his distaste for war and cites this as one of the main reasons why he cannot serve in the court of princes. As Baker-Smith has argued, being a devout Christian, Hythlodæus holds the belief that 'charity is a divine mandate and that war is its ultimate violation'.<sup>60</sup> Hythlodæus imagines a scenario where he, opposing the 'distinguished men' in the French court who are 'competing to think up schemes of warfare', counsels the king of France against an incursion into Italy.<sup>61</sup> In addition to his opposition to war on the ground of charity and humanity, Hythlodæus sees the army made up of nobles and retainers a great burden on the people, and that it is not in the public's interest 'to maintain for the emergency of war such a vast multitude of people'.<sup>62</sup> Given his political stance, it is not surprising that the commonwealth he admires appears to suffer from none of those distresses. Hythlodæus's description of Utopia begins with the abolishment of the warrior class: in contrast to Europe where the retainers and the nobles are separated from the people and prey on the latter, King Utopus is said to have had his soldiers mix with the civilians as soon as he conquered the land that is going to be Utopia: he ordered his soldiers to collaborate with the original inhabitants to dig a channel that is fifteen miles wide that separates Utopia from the mainland. From then on, Hythlodæus never mentions any dedicated warrior class within Utopia. In addition, he assures

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<sup>60</sup> Baker-Smith, *More's Utopia*, p. 118.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

the listeners that Utopians, unlike the princes in Europe, are averse to the practice of war:

[Utopians] utterly despise war as an activity fit only for beasts, yet practised more by man than by any other animal. Unlike almost every other people in the world, they think nothing so inglorious as the glory won in battle.<sup>63</sup>

From this one may get the initial impression that the Utopians condemn war because they consider it bestial and unworthy of human nature, and that Hythlodæus's preference for Utopia is well-founded. However, it is revealed that instead of being the champion of peace, the Utopians wage wars, and do so questionably, in a way that 'other nations condemn':

As soon as war is declared, therefore, [Utopians] have their secret agents simultaneously post any placards, each marked with their official seal, in the most conspicuous places throughout enemy territory. In these proclamations they promise immense rewards to anyone who will do away with the enemy prince.<sup>64</sup>

The Utopians defend this practice by claiming that it will 'spare the lives of many innocent persons who would have died in the fighting' through 'the sacrifice of a few guilty men'. Yet this humane explanation gradually loses its validity when one witnesses that they will resort to stirring up dissensions within the enemy country, or even 'rous[ing] up neighbouring peoples against the enemy by digging up ancient claims to dominion'.<sup>65</sup> Should it be necessary, Utopians do not hesitate to cause civil strife or international war, and one may legitimately question whether this will not lead to greater bloodshed. In addition, instead of deploying their own soldiers, the Utopians tend to hire Zapoletes, who are especially ferocious fighters. Whether these mercenaries are going to cause greater slaughter of the innocent is evidently outside their consideration. The Utopians, then, are not really avoiding the bestiality of war. Instead, as Elizabeth McCutcheon puts it, by devising those measures, they in fact 'fight as animals who use their "strength of intellect"'.<sup>66</sup>

As Hythlodæus's narrative unfolds, the image of the Utopians gradually shifts from lovers of peace and representatives of humanity to shrewd practitioners of realpolitik, who will

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 87-88.

<sup>66</sup> Elizabeth McCutcheon, 'The Language of Utopian Negation: Book II of More's *Utopia*', *Moreana*, 52 (2015), 37-50 (p. 49)

make use of all means to achieve their goals. As the obstinacy of their opponents grows, so, too, does Utopian deviousness. Yet Hythlodæus betrays no sign of noting the problem. Unbeknownst to him, he is supporting a regime that is equally, if not more, unscrupulous in wars and foreign relations as the French king in Book One. The French King is scheming to contain England by stirring up the ‘Scots’ and encouraging a ‘banished nobleman with pretensions to the English throne’, measures which the Utopians are well versed in.<sup>67</sup> If so, his ground for avoiding politics in Europe becomes shaky, for even Utopia is not exempt from the moral ambiguities of war.

The futility of Hythlodæus’s attempt to suppress the subject of war in the political world is reflected in the failure of the Utopians to disentangle themselves completely from the reality of killing and bloodshed. The Utopians’ apparent aversion to war fails to preserve their moral purity but lands them in increasingly controversial territories. Eager to avoid their own involvement, the Utopians are forced to employ others to fight in their stead. Rather than show awareness that this act merely relegates but does not eliminate evil, they think themselves justified, and that they are doing a service to mankind by having fierce mercenaries kill off each other, ‘sweep[ing] from the face of the earth all the dregs of that vicious and disgusting race’ in the process.<sup>68</sup> Yet the Utopians are not like Jonathan Swift’s Houyhnhnms and the mercenaries are not Yahoos; both are human, if only brought up under different customs. The Utopians are in no position to solve a human problem by simply exterminating the human perpetrators as if they were irrational brutes. This is not to mention that ironically, the mercenaries form the only barrier that separates the Utopians from direct bloodshed. The Utopians do not realize that they cannot help but live on the vice of others: in order that there are people who would sell their lives for gold to fight on behalf of Utopians, the other countries must first be corrupted by the love of wealth. One wonders whether the Utopians are content that other countries are corrupted by gold so that this relieves them from the need for military exertions and supplies them with willing soldiers. A clue to this can be seen in their use of slaves, who, wearing the golden chains made from superfluous Utopian gold, perform the lowly work of butchering animals, a task which Utopian citizens avoid so as not to become accustomed to cruel acts.<sup>69</sup> Similarly bounded by gold, the mercenaries act as the Utopians’ willing slaves in slaughtering human beings. Utopian humanity is preserved with inhumanity, and as a result cannot help but be contaminated by the latter. Its apparently charitable repugnance of war is tainted by considerations of utility and realpolitik. Perhaps it is a blessing

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<sup>67</sup> More, *Utopia*, pp. 29, 87-88.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71

that Utopia is located on the other side of the equator instead of adjacent to Europe, or else Europe would fall prey to Utopia's machinations.<sup>70</sup>

The moral ambiguities of Utopian military practice not only highlight the difficulty of Hythlodæus's peaceful approach to politics, but also haunt his attempt to realize his Christian ideal commonwealth based on communism. Despite Hythlodæus's apparent admiration of Plato, he deviates from his Greek predecessor and gravitates towards the Christian ideal by praising a regime that extends communism to all rather than merely the guardian class. The Utopians are able to do so because Utopus has abolished the distinction between soldiers and civilians. Herein lies an additional reason why the Utopians avoid war at all costs, for to maintain equality and conceal any distinction between the different classes, they cannot afford to encourage military undertakings which will likely create a faction desiring martial honour. To do so would run the risk of turning the state into a regime similar to that of Sparta and undo the founding act of Utopus.<sup>71</sup> Inadvertently, to preserve the nature of communism in Utopia, they are forced to rely on extraordinary measures such as political assassination and foreign troops.

In addition to the problematic approach to war, More caps his sobering lesson on the futility of Utopia with an implicit warning that Hythlodæus's ideal state, though founded upon principles closest to Christianity, is not invincible once put to the test. Hythlodæus is evidently confident that Utopia is an enduring commonwealth. He believes that the habitats of this new island have 'laid the foundations of a commonwealth that is not only very happy but also, so far as human prescience can tell, likely to last forever':

As long as they preserve harmony at home, and keep their institutions healthy, they can never be overcome or even shaken by all the envious princes of neighbouring countries, who have often attempted their ruin, but always in vain.<sup>72</sup>

According to this description, the Utopians have found a way to resist corruption from within and

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<sup>70</sup> One might argue that the problems can be solved if the entire world adopts Utopian institutions. According to Hythlodæus, when Utopia takes the land of others to expand its territories, the natives have two choices: either to adopt Utopian institutions or be driven away by force. It is highly unlikely that any state will undertake the revolutionary change rather than mount a defence, and therefore the only way the whole world can adopt Utopian communism would be for Utopians to displace enough people to force the world into submission. See *ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>71</sup> Utopian history stretches back 1760 years. According to R. J. Schoeck and van Malsson, this takes the readers to approximately the year 244BC when Spartan King Agis IV tried and failed to pass egalitarian reform. See R. J. Schoeck, 'More, Plutarch and King Agis: Spartan history and the meaning of *Utopia*', *Philological Quarterly*, 35 (1956), 366-75 and van Malsson, 'The State of Philosophy and Thomas More's *Utopia*', p. 18. Utopia would be similar to the egalitarian Sparta but without the defining Spartan trait, that is, its warlike character. Also, cf. Plato, *Republic*, 544c-545a: the first stage of corruption of the ideal commonwealth is its transformation into a regime like that of Sparta, with the rulers desiring military victory and honours.

<sup>72</sup> More, *Utopia*, p. 106.

military threats from without. However, Hythlodæus's description of their military practice hardly guarantees that Utopia will live up to his expectations. The Utopians have several ways of dealing with foreign threats: they will first try to bribe. Should this fail, they will employ mercenaries and find out ways to stir up the neighbouring state of the enemy to attack them. When this fails, they will try to hold the enemy off by fighting them on the open seas instead of on their homeland. In Hythlodæus's description of the Utopian war strategy, readers witness how Utopians themselves are increasingly cornered as their attempt to direct war from their mainland fails. Should they exhaust all other measures, they are forced to fight on board their ships or in places where there is no place to run away, calling on all men and placing the timid among the brave. In this way, 'shame at failing their countrymen, the immediate presence of the enemy and the impossibility flight often combine to overcome their fear'.<sup>73</sup> Yet the final picture of virtue created by necessity is hardly a convincing example of Utopian military prowess. Should the enemy stand their ground, 'the hand-to-hand fighting is apt to be long and bitter, ending only when everyone is dead'. And even Hythlodæus himself speaks of several times when the enemy of Utopia 'seemed to have the best of day' and 'routed the main Utopian forces'.<sup>74</sup>

Through Hythlodæus's exposition of the 'static' Utopian institution and its 'dynamic' engagement with the foreign world, readers witness that Hythlodæus's ideal of a Christian commonwealth, both in itself and in practice, is filled with contradictions and is unable to provide a satisfying solution to political problems. If Hythlodæus vigorously holds his standard as he does in Book One, he will see that by escaping into his 'no-place', he does not avoid the moral dilemmas he encounters in Europe and thus he is standing on flimsy ground when opposing the civil philosophy of 'More' and abstaining from politics. More accomplishes Hythlodæus's 'turn' to civil philosophy through a little incident that involves the conversion of a Utopian to Christianity. Upon conversion, this new follower of Christ began to attack the Utopian institutions. Hythlodæus, who in Book One of *Utopia* represents the speaker of blunt truth, suddenly changes his approach. Speaking of the convert, Hythlodæus says that 'as soon as he was baptised, he took upon himself to preach the Christian religion publicly, with more zeal than discretion.' Hythlodæus and the others warned him not to do so, but he only 'work[ed] himself up' to a higher pitch. The relationship between Hythlodæus and the convert is almost the exact mirror of the relationship between 'More' and Hythlodæus: when 'More' advises caution in court, Hythlodæus 'works himself up' to openly advise princes with blunt truth and criticize their

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90-91.

wrong doings. He further condemns all commonwealths that allow private property.<sup>75</sup> By having Hythlodæus act in this way in Book Two, More shrewdly has Hythlodæus plan his own downfall. If discretion and prudence in speech are still important in a state that is especially close to Christian teaching in terms of its political organization, there is no reason that Hythlodæus should abandon a more civil rhetoric in Europe, where Christianity is introduced under less auspicious circumstances and mixed with less salutary customs. Without knowing it, Hythlodæus has already conceded his ground to ‘More’.

The conclusion to Book Two of *Utopia* observes the two-fold failure of Hythlodæus: his failure to convince with a perfectly Christian commonwealth, and his failure to use this commonwealth to support the moral zeal he displayed in Book One against the civil philosophy of ‘More’. As Hythlodæus exhausts himself in his monologue, ‘More’ tells the readers that Utopia is filled with absurdities, including their religious and military practices, but most importantly the foundation of their system, the moneyless economy. Given the connection between Utopian communism and its military and religious practices, this conclusion is indeed a very fair assessment of the weakness of Utopia.<sup>76</sup> Hythlodæus’s ideal of the charitable Christian commonwealth based on the abolition of private property crumbles under its own inconsistencies. This offers a powerful argument, albeit an indirect one, in support of the civil philosophy of ‘More’, showing that Hythlodæus’s zeal leads him to the dead-end of ‘no-place’. More thus settles the dispute that lurks in the background of Book Two, and by having civil philosophy triumph over the Christian-inspired rhetoric of Hythlodæus, he has extended the function and usefulness of this classical inheritance to understanding the relation between Christianity and politics, and how this should actually influence a believer’s political approach. More himself exemplifies this approach of civil philosophy when he refuses to follow Hythlodæus’ pursuit of the ideal charitable communism *ad absurdum*. Instead, he chooses the moderate approach of combining charity with private property: ‘The rich man’s substance is the well-spring of the poor man’s living’.<sup>77</sup> Both philosophers and Christians can profit from More’s civil philosophy, for rational wisdom and Christian religion attest to the same conclusion, that this world is far from

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<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94. Cf. pp. 28-36.

<sup>76</sup> Scholars are generally less willing to give credit to the judgement of ‘More’ on the desirability of Utopia due to the fact that he is a literary persona. While Brendan Bradshaw argues that the judgment on the absurdity of Utopia should be taken at face value, Skinner and Eric Nelson have countered that Utopia is indeed the best commonwealth and that the opinion of ‘More’ is not that of More. See Bradshaw, ‘More on *Utopia*’, p. 25; Skinner, ‘Thomas More’s *Utopia* and True Nobility’, p. 241; Eric Nelson, ‘Greek Nonsense in More’s *Utopia*’, *The Historical Journal*, 44.4 (2001), 889-917 (pp. 891-92, 912).

<sup>77</sup> Thomas More, *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*, ed. by Frank Manley (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 184. How More’s approach differs Bacon on charity from the perspective of theory and practice will be further discussed in the following chapter.



perfect, and ‘it is impossible to make everything good unless all men are good’.<sup>78</sup> Hythlodæus’s failure to articulate the Christian commonwealth will be a pertinent lesson to other potential ‘Hythlodæuses’ who are inclined, in politics, to ‘preach openly from the housetops’.<sup>79</sup>

#### 1.4 Early Modern Translations of *Utopia*: Paratexts and the Recreation of *Utopia*

If More’s *Utopia* ends with Hythlodæus’s failure to articulate the best commonwealth and the return to the option of civil philosophy, this message was lost in the early and subsequent translations of *Utopia*, which again explains why it has been missed for so long. Instead, early modern translators fell under the charm of Hythlodæus’s tale: more often than not, his failure is refashioned into a triumph of presenting the true ideal. In the conclusion to this chapter I will consider the early modern understanding of *Utopia* through the paratexts in the first translations of *Utopia*. As Helen Smith and Louise Wilson argue, Renaissance paratexts alter and transform the ‘contexts and possibilities of the book’s reception’ and the ‘priorities and tone of the text’.<sup>80</sup> Editors of the paratexts of earlier modern translations of *Utopia* point out that materials such as ‘prefaces, dedications and permissions’ provides ‘signs indicating what was at stake in that act’ of translation.<sup>81</sup> By looking at those paratextual elements such as prefaces and other modifications of the text, I will suggest that the *Utopia* appropriated by the translators no longer retains the radical questioning of More, but instead either falls into the conventional category of satire (as a poetical vision of the best commonwealth), or becomes a pragmatic blueprint for social reforms to deal with problems such as poverty, theft and beggary.

In discussing the early modern paratexts of *Utopia*, this study owes much to the work of Terence Cave who records translations and Latin editions of *Utopia* in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century and collects the important paratexts in his *Thomas More’s Utopia in Early Modern Europe*. Additionally, Cave provides highly useful information on the publication history of *Utopia* and its translations. In writing this section, I have made use of his collection of paratexts. However, unlike Cave whose focus is primarily the history of early editions and translations of *Utopia*, the following analysis builds on my reading of *Utopia* as a work

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>80</sup> Helen Smith and Louise Wilson, ‘Introduction’, in *Renaissance Paratexts*, ed. by Helen Smith and Louise Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 1-14 (p. 5).

<sup>81</sup> *Thomas More’s Utopia in Early Modern Europe: Paratexts and Contexts*, ed. Terence Cave (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), xiii.

intimately related to theory and practice and civil philosophy, and aims to study how the changes to *Utopia* made by translators may have facilitated a drastically different reading. I have consulted, in addition to the paratexts in Cave's collection, early modern translations of *Utopia* to identify more precisely the changes translators made to More's text. Furthermore, changes to marginal notes to *Utopia*, which are not included in Cave's collection, most notably the notes in Ralph Robinson's English translation of *Utopia* (1551), are analysed to understand how those changes reflect the translator's reading of the text.

The early modern translators did not simply translate the text from the Latin edition. The translation is often a process of recreating More's text, and this process begins firstly, and most conspicuously, with the title. The title of the earliest Latin editions of the work generally read

On the Best State of a Commonwealth, and on the New Island of Utopia, a Truly Golden Handbook, No Less Salutory than Entertaining, by the Most Distinguished and Eloquent Author Thomas More, Citizen and Sheriff of the Famous City of London (*'De optimo reip. statu, deque noua insula Vtopia libellus uere aureus, nec munus salutaris quam festiuus, clarissimi disertissimique uiri Thoae Mori inclytae ciuitatis Londinensis ciuis et Vicecomitis'*)

There are, however, some minor variations. The 1516 Louvain edition placed 'a Truly Golden Handbook' before 'On the Best State of a Commonwealth', while the 1517 Paris edition substitutes 'No Less Salutory than Entertaining' with 'No Less Useful than Elegant' (*'non minus utile quam elegans'*). Otherwise, the title for the various Latin editions from 1516 to 1555 have largely remained similar. In the Latin title, the book is concerned with two topics: the new island of Utopia and (*'deque'*) the best state of a commonwealth. The conjunction 'and' makes it problematic to simply identify Utopia with the best state of a commonwealth. Furthermore, the title contains both the 'New Island of Utopia' and the concrete and real city of 'London', where 'More' resides and renders his service as 'citizen and sheriff' (*'ciuis et Vicecomitis'*). 'Utopia' occupies the beginning of the title, while 'More' and 'London' are placed in the end, as far removed as possible from the imaginary island. The distance between the two seems to reflect the distance between the opposing approaches to politics represented by Hythlodæus and 'More', namely, the Utopian state and the civil philosophy, discussed earlier. The question emerges as to whether a civil philosopher, disguised as a 'citizen' will seriously consider the ideal of Utopia: the description of the book as 'entertaining' indicates that work is presented with a degree of

levity rather than practical earnestness. In addition, the title describes the book as ‘golden’, and gold is the most worthless metal in Utopia. As the reader enters Book Two, the value of More’s book on Utopia and the best commonwealth becomes suspect.

In contrast to those preparing Latin editions, few vernacular translators of *Utopia* (with the exception of Ralph Robinson) retained most of the original title. Many discarded it altogether. In reinventing the title, they tended to merge Utopia with the best commonwealth. In this way, the island of Utopia is no longer a problematic experiment in presenting the best commonwealth that leads to absurdities, but a salutary answer to political ills. The title of the German edition published in Basel in 1524 reads ‘*Von der wunderbarlichen Innsel Utopia genant*’ (‘About the Wonderful Island called Utopia’). The 1612 Leipzig edition has the title ‘*De optimo Reipublicae Statu, Libellus vere aureus. Ordentliche und Außführliche Beschribung der uberaus herrlichen und gantz wunderbarlichen doch wenigen bißhero bekandten Insul UTOPIA*’ (‘On the Best State of a Commonwealth, a truly golden handbook. Proper and comprehensive description of the most wonderful and most marvelous, but hitherto little known island of Utopia’). The title further describes Utopia as the example of ‘the best manner and form of a praiseworthy and well-organized polity and government’ (‘*die beste weis und art einer löblichen und wolbestellten Pollicey und Regiments*’). The German part of the title almost becomes the subtitle of the Latin part, as if the description of Utopia is the content of a treatise entitled ‘On the Best State of a Commonwealth’. The title of the 1548 Venetian version reads ‘*Del Governo dell’Isola Eutopia*’, effectively changing Utopia into Eutopia – the ‘no-place’ into ‘good-place’. In this ‘good-place’ there are to be found ‘new ways to govern states, to rule peoples, to provide laws for the senators’ (‘*nuovi modi di governare Stati, reggier Popoli, dar Leggi à senatori*’). Contrary to the Latin title that describes the book as ‘salutary and entertaining’, the Italian translator intimates that Utopia is to be considered as containing serious advice by calling the book ‘no less useful than necessary’ (‘*non meno utile che necessaria*’). The levity of the original is overshadowed by the urgency to learn from the new island. The 1550 French edition conveys through its reinvented title that Utopia is ‘the perfect state of a well-organized commonwealth (‘*le parfait estat d’une bien ordonnee politique*’) and that it is ‘the mirror of the republics of the world and the model of a happy life’ (‘*le miroer des republicque du monde, et l’examplaire de vie heurus*’).<sup>82</sup>

In addition to changing the original title, the translators have also modified More’s text to create the impression that the work is indeed about the best commonwealth of Utopia. Many

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 150-51, 162-63, 172, 182, 188.

translators have found it convenient to omit Book One, or a large part of it, and only present Book Two or the description of Utopia proper. As a result, the debate on civil philosophy between ‘More’ and Hythlodæus, so central to the desirability of Utopia, is glossed over. Rather than coming to Book Two with reservations, readers are presented with Utopia upfront, after it has been praised by the title as the best commonwealth containing salutary customs. The 1524 Basel edition omits the entirety of Book One and begins with the description of Utopia. The 1612 Leipzig edition retains a fraction of Book One: it includes how ‘More’ meets Hythlodæus thanks to the introduction of ‘Giles’, and the experience of Hythlodæus as a traveller. However, it stops right before the discussion of whether Hythlodæus should participate in politics and jumps immediately to the end of Book One, where ‘More’ and ‘Giles’ are ‘again in the garden’ (*wieder in Garten*) and listen ‘with great desire’ (*mit grossem verlangen*) to Hythlodæus speaking about the Utopian state.<sup>83</sup> The Leipzig edition also contains a small but significant change to the ending of More’s text. While the Latin edition ends with ‘the afternoon discourse of Raphael Hythlodæus on the laws and customs of the island of Utopia, hitherto little known’ (*sermonis pomeridiani Raphaëlis de legibus et institutis Vtopiensis insulae paucis adhuc cognitae*), the Leipzig edition has ‘the end of the description of the marvellous, until now little-known island of Utopia’ (*ende der Beschreibung der wunderbarlichen/ noch bißher wenig bekanten Insul Utopia*’).<sup>84</sup> The Latin edition is reserved about Utopia: the remarkably neutral description of Hythlodæus’s ‘afternoon discourse’ contrasts with the title of the individual books which reads ‘the discourse of Raphael Hythlodæus on the best state of a commonwealth’ (*sermonis quem Raphael Hythlodæus de optimo reipublicae statu*), and begs the question whether Hythlodæus has successfully presented the best commonwealth or merely its shadow, namely, Utopia. The German adjective ‘wunderbarlichen’, by contrast, corresponds to the title ‘gantz wunderbarlichen doch wenigen bißhero bekandten Insul Utopia’, and readers are led to imagine that the description of the best commonwealth is sandwiched between the title and the ending.

Unlike the German translations which have, more or less, discarded Book One of *Utopia*, the first Italian translation of *Utopia*, made by Ortensio Lando and published in 1548, retained both books. Yet More’s work did not only circulate in standalone translations. When Lando’s version was incorporated as the last book of Francesco Sansavino’s *Del governo de i regni et*

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<sup>83</sup> *De optimo Reipublicae Statu, Libellus vere aures. Ordentliche und Außführliche Beschreibung Der uberaus herrlichen und gantz wunderbarlichen doch wenigen bißhero bekandten Insul Utopia*, trans. by Gregorius Wintermonart (Leipzig: Henning Grosse, 1612), p. 11.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211. When quoting the Latin version of More’s *Utopia*, I use the page number of vol. 4 of *The Complete Works of Thomas More*, ed. Edward Surtz and J. H. Hexter, 12 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961-1997). *Utopia*, ed. by Edward Surtz and J. H. Hexter, p. 246.

*delle repubbliche cosi antichee come modern* ('On the government of kingdoms and republics both ancient and modern'), first published in 1561, the content underwent drastic changes. Book One is entirely omitted, and Book Two ends abruptly after Hythlodæus has finished describing Utopian religion. His indignant criticism of the sin of pride as well as other political communities are no longer to be found, and also missing is the final reservation of 'More' on Utopia and its moneyless economy.<sup>85</sup> In fact, one does not even realize that the whole discourse on Utopia is by Hythlodæus, the speaker of 'nonsense'. These decisions to modify the text are connected to the fact that *Utopia* is presented not on its own but is included in a collection of descriptions of modern and ancient kingdoms and republics. As a result, all the dialogical elements of *Utopia* have been eliminated and the book is reduced to a treatise on a fictional commonwealth, one which Sansavino considers to be 'beautiful in its effect' and fit to be placed last in the collection as its climax.<sup>86</sup> Sansavino's *Del governo* proved popular and underwent at least five reissues before 1607. These reissues contain various additions but always conclude with the republic of Utopia. Most of the content of *Del governo*, including the section on Utopia, is to be found in a French translation made by Gabriel Chappuys published in 1585. With the popularity of Sansavino's work, Kristin Gjerpe proposes that it is this version that made *Utopia* 'available to a much wider reading public in Italy and France'.<sup>87</sup> If so, despite the existence of the complete translations, the general image that readers receive of *Utopia* is likely to be of the imaginary best commonwealth supported by More, rather than the 'nonsense' of Hythlodæus.

In addition to the translator's personal choices, the religious background also contributed to the reshaping of More's text into the best commonwealth. Catholic Spain produced a distinctive version of *Utopia* in 1637 made by Don Jerónimo Antonio de Medinilla y Porres. According to the 1583 *Index de L'Inquisition Espagnole*, which enumerates the banned books in Catholic Spain, More's *Utopia* 'was banned until expurgated'.<sup>88</sup> As a Catholic, Medinilla was evidently torn between praising More as the 'pious martyr' ('*piadoso mártir*') and the puzzling Utopian religion which is far from his own.<sup>89</sup> In translating the book, he undertakes the role of expurgating the questionable content to render Utopia truly good. While Utopians practise a variety of religions, Medinilla translated the chapter heading of the last section as 'On Utopian Religion' ('*De la religion*') as opposed to 'On Utopian Religions' ('*De Religionibus*')

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<sup>85</sup> Francesco Sansovino, *Del governo de regni et delle repubbliche antiche et modern* (Venice: 1561), p. 200.

<sup>86</sup> Thomas More's *Utopia in Early Modern Europe*, p. 61.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59

<sup>88</sup> Henry Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition: A Historical Revision*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 179.

<sup>89</sup> Thomas More's *Utopia in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 240-41

*Vtopiensium*'), and even then he thought it necessary to prevent any misunderstanding by adding a long note on that chapter. He emphasized that perhaps there were a variety of religious practices in More's *Utopia* but this should not be used by the 'atheist or political thinker' ('*Ateísta, i Político*') to pervert the intention of More.<sup>90</sup> Medinilla argued that the multitude of religious practices should not be taken as the toleration of heresies, but rather reflect the actual state of human affairs: while 'initially there was a single form of government, law and ceremonies in the primitive church' ('*un modo de gobierno, leyes, i ceremonias uvo en la Primitiva Iglesia*'), it is no longer the case as there are now 'many canons of Apostles, and every age has had diverse customs' ('*muchos Cánones de los Apóstoles, i a cada Era le ha tocado varios usos*').<sup>91</sup> Rather than expose a feature of Utopia that 'More' considers absurd, Medinilla uses the history of the Catholic church to explain away the absurdity. Medinilla further diminishes any chance that Hythlodæus's discourse is met with criticism by making crucial changes to the response of 'More' to him at the end of Book Two. While 'More' originally mentioned that many things in Utopia, such as war and religion, seem as absurd, Medinilla says 'many other things come to my mind' ('*á mí me venían á la memoria otras muchas*') without stating their absurdity. Although Medinilla retains the very last sentence in which 'More' states that he cannot agree with everything Hythlodæus has said ('*Interea quemadmodum haud possum omnibus assentiri quae dicta sunt*', translated into '*En el ínterin no puedo dexar de conformar con todas las cosas que dixo*'), disagreement is far less critical than a charge of absurdity.<sup>92</sup>

By removing the dialogue in Book One, by emphasizing the 'marvellous' qualities of the 'new island', and by explaining away the religious absurdities of Utopia, the early modern translations of *Utopia* prepared their readers to see the 'no place' as the 'good place'. They further secured this interpretation with another important paratextual element: the prefatory material which often substitutes the original letters that preceded the two books of *Utopia*. In the preface to the 1559 French translation published in Lyon and the prefatory letter in the 1643 French translation published in Amsterdam, *Utopia* is compared to the fables ('*fabuleuse mythologie*' and '*fable*') written by poets ('*poëtes*'), and the chief merit of the work is that it presents 'a moral republic and a most perfect form of government' ('*une morale Republique, et tresparfaite politique*'), and does so employing fiction so that the readers can be instructed while feeling the pleasure of imagination.<sup>93</sup> The poetical features of the book, including the

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> *La Utopia de Tomás Moro*, trans. by Don Geronimo Antonio de Medinilla y Porres (Madrid: 1790), pp. 203-5.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 188-91, 198-201.

employment of fiction and imagination, are conceived as serving the purpose of pleasant instruction, as opposed to complicating the argument of *Utopia*. Contrary to the French translator's practice of highlighting the fictional nature of the work, the original prefatory material blurs the fictional and the real. The two letters by More and Giles, who are present as the literary personae, describe Hythlodæus as if he were a real person.<sup>94</sup> To add more realism, Giles mentions that he failed to catch Hythlodæus's disclosure of the location of Utopia because he was distracted when 'one of More's servants came in to whisper something in his ear'. Similarly, More asks Giles to 'get in touch' with Hythlodæus to make sure 'my work contains nothing false and omits nothing true'.<sup>95</sup>

The interplay between reality and fiction has greater significance than acting as a mere poetical device because the entire work of *Utopia* revolves around the real and fictional approach to political problems, that is, civil philosophy and the Utopian state. The two begin to disentangle as the difference between 'More' and Hythlodæus grows, and readers are thrust into Utopia only to realize that the ideal state is purely fictional: it cannot exist with all the inconsistencies and contradictions, some of which have been discussed in the previous section. Utopia is too good, and too self-contradictory, to be true. The self-dissolution of Utopia as a pipe dream leads to the only real choice, namely, the civil philosophy of 'More'. The fictional, then, is pleasant not just in the sense that it instructs the people of a better way of life, but that it leads back to the consideration of real politics and civil philosophy. The gradual disentanglement of reality and fiction is coeval with the unfolding of the argument of the book. By forcefully setting the two apart, the translators have diminished the original complexity of the work.

Another consequence of regarding Utopia as the best commonwealth is that Utopia becomes the mirror that reveals the defects of existing commonwealths. The imperfection of Utopia is overlooked and the satire no longer cuts both ways. The French preface to the 1559 edition describes *Utopia* as an image which criticizes 'the defects of present-day forms of government, which are all perverted and corrupt' (*les defaux des Politiques, qui sont à present toutes perverties et corrompues*). With the martyrdom of More, the picture is further complicated. In Sansovino's collection of kingdoms and republics, the preface to Book Two of *Utopia* describes how More resisted the decision of Henry VIII to remarry: More was 'unwilling

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<sup>94</sup> The two letters, namely the letter by Peter Giles to Jerome Busleyden and the letter by Thomas More to Peter Giles, are always reproduced in the Latin editions of *Utopia* until the Basel 1563 edition, which only contains Book Two of the work. By contrast, the letters are generally omitted in the translations: among over twenty editions published between 1524 till 1643, they have only been retained in the 1548 Venice edition, 1643 Amsterdam edition, the English translations by Ralph Robinson except the 1639 London edition, and the 1629 Hoorn edition in Dutch.

<sup>95</sup> More, *Utopia*, pp. 5, 121.

to consent to the criminal desire of the King' (*'non volendo consentire alle scelerate voglie del Re'*), and Henry VIII repaid him by 'having him shamefully put to death like a thief' (*'l'esser come un ladrone vergognosamente fatto morire'*). Following this, Sansovino tells the readers that 'this very learned man was sick of the corrupt customs of our time, he composed in a most elegant style this republic situated in that region of fortunate people' (*'ora questo huomo dottissimo havendo a noia i corrotti costumi del nostro secolo scrisse molto ornatamente in quella Regione della gente beata questa Repub.'*).<sup>96</sup> By presenting a parallel, comparing More resisting Henry VIII to More sick of the corrupt custom of 'our time', Sansovino makes our author appear equally earnest in both cases. Utopia seems to be More's attempt to combat the evil in his time that eventually finds its cumulative expression in the king's attempt at divorce. When the criticism of 'our age' takes the central stage, the problem of civil philosophy and the unreliable character of Hythlodæus and Utopia recede into the background.

In other translations, Utopia is recast not as a fictional republic for people's pleasant instruction, but a serious blueprint for social reform. As a result, the satirical element of the work becomes less important, and so, too, does the criticism of Hythlodæus while the endorsement of civil philosophy is overlooked in favour of specific measures of reform that can be derived from Utopia. The most prominent example is to be found in Ralph Robinson's English translation. In his 1551 preface to his translation of *Utopia*, Robinson stated that the work belongs to the kind of writing in which learned men 'put forth new inventions and devices' to further 'the public wealth'. This preface was deleted in the 1556 edition, but Robinson made some substantial revision to the marginal notes for the new edition, and a closer look at these shows that they are likely inserted to convey the same message.<sup>97</sup> The original marginal notes in the Latin edition were ascribed to Erasmus and Peter Giles, and these notes were little concerned with the first book of *Utopia*, which includes a detailed criticism of the social evils in England, including enclosure and the harsh punishment of thievery. Yet precisely this section of Utopia seems to deeply interest Robinson and contains the vast majority of new notes he added. In seven separate notes Robinson identifies the cause, or in his words, 'the mother', of thievery: these include 'idelnesse', 'soldiers', 'idle seruyng men', 'shepe maisters' who are 'decayers of husbandrye', 'dearth of victuales', 'corrupte education of youth', 'whores, winetauernes, alehouses and vnlawfull games'. He repeatedly emphasized how enclosure and the rise of the price of wool

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<sup>96</sup> Thomas More's *Utopia in Early Modern Europe*, p. 177.

<sup>97</sup> Elizabeth McCutcheon, 'Ten English Translations/Editions of Thomas More's Utopia', *Utopian Studies*, 3.2 (1992), 102-120 (p. 104). When referring to the 1556 version, I use the page number of *Sir Thomas More's Utopia*, ed. by Edward Arber (London: Constable, 1906).



caused ‘decay of husbandry’, which in turn led to idleness and thievery.<sup>98</sup>

In keeping with his concern with social problems, Robinson was keen to highlight measures to deal with thievery in *Utopia*. He added notes on the ‘inconvenience’ caused by ‘punishynge theft with death’: ‘punishing of theft by deathe causeth the thefe to be a murtherer’. When Hythlodæus, the protagonist of *Utopia*, described in detail how Polylerite, an imaginary society, punished theft, the Latin marginal notes only read ‘*respublica Polyleritarum apud Persas*’ (‘the Polylerite republic near the Persians’). In contrast, Robinson’s note reads ‘a worthy and commendable punishment of theues in the weale publique of the Polylerites in Persia’, and one of the commendable punishments is that ‘theues condemned to be commen labourers’.<sup>99</sup> Robinson seemed to be attracted by the proposal of Hythlodæus, and may be considering his idea as a viable approach. This is even more clearly reflected in a passage dealing with idleness: when Hythlodæus describes that most Utopians share manual labour and wealth, and that there is no place for idle servants, the original Latin marginal note reads ‘*sic excludi potest ociosa turba ministrorum*’ (‘thus one can eliminate the crowd of idle servants’). Robinson translates this note into ‘so might we well be discharged and eased of the ydle company of seruyngmen’.<sup>100</sup> The phrase ‘ydle company of seruyngmen’ corresponds to the ‘ydle seruyngmen’ used, as we have observed, in Robinson’s marginal note on Book One concerning the cause of thievery. Robinson, through these notes, established a connection between Utopian custom and its possible application in England. It is, then, not surprising that he rendered the third person singular ‘*potest*’ into ‘we might’, making the subject the translator and target readers of the English translation.

Robinson’s translation is unique in that it is the only edition in the vernacular the paratext of which lays heavy emphasis on the first book of *Utopia*. As the English translator, he was very much concerned with the English problems reflected in *Utopia*. Through the paratexts he adds, he has instilled a practical spirit into More’s work, and introduces the text to vernacular readers as a set of possible reform measures. Robinson has, as it were, already chosen his alliance with ‘More’ against the position of Hythlodæus: he has decided to perform his duty as a citizen to society through his act of translation. As a result, the debate on civil philosophy is no longer a key question. Robinson’s attitude towards philosophy and politics is most tellingly reflected in the story of Diogenes the Cynic in Robinson’s 1551 preface to his translation of *Utopia*. When

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<sup>98</sup> *Sir Thomas More’s Utopia*, ed. Edward Arber, pp. 38-39, 41-43.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48. *Utopia*, ed. Edward Surtz and J. H. Hexter, p. 74.

<sup>100</sup> *Sir Thomas More’s Utopia*, ed. Edward Arber, p. 90. *Utopia*, ed. Edward Surtz and J. H. Hexter, p. 136.

Diogenes saw that the Corinthians were busy making preparations to defend their city against the invasion of King Philip, he decided to ‘tumble up and done hether and thether upon the hille syde, that lieth adjoyninge to the citie, his great barrel or tunne, wherein he dwelled’. And when he was asked why he did this, he replied that ‘it were no reason that I only should be ydell, where so many be working’. Robinson compared his translation of *Utopia* to fulfilling his duty to God and his country and tumbling his own ‘tubbe’.<sup>101</sup> There are, for Robinson, no idle philosophers like Hythlodæus but only busy ones like Diogenes. Ironically, this makes him less keen on the opposition between Hythlodæus and the civil philosopher ‘More’, so central to Book One of *Utopia*.

By looking at the paratextual elements and the modification of the text of *Utopia* in early modern vernacular translations, we have witnessed how the complexity of the original work and its message on civil philosophy is gradually reduced to a fictional representation of the best state of commonwealth either to entertain and instruct or guide practice. The translators recreated the titles to stress that Utopia is indeed the best commonwealth. They further modified the original text and even cut the entirety of Book One to support this interpretation. As a result, the state of Utopia becomes the mirror that reflects the deficiencies of existing states, but the blemishes of the mirror itself have been largely overlooked. Emphasis is generally laid on Book Two, and consequently the overarching argument of the entire work is buried. In a way, not *Utopia*, but the translations of *Utopia*, shape More’s book into a treatise solely about the best commonwealth.

## 1.5 Conclusion

Hythlodæus says that many philosophers have written books on how to govern well, but few kings ever take their advice. In writing *Utopia*, More seems to merely add another one to the count. However, as I have argued in the preceding analysis, the usefulness of *Utopia* may well be beyond its immediate political effect. Rather than set out a practical way to create a best commonwealth, its greatest use may be to reveal to the potential ‘Hythlodæuses’ that their Christian inspired moral obstinacy has no place in the court of princes, but more importantly, no place even in a commonwealth that most resembles the Christian way of life. The first piece of ‘modern utopian literature’ does not lead to Utopia, but away from it, to the classical inheritance

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<sup>101</sup> Thomas More’s *Utopia in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 206-7.

of civil philosophy, now adapted to a new Christian context.

This aspect of *Utopia* emerges when Book Two is read in conjunction with Book One and the ideal state is viewed from the critical distance created by the dialogue on civil philosophy. It also emerges from More's ironical treatment of Hythlodæus and various ambiguities that are present in the title of the book and ultimately set *Utopia* apart from the best state of the commonwealth. However, those ambiguities are concealed when various early modern translators modified More's text or omitted major parts or the entirety of Book One of *Utopia*. These modifications have the tendency to present *Utopia* as containing the best commonwealth, a form that much resembles the modern conception of utopia, rather than More's sceptical thinking on such endeavours.

Yet even when refashioned into utopian literature as we know it, *Utopia* still represents an unrelenting effort to articulate the best commonwealth, although the best commonwealth is presented by a person whose name represents the knower of nonsense and thus inevitably arouses suspicion. A century after the publication of *Utopia*, a new model of utopian literature emerged in the form of Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*. Although it is clothed in the form inaugurated by More's *Utopia*, it advocates a commonwealth that is not perfect but perfectly fit for practice. This turn will take writing on imaginary commonwealths far away from the pursuit of the best state, and even farther away from the questioning of this pursuit, making utopian literature much more akin to a blueprint for social reform than a reflection on the distance between the theory of best commonwealth and its actual practice.

## Chapter 2. The Shift to Charity and the Genesis of the Baconian Modern Utopia

### 2.1 Introduction

In More's *Utopia*, the first modern utopian literary fiction, the description of the ideal state is preceded by a satirical dialogue which questions the very act of pursuing the perfect commonwealth. A century later, Bacon wrote his utopian fiction *New Atlantis* (1624), which contains a technologically advanced state named Bensalem. This time, however, what precedes the description of the ideal state is not a sceptical dialogue. Rather, this utopian fiction, one of the last works by Bacon to be published (d. 1626), follows the author's life-long endeavour to reform natural science so that his idea of a utopian commonwealth could be brought into fruition. A playful idea of utopia is replaced by one intended to be taken seriously as a potential model. Unlike *Utopia*, *New Atlantis* reads almost like an optimistic prophecy of what is to come – scientific institutions, improved medicine, prolonged life, fantastic progress in technology, to name but a few modern achievements. That Bacon not only depicts the utopian commonwealth, but also imagines a way to reach it, marks a crucial turn in utopian literature and the relation between theory and practice – to use Bacon's own words in his *Advancement of Learning*, 'contemplation and action may be more nearly and straightly conjoined and united together than they have been'.<sup>1</sup>

The aim of this chapter is to explore some of the reasons behind this momentous shift in utopian literature and to understand the new approach to theory and practice initiated by Bacon. Bacon's combination of theory and practice has already received much attention, especially in the sphere of natural science. Paolo Rossi's classic study *Francis Bacon, from Magic to Science* (1968), situates Bacon's endeavour in the historical background of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, where mechanical arts grew in importance due to the rising needs of social and economic development.<sup>2</sup> Antonio Pérez-Ramos's 1988 study, on the other hand, sees Bacon's effort as mainly an intellectual one: Bacon revolutionizes the key concepts in Aristotelian natural

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Bacon, 'The Advancement of Learning', in *Major Works*, ed. by Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 148.

<sup>2</sup> Paolo Rossi, *Francis Bacon, from Magic to Science*, trans. by Sacha Rabinovitch (London: Routledge, 1968), pp. xiii, 5-6, 32-33, 51-67.

philosophy so that the aim of knowledge is to understand how to create a certain effect in nature.<sup>3</sup> More recent studies by Laurance Lampert and Tom van Malsson go beyond natural science and examine Bacon's project as a whole, and suggest that Bacon's reform of theory and practice aims to create a society where the highest principle is laid down by Baconian philosophy, thereby establishing the supremacy of philosophy over religion.<sup>4</sup>

The present study benefits immensely from the existing scholarship on Baconian science, and it acknowledges the value of investigating the problem of theory and practice beyond the sphere of natural science alone. However, rather than focusing on the supremacy of philosophy and theology, this study takes its cue from Bacon's own statement: that his 'vast contemplative ends', or his entire scientific project, spring from 'philanthropia', or love of man.<sup>5</sup> In the first section of this chapter, I argue that Bacon finds the theological equivalent to 'philanthropia' in the Christian notion of charity, but that he modifies the theological concept so that its focus shifts from God to man. This reformed notion of charity guides Bacon's effort to reform both natural philosophy and civil philosophy for the benefit of mankind. Bacon's preoccupation with charity, however, is not a devotion to an abstract concept but stems from specific historical circumstances, especially the religious conflict in his day between Catholics and Protestants. In the second section, I examine how the religious conflict shaped Bacon's human-centric conception of charity, and how this, in turn, induces Bacon to embrace a more tolerant position that eventually gives shape to *New Atlantis*. In the third and final section, I will reexamine *New Atlantis* from the perspective of charity and 'philanthropia', and argue that Bacon's utopia is meant as a solution to the inhuman cruelty caused by religious zealotry. As such, Bensalem, the imaginary commonwealth in *New Atlantis*, is not simply the best commonwealth, but a utopia devised for a specific problem. It is by deviating from the original purpose of utopia – the investigation of the best state of commonwealth – that Bacon seemingly accomplished the impossible: the combination of theory and practice.

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<sup>3</sup> Antonio Pérez-Ramos, *Francis Bacon's Idea of Science and the Maker's Knowledge Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 68-82.

<sup>4</sup> Laurance Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times: A Study of Bacon, Descartes, and Nietzsche* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 68. Tom Van Malsson, *The Political Philosophy of Francis Bacon* (New York: SUNY Press, 2015), p. 239.

<sup>5</sup> Francis Bacon, 'Letter to Lord Burghley', in *Major Works*, ed. by Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 20-21

## 2.2 Francis Bacon on Charity

In the *Advancement of Learning*, Francis Bacon put forward his project to reform natural philosophy and civil philosophy so that both can serve ‘the benefit and use of men’. The new direction philosophy takes is embodied in the word ‘charity’.<sup>6</sup> By redefining charity in a human-centric and worldly fashion, Bacon not only injects a new meaning into this ancient Christian virtue, but also turns it into a transitional concept that allows him to pursue a novel utopian vision under the guise of traditional theological terminology. In this section, I will examine how Bacon departs from important predecessors on the issue of charity, and how, under this new definition, natural philosophy and civil philosophy are transformed to serve charity and the utopian ideal.

Prior to Bacon, the definition of charity had always revolved around the central position of God. More specifically, charity as the love of one’s neighbour is an extension of one’s love of God. On this issue authors such as the Scholastic authority Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), the moderate Catholic Desiderius Erasmus (1469-1536) and the more radical Protestant John Calvin (1509-64) all concur in spite of the significant differences in their theological stances. In his *Explanation of the Apostles’ Creed*, Erasmus states that charity has two aspects, or two ‘eyes’ as he puts it, suggesting that it looks in two directions: ‘the right [charity] directs to God, the left it turns aside to its neighbour, for it loves the former above *all* things as the supreme good and the latter as a kinsman for God’s sake’.<sup>7</sup> If for Erasmus charity looks at both God and one’s neighbour but primarily at God as ‘the supreme good’, Calvin puts more emphasis on the necessity to love one’s neighbour for the sake of God:

If we rightly direct our love, we must first turn our eyes not to man, the sight of whom would more often engender hate than love, but to God, who bids us extend to all men the love we bear to him, that this may be an unchanging principle: whatever the character of the man, we must yet love him because we love God.<sup>8</sup>

These definitions do not differ much from that of Aquinas, who considers charity as love of one’s neighbour but primarily ‘on account of what he has of God’:

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<sup>6</sup> Bacon, ‘The Advancement of Learning’, in *Major Works*, pp. 120-299 (p. 147).

<sup>7</sup> *Collected Works of Erasmus*, ed. by Alexander Dalzell and others (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1975-), LXX: *Spiritualia and Pastoralia*, ed. by John W. O’Malley (1998), p. 239.

<sup>8</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, 2. 8. 54.

The aspect under which our neighbour is to be loved, is God, since what we ought to love in our neighbour is that he may be in God. Hence it is clear that it is specifically the same act whereby we love God, and whereby we love our neighbour.<sup>9</sup>

Against the consensus of these opposing theological authorities, Bacon's redefinition of charity, which shifts the emphasis from the love of God to love of man, is new and revolutionary. This Baconian understanding of charity is most conspicuous in two of his essays, 'Of Marriage and Single Life' and 'Of Goodness and Goodness of Nature'. In 'Of Marriage and Single Life', Bacon collapses the difference between charity and love for one's own wife and children: 'A single life doth well with churchmen; for charity will hardly water the ground where it must first fill a pool.'<sup>10</sup> The argument Bacon is making is a simple one: a minister will not be able to dedicate love to his parishioners if he has to focus first on his family. Yet, what is striking in the sentence is that Bacon does not distinguish between love for one's family, which is essentially an extension of self-love, with the orthodox understanding of charity which is directed towards mankind. Both self-love and love for society in general are now subsumed under the name of charity. The comparison of love/charity to water indicates that wherever charity is directed, whether towards a 'pool' (one's family), or the 'ground' (society and mankind in general), the 'water' (charity) itself remains unchanged: the private love for one's family and charity spring from the same source.

Building on the insight that the mundane love of one's family should be the basis of charity, Bacon warns that charity divorced from one's love towards a wife and children threatens to undermine the quality of charity:

Certainly wife and children are a kind of discipline of humanity; and single men, though they may be many times more charitable, because their means are less exhaust, yet, on the other side, they are more cruel and hardhearted (good to make severe inquisitors), because their tenderness is not so oft called upon.<sup>11</sup>

If previously Bacon contends that the single man can love society better if he is not distracted by his love for his own family, he now modifies this argument subtly and grounds the charity of the

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, Q. 25, A. 1. Also II-II, Q. 27, A. 8: 'Now the love of one's neighbour is not meritorious, except by reason of his being loved for God's sake.'

<sup>10</sup> Bacon, 'Of Marriage and Single Life', in *Major Works*, pp. 353-4 (p. 353).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

single man on a much narrower basis: a single man is more charitable not because he possesses more of that Christian virtue or has love to spare, but merely because his ‘means are less exhaust’. While single men excel in material possession, when it comes to humanity, they must be considered inferior to married men, for without the discipline of ‘wife and children’, they are prone to cruelty and hardheartedness. It would now appear it is the married, not the single man, who practises charity, and he is closer, not because he is devoted to the love of God, but because he is disciplined by the love he bears to his wife and children. Bacon’s understanding of charity is grounded in humanity instead of religion and the love of God.

The argument in ‘Of Marriage and Single Life’ paves the way for a much more direct confirmation of the equivalence of charity and love of man (‘*philanthropia*’) in his essay ‘Of Goodness and Goodness of Nature’:

I take Goodness in this sense, the affecting of the weal of men, which is that the Grecians call *Philanthropia*. [...] This of all virtues and dignities of the mind is the greatest; being the character of the Deity. [...] Goodness answers to the theological virtue Charity, and admits no excess, but error.

That ‘goodness answers to the theological virtue Charity’ leaves it open as to whether goodness, which concerns the ‘weal of men’, is the secular equivalent of charity or the two are the same. However, Bacon does not hesitate to use the two words as if they are interchangeable in the opening sentence of the next paragraph: ‘Errors indeed in this virtue of goodness or charity may be committed.’<sup>12</sup> The singular ‘this’ and the conjunction ‘or’ seems to imply that the Christian virtue of charity is the same as the virtue that has a Greek name (‘*Philanthropia*’) and a non-Biblical origin.<sup>13</sup> Bacon underscores the importance of self-love by arguing that charity should be modelled upon self-love:

Beware how in making the portraiture thou breakest the pattern. For divinity maketh the love of ourselves the pattern; the love of our neighbours but the portraiture. ‘Sell all thou hast, and give it to the poor, and follow me’: but sell not all thou hast, except thou come

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<sup>12</sup> Bacon, ‘Of Goodness and Goodness in Nature’, in *Major Works*, pp. 363-4 (p. 363).

<sup>13</sup> In Bacon’s letter to Lord Burghley (undated), he says that his whole project to reform natural science is motivated by ‘curiosity, or vain-glory, or nature, or (if one take it favourably) *philanthropia*.’ (‘Letter to Lord Burghley’, in *Major Works*, pp. 20-1.) Bacon would later describe this whole enterprise as a combination of knowledge and charity. It would appear that charity for Bacon means no more than *philanthropia*.



and follow me; that is, except thou have a vocation wherein thou mayest do as much good with little means as with great; for otherwise in feeding the streams thou driest the fountain.<sup>14</sup>

In arguing that self-love should be the model for charity, Bacon departs from Erasmus and Calvin. While the affirmation of the importance of self-love bears similarity to the scholastic tradition represented by Aquinas, a closer examination shows that Bacon's position is unique. According to Aquinas:

It is written: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' Whence it seems to follow that man's love for himself is the model of his love for another. But the model exceeds the copy. Therefore, out of charity, a man ought to love himself more than his neighbour.<sup>15</sup>

Aquinas, too, advises that in providing alms to others, one should not do so excessively as to injure his own ability to sustain himself:

For instance, if a man found himself in the presence of a case of urgency, and had merely sufficient to support himself and his children, or others under his charge, he would be throwing away his life and that of others if he were to give away alms, what was then necessary to him.<sup>16</sup>

Despite those apparent similarities there is a glaring difference between Bacon and Aquinas: Bacon's advice on the importance of self-love is subsumed under a Machiavellian argument that prioritizes worldly good over otherworldly good and divine good. One ought to make self-love the model in order to avoid the Machiavellian accusation that 'the Christian faith had given up good men in prey to those that are tyrannical and unjust' because 'there was never law, or sect, or opinion, did so much magnify goodness, as the Christian religion doth.'<sup>17</sup> Bacon's quotation is a paraphrase of Machiavelli's argument in his *Discourse on Livy*:

Our religion, having shown the truth and the true way, makes us esteem less the honour of

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<sup>14</sup> Bacon, 'Of Goodness and Goodness of Nature', p. 364.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, Q. 26, A. 4.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, II-II, Q. 32, A. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Bacon, 'Of Goodness and Goodness of Nature', p. 363.

the world, whereas the Gentiles, esteeming it very much and having placed the highest good in it, were more ferocious in their actions. [...] Our religion has glorified humble and contemplative more than active men. It has then placed the highest good in humility, abjectness, and contempt of things human. [...] If our religion asks that you have strength in yourself, it wishes you to be capable more of suffering than of doing something strong. This mode of life thus seems to have rendered the world weak and given it in prey to criminal men, who can manage it securely, seeing that the collectivity of men, so as to go to paradise, think more of enduring their beings than of avenging them.<sup>18</sup>

According to Machiavelli, Christianity causes men to become weak by devoting their minds to transcendent truth, which debases worldly glory. This, coupled with the praise of humility and suffering, renders men incapable of defending themselves from criminals and tyrants. It does so because the transcendent truth promises them the bliss of paradise in the afterlife, and thus in their pursuit of otherworldly goods, they neglect and worsen their own wellbeing as well as that of others. Bacon's readers who were familiar with Machiavelli would realize that his objection to charity that damages self-interest is directed first and foremost against an idea of charity that is motivated by the promise of the 'paradise' at the cost of the good of this world.

In line with this reasoning, after paraphrasing Machiavelli, Bacon offers an interpretation of *Matthew* 19: 21. In the Bible, Christ says to the rich young man who is unwilling to part with his riches that 'If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.' Bacon comments on the passage but omits the crucial 'treasure in heaven':

'Sell all thou hast, and give it to the poor, and follow me': but sell not all thou hast, except thou come and follow me; that is, except thou have a vocation wherein thou mayest do as much good with little means as with great.<sup>19</sup>

Bacon fails to mention that in the context where this quotation is found, the antagonism is between following Christ to secure the 'treasure in heaven' and the 'covetousness' of riches that

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<sup>18</sup> Machiavelli, *Discourse on Livy*, ii, 2.2. Paragraph number refers to the following edition: Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourse on Livy*, trans. by Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996).

<sup>19</sup> Bacon, 'Of Goodness and Goodness of Nature', p. 364.

diverts human beings from the way of Christ, as Calvin and Erasmus had argued.<sup>20</sup> The young man whom Christ speaks to has been practising the commandment of ‘You Shall Love Your Neighbour as Yourself’, but he still falls short of attaining eternal life as he lacks the will to become ‘complete’ and ‘sell [his] possessions and give it to the poor’. Bacon, in effect, advises his readers to ‘sell not all thou hast’; if they take this advice, his readers will be following the example of the young man who does good and loves his neighbour rather than focusing primarily on obtaining the ‘treasure in heaven’. Deviating from his humanist predecessors, borrowing from Aquinas, Bacon in the end arrives under the banner of Machiavelli: he grounds charity not just in self-love, but also in this world as opposed to the afterlife.

This secularization of charity is not just of theological significance but also closely corresponds to Bacon’s overall plan to render theory and practice ‘more nearly and straightly conjoined and united together than they have been’.<sup>21</sup> This marks a significant departure from More’s civil philosophical approach to Christian ideals. More understands the nobility of Christian virtues, but he is also acutely aware that as a ‘citizen’ one has to adapt to ‘the drama in hand’ and so satirizes the radical approach of Hythlodæus, whose utopia appears charitable but is in fact burdened by contradictions arising from his naïve idealism.<sup>22</sup> More’s civil philosophy is thus characterized by both the knowledge of higher principles and the attempt to accommodate those principles to political reality, while remaining ever conscious of the tension between theory and practice. By contrast, Bacon’s approach is characterized by the reinterpretation of rather than accommodation to the higher principle of ‘charity’. Defining charity as an extension of self-love, Bacon deviates from the theological core and substitutes it with a much more mundane understanding. Bacon is able to ‘more nearly and straightly’ unite Christian ideal to practice precisely because he has subtly revised certain elements of that ideal.

Charity, secularized and humanized, provides the guiding principle for the reform of natural and civil philosophy so that both can serve the newly defined worldly ends. In terms of natural philosophy, Bacon endeavours to distance it from theology, and turn natural philosophy away from direct contemplation of God and towards the contemplation of nature, which Bacon terms ‘God’s work’. This transition will allow natural philosophy to focus vigorously on the movements and processes in nature which people can replicate, and provide technological mastery over nature for greater material benefit.

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<sup>20</sup> *Collected Works of Erasmus*, ed. by Alexander Dalzell and others (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1975-), LXV: *Paraphrase on the Gospel of Matthew*, ed. by Robert D. Sider (2008), pp. 276-7.

<sup>21</sup> Bacon, ‘The Advancement of Learning’, p. 148.

<sup>22</sup> More, *Utopia*, pp. 34-5.

In the separation of theology and natural philosophy, Bacon does not work in a vacuum but builds on the groundwork already laid down by Protestant and humanist predecessors. Bacon shares their disapproval, if not hostility, towards scholastic philosophy, yet more importantly for Bacon, their criticism of scholastic philosophy leads to the general problem of which scholastic philosophy is also an example: the fact that the study of the natural world is entangled with the study of theology. The protestant reformers generally hold that true knowledge of God is to be attained through Scripture alone, with natural philosophy playing a minimal role. According to Martin Luther, in terms of the knowledge of God, ‘Neither councils, fathers, nor we, in spite of the greatest and best success possible, will do as well as the Holy Scriptures, that is, as well as God himself has done.’<sup>23</sup> To prevent the contamination of theology from philosophy, Luther goes so far as to argue that ‘As nobody except a married man can put the passion of the flesh to its natural proper use, so then nobody can put his mind to philosophy except a fool in Christ.’<sup>24</sup> Calvin, while not as hostile towards moral and natural philosophy in general, separates knowledge into human knowledge such as science, art, politics and law, and the divine knowledge which concerns God and true righteousness; he considers human reason incapable of pursuing the latter type of knowledge:

[The pagan philosophers] never even sensed that assurance of God’s benevolence towards us (without which man’s understanding can only be filled with boundless confusion).

Human reason, therefore, neither approaches, nor strives toward, nor even takes a straight aim at, this truth: to understand who the true God is or what sort of God he wishes to be toward us.<sup>25</sup>

To gain true knowledge of God, one must rely primarily on the Word of God, or Scripture: ‘We must come, I say, to the Word, where God is truly and vividly described to us.’<sup>26</sup> Even the moderate Erasmus sees a diminished role for natural philosophy in theology. The principle reason for the acquaintance of objects of nature is not that this knowledge leads one from physics to metaphysics and God, but that this knowledge facilitates the interpretation of the Bible if those natural objects are mentioned in it:

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<sup>23</sup> *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings*, ed. by Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), p. 64.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Luther, *Early Theological Works*, ed. by James Atkinson (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1962), p. 280.

<sup>25</sup> Calvin, *Institute of Christian Religion*, 2. 2. 18.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 1. 4. 3.

[Augustine] had asked that the fruit of the mandrake be brought to him so that he might deduce from either the form, taste, or smell something that would contribute to the explanation of the allegory of the mystic narrative about Rachel selling to her sister, Leah, at the price of that fruit the opportunity to lie with the husband they held in common. Moreover, with how many words does St Ambrose, in his exposition of the thirteenth chapter of Luke, explain in what respects the fig tree differs from the other trees; he does so that it might become more evident how well this tree, as a type, fits the synagogue.<sup>27</sup>

Since the source of divine teaching is to be found in the Bible, it sets the ambit of the necessary knowledge of nature. What one needs is not a system of natural philosophy like that found in Aristotle's *Physics*, but rather a knowledge of individual objects. Furthermore, Erasmus holds that the teaching of the Bible, far from being anything connected with natural philosophy, concerns the moral conduct of human life: a student of the Bible should 'bow before the inscrutable mystery of God' and 'recognize their own weakness [in comprehending the divine mystery] and attend rather "to the evil and good that has been done within their own house"'.<sup>28</sup>

The Protestant reformers and humanists seek to preserve the purity of theological teachings by grounding it firmly in Scripture. Bacon seizes upon this as a reason for providing room for natural philosophy to operate without the interference of theology. He readily takes the position of Erasmus and Calvin that true moral teaching as well as true knowledge of God is to be found in Scripture. Like them, Bacon claims that the 'great mysteries of the Deity, of the Creation, of the Redemption' and 'the law moral truly interpreted' are not to be attained except by 'inspiration and revelation from God', namely, 'upon the word and oracle of God'.<sup>29</sup> In terms of knowledge of nature, 'the scope or purpose of the Spirit of God is not to express matters of nature in Scriptures, otherwise than in passage, and for application to man's capacity and to matters moral or divine.'<sup>30</sup> By separating the study of Scripture from natural philosophy, Bacon prevents the mingling of philosophy and theology, which he perceives as detrimental to the development of natural philosophy:

The careful inquirer will find that there is more danger to Natural Philosophy from this

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<sup>27</sup> *Collected Works of Erasmus*, ed. by Alexander Dalzell and others (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1975-), XLI: *Spiritualia and Pastoralia*, ed. by Robert D. Sider (2019), p. 502.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 737.

<sup>29</sup> Bacon, 'The Advancement of Learning', pp. 289-90.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295.

specious and ill-matched union [of theology and natural philosophy] than from open hostility. For in this intimate contract only what is already received in Natural Philosophy is included; all fresh growth, additions, improvements are excluded more strictly and obstinately than ever before. In fine every development of philosophy, every new frontier and direction, is regarded by religion with unworthy suspicion and violent contempt.<sup>31</sup>

A natural philosophy that is always evolving cannot possibly coexist with a theology that sanctifies, and thus fossilizes, the natural philosophy it intends to absorb.

If *Sola Scriptura* sets the boundary for theology, crucially for Bacon, this boundary applies to natural philosophy and directs it towards the realm of nature, which Bacon terms ‘God’s work’. Bacon’s attention is occupied, not by the understanding of God in Scripture, the focus of Erasmus and Calvin, but by ‘God’s work’ as it is manifested in the natural world. He is wary of any philosophy that oversteps its boundary and aspires to the direct understanding of God. Bacon is critical of two such mistakes natural philosophy makes in studying ‘God’s work’. The first mistake is that natural philosophy seeks to affirm the existence of a Christian God. Bacon distinguishes between the ‘work of God’ and the ‘image of God’, a phrase that for Bacon signifies the identity of the true God which can only be found in Scripture. Natural philosophy ‘sufficeth to convince atheism, but not to inform religion’ and it provides only ‘rudimentary knowledge concerning God’:

Therefore there was never miracle wrought by God to convert an atheist, because the light of nature might have led him to confess a God. But miracles have been wrought to convert idolaters and the superstitious, because no light of nature extendeth to declare the will and true worship of God. For as all works do shew forth the power and skill of the workman, and not his image; so it is the works of God; which do show the omnipotency and wisdom of the works of the maker, but not his image.<sup>32</sup>

Even the idolaters and the superstitious do not deny that behind the universe there is a wise and omnipotent maker, but they cannot grasp the true identity of God. Natural philosophy allows one to study and admire the work of the creator, but while it seems to affirm the existence of such a creator, regarding his true identity, or his ‘image’, it must remain powerless to ascertain it. Only

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<sup>31</sup> Farrington, *The Philosophy of Francis Bacon* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1966), p. 78.

<sup>32</sup> Bacon, ‘The Advancement of Learning’, p. 191.

with miracles, not natural philosophy, can God convert ‘idolaters and the superstitious’ who believe in God but in the wrong God. Since natural philosophy cannot affirm the God that makes nature is a Christian God, to ascend from nature to specific articles of Christian theological teaching is even less plausible: ‘out of contemplation of nature, or ground of human knowledges, to induce any verity or persuasion concerning the points of faith, is in my judgment unsafe.’<sup>33</sup>

The second mistake which Bacon identifies is that philosophers, when they study nature or ‘God’s work’, are too hasty in ascending from natural phenomena to God and religion, instead of focusing on the more profitable study of the natural law of motion. As he explains:

Now the philosophy of the Greeks, which in investigating the material principles of things is careful and acute, in inquiring the principles of motion, wherein lies all vigour of operation, is negligent and languid [...]. Those who refer it to God, though they are quite right in that, yet they ascend by a leap and not by steps. For beyond all doubt there is a single and summary law in which nature centres and which is subject and subordinate to God; the same in fact which in the text just quoted is meant by the words, *The work which God worketh from the beginning to the end*. Democritus considered the matter more deeply, and having first given the atom some dimension and shape, attributed to it a single desire or primary motion simply and absolutely, and second by comparison. For he thought that all things move by their proper nature towards the centre of the world; but that that which has more matter, moving thither faster, strikes aside that which has less, and forces it to go the other way. This however was but a narrow theory, and framed with reference to too few particulars.

Bacon readily affirms that the principle of movement should be traced back to God, but this connection between God and the principle of movement is not what Bacon is primarily interested in. Rather, he is more concerned with the ‘content’ of this principle of movement or the specific natural laws of movement, for only by grasping a true interpretation of the law of movement can one hope to replicate those movements and achieve ‘all vigour of operation’. In contrast, the connection between movement and God is of little importance. Bacon praises the atheist Democritus over the philosophers who more readily introduce God into their natural philosophy. For at least Democritus endeavours to provide an explanation of the principle of movement,

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 192.

albeit an incomplete one, by attributing to atoms a desire to move towards the centre of the world. Bacon is not unaware that for Democritus, the pattern of movement of atoms is attributed to ‘fortune’ rather than to a divine mind.<sup>34</sup> Yet Democritus erred not so much in his atheism, as in the narrowness of this principle, for Bacon notes that his atomism cannot explain the motion of ‘heavenly bodies’ in cycles.

If Bacon can overlook the atheist nature of a particular brand of philosophy as long as it provides keen insight into natural law, there is no guarantee others will do so, and Bacon sets out to argue that atomist philosophy is, in fact, most conducive to the belief in the existence of a divine mind in the cosmos:

I had rather believe all the fables in the Legend, and the Talmud, and the Alcoran, than that this universal frame is without a mind. And therefore God never wrought miracle to convince atheism, because his ordinary works convince it. It is true, that a little philosophy inclineth man’s mind to atheism; but depth in philosophy bringeth men’s minds about to religion. For while the mind of man looketh upon second causes scattered, it may sometimes rest in them, and go no further; but when it beholdeth the chain of them, confederate and linked together, it must needs fly to Providence and Deity. Nay, even that school which is most accused of atheism doth demonstrate religion; that is, the school of Leucippus and Democritus and Epicurus. For it is a thousand times more credible, that four mutable elements, and one immutable fifth essence, duly and eternally placed, need no God, than that an army of infinite small portions or seeds unplaced, should have produced this order and beauty without a divine marshal.<sup>35</sup>

The belief in God rests in beholding the universal frame of the world that contains the orderly movement of things. The atomist philosophers, such as Leucippus, Democritus and Epicurus, reinforce this belief because based upon their description of the world as ‘an army of infinite small portions or seeds unplaced’, it is even harder to conceive of a world with ‘order and beauty’ but without a ‘divine marshal’. If in the study of nature, Bacon criticizes one for ascending too quickly towards God, in this essay Bacon has no qualms about ‘fly[ing] to Providence and Deity’.

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 198-9. ‘The natural philosophy of Democritus and some others, who did not suppose a mind or reason in the frame of things, but attributed the form thereof able to maintain itself to infinite essays or proofs of nature, which they term “fortune”, seemth to me (as far as I can judge by the recital and fragments which remain unto us) in particularities of physical causes more real and better enquired.’

<sup>35</sup> Bacon, ‘Of Atheism’, p.371



Furthermore, he even temporarily allows himself to indulge in ‘all the fables in the Legend, and the Talmud, and the Alcoran’. What Bacon truly thinks of those fables, or even ‘Providence and Deity’, is of little consequence, but such a display of piety is enough to give the impression that all roads of atheism lead back to religion.

Bacon both affirms the existence of God in nature but strictly separates natural philosophy from the investigation of God. In this way, natural philosophy can study nature without the danger of mingling with theology and being accused of atheism.<sup>36</sup> Natural philosophy, thus reformed, is in a position to contribute to the material good of mankind and serve charity. The proper goal of natural philosophy is ‘the command over things natural, – over bodies, medicine, mechanical powers, and infinite other of the kind’.<sup>37</sup> By understanding the universal nature of ‘voluntary motions’, ‘vegetations’, ‘colours’, ‘gravity and levity’, ‘density’, ‘tenuity’, and ‘heat and cold’, the new natural philosophy promises to grant human beings the power over those effects in nature. With this power, Bacon believes that humanity could aspire to greater material good, which is impossible under previous philosophical systems that are too ‘dogmatical’:

Methods and medicine for the retardation of age and the prolongation of life were by the ancients not despaired of, but reckoned rather among those things which men once had and by sloth and negligence let slip, than among those which were wholly denied or never offered.<sup>38</sup>

While the prolongation of life is promised by the new science, how it was promised to the ancients is unclear. However, if one takes the ancient to mean not just the people of the ancient time but the most ancient of all humanity, biblical Adam, the passage becomes intelligible, as Bacon also considers the fruit of natural philosophy to be, in a way, a return to the state of Eden:

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<sup>36</sup> Regarding the true religious position of Bacon, he makes clear that it will remain a mystery. In his essay ‘On Atheism’, Bacon states that if people ‘truly think that there were no such thing as God, why should they trouble themselves’ (Bacon, ‘Of Atheism’, p. 371). However, one may make educated guesses on this topic. See, for example, Bacon’s praise of Alexander in his *Advancement of Learning*. Alexander, bleeding from his wound, says ‘Look, this is very blood; this is not such a liquor as Homer speaketh of, which ran from Venus’ hand when it was pierced by Diomedes.’ (Bacon, ‘Advancement of Learning’, p. 160) Diomedes wounded Venus in the wrist, but Jesus was pierced in the hand. By confounding the wounds of Venus and Jesus, Bacon’s exemplary political leader, Alexander, is saying that he is not like the God who is pierced in the hand, metaphorically referring to him not being a Christian. Swift, in his ‘Abstract of Collin’s “Discourse of Freethinking”’, suggests that Bacon is a freethinker who uses religion and superstition equivocally and ‘prefers atheism before superstition’. See Jonathan Swift, *Prose Works*, ed. by Scott Temple, 12 vols (London: George Bell and Sons, 1911), III, pp. 190-1. Cf. the opening sentences of ‘Of Atheism’ and ‘Of Superstition’, which appear to be what Swift had in mind.

<sup>37</sup> *The Works of Francis Bacon*, 14 vols, ed. by James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath (London: Longmans & Co, 1870), VI, p. 749.

<sup>38</sup> Bacon, *Works*, VI, p. 750.

[The true ends of knowledge] is a restitution and reinvesting (in great part) of man to the sovereignty and power (for whensoever he shall be able to call the creatures by their true names he shall again command them) which he had in his first state of creation. And to speak plainly and clearly, it is a discovery of all operations and possibilities of operations from immortality (if it were possible) to the meanest mechanical practice.<sup>39</sup>

With this, Bacon makes the bold claim that humanity's failure to enjoy material good in Eden is not so much the result of sin, as the decline and failure of natural science. As such, the Biblical paradise becomes a human utopia, the culmination of the Baconian enterprise.

The thoroughly reformed ideal of charity and its combination with Baconian natural science requires a new kind of philosopher to implement it. Given the decidedly active character of natural science, Bacon heavily favours philosophers' participation in civil society over contemplative seclusion. This leads Bacon to tackle the age-old problem of the superiority of the contemplative life over the active life, a central theme of civil philosophy. Here, as with his discussion of science and religion, Bacon borrows from his humanist predecessors, but he modifies what they say in such a way as to facilitate the combination of civil philosophy with worldly natural science.

The preference for the active life is not uncommon among Bacon's humanist predecessors. Thomas More, in his *Utopia*, puts forward a case in support of the philosopher's participation in politics, following the Platonic ideal of philosopher-counsellor. The character 'More' argues that:

Plato thinks that commonwealths will be happy only when philosophers become kings or kings become philosophers. No wonder we are so far from happiness when philosophers do not condescend even to assist kings with their counsels.<sup>40</sup>

The task of philosophers, for 'More', is to mitigate the evil in political life with their moral integrity. While evil cannot be expected to be eradicated, and kings will not reform their ways entirely, the counsel of philosophers can at least make things 'as little bad as possible'.<sup>41</sup> For 'More', the issue at stake in deciding between contemplation and action lies in the philosopher's

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<sup>39</sup> Bacon, *Works*, III, p. 222.

<sup>40</sup> More, *Utopia*, p. 28.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

willingness to compromise their perfect moral ideal for the sake of political reality.

Bacon endorses the active life but for drastically different reasons. He is conspicuously silent on the moral ideals of philosophers. Instead, in the name of Christian charity, he aims to combine the public-spiritedness of civil philosophers with the pleasure-oriented philosophy of Epicureans. Christianity lends Bacon important arguments against contemplative life on two levels that help to shift the balance in favour of the active life. On the one hand, Bacon argues that charity requires that one devote oneself to the good of society, and that between contemplative leisure and political activities, the latter must take precedence. Bacon contends that there are two kinds of good – ‘the one, as every thing is a total or substantive in itself; the other, as it is a part or member of a greater body’, and that between the two, ‘the latter is in degree the greater and the worthier, because it tendeth to the conservation of a more general form’.<sup>42</sup> The greatest proof that the good of the society is higher than private good is provided by the example of Christian charity:

It may be truly affirmed that there was never any philosophy, religion, or other discipline, which did so plainly and highly exalt the good which is communicative, and depress the good which is private and particular, as the Holy Faith; [...] for we read that the elected saints of God have wished themselves anathematized and razed out of the book of life, in an ecstasy of charity and infinite feeling of communion.<sup>43</sup>

In this way, Christian charity ‘doth judge and determine’ the ‘preferment of the contemplative or active life’, and decides against the former.<sup>44</sup> This Christian virtue favours the schools of Zeno and Socrates, which regard the exercises of virtue which ‘chiefly embrace and concern society’ as the highest good. From the perspective of charity, those schools are superior to the Epicureans, who consider the highest good to be either ‘pleasure’ or ‘serenity of mind and freedom from perturbation’.<sup>45</sup>

In addition to supporting the active life, Christianity invalidates the argument that contemplative life and wisdom supplies the highest form of human bliss. This high evaluation of happiness brought by contemplative life has its root in the Greco-Roman philosophical tradition. Those pagan philosophers, argues Bacon, have ‘feigned an higher elevation of man’s nature than

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<sup>42</sup> Bacon, ‘The Advancement of Learning’, p. 246.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 246-7.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 247-8.

was', and he gives an example taken from Seneca's *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*: '*Vere magnum, habere fragilitatem hominis, securitatem Dei*' ('It is true greatness to have in one the frailty of a man and the security of a god').<sup>46</sup> Seneca's letter is in fact a praise of the practice of philosophy. The wise man not only approaches divinity, in some aspects he even surpasses the gods: for gods attain their tranquility through nature, yet the wise attains it through himself ('*Est aliquid quo sapiens antecedit deum: ille naturae beneficio non timet, suo sapiens*').<sup>47</sup> Through the incredible power of philosophy, human beings can beat back the influence of chances ('*Incredibilis philosophiae vis est ad omnem fortuitam vim retundendam*').<sup>48</sup> Those philosophers, misguided by their understanding of human perfection through virtue, fail to perceive that true bliss is only attainable through the eternal life promised by Christ:

The doctrine touching the Platform or Nature of Good considereth it either Simple or Compared; either the kinds of good, or the degrees of good: in the latter whereof those infinite disputations which were touching the supreme degree thereof, which they term felicity, beatitude, or the highest good, the doctrines concerning which were as the heathen divinity, are by the Christian faith discharged. And as Aristotle saith, that 'young men may be happy, but not otherwise but by hope'; so we must all acknowledge our minority, and embrace the felicity which is by hope of the future world.<sup>49</sup>

By denouncing the contemplative life and supporting charitable actions, Bacon eliminates the traditional philosophical argument that undermines political-active life. However, Bacon's true innovation lies in his combination of the praise of active life with a worldly moral taste. The private, contemplative life which he attacks in the name of Christianity, he now substitutes with what is in essence Epicureanism. Bacon argues that the life of the wise is characterized by a combination of the traits of two classes of people: the ignorant 'who take no care of the future but think only of what is pleasant at the time', and the seemingly wise who 'by their caution decline and remove out of their way many evils and misfortunes'. The former lack foresight while the latter 'stint themselves of many pleasures and of the various agreeableness of life, and cross their genius and (what is far worse) torment and wear themselves away with cares and solicitude and inward fears.' True wisdom preserves the advantages of both without being tainted by the

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 245. Bacon's quotation is taken from *Epistulae Morales ad Lucilium*, liii, 12.

<sup>47</sup> Seneca, *Epistulae*, liii, 11.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>49</sup> Bacon, 'The Advancement of Learning', p. 245.

shortcomings of either. The ideal wise person is ‘prepared for all events and equal to any fortune, foresees without fear, enjoys without fastidiousness, and bears without impatience.’ The truly wise are separated from the vulgar not because of their superior moral virtue, but for their mental fortitude. Bacon says that the wise are like the happy ones whom Virgil describes in his *Georgics*:

*Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas,  
Quique metus omnes et inexorabile fatum  
Subjecit pedibus, strepitumque Acherontis avari*

(Blessèd, he who understands the working of nature, and tramples all fear and relentless fate and the bone-shaking clatter of greedy Death beneath his feet.)<sup>50</sup>

Even though Bacon quotes Virgil, the verses allude to the philosophy of Epicurus and Lucretius’ *De rerum natura*.<sup>51</sup> By quoting Virgil, Bacon evades the odious name of Epicurus while promoting a morality that is akin to Epicurean philosophy. Although Bacon has criticized Seneca for his saying ‘*Vere magnum, habere fragilitatem hominis, securitatem Dei*’ in the name of Christianity, he now cites the same saying of Seneca approvingly in order to praise the new wisdom which Bacon defines in an Epicurean manner:

*Ne forte naturae suae angustias et fragilitatem nimium pertimescant aut causentur, ac si hujusmodi fortitudinis et constantiae capax omnino non esset; de quo ipso Seneca bene ominatus est, cum dicat, Magnum est habere simul fragilitatem hominis, et securitatem Dei.*

(Lest they should too much mistrust the narrowness and frailty of their own nature, or plead it in their own excuse, as though it were altogether incapable of this kind of fortitude and constancy: the true nature of which was well divined by Seneca, when he said, *It is true greatness to have in one the frailty of man and the security of God*)<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Bacon, *Works*, VI, p. 675. Virgil, *Georgics*, 2. 490-2, translation is quoted from *Virgil’s Georgics*, trans. by Janet Lembke (New Havens: Yale University Press, 2005).

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, 3. 14-30, 37. *P. Vergili Maronis Opera*, ed. by John Conington, 3 vols (London: George Bell, 1858-1871), I (1858), p. 246 and commentary.

<sup>52</sup> Bacon, *Works*, VI, p. 675.

What is to be criticized is not the pagan philosopher's divergence from Christianity, but rather their divergence from Baconian wisdom. It is the latter, and not the saintliness of Christians or the moral virtue of philosophers, that deserves to be called divine. By enshrining pleasure as the highest private good, Bacon creates, under the name of charity, a new brand of civil philosophy that combines the praise of pleasure with public-spiritedness.

This new brand of civil philosophy differs from Epicureanism, however, in that it encourages daring pursuit of human material want. Epicurus and Lucretius, while placing pleasure as the highest good, nonetheless advocate a way of life that is characterized by moderation. This peculiar character of Bacon's civil philosophy is based on his reassessment of traditional civil philosophy and its shortcoming. In the *Wisdom of the Ancients*, Bacon delineates how civil philosophy comes to focus on virtue rather than material want:

Natural philosophy proposes to itself as its noblest work of all, nothing less than the restitution and renovation of things corruptible, and (what is indeed the same thing in a lower degree) the conservation of bodies in the state in which they are, and the retardation of dissolution and putrefaction. Now certainly if this can be effected at all, it cannot be otherwise than by due and exquisite attempering and adjustment of parts in nature. [...] Yet being a thing of all others the most difficult, it commonly fails of effect; and fails (it may be) from no cause more than from curious and premature meddling and impatience. Then Philosophy finding that her great work is too much for her, in sorrowful mood, as well becomes her, turns to human affairs; and applying her powers of persuasion and eloquence to insinuate into men's minds the love of virtue and equity and peace, teaches people to assemble and unite and take upon them the yoke of laws and submit to authority, and forget their ungoverned appetites, in listening and conforming to precepts and discipline.<sup>53</sup>

Civil philosophy of the past is, according to this description, the result of natural philosophy's failure in securing, if not immortality, at least long lives ('retardation of dissolution and putrefaction'). Topics such as virtue and law are not superior to the fulfillment of bodily want and the delay of age – they are the central concern of civil philosophers because compared with immortality and long life, virtue and law are comparatively easier to establish. While the delay of

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<sup>53</sup> Bacon, *Works*, VII, pp. 721-2.

death requires ‘exquisite attempering and adjustment of parts of nature’, a task ‘most difficult’, virtue and law needs no greater talent than ‘powers of persuasion and eloquence’. More importantly, the traditional civil philosophy that advocates virtue betrays a fundamental pessimism: the turn from natural philosophy to morality is ‘sorrowful’.

Contrary to the pessimism of the past, Bacon’s own philosophy is characterized by hope. Bacon severely criticizes the past philosophers for their failure to enlarge human power out of their despair:

Philosophy, too, from which the art of medicine has been carved, nourishes in its bosom certain pet theories, which, if critically examined, amount to this, that nothing really great, no effective control over nature, can be won by human ingenuity or art. [...] But, if those propositions be looked into, their effect is found to be a mischievous limitation of human power, a deliberately contrived mood of despair, which rejects not only the auguries of hope but the windfalls of experience and hamstring the promptings and sinews of all enterprise.<sup>54</sup>

Contrary to the despair of the past philosophy, Bacon sees fit to give men promises of greater material benefit: ‘I have thought good to make as it were a Kalendar or Inventory of the wealth, furniture, or means of man according to his present estate’, and the purpose of this, Bacon describes as follows:

I may at the least give some awaking note both of the wants in man’s present condition and the nature of the supplies to be wished; though for mine own part neither do I much build upon my present anticipations, neither do I think ourselves yet learned or wise enough to wish reasonably: for as it asks some knowledge to demand a question not impertinent, so it asketh some sense to make a wish not absurd.<sup>55</sup>

This passage carefully divulges the possible untenability of optimism, and renders Bacon’s decision to promote optimism in the power of natural science more glaring. By documenting the existing power of mankind, Bacon hopes men could understand their present want, which, as it is, is in need of enlightenment, as highlighted by the expression ‘awaking note’. However, what

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<sup>54</sup> Farrington, *The Philosophy of Bacon*, pp. 73-4.

<sup>55</sup> Bacon, *Works*, III, pp. 233-4.

humanity can possibly achieve remains a question, and what they can reasonably wish for must be based on knowledge, or on their technological prowess: 'it asketh some sense to make a wish not absurd'. Nevertheless, Bacon has repeatedly promised that mankind can achieve the prolongation of life. This 'wish' is based, not upon the existing technological level, but on the supposed advance of technology that may or may not be achieved in the future. As such, Baconian optimism is a daring gamble: it promises the future good to be wished for without guaranteeing to supply the technological means to achieve it. Yet this daringness and optimism are nonetheless necessary to transform the passive Epicureanism into hopeful activities. This optimism not only foreshadows the utopia in *New Atlantis*, but also the scientists satirized by Swift in *Gulliver's Travels*.

To conclude, while Bacon starts from the familiar criticism of scholastic philosophy by humanists and Protestant reformers, his redefinition of charity and knowledge leads to an entirely new teaching. The Pauline directive to employ knowledge for charity has been reformed so that it no longer positions God as the centrepiece of charity. Charity, redefined, is human-centric, more concerned with worldly good, and married to a new natural science that endlessly pursues advancement of technology and human good. The representatives of charity are no longer the churchmen, but the worldly philosophers who endorse pleasure and endeavour to bring such worldly good to their fellow citizens. For Bacon, those charitable philosophers will be key in leading people into the new utopia outlined in *New Atlantis*, and their participation in politics has become especially urgent because, as I shall argue in the next section, Europe in Bacon's time was riven by religious conflict, and only a human-centric charity can overcome the deadly sectarian division.

### **2.3 Baconian Charity and Religious Zealotry**

In the previous section, I argued that Bacon redefines charity in his *Essays* and the *Advancement of Learning*, shifting its focus from the love of God to the love of man. With this human-centred charity as a guideline, it becomes apparent that both civil and natural philosophy need to be reformed to serve the bodily good of man. The change Bacon seeks is comprehensive and revolutionary, but the necessity of this sweeping change becomes understandable only when it is placed within Bacon's assessment of his times. In this section, by examining Bacon's writing on charity and its related historical context, I argue that Bacon's new definition of charity takes place



within his broader consideration of religious zealotry, and it offers a new and moderate solution to the evils caused by religious division. This context, in turn, offers crucial insight into *New Atlantis*, and illuminates one hitherto neglected aspect of that utopia – namely, that it is a response to the religious crisis in Bacon’s time.

The problem of religious zealotry and how it subverts charity and the bonds of human society had long occupied Bacon. The 1612 edition of Bacon’s *Essays* opens with ‘Of Religion’, and under this broad title Bacon focuses specifically on one aspect of religion: how its ‘quarrels and diuisions’ have led to actions that dissolve the ‘bonds of humane society’ and ‘deface piety and charity’. Bacon highlights two recent ‘execrable accions of murthuring of Princes, butchery of people, and firing of States’ performed in the name of religion: the 1572 St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre of thousands of Huguenots across France, and the 1605 Gunpowder Plot in England, a failed attempt on the life of James VI and I. Bacon considers those atrocities worse than ‘the act of Agamemnon, enduring and assisting at the sacrifice of his daughter’. Bacon quotes Lucretius’ famous line ‘To such heights of evil are men driven by religion’ and contends that a modern Lucretius would be ‘seven times more epicure and atheist than he was’, ‘if he had known the massacre of France, or the powder treason of England’.<sup>56</sup>

The St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre and the Gunpowder Plot are but two instances of religious zealotry that Bacon evokes. In the 1612 essay ‘Of Custome and Education’, Bacon lists four assassins who professed a violent Catholic faith: Friar Clement, killer of Henri III of France in 1589; François Ravillac, killer of Henri IV of France in 1610; and John Jaureguy and Baltazar Gerard, the former wounding Prince William of Orange and the latter killing him in 1584. Comparing those assassinations with Machiavelli’s writings on the same subject, Bacon observes that the evil caused by ‘superstition’ surpasses the notorious teaching of Machiavelli. Machiavelli suggests that to achieve ‘a desperate conspiracie’, such as the assassination of princes, one ‘should not rest vpon the fierceness of any mans nature, or his resolute vndertakings, but take such a one as hath had his hand formerly in blood’.<sup>57</sup> In the passage Bacon refers to, Machiavelli singles out two elements that cause killers to fail: ‘either the presence [of the prince] must have terrified them or some humanity of the prince must have humiliated them.’<sup>58</sup> For Machiavelli, only a man seasoned in the profession of killing can disregard authority and humanity, but Bacon observes that religious zealotry can inspire an ordinary human being to do away with both:

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<sup>56</sup> Bacon, *Works*, VI, p. 543. Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 1.101: ‘Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum’.

<sup>57</sup> Bacon, *Works*, VI, p. 573

<sup>58</sup> Niccolo Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 3.6.14. Numbering of the section is taken from *Discourses on Livy*, trans. by Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996).

‘Onelie Superstition is now so well aduanced, that men of the first blood [namely, committing their first murders], are as firme, as butchers by occupation.’<sup>59</sup>

It is important to note that although Bacon’s examples are almost exclusively Catholic zealots, thereby giving the impression that his condemnation of those actions may stem from his Protestant background, his scope is in fact both broader and more inclusive. In combating those evils against the bonds of human society, a union of mankind as a whole comes to the fore in Bacon’s writings. Like his focus on man in his redefinition of charity, Bacon is speaking on behalf of humanity without referencing a specific religious doctrine or faction. The 1612 essay ‘Of Religion’ concludes with the following exhortation:

Since these things are the common enemies of human society, princes by their power, churches by their decrees, and all learning (Christian, moral, or whatsoever sect or opinion) by their Mercury rod, ought to join in the damning to hell for ever these facts, and their supports.<sup>60</sup>

Bacon’s emphasis here on eliminating ‘the common enemies of human society’ by ‘Christian, moral, or whatsoever sect or opinion’ was to be repeated multiple times in his later writings and speeches. In 1615, Bacon spoke, for example, as attorney general against John Owen who was indicted for high treason. Owen published speeches which argued that it was ‘lawful for any man to kill a King excommunicated as for the hangman to execute a condemned person’.<sup>61</sup> Bacon contends that Owen’s treason belongs to a new breed of crimes that are ‘grounded upon a motive of religion; which is a trumpet that inflameth the heart and powers of a man to daring and resolution’.<sup>62</sup> In line with Bacon’s belief that those actions are hostile to ‘Christian, moral, or whatsoever sect or opinion’, he brings in the example of ‘Mahometans’, or Muslims:

I find that the Saracen prince, of whom the name of the assassins is derived, which had divers votaries at commandment, which he sent and employed to the killing of divers princes in the east, by one of whom Amurath the first was slain, and Edward the first of England was wounded, was put down and rooted out by common consent of the Mohametan princes.

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<sup>59</sup> Bacon, *Works*, VI, p. 573.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>62</sup> Bacon, *Works*, XII, p. 156.

Bacon's cosmopolitan vision of humanity could not find a clearer expression if the exemplar of a league against inhuman crimes is taken from the Mahometans, who suppressed the assassins attempting to murder princes, including Christian princes in the west, their religious rivals. Lastly, in the 1625 edition of his *Essays*, the entirety of the 1612 essay 'Of Religion' is incorporated into a more extensive piece titled 'Of Unity in Religion', and Bacon highlights the following point in the expanded version: that in enforcing religious unity, men must beware that 'they do not dissolve and deface the laws of charity and of human society', and 'to consider men as Christians', one should not 'forget that they are men.'<sup>63</sup>

I have observed how in denouncing religious zealotry in Europe, humanity and charity become central concepts for Bacon. Yet as such the scope of humanity and charity is restricted: Bacon seems only to juxtapose those two concepts against the 'murdering of Princes, butchery of people, and firing of States'.<sup>64</sup> When praising the Muslims in his speech against Owen, Bacon did so in order to use them as the counter example to the inhuman zealotry in Christendom. It is in one of Bacon's last writings, *An Advertisement Touching a Holy War* (1623), that one finds a much broader expression of humanity and charity that is willing to encompass not only Christians, but also people of other faiths. There, Baconian charity, shaped by European religious conflict, transcends its origin, takes on a life of its own, and paves the way for the utopia in *New Atlantis*.

*An Advertisement Touching a Holy War* is written in the form of a dialogue, unique among Bacon's writings. The dialogue in *Utopia* allows More to expose the fallacy of Hythlodæus, and Bacon employs the same literary form to present satirically the religious zealotry of various sects in his time with unrivalled immediacy. The topic of holy war is discussed by six participants from diverse backgrounds: Gamaliel, a Protestant zealot; Zebedæus, a Catholic zealot; Martius, a military man; Eusebius, a moderate divine; Eupolis, a 'politique' (a French expression that designates the moderates who hold the political unity and stability to be more important than sectarian struggle between the Protestants and Catholics); and Pollio, a courtier. The dialogue is divided into two parts. In the first part, Martius praises the various wars Christians waged against

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<sup>63</sup> Bacon, *Works*, VI, p. 386. One also notes that between the 1612 and the 1625 versions, there is a shift of Bacon's position into a more religiously neutral ground. In the 1612 version Bacon still seems to give leeway to the Protestant radicals like the Anabaptists: '[Lucretius] would rather haue chosen to be one of the Madmen of Munster, then to haue beene a partaker of those Counsels [massacre of France and the powder treason of England].' By contrast, in the 1625 edition, Bacon roundly condemns the Anabaptists who did a 'monstrous thing to put [the sword] into the hands of the common people', and groups them among the 'cases of overt scandal, blasphemy, or intermixture of practice against the state'.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 543.

people of other faiths, especially against the Ottoman Turks, but is repeatedly questioned by Pollio regarding the inhumanity of such an endeavour. Martius, being a simple soldier, cannot formulate a coherent response regarding the legitimate basis of religious war, so Eupolis decides to ask the other participants to elaborate on this point. In the second part, the Catholic zealot Zebedaeus presents his ideal of holy war, and defines it as a war against people who violate humanity and universal natural law, such as pirates and assassins.

The dialogical form of the work generates a wide range of readings, increasing the difficulty of identifying the author's position. Brinda Charry, for example, believes that Bacon truly intends to advocate a war against the Turks, as they are 'a primitive force that resists progress and modernity'.<sup>65</sup> Nabil Matar similarly considers that Bacon is genuine in his advocacy of a Holy War, but considers this Holy War an expression of mercantilist imperialism under the mask of anti-Muslim 'racism and bigotry'.<sup>66</sup> Craig Rustici, by contrast, sees Bacon's 'Holy War' as a metaphor for scientific conquest of nature to 'benefit all humanity'.<sup>67</sup>

Those different readings, however, gloss over the crucial position of *An Advertisement Touching a Holy War* in the overall development of Bacon's understanding of humanity and charity. That Bacon extends humanity to include consideration of the people of different faiths is most visible in two pivotal moments in the dialogue concerning the fate of Islamic people. First, when Martius is carried away by his praise of holy war against the Ottomans, the courtier Pollio coolly asks him to comment on the 'extirpation of the Moors of Valentia', an act by Duke of Lerma under Phillip III of Spain that resulted in the expulsion of Muslims from the Iberian peninsula. Martius is struck silent but Gamaliel speaks up, before receiving a rebuke from Zebedaeus:

GAMALIEL. I think Martius did well in omitting that action, for I, for my part never approved it; and it seems God was not well pleased with that deed; for you see the King in whose time it passed (whom you Catholics count a saint-like and immaculate prince) was taken away in the flower of his age; and the author and great counsellor of that rigor (whose fortunes seemed to be built upon the rock) is ruined; and it is thought by some that

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<sup>65</sup> Craig M. Rustici, "Martyrdom and Modernity: The Discourse of Holy War in the Works of John Foxe and Francis Bacon", in *Just Wars, Holy Wars, and Jihads: Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Encourters and Exchanges*, ed. by Sohail H. Hashmi (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 167-89 (pp. 181, 185).

<sup>66</sup> Nabil Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 12, 152-3.

<sup>67</sup> Craig M. Rustici, "'The Great Sophism of All Sophisms': Colonialist Redefinition in Bacon's Holy War", *Renaissance and Reformation* 16:4 (1992), 49-72 (pp. 50, 57).

the reckonings of that business are not yet cleared with Spain; for that numbers of those supposed Moors, being tried now by their exile, continue constant in the faith and true Christians in all points save in the thirst of revenge.

ZEBEDAEUS. Make not hasty judgment of that great action, which was as Christ's fan in those countries; except you could show some such covenant from the crown of Spain, as Joshua made with the Gibeonites, that that cursed seed should continue in the land. And you see it was done by edict, not tumultuously; the sword was not put into the people's hand.<sup>68</sup>

The wrangling of Gamaliel and Zebedaeus obfuscates the critical issue of the inhumanity of the 'extirpation of the Moors'. While Gamaliel, the Protestant zealot, opposes this action, his grounds for doing so are religious: the apparent displeasure of God, and the fact that the 'supposed Moors' continue steadfast in their Christian belief. However, in arguing this way, Gamaliel implies that should nothing befall Philip III, and should the Moors prove to be infidels, the inhuman action would be justified. Zebedaeus' argument is even more extreme. For him, as long as the ruler undertakes religious prosecution 'by edict, not tumultuously', he has the full license to do so towards any people of different faith provided that he has not sworn to God not to harm them, like Joshua did to the Gibeonites in *Joshua* 9. Pollio's display of concern towards the Muslims stands apart from Gamaliel and Zebedaeus' failure to address the inhumanity of their expulsion, and signals a religiously tolerant position.

The full extent of Pollio's tolerance, however, is only displayed when he reminds Martius, who is enthusiastic about waging war against the Ottoman Turks, that 'they are no idolators': 'For the Turks do acknowledge God the Father, creator of heaven and earth, being the first person in the Trinity, though they deny the rest'.<sup>69</sup> Upon which Zebedaeus responded with 'great reprehension and severity':

We must take heed that we fall not at unawares into the heresy of Manuel Comnenus, Emperor of Graecia, who affirmed that Mahomet's God was the true God; which opinion was not only rejected and condemned by the synod, but imputed to the Emperor as extreme madness; being reproached to him also by the Bishop of Thessalonica, in those

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<sup>68</sup> Francis Bacon, *An Advertisement Touching a Holy War*, ed. by Laurence Lampert (Prospect Heights: Waveland, 2000), p. 21.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

bitter and strange words as are not to be named.<sup>70</sup>

According to the annals by Niketas Choniates, Emperor Manuel Comnenus engaged in a theological dispute regarding the superiority of the Father over the Son in the Trinity, and contended that the Son is inferior due to ‘his created and passible flesh’. This technical theological disputation, however, was aimed at approximating Christianity to Islam, which worships the Father but denies the divinity of the Son, Jesus Christ. By elevating the Father, Manuel believed that Christianity would accommodate Muslims better as it would not force them to place Jesus in the same place as the Father, thus causing a degradation to their God: ‘It was scandalous that the Agarenes [who were Muslims], when being converted to our God-fearing faith, should be made to blaspheme God in any manner.’<sup>71</sup> This new theology, which better accommodated the Muslims, was fiercely opposed by the Bishop of Thessalonica, Eustathios, who said those ‘bitter and strange words’ which Zebedaeus did not name: ‘My brains would be in my feet and I would be wholly unworthy of this garb were I to regard as true God the pederast who was as brutish as a camel and master and teacher of every abominable act.’<sup>72</sup> Zebedaeus’ opposition to the more humane Pollio is an imitation of Eustathios’ opposition to Manuel’s tolerance. This time, even the Protestant Gamaliel will not come forward in support of Pollio.

Bacon shows that the humanity of Pollio borders on the heresy of Manuel, and neither Protestant nor Catholic theology can embrace it comfortably. Yet in spite of the potential heresy, the position held by Bacon’s Pollio, rejected by Zebedaeus and Gamaliel, anticipates a feature of Bensalem: in *New Atlantis*, Jews who do not acknowledge Jesus as God enjoy peaceful residence in the humane and religiously tolerant Bensalem, and Manuel’s accommodation of Muslims is mirrored by Bacon’s accommodation of Jews. Bacon is able to do so precisely because his charity and humanity, shaped by the religious conflict in Europe, have transcended the sectarian boundaries.

By placing Bacon’s emphasis on man in his redefinition of charity side by side with his concern with religious zealotry, we can observe that the reform Bacon calls for does not come from an ivory tower but is a response to a European crisis created by sectarian divisions. Baconian charity aims to remind people that if one is ‘to consider people Christians’, or even Jews and Muslims, one should not forget that ‘they are men’. This lofty goal is repeated

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Niketas Choniates, *O City of Byzantium, Annals of Niketas Choniates*, trans. by Harry J. Magoulias (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984), sect. 212.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, sect. 216-7.

throughout Bacon's decades of writings on religious controversy, but only in *New Atlantis* that one finds its fulfillment in a utopian haven where the consideration of humanity overrides the differences of religious doctrines.

## 2.4 Bensalem, the Humane, Tolerant, and Flawed Utopia

A year or two after Bacon wrote his *Advertisement Touching a Holy War* (1622-23), he began working on the *New Atlantis* (1624). Similar to More's *Utopia*, *New Atlantis* presents the ideal commonwealth through first-person narration. While the work appears to be incomplete, it manages to provide a substantial depiction of a religiously tolerant society. The utopia in *New Atlantis* is named Bensalem, meaning 'the son of peace' in Hebrew, and its peacefulness contrasts sharply with the manifestation of religious zealotry in *An Advertisement Touching a Holy War*. Accommodating people of various faiths, Bensalem is free of theological contentiousness. In this section, I will argue that despite the incompleteness of *New Atlantis*, it represents Bacon's effort to humanize the Christian concept of charity. I will first briefly discuss the formal elements of *New Atlantis*, especially how its incompleteness may impact on interpretation of this utopian piece. I will then move on to my analysis of *New Atlantis*, paying special attention to how Bensalem manages to provide a utopian vision of a humane, tolerant Christian society that focuses on the worldly needs of mankind.

The incompleteness of *New Atlantis* presents special interpretative challenges to anyone who wants to offer a reading of the text. The work breaks off abruptly after the protagonist receives an account of the scientific institution Salomon's House and is asked to deliver this information back to Europe. This incompleteness creates the following difficulty: does the unfinished state of *New Atlantis* mean that all interpretations must be essentially provisional? I believe that this difficulty can be better tackled if the unfinished state of *New Atlantis* is placed within the context of Bacon's overall thinking on the ideal society. In *Valerius Terminus*, Bacon mentions that it is still too early to know the boundary of improvement of human society, for humans are not 'learned or wise enough to wish reasonably'; only with the development of science can one see what is to be wished for: 'it asks some knowledge to demand a question not impertinent, so it asketh some sense to make a wish not absurd', but the new natural science is far

from being adequately developed.<sup>73</sup> *New Atlantis*, as it were, stands on the threshold where humans will begin to explore the hitherto uncharted territory of desire as they are increasingly equipped with the new science and technology, and the incompleteness of *New Atlantis* mirrors the uncertain future of human society which Bacon's new natural science aims to shape.

In this sense, the incompleteness of *New Atlantis* does not mean that its interpretation is essentially provisional. Rather, it conforms to Bacon's understanding of the impact of technological advancement on human good. Setting aside the idea that the incompleteness of *New Atlantis* reflects its openness to future developments, one could also argue in a different way that *New Atlantis* is finished as it stands. Firstly, Bacon oversaw part of the translation of *New Atlantis* into Latin, which indicates that he considered the work as substantially complete.<sup>74</sup> Secondly, while *New Atlantis* retains a certain openness to the future, Bacon has completed his exposition of the core features of Bensalem, the ideal city. These core features are intended to serve as a catalyst for future improvements for the advancement of society and they are in agreement with the general tenor of Bacon's scientific and literary output: religious tolerance, humanity, and above all a combination of Christianity and new science.

Those principles cherished by Bacon are presented to readers through a first-person narration of the ideal commonwealth, a literary feature that follows the example of More but at the same time departs from *Utopia* in crucial ways. Like *Utopia*, the description of the ideal commonwealth is delivered in the first person, but Bacon's protagonist remains anonymous throughout. We only know that he, together with his fellow travellers, were stranded at sea and eventually taken in by the residents of Bensalem. During the stay, he advised his fellow travellers to behave in a proper manner so as not to antagonise the hosts, and everyone obeyed this advice although the protagonist was not the captain, 'our foremost man'. This man who distinguished himself with his sagacious advice is thus a far cry from the zealous Hythlodæus whose zealotry invites scepticism. More importantly, the protagonist is not pitched into a dialogue against a civil philosopher who finds himself bound by European political reality and maintains a healthy critical distance from utopian efforts. Having full power over the narration, the protagonist is free to enchant the readers with his observations of Bensalem – observations that aim to bring Europe closer to Bensalem.

Underlying the various observations made by the protagonist in *New Atlantis* is a theme

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<sup>73</sup> Bacon, *Work*, III, p. 234.

<sup>74</sup> Francis Bacon, *New Atlantis and the Great Instauration*, ed. by Jerry Weinberger, rev. edn (Wheeling, Ill.: Harland Davidson, 1989), p. xxv. The nineteenth-century editors of Bacon's work consider that *New Atlantis* was 'intended for publication as it stands' 'though not finished'. See *The Works of Francis Bacon*, III, p. 121.



that Bacon has pursued since his *Advancement of Learning*: the integration of Baconian science and Christianity. This is finally achieved in Bensalem due to one crucial factor: the introduction of Christianity into Bensalem is mediated by the scientific institution of Salomon's House. Prior to the reception of Christianity Bensalem was not a *tabula rasa*. Through Salomon's House, Bensalem establishes its connection with the Jewish king Solomon and the God in the Biblical tradition. This connection is presented by a Christian priest to the travellers to Bensalem when he recounts the history of Salomon's House:

Ye shall understand (my dear friends) that amongst the excellent acts of that king, one above all hath the pre-eminence. It was the erection and institution of an Order or Society, which we call Salomon's House; the noblest foundation (as we think) that ever was upon the earth; and the lanthorn of this kingdom. It is dedicated to the study of the works and creatures of God. Some think it beareth the founder's name a little corrupted, as if it should be Solamona's House. But the records write it as it is spoken. So as I take it to be denominate of the king of the Hebrews, which is famous with you, and no stranger to us. For we have some parts of his works, which with you are lost; namely, that natural history, which he wrote, of all plants, from the "cedar of Libanus" to the "moss that groweth out of the wall", and of all things that have life and motion. This maketh me think that our king, finding himself to symbolize in many things with that king of the Hebrews (which lived many years before him), honoured him with the title of this foundation.<sup>75</sup>

The Christian priest's account highlights two points that link the Hebrew Bible and its God with Salomon's House. Firstly, Salomon's House is dedicated to the study of the 'works and creatures of God', and secondly, the institute is said to honour the Hebrew king Solomon, who has composed the natural history of plants and animals, which Salomon's House inherits. Yet the two points, upon closer examination, reveal a deep ambiguity in this link. The Bible does not grant natural science a prominent position in relation to God. To counter this, King Solomon, once beloved by God and celebrated for his wisdom and knowledge of God's creatures, becomes a necessary intermediary between science and God. Solomon is described here as an author of a natural history, a category not found in Bible but a part of Bacon's own system of natural

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<sup>75</sup> Francis Bacon, 'New Atlantis', in *Major Works*, pp. 457-89 (p. 471).

philosophy: his work supposedly records observations of nature from which natural law is extrapolated. Meanwhile, no mention is made that Solomon did not actively pursue natural science, and that his knowledge of nature was a gift from God.<sup>76</sup> These are subtle yet important differences between Solomon and Solamona.

This appropriation of king Solomon into a prototype of the natural scientist, an account accepted by the Christian priest in *New Atlantis*, is precisely what Bacon has done in his *Advancement of Learning*. To defend the pursuit of natural science against its theological opponents, Bacon repeatedly quotes but deliberately paraphrases Solomon's sayings to support his project. Bacon paraphrases Solomon's saying that 'the Eye is neuer satisfied with seeing, nor the Eare with hearing' to imply that there is no limit to the quantity of knowledge, and that human beings may feast on this knowledge without the danger of becoming proud, despite the fact that this quotation is closely followed by Solomon's warning that 'he that encreaseth knowledge, encreaseth anxietie'. Bacon also claims that Solomon's saying that 'the worke which God worketh from the beginning to the end, is not possible to be found out by Man' does not refer to the limit of the human mind, but to the 'impediments as of shortnesse of life, ill coniunction of labours, ill tradition of knowledge ouer from hand to hand'. Nevertheless, according to the original passage, the difficulty for human beings of comprehending God's action lies in the insurmountable difference between human beings as temporal beings and God, whose action lasts forever. Bacon thus turns the cautionary sayings of *Ecclesiastes* such as 'all is vanity' into a hopeful call for the improvement of natural knowledge. When viewed alongside Bacon's *Advancement of Learning*, what is ostensibly a discussion of the connection between Salomon's House and Solomon is in fact an attempt to find a foothold for science in the Bible through the re-imagining of Solomon.

Using Solomon as a Biblical model, king Solamona pursues what appears none other than the Baconian science. According to the Christian priest, the other name of Salomon's House is the 'College of the Six Days Works':

I am satisfied that our excellent king had learned from the Hebrews that God had created the world and all that therein is within six days: and therefore he instituting that House for the finding out of the true nature of all things, (whereby God might have the more glory in

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<sup>76</sup> 1 Kings 4: 29-33: 'God gave Solomon very great wisdom, discernment and breadth of understanding as vast as the sand on the seashore [...] He would speak of trees, from the cedar that is in the Lebanon to the hyssop that grows in the wall; he would speak of animals, and birds and reptiles and fish.'

the workmanship of them, and men the more fruit in the use of them), did give it also that second name.<sup>77</sup>

Through Solamona's studies in nature, 'God might have the more glory in the workmanship of them, and men the more fruit in the use of them'. This description of the goal of Salomon's House is in perfect alignment with Bacon's *Advancement of Learning*, where he admonishes scholars to employ learning 'for the glory of the Creator and the relief of man's estate', for 'generation, fruit and comfort'.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, to achieve these two goals, the natural history of Solomon is not enough. For Bacon observes in the *Advancement of Learning* that only when science ascends to the highest natural law can it give mankind the necessary power to better their lives. And in a similar vein, Solamona goes beyond Solomon's study of plants and creatures, and aims instead to pursue the knowledge hidden in God's powers manifested in the six days of creation.

The central figure in Bensalem, Solamona, who is both Baconian and intimately connected with King Solomon, embodies the unique relation between Bensalem and the Biblical tradition: by attaching itself to Solomon and the Hebrew God, Bensalem can utilize those elements as a carrier of the Baconian vision that can be grafted onto Christianity when it arrives and supersedes the Old Testament. As if to demonstrate that Salomon's vision of science working for the glory of God and use of men continues into the new religion, Bacon gives a member of Salomon's House a pivotal role at the moment of the introduction of Christianity into Bensalem. According to the account given by the Christian priest on the history of Bensalem that includes the establishment of Salomon's House, Bensalem was converted to Christianity 'about twenty years after the ascension of our Saviour'. One night, the people of Renfusa ('sheep-natured'), a part of Bensalem, observed 'some miles into the sea, a great pillar of light; not sharp, but in the form of a column or cylinder', and 'on the top of it was seen a large cross of light'. Upon seeing this spectacle, they 'put themselves into a number of small boats, to go nearer to this marvellous sight'. As they approached the pillar, however, 'they found themselves all bound, and could go no further'. It 'so fell out' that a member of Salomon's House was on board, and after contemplating this marvellous sight, 'he fell down upon his face; and then raised himself upon his knees', and made the following prayer:

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<sup>77</sup> Bacon, 'New Atlantis', p. 471.

<sup>78</sup> Bacon, 'Advancement of Learning', pp. 147-8; 'New Atlantis', p. 471.

Lord God of heaven and earth, thou hast vouchsafed of thy grace to those of our order, to know thy works of creation, and the secrets of them; and to discern (as far as appertaineth to the generations of men) between divine miracle, works of nature, works of art, and impostures and illusions of all sorts. I do here acknowledge and testify before this people, that the thing which we now see before our eyes is thy Finger and a true Miracle.<sup>79</sup>

Upon finishing his prayer, his boat miraculously began to move towards the light pillar, only to discover an ark that contained the Holy Scripture and a letter from the Apostle Bartholomew. The letter stated that the apostle was ‘warned by an angel’ to ‘commit this ark to the floods of the sea’, and that on the day the people receive this ark then also ‘is come unto them salvation and peace and goodwill, from the Father, and from the Lord Jesus’.<sup>80</sup>

Thanks to the special connection between Salomon’s House and the Biblical tradition which Bacon has taken pains to have the Christian Priest establish, the significance of having one of its members placed in an authoritative position in relation to this divine revelation is hard to overlook. When this member of Salomon’s House made the prayer that highlights God’s grace ‘to those of our order, to know thy works of creation, and the secrets of them’, it is both a prayer to God and, crucially, a prayer meant to be heard by the people present at this miraculous event to underline his exclusive access to divine secrets through scientific enquiry. This is reinforced by what appears to be God’s own admission: after this prayer the member was allowed to approach the ark containing the Bible while others ‘found themselves all bound, and could go no further’. The series of miracles seems to give the impression that God is truly present during the conversion of Bensalem, but one must note that all those miracles are Bacon’s own poetical creation. The carefully crafted story of miracles allows Bacon to cloak a new message under a pious atmosphere: the most privileged position in the Christian commonwealth is to be granted to none other than Baconian scientists.

Due to the presence of the member of Salomon’s House, the introduction of Christianity into Bensalem happens, not haphazardly, but under the guidance and authority of Baconian science. The full significance of the scientist of Salomon’s House in the reception of Christianity, however, can only be appreciated when he is placed within the miracles and Biblical references which Bacon liberally weaves in the narrative. Travis DeCook sees the pillar of light as a reference to Exodus 13:21-22, ‘where God uses a pillar of light to guide the Israelites out of

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<sup>79</sup> Bacon, ‘New Atlantis’, p. 464.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 464-5.

Egypt'.<sup>81</sup> The ark, on the other hand, points both to Noah's ark (Bartholomew committed the ark to the 'floods' of the sea) and the Ark of the Covenant, and David Renaker suggests that the Bensalem scientists are like 'Aaron and his sons' who 'might enter the sanctuary where the Ark of the Covenant was'.<sup>82</sup> The reception of the ark in Bensalem thus seems to foretell a new promised land. However, the human leader of the promised land is no longer Moses but a member of Salomon's House. This will usher in a new age of Christianity, just as the ark of Noah preserved the only righteous people left on earth for mankind to start anew and renew their relationship with God. One is even tempted to go a step further: the ark containing the whole Bible was sent by St. Bartholomew after he was warned by an angel. If we allow that Bacon does not choose his saint carelessly, the name Bartholomew and its association with the famous massacre that Bacon mentioned many times in his *Essays* points to one prominent possibility: the angel warned St. Bartholomew of the terrible religious conflict in Europe in the future, and he was to send this ark so that the country that discovered it could preserve a better version of Christianity, without religious controversies and zealotry.

In the Christian Priest's account of the history of Salomon's House and the reception of Christianity in Bensalem, Bacon outlines how the combination of Christianity and humanity can be put into practice. The responsibility falls on the Baconian scientists, who must imitate Solamona to fuse the pursuit of Baconian science into Biblical teaching (as Bacon himself had done in the *Advancement*), and guide Christianity just as the member of Salomon's House guided the reception of Christianity in Bensalem. If in *New Atlantis*, Christianity arrives after the establishment of Baconian science, contrary to the actual history of Europe, the temporal priority is but a metaphor for the essential priority: only when Christianity places the Baconian science at its heart, can one arrive in the truly humane utopia.

The humanity of Bensalem as a result of the combination of Baconian science and Christianity is reflected in two major aspects: the elimination of sectarian conflict and the focus on human needs cloaked in religious terms. First and foremost, due to the focus on God's work as opposed to theological teachings, Bacon roots out the possibility of theological controversies, unlike Europe where those controversies descended into sectarian conflicts that ultimately led to actions against the law of charity. The discussion on Christianity in *New Atlantis* is limited to one point only: how Christianity arrives in Bensalem. When the Christian priest finished his narration

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<sup>81</sup> Travis DeCook, 'The Ark and Immediate Revelation in Francis Bacon's "New Atlantis"', *Studies in Philology*, 105.1 (2008), 103-122 (p. 110).

<sup>82</sup> David Renaker, 'A Miracle of Engineering: The Conversion of Bensalem in Francis Bacon's "New Atlantis"', *Studies in Philology*, 87.2 (1990), 181-93 (p. 191).

of the arrival of Christianity, and before anything more could be said of Bensalem Christianity, ‘a messenger came’ and the Christian priest was summoned ‘somewhat abruptly’. When he returned, the topic of Christianity is dropped and the discussion shifts to Bensalem history that eventually discloses the details of Salomon’s House. A chance to mention theology is replaced with a discussion on a scientific academy. This apparent absence of theology is supplemented by a key detail related to Salomon’s House. As the Christian priest pointed out in his narration of the naming of Salomon’s House, the alternative name for the scientific academy is the College of Six Days Works, referring to God’s creative act lasting for six days. Bacon has repeatedly mentioned in his *Advancement of Learning* and its later Latin expansion that theology is to be compared to the Sabbath: ‘Let us come to that learning, which both the former times were not so blessed as to know, sacred and inspired Divinity, the Sabbath and port of all men’s labours and peregrinations’.<sup>83</sup> The omission of the Sabbath in the highest institution in Bensalem indicates that theology is, if not banished, then at least underplayed. What supersedes theology, which has divided Europe, is a unified vision of Salomon’s House, as expressed by its member in the meeting with the protagonist: ‘The End of Our Foundation is the knowledge of Causes, and secret motions of things; and the enlarging of the bounds of Human Empire, to the effecting of all things possible.’ The member of Salomon’s House went so far in purging all theological connotations so as to omit the fact that one of the key functions of Salomon’s House envisioned by Solamona, the founder of Salomon’s House, is to glorify God through the study of his creations.

The humane tolerance resulting from the lack of theological dispute extends beyond the sphere of Christianity. In *An Advertisement Touching a Holy War*, Pollio’s attempt to defend the humanity of Muslims is rebuked by the Catholic zealot, Zebedaeus. In contrast, one finds Bensalem tolerant of the Jews who, like Muslims, do not acknowledge the divinity of Jesus Christ. In fact, it appears that some of the Jews even have privileged access to Salomon’s House. Joab, the Jew in *New Atlantis*, entertains a member of Salomon’s House during his visit, and is picked as the messenger to inform the travellers of a private meeting arranged for them to meet that member. The closeness of the Jews to Salomon’s House mirrors the closeness between Salomon’s House and Solomon as well the God of the Old Testament. Thanks to this unique relation, Bensalem is able to absorb people of different faiths who share the belief in the importance of the study of God’s work.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Bacon, *Works*, V, p. 111.

<sup>84</sup> The closeness between the Jews and Salomon’s House is noted by Claire Jowitt in “‘Books Will Speak Plain’? Colonialism, Politics and Jewishness in Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis*”, in *Francis Bacon’s “New Atlantis”: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. by Bronwen Price (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 129-54 (pp. 145, 147). However, Jowitt believes Bacon

In addition to the lack of theological division, the fusion of Baconian science and Christianity contributes to humanity by integrating the fulfilment of human needs into Biblical religion. This is most prominently displayed in the Feast of the Family. The feast is granted ‘to any man that shall live to see thirty persons descended of his body alive together, and all above three years old’. Prior to the feast, the father of the family, whom the Bensalem people call Tirsan, calls together the entire family and ‘sitteth in consultation concerning the good estate of the family’. He also chooses one of the sons to live in his house with him, who will be called ‘Son of the Vine’. On the day of the feast, a herald from the king of Bensalem will present the Tirsan with the ‘King’s Charter’, which contains ‘many privileges, exemptions, and points of honour, granted to the Father of the Family’, and calls the father the ‘creditor’: ‘for they say the king is debtor to no man, but for propagation of his subjects’. In addition to the charter, the herald presents a cluster of grapes made of gold, the number of grapes being as many as there are descendants of the family. The grapes are ‘daintly enamelled’, and if ‘the males of the family be in greater number, the grapes are enameled purple, with a little sun set on the top; if the females, then they are enamelled into a greenish yellow, with a crescent on the top’.<sup>85</sup> Towards the end of the feast, a hymn is sung, and the subject is always ‘the praises of Adam and Noah and Abraham; whereof the former two peopled the world, and the last was the Father of the Faithful’, and the hymn concludes with ‘a thanksgiving for the nativity of our Saviour, in whose birth the births of all are only blessed.’

The Feast of the Family, with its prominent imagery of grapes, seems to be loosely based on the Jewish feast of Sukkot, which takes place at the end of the grape harvest. According to Suzanne Smith, Tirsan may refer to ‘Tirshatha’, the title of Nehemiah as governor who participated in Sukkot.<sup>86</sup> The festival of Sukkot is an event meant to commemorate the exodus of the Jews from Egypt and reinforce the understanding of man’s dependence on God.<sup>87</sup> The Feast of the Family, however, is a much more secular version of Sukkot. Rather than emphasizing the dependence on God, it is an elaborate celebration of human propagation. Nehemiah, the governor, or Tirshatha, who reminds the people of Israel of the holiness of Sukkot, gives way to

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to be anti-Jewish and that Bacon uses Joab to warn against the dangers of Jews who appear to be friendly to Christianity but are essentially against it.

<sup>85</sup> Bacon, ‘New Atlantis’, pp. 472-5.

<sup>86</sup> Suzanne Smith, ‘The *New Atlantis*: Francis Bacon’s Theological-Political Utopia?’, *Harvard Theological Review* 101.1 (2008), 97-125 (p. 110 and note 66).

<sup>87</sup> Leviticus 23: 42-43: ‘You shall live in booths for seven days; all the native-born in Israel shall live in booths, so that your generations may know that I had the sons of Israel live in booths when I brought them out from the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.’

Tirsan, the head of the family, whose sole distinction is his numerous children.<sup>88</sup> The occasion for the celebration, the King's Charter that highlights the 'propagation of subjects', as well as the gifts of grapes, are all closely linked to the number of descendants, with an almost rational-scientific emphasis on a precise threshold. This celebration of human propagation is in accordance with Bacon's own assessment of private good in the *Advancement of Learning*, where he argues that the highest private good is to 'dilate or multiply'.<sup>89</sup>

While a holy festival serving as a reminder of God is transformed into a festival that celebrates a private good acknowledged by Bacon, God is not absent. The dinner ends with a thanksgiving to Jesus Christ, 'in whose birth the births of all are only blessed'. This prayer epitomizes the relation between God and humanity in Bensalem: God does not run counter to human needs. Instead, thanks to the blessing of the birth of Jesus Christ, the act of human propagation is elevated and its joy is increased. The Feast of the Family is a ritual that not only celebrates human propagation but also God's confirmation of human propagation.

By having God affirm what is essentially a universal human need in the most important festival in Bensalem, Bacon supplements the lack of theological doctrine with a unifying principle that can connect people of different faiths. Bensalem's achievement is shown in the fact that it is a Jew, Joabin, who praises the Feast of the Family to the narrator, despite its Christian connotation: 'You have reason for to commend that excellent institution of the Feast of the Family. And indeed we have experience, that those families that are partakers of the blessing of that feast do flourish and prosper ever after in extraordinary manner'.<sup>90</sup> This comes as no surprise, for the celebration of human propagation is in perfect alignment with God's blessing in Genesis 1: 28: 'Be fruitful and multiply'.

The common root of Christians and Jews in Bensalem, however, goes deeper than their mutual praise of the Feast of the Family. The Jews in Bensalem are of a special type: they merge their religion with the appreciation of the Bensalem regime. According to the narrator, the Bensalem Jews believe that in the age of the Messiah, 'the king of Bensalem should sit at [Messiah's] feet, whereas other kings should keep a great distance'.<sup>91</sup> This praise of a king outside the Biblical tradition is very unorthodox, and Bacon hints at this fact by telling the readers that the Bensalem Jews are said to be descendants of Nachor, the brother of Abraham and

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<sup>88</sup> Nehemiah 8: 9.

<sup>89</sup> Bacon, 'Advancement of Learning', pp. 248-9. The difference between Sukkot and the Feast of the Family is also displayed in the presence of imagery of Egyptian gods. According to Howard B. White, the sun and crescent enamelled on the grapes are symbols of Osiris and Isis. See Howard B. White, *Peace Among the Willows* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968), p. 173.

<sup>90</sup> Bacon, 'New Atlantis', p. 476

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*



a person who worships idols (Genesis 31: 53). The Bensalem Jews' potentially idolatrous praise of Bensalem is mitigated by the fact that they also believe that Bensalem was secretly legislated by Moses. Just like the humanized Christianity, the belief of Jews in Bensalem is a hybrid of Baconian ideal and Biblical orthodox – in their case, the Old Testament. The appreciation of Bensalem is woven into the fabric of both Judaism and Christianity. The arrival of Christianity does not upset the basic tenets of Bensalem – Baconian worldly humanity, and as a result, the Bensalem Jews can view Christ positively as the 'Elijah of the Messiah', or the herald of Messiah. The age of Messiah, according to Isaiah 2: 4, is an age of peace, precisely the very definition of Bensalem ('Son of Peace').

The emphasis on human needs to establish a humane utopia is Bacon's solution to the contemporary problem of religious war, but this comes at a certain cost, and Bacon does not shy away from spelling it out. The propagation of family leads to the deeper question underlying Bacon's utopia: how to reconcile the recognition of bodily good with the law. Just as the good of generation is great, so too is its pleasure.<sup>92</sup> The protagonist of *New Atlantis* puts this question to Joabin, the Jew who is 'a wise man, and learned, and of great policy, and excellently seen in the laws and customs of that nation': do the people of Bensalem, so desirous of having children, practice monogamy or polygamy? Joabin, in response, insists that 'there is not under the heavens so chaste a nation as this of Bensalem', and explains the reason for their ability to honour marriage, contrasting the practice in Europe:

Know therefore, that with them there are no stews, no dissolute houses, no courtesans, nor any thing of that kind. Nay they wonder (with detestation) at you in Europe, which permit such things. They say yet have put marriage out of office: for marriage is ordained a remedy for unlawful concupiscence, and natural concupiscence seemeth as a spur to marriage. But when men have at hand a remedy more agreeable to their corrupt will, marriage is almost expelled.<sup>93</sup>

For a man 'excellently seen in the laws and customs' of Bensalem, Joabin's explanation of the ground of Bensalem's chastity is strangely unpersuasive. The only reason for Bensalem's ability to honour marriage, it seems, is that they resolutely banish the practice of prostitution, and without 'stews', 'dissolute houses' or 'courtesans', marriage can fulfill its function as 'a remedy

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<sup>92</sup> Bacon, 'Advancement of Learning', p. 249: 'In the pleasures of living creatures, that of generation is greater than that of food'.

<sup>93</sup> Bacon, 'New Atlantis', p. 477.

for unlawful concupiscence'. Yet Joabin's account leaves open whether the institution of marriage really overcomes the problem of natural concupiscence, for natural concupiscence merely 'seemeth' a spur to marriage. Joabin allows that for the corrupted will, the 'more agreeable remedy' can be more appealing than marriage. Bacon himself could hardly have believed Joabin's naïve explanation. In his essay 'Of Nature in Men' (1612, reprinted in 1625 edition), Bacon observes that 'nature is often hidden; sometimes overcome; seldom extinguished', and the desire for bodily pleasure cannot be easily banished. And in 'Of Love' published in the 1625 version of *Essays*, shortly after he wrote *New Atlantis*, Bacon warns that 'love can find entrance not only into an open heart, but also into a heart well fortified'.<sup>94</sup>

The contrast between the 'chaste minds' of Bensalem and a tacit admission of the corrupted human will is further underscored by one additional marriage-related custom. According to Joabin, Bensalem's citizens, like those of More's Utopia, want to avoid bodily defects when choosing partners, and have thus modified a custom found in *Utopia*:

I have read in a book of one of your men, of a Feigned Commonwealth, where the married couple are permitted, before they contract, to see one another naked. This they [people of Bensalem] dislike; for they think it a scorn to give a refusal after so familiar knowledge. But because of many hidden defects in men and women's bodies, they have a more civil way; for they have near every town a couple of pools, (which they call 'Adam and Eve's pools') where it is permitted to one of the friends of the man, and another of the friends of the woman, to see them severally bathe naked.<sup>95</sup>

The Utopians, like the people in Bensalem, honour marriage and practice monogamy. According to Hythlodæus, they have very strict laws regarding divorce and adultery, so making sure that their potential partners do not have bodily defects is paramount.<sup>96</sup> Joab presents Bensalem as offering an improvement on the Utopian marriage custom: an impartial observer taking the place of a person in love. Bensalem appears as a scientific modification of Utopia. Yet by allowing a friend to view the naked potential partner, the Bensalem custom introduces a new risk. The friend could be enamoured and become a potential adulterer. This danger is subtly hinted at with the name Joabin. Many scholars have identified Joabin with the Biblical Joab who helped David kill

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<sup>94</sup> Bacon, 'Of Love' and 'Of Nature in Men', in *Major Works*, pp. 358, 417..

<sup>95</sup> Bacon, 'New Atlantis', p. 478.

<sup>96</sup> More, *Utopia*, p. 80.

Uriah, after David has viewed Uriah's wife, Bathsheba, bathe naked.<sup>97</sup> The conflicting image of the purity of Adam and Eve and the adultery of David is emblematic of a problem inherent in the highlighting of human needs: there is the potential danger that desire may harm the integrity of customs, something science is powerless to suppress.

What is an attempt to mend the inconvenience of one utopia leads to an entirely new inconvenience, and this seems to confirm More's observation that all attempts at creating an ideal society inevitably cause a certain number of absurdities:

Did any one of all the philosophers who have offered a pattern of a society, a ruler, or a private household set down everything so well that nothing ought to be changed. Actually, if it weren't for the great respect I retain for certain highly distinguished names, I could easily produce from each of them a number of notions which I can hardly doubt would be universally condemned as absurd.<sup>98</sup>

For More, the imperfections of utopias lead one back to the commonsensical political world and the practice of civil philosophy. Bacon, however, takes an entirely different path. His publication of multiple works on new science shows that he is committed to his utopian project. If Bacon acknowledges that utopias cannot help but contain defects, then those defects are to be understood as lesser evils and costs that are necessary to address what he conceives to be the greater evil: the inhumanity of religious zealotry. That Bacon resolutely forges ahead despite the imperfection of utopia is the most important sign that we have that he departed from the cautious utopian writings of More and his predecessors to enter into an entirely new age.

To conclude my reading of *New Atlantis*, Bacon offers in this utopian writing his answer to the problem of religious zealotry in his age. The key lies in humanizing the Christian religion, and to do so Baconian scientists must appropriate science and the Bible to create a new Christianity that places both science and humanity at its core. With the emphasis on science and humanity replacing theological dispute, Bensalem offers an image of a future where mankind is free from religious divisions and united under the principle of human needs, in the name of religion. While Bacon is adamant that his scientific project should be carried forward, he is not

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<sup>97</sup> 2 Samuel 11. White, *Peace Among the Willows*, p. 245; J. Weinberger, 'Science and Rule in Bacon's Utopia: An Introduction to the reading of *New Atlantis*', *The American Political Science Review*, 70.3 (1976), 865-85 (p. 882); DeCook, 'Francis Bacon's Jewish Dreams', pp. 122-3. Jowitt in "'Books Will Speak Plain"', p. 143. Malssohn, *The Political Philosophy of Francis Bacon*, p. 216.

<sup>98</sup> More, *Utopia*, p. 109.

blind to the problems that may accompany his solution, and he signals this through Biblical allusion. Nevertheless, Bensalem as a solution to religious zealotry vastly outweighs its defects. This consideration, instead of the merit of Bensalem examined in itself, underlies Bacon's decision to promote this utopia, and this peculiarity of *New Atlantis* signals a decisive break from the utopian writings of the past, represented by figures far apart in time: Plato and More.

## 2.5 Conclusion

In More's *Utopia*, the character 'More' faces Hythlodæus, a Christian zealous for justice, and responds to him by advising civil philosophy. Bacon, too, finds himself facing religious zealotry, but he offers a different solution. Instead of accommodating the Christian ideal to political reality with civil philosophy, he radically reinterprets the Christian ideal of charity so that it becomes a practical teaching aimed at tackling the problem of zealotry. This shift from civil philosophy to Baconian charity creates a titanic shift in the relation between theory and practice and the meaning of utopia. For the first time, utopia is not the perfect commonwealth that constantly contrasts with all existing commonwealths. With this shift, civil philosophy no longer means a mediation between the ideal and reality, and Bacon's insistence that philosophers involve themselves in politics takes on a new meaning: they are to imitate the member of Salomon's House and actively pursue the combination of Christianity, humanity and science, and they are to serve thereby as the cornerstone for the realization of Baconian utopia.

Despite the lofty goal of Bacon, the utopia he envisioned is ultimately mundane: human need, rather than justice, characterizes Bensalem. The philosophers are to practice charity, but it is a type of charity that is not very different from self-love. The moral perfection once visible in the writings of Plato and Seneca is replaced by an earthly devotion to pleasure and worldly goods so that the philosophers can align themselves with the focus on material benefit in the Baconian utopia. As a result, Bacon's project creates two dangers. Not only does he lower the ideal of utopia, but by making philosophers too much at home in his utopia, he risks them becoming blind to the perfect commonwealth. Ironically, Bacon's solution is such a success that it vastly outlives the problem, and the scientific project carries on in full force even after the religious conflict abates. It takes a mind as acute as that of Jonathan Swift to be unfazed by the revolution started by Bacon, to uncover the ills of modern utopia despite its gathering momentum and to expose them in *Gulliver's Travels*.

## Chapter 3. Jonathan Swift and the Criticism of Modern Utopia

### 3.1 Introduction

From Thomas More to Francis Bacon, utopian literature took a drastic turn. More was never serious about implementing his ideal commonwealth; Bacon was. The ideal state in *New Atlantis* (1627) depends on technological advances to deliver material welfare to its people, and Bacon, to show his commitment to the cause, left us a wealth of scientific writings that point the way to the natural science that will facilitate those advances. Bacon, however, was not alone in this aspiration. On the continent, René Descartes, another key figure in the establishment of modern science, promised the ‘invention of an infinity of artifices that would enable us to enjoy, without any pain, the fruits of the earth and all the goods to be found there’.<sup>1</sup>

To pave the way for the new science Bacon and Descartes spared no effort in bringing down the scholastic philosophers and their master Aristotle. The effort was not in vain. In 1667, the Royal Society championing Baconian science was established by Charles II and in the *History of the Royal Society*, a work commissioned for the occasion, Thomas Sprat sang the praises of Bacon as one who provided ‘the best arguments, that can be produc’d for the defence of Experimental Philosophy; and the best directions, that are needful to promote it’.<sup>2</sup> Three decades later, scholars on the continent such as Matheo Zapata and Miguel Marcelino would describe how Cartesian teaching was besieging the traditional learning and threatening to cause the greatest spiritual upheaval in centuries.<sup>3</sup> The influence of this intellectual revolution penetrated far beyond the confines of natural science and metaphysics. Riding the wave of modern natural science, Thomas Hobbes was confident enough to propose a modern political science, based on the new scientific method, that would supersede the political teachings of Plato and Aristotle. Political science, according to Hobbes, is no older than the publication of his *De Cive* (1642).<sup>4</sup> The scientific spirit even affects the literary circle, and men of letters such as Bernard le Bovier Fontenelle advocated a literary criticism that would share the preciseness of Cartesian reason.

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<sup>1</sup> René Descartes, ‘Discourse on Method’, in *Philosophical Essays and Correspondence*, ed. and trans. by Roger Ariew (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), pp. 46-82 (p. 74).

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Sprat, *The History of the Royal Society for the Improving of Natural Knowledge* (London: 1667), pp. 35-36.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment, Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *De Corpore*, ‘Dedication’; *Elements of Law Natural and Politic*, 1.13.3.

Jonathan Swift began his literary career when the authority of the ancient authors was ‘besieged’ by the Moderns. This background shows in *The Battle of Books* (1704), one of Swift’s earlier writings, where he satirizes the leaders of modern learning across all fields and champions the Ancients. Yet his most sustained scrutiny of the Moderns is to be found in his *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726), where he offers a pair of contrasting diptychs in an exaggerated form: first, between the modern and ancient states in Books One and Two; and, second, between the modern natural scientists and ancient moral philosophers in Books Three and Four. Given the close relation between modern science and its promise to improve society, and the position of modern science as a key bastion in the overall campaign against the Ancients, my analysis of *Gulliver’s Travels* will focus primarily on the second half of the work, where Swift not only casts doubt on the benefits of science on society, but more importantly contrasts it with the moral philosophy of Socrates.

By portraying and contrasting two societies dominated by natural scientists and moral philosophical beings respectively, Swift raises the question of which offers the true model of an ideal society: the scientific utopia in Bacon’s *New Atlantis*, or the moral utopia in Plato’s *Republic* or More’s *Utopia*. Scholars such as Chloë Houston and Herman J. Real have identified Swift’s close engagement with *Utopia* and *New Atlantis* in his *Gulliver’s Travels*, but how this engagement is related to Swift’s keen interest in the battle between the Ancients and the Moderns has not been adequately addressed.<sup>5</sup> While Swift’s sympathy lies with the ancient model, I argue that a close reading of *Gulliver’s Travels* also shows that Swift is in fact deeply ambiguous regarding the feasibility of classical moral ideals in the modern time. Both the modern scientific utopia and the classical moral utopia turn out to be ‘no-place’: the former lacks moral goodness and the latter is clouded by pessimism and struggles to face the challenge of modern science. This ambiguity reflects a scepticism that further complicates the theory and practice of utopia, for the ideal that is meant to guide practice becomes fraught with uncertainties once scrutinized.

Before examining *Gulliver’s Travels*, however, we will first look into Swift’s very first participation in the quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns in his *Battle of the Books*. Despite being an early and polemical work, the *Battle of the Books* provides clues about those whom Swift considers the main representatives of the two camps, and many arguments against the Moderns in *Gulliver’s Travels* can already be found in this earlier work. The often lurid and

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<sup>5</sup> Chloë Houston, ‘Utopia, Dystopia or Anti-utopia? Gulliver’s Travels and the Utopian Mode of Discourse’, *Utopia Studies*, 18.3 (2007), 425-442 (p. 427); Hermann J. Real, ‘Voyages to Nowhere: More’s *Utopia* and Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*’, in *Eighteenth-Contexts: Historical Inquiries in Honor of Philip Harth*, ed. by Philip Harth and others (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), pp. 96-113.

always partisan piece provides a useful contrast to *Gulliver's Travels*, allowing us to see more clearly how Swift's thoughts on the battle between the Ancients and the Moderns matured over the years to become more balanced and nuanced.

### 3.2 Swift as the Ally of the Ancients in the *Battle of the Books*

Swift's first public engagement in the quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns is his *Battle of Books*, a work that was partly written out of the need to defend Sir William Temple, for whom Swift was working as secretary. Temple was a respected statesman before retiring to Moor Park, and among his achievements was the negotiation of the marriage between the Prince of Orange and Princess Mary of England. His involvement in the quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns was not from the standpoint of a professional scholar, but that of an educated gentleman. According to his own account, the occasion of writing his *Essay upon the Ancient and Modern Learning* (1690) stemmed from his reading of Fontenelle's poetry that disparaged the virtue of ancient literature.<sup>6</sup> Temple rose to defend the honour of the Ancients, but unfortunately, in his eagerness to praise the Ancients and show their genius, Temple made the mistake of citing the example of the *Letters of Phalaris*, which turned out to be spurious. The ensuing controversy further occasioned a skirmish of wits between the supporters of ancient and modern learning on the English scene, with Swift on the side of Temple and the Ancients, battling against the likes of Richard Bentley and William Wotton.

Temple's *Essay upon the Ancient and Modern Learning*, although not unbiased, is by all means temperate. He argued that the Moderns' sense of superiority was not well founded, and that their possession of accumulated wisdom did not necessarily place them above the Ancients, as the ancient Greeks themselves may have benefitted from more ancient sources such as the Egyptians, Phoenicians or even 'Chaldæans, Arabians and Indians'. The Moderns' reliance on books was, according to Temple, a possible weakness: the Ancients might receive their teaching from living, oral traditions, but the Moderns had to rely on written records which 'like a Hand with an Inscription, can point out the straight way upon the Road', but cannot 'resolve doubts' or 'answer questions'.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, Temple thought that such scientific achievements as Harvey's

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<sup>6</sup> Sir William Temple, *Essays on Ancient and Modern Learning and On Poetry*, ed. by J. E. Spingarn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Temple, *Essay upon Ancient and Modern Learning*, p. 7.

theory of blood circulation were yet to be proven right, let alone better than their ancient counterparts.

Temple concluded that his essay was ‘a small Piece of Justice I have done the Ancient’ and in a conciliatory tone he hoped that the Moderns would not take it for ‘any Injury’.<sup>8</sup> Swift’s *Battle of Books*, by contrast, was not about justice or the balanced view: he aims instead to injure, perhaps fatally, certainly extravagantly – the side of the Moderns. This satirical piece plays out in the regal library at St James’s Palace where all the combatants were not actual persons but their books. It opens with the Modern authors, metamorphosed into books, vying for the supreme spot on Mount Parnassus that has been occupied by the Ancients. The animosity between the camps heightened when books arguing for the superiority of the Moderns begin to enter the libraries. The war finally breaks out when Aesop, the ‘book’, seizing on a debate between a spider and a bee on the virtue of their respective way of life, proclaims that the Ancients were like the bee, who ‘by an universal range, with long search, much study, true judgment, and distinction of things, brings home honey and wax’, while the Moderns are like the spider, who ‘by a lazy contemplation of four inches round, by an overweening pride, [...] turns all into excrement and venom, produces nothing at last but flybane and a cobweb’.<sup>9</sup> This comparison angers the Moderns and the two camps prepare for battle. The army of the Ancients consists of Homer, Pindar, Euclid, Plato, Aristotle, Herodotus, Livy and Hippocrates. Their enemies, the Moderns, include poets such as Tasso and Dryden, philosophers such as Bacon, Hobbes, Descartes and Gassendi, physicians such as Harvey and scholastic philosophers such as Aquinas and Dun Scotus. The ensuing battle sees heavy casualties in the camp of the Moderns, and ends with Bentley and Wotton unceremoniously pierced by a spear, , like a pair of ‘woodcocks’ on an ‘iron skewer’.<sup>10</sup>

The appearance of Wotton and Bentley in the *Battle of Books* may make it seem like an occasional work undertaken to defend Swift’s employer, yet even so it still contains a distinctive approach to the quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns. Swift was by no means writing in the shadow of Temple. If for Temple, the ancient heritage of wisdom stretched back to the teachers of Greeks, such as the Egyptians and the Indians, Swift’s work instead makes clear that the scope of the Ancients was purely within the Greco-Roman world, as can be seen in the list of ancient combatants.

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Swift, ‘The Battle of Books’, in *Major Works*, ed. by Angus Ross and David Woolley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 1-22 (p. 9).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.



Another more important sign that Swift formulated his own position in the quarrel of the Moderns and the Ancients, is that he freely utilized the Moderns' own arsenal and turned it against them. The confidence with which Swift employed the writings or philosophical systems of the Moderns such as Hobbes and Bacon shows that Swift was intimately familiar with them. The lurid description of the *Battle of Books* should not blind us to the skill and understanding with which Swift draws on the writings of the Moderns in order to satirize them. Take, for example, the opening section of the *Battle of the Books*, where Swift places the battle within the framework of the political science of the Moderns:

For, to speak in the phrase of writers upon politics, we may observe in the Republic of Dogs (which, in its original, seems to be an institution of the Many) that the whole state is ever in the profoundest peace after a full meal; and that civil broils arise among them when it happens for one great bone to be seized on by some leading dog, who either divides it among the few and then it falls to an oligarchy, or keeps it to himself and then it runs up to a tyranny. The same reasoning also holds place among them in those dissensions we behold upon a turgescency in any of their females. For the right of possession lying in common [...] jealousies and suspicious do so abound that the whole commonwealth of that street is reduced to a manifest state of war, of every citizen against every citizen [...]<sup>11</sup>

The republic of dogs is a thinly-veiled attack on Thomas Hobbes's political theory. The wording of 'a manifest state of war, of every citizen against every citizen' almost repeats verbatim Hobbes's description of the state of nature as 'a condition of war of everyone against everyone'.<sup>12</sup> There is evidence that Swift was familiar with Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651) when composing the *Battle of Books*. The work was mentioned in *A Tale of a Tub* as an example of irreligious free-thinking, and in *A Discourse Concerning the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit*, both of which were published together with the *Battle of the Books* in 1704. The image of a dog, while comical, is accurate in representing Hobbes's teaching: there are no aristocratic, virtuous dogs versus commoner dogs; rather, they are all driven by desire and pride. When Hobbes describes human beings in *Leviathan*, he does not distinguish them by their moral or intellectual virtue but merely

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. by Edwin Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), p. 80..

by their physical strength and cunning in securing their own well-being and honour, and he concludes that the physical and intellectual powers do not differ much from person to person.<sup>13</sup>

By framing the battle in the light of the republic of dogs, a republic, which, Swift added, engaged in ‘foreign war’ out of ‘poverty or want’ as well as ‘pride’ on the part of the aggressor, he made the Moderns’ attempt at dislodging the Ancients appear in a ridiculous light: the readers are to imagine that the Moderns are like the republic of dogs advancing towards the civilized and cultured Ancients.<sup>14</sup> Brutish as the Moderns are, they do not recognize the virtue of the latter, since the Moderns, like the human beings in Hobbes’s teaching, see no clear superiority in others. The ‘Republic of Dogs’ is the first sign of the bestializing of human beings by the Moderns. This is an idea that Swift would develop in Book Four of *Gulliver’s Travels* where Gulliver meets the Yahoos, creatures with the shape of humans but the bestiality of dogs. The image of dogs and virtuous Ancients is just one step away from the contrast between Yahoos and apparently virtuous Houyhnhnms to be found in *Gulliver’s Travels*.

Next to Hobbes, Francis Bacon was the second important author whose arguments in support of the Moderns were turned on their head by Swift. The reader of the *Battle of the Books* learns of how one of the Moderns shamelessly tried to use sophistry to cheat the Ancients out of their place on Parnassus: ‘[The Modern] seemed very much to wonder how the Ancients could pretend to insist upon their antiquity, when it was so plain [...] that the Moderns were much the more ancient of the two’.<sup>15</sup> The original version of this argument is to be found in Bacon’s *Advancement of Learning*, where he argued that the Moderns were more ancient compared with the Ancients and therefore should not bow to their authority: ‘These times are the ancient times when the world is ancient, and not those which we account ancient ‘ordine retrograde’ by a computation backward from ourselves’.<sup>16</sup> According to this criterion, the claim to antiquity is based on the actual age of the world: since thousands of years had lapsed between ancient Greece and ‘our’ time, the present age is thousands of years older than classical antiquity and therefore more ‘ancient’. This sophistry usurps the meaning of ‘ancient’ and ‘modern’ and inadvertently deprives the speaker of their own claim to be ‘modern’. However, it is the centrepiece of the

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>14</sup> Swift, ‘The Battle of the Books’, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>16</sup> Francis Bacon, ‘Advancement of Learning’, p. 145. More evidence that Swift was likely familiar with this work is seen in his allusion to an argument used in it in his *Tale of a Tub*. Bacon wrote that time was like water and what had been passed down was light and unsubstantial learning, while the grave and solid sank. In his *Tale of a Tub*, Swift wrote that the modern learning was so light that they could ‘swim upon the surface for all eternity’. See Jonathan Swift, ‘A Tale of a Tub’, in *Major Works*, pp. 62-164 (p. 76).

*Battle of the Books*, that is, the exchange between the bee and the spider, where we witness Swift ingeniously defang a distinctly Baconian rhetorical weapon.

The episode regarding the bee and spider acts as the trigger that leads up to the eventual battle between the Ancients and the Moderns. When the bee disturbs the cobweb, the spider ventures out to confront the bee and tries to impose on the latter the argument that the life of the spider was allowed by ‘all the world’ to be ‘so much better’. According to the spider, the bee is ‘without house or home, without stock or inheritance’, and thus leads a life ‘of universal plunder upon nature’. By contrast, the spider is a ‘domestic animal, furnished with a native stock’ within himself, and his ‘large castle’, or cobweb, is built with his own hands and material extracted from his own person, with the help of ‘improvements in the mathematics’. The bee replies that he indeed visits ‘all the flowers and blossoms of the field and the garden’, but ‘whatever I collect from thence enriches myself without the least injury to their beauty, their smell, or their taste’. Moreover, he uses this labour to bring home ‘honey and wax’. The bee then goes on to dispute the spider’s account that he is wholly self-sufficient: ‘your inherent portion of dirt does not fail of acquisition by sweepings exhaled from below; and one insect furnishes you with a share of poison to destroy another’.<sup>17</sup> Hearing this, Aesop exclaims that the two perfectly captured the difference between the Ancients and the Moderns:

Was ever anything so modern as the spider in his air, his turns, and his paradoxes? He argues in the behalf of you his brethren, and himself, with many boastings of his native stock and great genius. [...] As for us, the Ancients, we are content, with the bee, to pretend to nothing of our own beyond our wings and our voice. [...] We have rather chose to fill our hives with honey and wax, thus furnishing mankind with the two noblest of things, which are sweetness and light.<sup>18</sup>

The bee and the spider allegory allows for a multiplicity of interpretations. For one, Swift might be writing in the framework of the Battle of the Ancients and the Moderns that took place in France, which had, thanks to the writings of Fontenelle, a special focus on literature. As mentioned above, Fontenelle was the reason for Temple’s involvement in the controversy. Charles Perrault and Fontenelle were participants in the battle of books, both advocated a more rationalist approach to literature. Larry F. Norman notes that Perrault faulted Aristotle for not

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<sup>17</sup> Swift, ‘The Battle of the Books’, pp.8-10.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

being able to prescribe rational, philosophical principles for poetry, and his ally Fontenelle called for ‘rigorous precision and exactitude’ (*‘une precision et une justesse’*) for literary criticism after Descartes introduced his ‘new method of reasoning and thinking’ (*‘nouvelle méthode de raisonner’*).<sup>19</sup> In this case, it would appear that Swift was directly targeting such geometric approaches to literature: while the ‘cobweb’ – the literary product – might be weaved with the aid of Cartesian reason, its material is still base and worthless. At the same time, the imagery of bees was often associated with sociability by the Ancients. Jonathan Woolfson notes that both Aristotle and Pliny the Elder used bees as an example of social and gregarious animals, and poets such as Virgil wrote about the ‘intensively organized society’ of bees.<sup>20</sup> The bee’s creation of honey and wax, its contribution to the common good, is then intended as a moral reprimand against the spiderlike scholar whose self-centeredness brings no benefit to mankind.

While both of the above interpretations are likely intended by Swift, it is the co-presence of the spider and the bee that renders Bacon a prime suspect as one of the key subjects of Swift’s satire, as Swift is here inverting a pair of passages from Bacon’s *Advancement of Learning* and *Novum Organum* (1620). ‘Spider’ was used by Bacon in the *Advancement* to signify the scholastic philosophers whose mind is shut within the cell of ‘a few Authors (chiefly *Aristotle* their Dictator)’.<sup>21</sup> In the *Novum Organum*, the bee represents the Baconian scientists who treads between the spiderlike Aristotelian school and the empiricists, whom Bacon compared to ants, before he made a new derogatory use of spiders:

Empiricists, like ants, simply accumulate and use; rationalists, like spiders, spin webs from themselves; the way of the bee is in between: it takes material from the flowers of the garden and the field; but it has the ability to convert and digest them. This is not unlike the true working of philosophy; which does not rely solely or mainly on mental power, and does not store the material provided by natural history and mechanical experiments in its memory untouched but altered and adapted in the intellect.<sup>22</sup>

By comparing the spider to the Moderns and the bee to the Ancients, Swift turns these

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<sup>19</sup> Larry F. Norman, *The Shock of the Ancient, Literature and History in Early Modern France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), pp. 4, 43.

<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Woolfson, ‘The Renaissance of Bees’, *Renaissance Studies*, 24.2 (2010), 281-300 (p. 283).

<sup>21</sup> Bacon, ‘Advancement of Learning’, p. 140: ‘For the wit and mind of man [...] if it work upon itself, as the spider, worketh his web, then it is endless, and brings forth indeed cobwebs of learning, admirable for the fineness of thread and work, but of no substance or profit.’

<sup>22</sup> Bacon, *Novum Organum*, 1. 95, 96.

comparisons on their heads and deftly uses Bacon's image, initially designed to ridicule the Aristotelian school and praise the Baconian scientists, to support the Ancients against the Moderns: the philosophical systems of the Moderns are no better than the scholastic controversies, despite the 'improvement of mathematics'. The spider's affinity with mathematics and its habit of contemplating 'four inches round' call to mind the modern philosopher who is famous for his philosophy centred around mathematics, Descartes, and likely his followers as well.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, Descartes' claim in his *Discourse on Method* (1637) to rely on no previous science and to follow his own path rather than in the footsteps of previous masters resembles closely the spider's prized self-sufficiency. Yet in addition to Descartes, the repurposed Baconian spider also neatly figures the work of another philosopher interlocutor: Hobbes.<sup>24</sup>

As mentioned above, Swift groups Hobbes with Descartes and Pierre Gassendi as the enemies of ancient philosophy, and both Descartes and Gassendi were primarily known for their natural philosophy. In putting Hobbes alongside these natural philosophers, Swift perhaps was following Temple, who had himself grouped Descartes and Hobbes together in his *Essay upon the Ancient and Modern Learning*, and intended to draw the readers' attention to Hobbes's theory on scientific subjects instead of political matters, for which Hobbes was especially famous.

Hobbes the 'natural scientist' shares an enthusiasm for mathematics with the spider. Hobbes bases the methodology of science on geometry alone. In order to have true science, according to him, one must begin 'ratiocination from the definitions, or explications of the names they are to use; which is a method that hath been used only in geometry'.<sup>25</sup>

This emphasis on definitions, and the explications of names brings us to the second, more complex, similarity between Hobbes and spider: self-centeredness and self-engendering. The spider weaves his web with material of his own, and Hobbes weaves his system of science with definitions. In his *Leviathan*, Hobbes defines science in the following manner:

When the discourse is put into speech, begins with the definition of words, and proceeds by connexion of the same into general affirmations, and of these again into syllogisms, the end or last sum is called the conclusion, and the thought of the mind by it signified is

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<sup>23</sup> Geogory Lynall argues that the spider refers specifically to the Cartesian philosopher Thomas Burnet. Yet given that Swift attempts to embody the difference between the ancient and the modern, it is unlikely that the fable of the bee and the spider should address one specific person. See *Swift and Science, the Satire, Politics and Theology of Natural Knowledge, 1690-1730*, pp. 2, 52-57.

<sup>24</sup> The Baconian Spider are often associated with Descartes, but Hobbes is seldom mentioned as a possible satirical target. See, for example, Michael R. G. Spiller, 'The Idol of the Stove: the Background to Swift's Criticism of Descartes', *Review of English Studies*, 25.97 (1974), 15-24; Philip Harth, *Swift and Anglican Rationalism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1961).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. 24.

that conditional knowledge, or knowledge of the consequence of words, which is commonly called science.<sup>26</sup>

In this way, Hobbes reduces science to definition and the correct use of syllogisms. The validity of science, in the Hobbesian system, relies on correct definition as the starting point. However, Hobbes simultaneously denies the possibility of arriving at a true definition. In order for definition to function, it must designate a group of things, or something universal. Hobbes says that universality only exists as a name: ‘there being nothing in the world universal but names; for the things named are every one of them individual and singular’.<sup>27</sup> To use Hobbes’s example, there are individual trees, but tree as species only exists as a name; there is no ‘treeness’, so to speak, but if this is true, that ‘treeness’ does not exist but as a mere ‘name’, there will be no true and reliable ground for deciding what is or is not a tree individually. Definition, then, is only a human convention, and so is the science that is based on it.<sup>28</sup> In this way, the human mind and the world are separated and science becomes the self-engendering of definition and syllogisms by the mind, similar to the spiders’ self-engendering of cobweb, or stale philosophical systems. The irony is doubled since Hobbes himself accused the scholastic philosophers of introducing empty names such as ‘incorporeal body’ and ‘incorporeal substances’.<sup>29</sup>

Swift’s clever manipulation of the rhetorical weapons of Bacon and his satirical employment of Hobbes’s political and scientific teachings is evidence that Swift was participating in the quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns with keen intellectual awareness. However, it is equally important to point out that the ‘Republic of Dogs’ and the exchange between the bee and the spider in the *Battle of the Books* are only preparatory for the final clash between the Ancients and the Moderns, in their book form, in the regal library, which caused a great many casualties on the side of the Moderns but none on the side of the Ancients.

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<sup>26</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 36.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>28</sup> Hobbes puts this in a more extreme manner in his objection to Descartes’ *Meditations*:

What shall we say if it turns out that reasoning is simply the joining together and linking of names or labels by means of the verb ‘is’? [...] [A]ll we can infer is whether or not we are combining the names of things in accordance with the arbitrary conventions which we have laid down in respect of their meaning. If this is so, as may well be the case, reasoning will depend on names, names will depend on the imagination, and imagination will depend (as I believe it does) merely on the motions of our bodily organs [...]

This is a conclusion that Descartes cannot accept: ‘If he [Hobbes] admits that the words signify something, why will he not allow that our reasoning deals with this something which is signified, rather than merely with the words?’ See *Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 3 vols, trans. by John Cottingham and Robert Stoothoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), II, pp. 125-26.

<sup>29</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 21.

Not only its outcome, but also Swift's depiction of battle show that the *Battle of the Books* is unabashedly partisan.

The partisanship is most notable in the way Swift employed literary form. We have already seen that during the episode of the bee and the spider, Swift has Aesop explain the meaning of the exchange as if it were a fable, an ancient form of which Aesop is the undisputed master. This granted the Ancients an unfair advantage over the Moderns in the debate over which side was superior. When it came to the actual fighting, Swift imitated the form of epic, exemplified by the work of Homer and Virgil, to describe the battle between the Ancients and the Moderns. It seems that not only would the Moderns face formidable adversaries, but they were also denied the 'home advantage' which Swift generously provides to the Ancients. The Moderns could no longer retreat to their spider dens and rely on their venom, but had to meet the Ancients on the open battlefield head on. The result was often quick and brutal. On the side of natural philosophy:

Aristotle, observing Bacon advance with a furious mien, drew his bow to the head and let fly his arrow, which missed the valiant Modern and went hissing over his head. But Descartes it hit; the steel point quickly found a defect in his head-piece; it pierced the leather and the pasteboard and went in at his right eye. The torture of the pain whirled the valiant bowman round till death, like a star of superior influence, drew him into his own vortex.<sup>30</sup>

Given the modern spider's pride in its improvement in mathematics, it is no surprise that Descartes, famous for his mathematical natural philosophy, should be the first to fall in battle. Aristotle's arrow finds a defect in Descartes helmet, piercing the philosopher's head towards his pineal gland, the supposed seat of the intellect and origin of Descartes' philosophy. The defect of Descartes' helmet is perhaps a humorous swipe at Descartes' philosophical system based on sound mathematics alone, which claims to be as solid as geometry but fails under the attack of the great ancient philosopher. The death of Descartes may also be an alteration of a set piece in Homeric epic. While in the *Iliad*, combatants die as death descends upon them like dark mist, the imagery of Descartes waltzing into his demise like a star drawn into a vortex in Cartesian cosmology takes away any semblance of tragedy

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<sup>30</sup> Swift, 'The Battle of the Books', p. 14.

While Descartes bears the brunt of Swift's satire and Aristotle's arrow, Bacon, somehow, escapes unscathed. Gregory Lynall argues that Bacon's survival indicates his status as the most favoured of all the Moderns in this polemical work. He argues that Bacon's sustained attack on the Scholastics and his experimental philosophy distance Bacon from the spiderlike Moderns and so save him from the same fate as Descartes.<sup>31</sup> By contrast, Laurence Bern argues that Bacon survives because he knows how to avoid danger: in Bacon's *Advancement of Learning*, Bacon says that all revolution should take care to leave the old terms intact, so that under the disguise of old terms one can smuggle in new definitions. Bacon then proceeds to keep the term of 'metaphysics' intact, but redefine metaphysics as an investigation of natural law, a key part of his own natural philosophy. Descartes, by contrast, is 'killed' for his lack of prudence, as he, in this *Discourse on Method*, openly doubts all teaching prior to him.<sup>32</sup>

While both conclusions are reasonable, I believe that to fully grasp the fate of Bacon it is necessary to take into account how quotations from Bacon's works are utilized in the *Battle of the Books* as a whole. Prior to Bacon's participation in battle, we have already witnessed how Swift used Bacon's rhetorical weapon, such as the debate between the spider and the bees and the modern claim to being the true 'ancient', against the Moderns. The importance of Bacon, Swift seemed to indicate, lies not just in his philosophy but also in his rhetorical support of the modern cause. Aristotle's arrow, while capable of piercing the armour of Cartesian system, is unable to hit Bacon's cunning sophistry, a task that is better left for Swift's satirical ability. While Bacon advances 'with a furious mien', once he is disarmed by Swift, he will no longer be a threat. His survival may not be the result of Swift's leniency.

In *The Battle of the Books* the Moderns are humiliated by the casualties inflicted by the Ancients, but they are equally humiliated whenever the combatants survive. Swift describes the scene when Virgil met his English translator, Dryden. Virgil 'appeared in shining armour, completely fitted to his body', and was 'mounted on a dapple grey steed, the slowness of whose pace was an effect of the highest mettle and vigour'.<sup>33</sup> By contrast, Dryden's helmet 'was nine times too large for the head', and his horse 'old and lean, spent the dregs of his strength in a high trot, which though it made slow advances yet caused a loud clashing of his armour, terrible to hear'. Upon seeing Virgil, Dryden 'soothed up the good Ancient, called him father, and by a large

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<sup>31</sup> Gregory Lynall, *Swift and Science, the Satire, Politics and Theology of Natural Knowledge, 1690-1730* (Palgrave Macmillan: 2012), pp. 67-68.

<sup>32</sup> Laurence Berns, 'Francis Bacon and the Conquest of Nature', *Interpretations, a Journal of Political Philosophy*, 7.1 (1978), 1-26 (p. 13).

<sup>33</sup> Swift, 'The Battle of the Books', p. 16.



deduction of genealogies made it plainly appear that they were nearly related', so that he could propose 'an exchange of armour, as a lasting mark of hospitality between them'. Virgil exchanged his armour of gold with Dryden's armour of rusty iron. While Virgil clearly got the worse end of the bargain, Dryden nevertheless appears ridiculous, since 'this glittering armour became the Modern yet worse than his own'. And when the two agreed to exchange horses, 'Dryden was afraid and utterly unable to mount'.<sup>34</sup> This incident recalls a similar scene in Homer's *Iliad*, where Glaukos faces Diomedes in battle. Upon learning the ancestry of Glaukos, Diomedes exclaimed that Glaukos was 'my guest friend from far in the time of our fathers'. They two refrained from fighting each other:

They spoke, and both springing down from behind their horses  
gripped each other's hands and exchanged the promise of friendship;  
but Zeus the son of Fronos stole away the wits of Glaukos  
who exchanged with Diomedes the son of Tydeus armor  
of gold for bronze, for nine oxen's worth the worth of a hundred.<sup>35</sup>

A scene of magnanimity in Homer thus becomes a scene of pathetic flattery. The combatants were not heroes eager for glory on the beach of Troy, but a semi-divine ancient poet and a clumsy modern ape. The exchange of armour becomes a metaphor for translation, and the inability of Dryden to match the armour of Virgil and mount his horse is a clear satire on Dryden's lack of gift in bringing Virgil's epic to life and doing it justice in the English tongue.

With all the epic devices, the *Battle of the Books* is still, as its title suggests, a battle of books in a library. Curiously, the Lilliputians in *Gulliver's Travels* are measured to be no more than six inches high, and the average size of a volume was of comparable height. While the combatants were intellectual 'giants', for a human onlooker, the actual battle must appear to be miniature. Gulliver would have been amused. One wonders whether when composing this work, Swift was taking the whole controversy very seriously. In 1687, when Perrault read his *Le siècle de Louis le Grand* to the French Academy to raise the subject matter of the quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns, the reaction was lukewarm at best. Norman notes that 'a certain impression of inconsequentiality reigned for decades to come' on the whole issue.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps the

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>35</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, 6. 232-36. Translation cited from *The Iliad of Homer*, trans. by Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011).

<sup>36</sup> Norman, *The Shock of the Ancient*, p. 13.

sentiment was shared by Swift, although in his literary execution his scope went far beyond the controversy surrounding Temple and his misuse of the *Letter of Phalaris*.

The *Battle of the Books*, as Swift's early entry into the battle between the Ancients and the Moderns, shows that he was well aware of the thoughts of Bacon, Hobbes, Descartes and other Moderns, and his close engagement with their arguments, although often in a satirical manner, is evidence that he was familiar with their writings and arguments. Still, the *Battle of the Books* was an occasional work, and Swift was mostly concerned with polemics. He deftly employed ancient literary forms such as epic and fable as weapons, freely plundered the Moderns of their rhetorical arsenal and took delight in the Ancients humiliating their adversaries. Unlike Temple's *Essay upon the Ancient and Modern Learning* that offered arguments, the *Battle of Books* was a satirical *jeu d'esprit*, with humorous imagery of the imaginary death of Descartes and the ill-fitting armour of Dryden. Moving from the *Battle of the Books* to *Gulliver's Travels*, I will argue that Swift no longer unreservedly endorsed ancient learning. By re-examining and comparing the Ancients and the Moderns in *Gulliver's Travels*, he presented a more sophisticated picture and challenged his reader to consider whether the ancient learning was indeed the unqualifiedly superior choice in providing the ideal model for a society.

### **3.3 *Gulliver's Travels* and the Battle against the Modern Utopians**

The *Battle of Books* was an occasional work, but Swift's interest in the battle between the Ancients and the Moderns was by no means occasional. Moving from the *Battle of the Books* to *Gulliver's Travels* one lands in strange yet familiar territories: familiar, in that one will recognize the combatants and characters from the *Battle of Books*, and strange in that these figures are now presented differently in foreign lands instead of as books in the library. The presumptuous modern spider characterized by its 'lazy contemplation of four inches round' and 'overweening pride' in mathematics is now transformed into Laputan scientists who are obsessed with mathematics and despise anyone not proficient in this discipline, as well as the Baconian scientists experimenting on nature in the cells of the Lagado Academy. Once again we witness a dispute between Aristotle and Descartes, but this time it is between two ghosts and – as Gulliver looks on – the dispute is settled by arguments, instead of weapons. The republic of dogs is present as well, although it is now superseded by the even more vicious Yahoos, as Swift realizes that he has unfairly compared humans to dogs: at least a common hound 'hath Judgment enough

to distinguish and follow the Cry of the *ablest Dog in the Pack*, without being ever mistaken', while humans are prone to elect the most deformed as their leaders.<sup>37</sup>

Yahoos and Laputans do not live in libraries, nor do they behave like the protagonists of ancient epics and fables. In *Gulliver's Travels*, Swift replaces those ancient literary forms with a very modern one: travel literature. More importantly, by doing so, Swift employs a literary form that also characterizes More's *Utopia* and Bacon's *New Atlantis*: depiction of utopias from the first-person perspective of a traveller. Like Hythlodæus in More's *Utopia*, Gulliver brings back news of supposedly ideal commonwealths but in the process loses his common sense. Like the unnamed sailor in Bacon's *New Atlantis*, Gulliver repeatedly finds himself stranded at sea and chances upon foreign lands. Between the two, Swift shows his partiality to More by giving us the name of the protagonist and tinging the name with evident irony: we distrust Hythlodæus because he is a 'babblers of nonsense' and we similarly distrust Gulliver in case we prove to be as 'gullible' as the protagonist.

The affinity between *Gulliver's Travels* and utopian literature has not escaped scholarly attention. Chloë Houston rightly points out that *Gulliver's Travels* contains images of and interactions with ideas of utopia. According to Houston, *Gulliver's Travels* criticizes the utopia that is supposedly attainable through technology, exemplified by *New Atlantis*, and aligns with More's *Utopia* to show that the ideal society is always a no-where that cannot be realized.<sup>38</sup>

While Houston is right in emphasizing this key difference between More and Bacon, in my study, I will approach Swift's interaction with utopian texts from another perspective. Utopian literature is not a uniform whole: while More's *Utopia* largely follows Plato's *Republic* and enquires into the problem of morals and justice, Bacon's *New Atlantis*, with its modern turn and emphasis on science and technology, departs from the classical model. *Gulliver's Travels* combines the form of travel literature that often characterizes utopian literature, with the same concern for divisions between the Ancients and the Moderns that first appeared in the *Battle of Books*. In doing so, it encapsulates the schism within utopian literature which is caused by the scientific approach to ideal societies. *Gulliver's Travels* is a reflection on both the modern approach to utopia and its classical counterpart. In the following section I will analyse how Swift exposes the deficiencies of the modern approach, and how he simultaneously praises the classical model while tacitly pointing out its weaknesses too. In doing so, Swift makes a unique

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<sup>37</sup> Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. by Claude Rawson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 244.

<sup>38</sup> Houston, 'Utopia, Dystopia or Anti-utopia? Gulliver's Travels and the Utopian Mode of Discourse', p. 427

contribution to the question of justice, as he shows that the problem of theory and practice must be reconsidered in the context of the modern intellectual revolution.

To be precise, the ‘utopian’ section of *Gulliver’s Travels* is present in the latter half of the book, namely Book Three and Book Four. In Book One and Book Two Gulliver encounters human beings in different sizes, yet their society and state are not ‘no-place’. Book One mirrors England during Swift’s time: the high-heel and low-heel factions are mere ‘code-names’ for the high church and low church factions. In Book Two, the land of the Brobdingnagians has a mixed regime that is not far from the ancient republican regime to be found in ‘Italy, Greece, and Sicily, as well as the great ones of Carthage and Rome’, which Swift discusses in his earlier work *A Discourse on the Contests and Dissentions between the Nobles and the Commons in Athens and Rome* (1701). The ancient republics are characterized by a three-fold division in power: ‘someone with eminent spirit’, a ‘Senate of Nobles’ and the ‘mass or body of the people’. Brobdingnag, similarly, balances the nobles’ desire for ‘power’, the people’s desire for ‘liberty’ and the king’s desire for ‘dominion’ with a good set of laws.<sup>39</sup>

While in the first two books Gulliver is firmly on the ground (if we discount that he has been carried around in a box by his nurse in Brobdingnag), in Book Three he finds himself on an island floating in the air. The location of the island and its distance from earth, the home of all kingdoms and republics, is the first sign that we are departing from the something close to the ‘real’ into the completely imaginary. Swift also describes the flying island as an ‘opaque body’, a term that is associated with the moon during Swift’s time.<sup>40</sup> As such, the flying island is not just a political body but also a heavenly body. David Womersley sees an allusion to Lucian’s *True History* where the moon is described as an island. The mention of the moon is also a possible reference to Daniel Defoe’s *Consolidator: Or, Memoirs of Sundry Transactions from the World in the Moon. Translated from the Lunar Language, by the Author of The True-born English Man* (1705), a work that satirizes political affairs using the ‘voyage-to-the-moon genre’ but also participates in the battle between the Ancients and the Moderns. In that work, modern knowledge of mathematics is brought to China by the Lunar residents, which explains the reason for the prosperity of learning of that ancient empire. Defoe thus uses a roundabout approach to present the superiority of the Moderns over the Ancients.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Jonathan Swift, ‘A Discourse of the Contest and Dissentions between the Nobles and the Commons in Athens and Rome, with the Consequences They Had upon Both Those States’, in *Major Works*, pp. 24-56 (pp.24-25). Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*, p. 127.

<sup>40</sup> Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle, *The Theory or System of Several New Inhabited Worlds*, trans. by Alpha Bern, (1718), p. 31.

<sup>41</sup> Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*, p. 144, note. Narelle L. Shaw, ‘Ancients and Moderns in Defoe’s Consolidator’, *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 28.3 (1988), 391-400 (p. 398).

Yet these satirical works do not exhaust the interpretative possibilities of the ‘flying island’, or the city in the sky. In Plato’s *Republic*, Socrates tells the interlocutor that the ideal city that he has laid out cannot really be achieved, but can only be found as a pattern in the heavens. Similarly, Augustine sees a dichotomy between the earthly city that begins with Cain and the heavenly city of God. The flying island, both as the seat of political power and a heavenly body, echoes those imaginary commonwealths.

The association of the flying island with a heavenly body carries a connotation of a city in the heavens, but Swift quickly qualifies this dignified connotation. According to Gulliver, the flying island can only rise above the ‘Region of Clouds and Vapours’, which is the ‘airy’ region instead of the heavenly spheres.<sup>42</sup> The word ‘airy’ is frequently associated with empty speculations in Temple’s and Swift’s vocabulary. According to Temple,

What has been produced for the Use, Benefit, or Pleasure of Mankind, by all the airy Speculations of those, who have passed for the great Advancers of Knowledge and Learning these last fifty Years, (which is the Date of our Modern Pretenders) I confess I am yet to seek, and should be very glad to find.<sup>43</sup>

Similarly, the modern hack in Swift’s *Tale of a Tub* talks about the ‘philosopher’s way’ of ‘erecting certain *edifices in the air*’, and comments that those systems do not last due to the ‘inclemencies of air’. Of those ‘edifices’, one is the product of Socrates who ‘was suspended in a basket to help contemplation’, an allusion to Aristophanes’s famous criticism of natural philosophers in his *Clouds*.<sup>44</sup> The Laputa island, also floating in mid-air, will soon reveal itself to be an oversized basket housing a multitude of philosophers. Swift thus juxtaposes a Platonic image of a heavenly city and a dubious, ‘airy’ philosophy, ripe for the ironic treatment of a modern Aristophanes.

If the literary conceit of philosophers floating in mid-air is ancient, the occupants of the ‘basket’ are thoroughly modern. In Laputa, Gulliver finds a group of people entirely caught up in the abstract thought of mathematics and music:

Imagination, Fancy and Invention, they are wholly Strangers to, nor have any Words in

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<sup>42</sup> Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*, p. 154.

<sup>43</sup> Temple, *Works*, ed. by Jonathan Swift, 2 vols (London, 1720), I, p. 301.

<sup>44</sup> Swift, ‘A Tale of a Tub’, in *Major Works*, pp. 62-164 (pp. 86-87).

their Language by which those Ideas can be expressed; the whole Compass of their Thoughts and mind, being shut up within the two forementioned Sciences [mathematics and music].

As a result, those people are exceedingly awkward in any other aspect of life that requires knowledge other than numbers and lines. Swift exposes this awkwardness through a description of their houses: most of them are strangely built, ‘without one right Angle in any Apartment’ (p. 234). The speculative scholars, per se, are but a comical presence of little harm. Yet Laputa is the capital where all political decisions are made, and the speculative scholars are the ones in power who can shape the world around them, including the land of Lagado over which their island floats. Moreover, the residents of Lagado see Laputa as a ‘heavenly pattern’, the ideal city, from where they can acquire true knowledge on how to improve society. After they return from a visit from Laputa, they form their own academies in order to utilize what they have learned from Laputa to transform their society and become projectors.

The new political status of the speculative scientists reshapes Swift’s criticism towards them. The Laputan’s obsession with mathematics shows that Swift is still targeting the Cartesian scientist and the Cartesian system that bases all natural sciences on mathematics, but in *Gulliver’s Travels* Swift adds another dimension to his criticism on Descartes, namely, his theory of body and soul, and its political implications. Gulliver observes that the Laputans are always accompanied by flappers, who flap the Laputans so that they will cease their contemplation and return to normal activities:

It seems, the Minds of these People are so taken up with intense Speculations, that they neither can speak, nor attend to the Discourses of others, without being roused by some external Taction upon the Organs of Speech and Hearing.

This description not only paints a picture of scientists who are deeply lost in their contemplations, but also in a mind that seems to be detached from the body, losing control of it, until the body itself is set into motion by an ‘external Taction’. The word ‘taction’ can be found in the *Philosophical Transaction* of the Royal Society, in which it is used to describe the interaction between circles.<sup>45</sup> The flapping of the Laputans seems to be an action on an inanimate

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<sup>45</sup> Royal Society, *Philosophical Transactions, Giving some Account of the Present Undertakings, Studies and Labours of the Ingenious in Many Considerable Parts of the World*, Vol. 3 (1668), p. 680.

mathematical object. As Richard Kennington points out, prior to Descartes, the soul is understood as both responsible for motion as well as for thinking, and Descartes is the first to divorce the function of motion from the soul.<sup>46</sup> The body, according to Descartes, can move on its own like a machine.<sup>47</sup> The Cartesian soul, like that of the Laputans, is solely devoted to thinking. When Gulliver hears that the Laputans, lost in contemplation, are in constant danger of ‘falling down every Precipice’, Swift is not just drawing on the famous anecdote of Thales falling over while lost in thought, but he is also showing the body-machine at work without the direction of the soul.<sup>48</sup> Yet if the soul is a purely contemplative faculty, and the body just a machine, how can the combination of the two produce a range of emotions and passions? This lacuna in Cartesian system is also the lacuna of the Laputans’ way of thinking, as they are utterly incapable of understanding notions such as ‘imagination, fancy and invention’.

Aristotle argue that those who lack understanding of human passion are unfit to participate in discussion in politics.<sup>49</sup> Yet the lack of human emotions or an understanding of them does not stop the Laputans debating politics passionately. They are, Guilliver tells us, ‘perpetually enquiring into publick Affairs, giving their Judgments in Matters of State’.<sup>50</sup> They do so because they believe political knowledge is the same as knowledge in mathematics: ‘the management of the world’ is the same as ‘rotating a globe’. Laputa scientists have a tendency to rely on ‘judicial Astrology’, or divination by stars, in their political practice. Their ignorance of the importance of human factors, the diverse passions and emotions, in political matters naturally leads them to believe that the human world is governed by influence from without, or from the natural world. Thus they seek assistance from celestial phenomena that can at least be grasped by mathematics but ultimately become undistinguishable from being superstitious.

The incompetence of the Laputans in politics leads to general moral corruption on the island. Gulliver observes that daughters and wives in Laputa ‘contemn their Husbands, and are exceedingly fond of Strangers’, and the mistress and lover act with the greatest familiarity. A noblewoman escapes from her husband on the island and is found with a ‘deformed Footman’, and although her base lover beats her everyday, she is taken from him ‘much against her Will’.<sup>51</sup> While it is tempting to use these passages as evidence only to show that Swift is a misogynist, we

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<sup>46</sup> Richard Kennington, ‘The “Teaching of Nature” in Descartes’s Soul Doctrine’, in *On Modern Origins*, ed. by Pamela Kraus and Frank Hunt (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004), pp. 161-86 (pp. 161-62).

<sup>47</sup> Rene Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, article 5.

<sup>48</sup> Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*, p. 146.

<sup>49</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1095a2-5.

<sup>50</sup> Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*, p. 150.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 152-3.

must also note the relation between wife and husband and the management of household were a staple topic in classical literature that symbolizes the general health of political societies.<sup>52</sup> The behaviour of the women in Laputa, the unregulated love affairs, and the unhealthy relation within families are all signs of the general moral anarchy that prevails because Cartesian science and mathematics have dominated the minds of the Laputans. The degenerate state of Laputa undermines the claim that an ideal state can be founded on natural science.

Swift would not have devoted a large section on the Laputans if they were merely fictional, and Book Three of *Gulliver's Travels* does look askance at real events that shows how the Cartesian preoccupation with mathematics and speculative philosophy damages the ability to make sound political judgment. A specific Laputan, namely, Isaac Newton, almost caused significant damage to Ireland in the infamous Wood's halfpence affair. William Wood was granted the right to mint coins for Ireland from 1722 to 1724, and Swift, among others, was suspicious of the quality of the coins. Newton was the Master of the Mint and he confirmed that the coins were of good quality. Yet in his *Drapier's Letters* (1724-25) Swift raised doubts about the competence of Newton as the Master of the Mint, for Newton's conclusion was based on the examination of the coins Wood had sent him. Being the face of the Royal Society, Newton is the natural target for Swift. While the English may deny the connection between Newton and Laputa, that is, Cartesian science, and were outraged when Fontenelle mentioned Descartes and Newton in one breath, Newton himself showed his profound respect for Descartes when he named his *magnum opus*, *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, after Descartes' *Principia Philosophiae*.<sup>53</sup> This, coupled with his blunder in an economic affair of grave importance, as well as anecdotes of his ineptitude in everyday life such as forgetting to dine due to contemplation, supplies Swift with ample ground to group him with the Laputans and crucify both them and him with his satire.<sup>54</sup>

The Cartesian Laputans receive mockery in *Gulliver's Travels*, which is largely in line with Swift's treatment of the modern spider and Descartes in his *Battle of the Books*. Descartes, after all, is among the casualties during the battle between the Ancients and the Moderns. Yet Swift's criticism against modern science is not, as in the *Battle of the Books*, restricted to the discipline of mathematics. Here we also witness Swift's most vehement attack on experimental

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<sup>52</sup> See, for example, Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, 3.4.12, 4.2.11. Plato, *I Alcibiades*, 114b-d.

<sup>53</sup> Regarding the Fontenelle episode, see Voltaire, *Philosophical Letters*, ed. by John Leign (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), p. 38. On the connection between Newton and Descartes, see Andrew Janiak, 'Newton and Descartes: Theology and Natural Philosophy', *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 50.3 (2012), 414-435, (p.415).

<sup>54</sup> According to Lynall, Swift probably heard stories about Newton's daily life from Catherine Barton, who lived with Newton in Jernyn Street until his death. See Lynall, pp. 93-94.



science, as is described during Gulliver's visit to the Lagado Academy. It is important to note that although Gulliver describes tens of projects in the Academy, there is no mention of mathematics. It is a general consensus among scholars that the Lagado Academy is mainly a parody of the Royal Society.<sup>55</sup> Thomas Sprat praised Bacon in his *History of the Royal Society in London, for the Improving of Natural Knowledge* (1667) and emphasized that the society takes direct inspiration from Baconian philosophy. And around the time Swift published *Gulliver's Travels*, Voltaire could confidently claim that Bacon is the 'father of experimental philosophy', whose philosophical work provides 'the scaffolding on which the new philosophy was built'.<sup>56</sup> The attack on the Royal Society is inseparable from an attack on its 'spiritual father'. This is surprising given that Bacon is among the few survivors in the *Battle of Books*, and his experimental science seems to be more akin to the bee rather than the spider. It is necessary, then, to look at two experiments in Lagado Academy to understand the reasons behind Swift's attack on Baconian science.

The first project Gulliver witnesses concerns an attempt to distil sunlight from cucumbers and capture it in hermetically sealed vials to warm the garden of the governor. According to Marjorie Nicolson, Swift's description is partly based on an actual experiment by Stephen Hales: while the experiment was published in *Vegetable Staticks* in 1727, Hales made many reports to the Royal Society in the years prior to the publication.<sup>57</sup> Hales describes how the sunbeam strikes the moisture in the ground, exciting it to penetrate the roots of the vegetable before it 'mounts with great rapidity in the free air'.<sup>58</sup> Swift may be borrowing from Hales' experiment or a similar one, but he reverses the process to create a project devoid of any practical value. The absurdity is on two levels: the idea of reversal that assumes that sunlight can be retrieved after it has entered the cucumbers, and the unnecessary complication of a simple process – if sunlight can indeed be caught, why not catch it from the sun directly instead of going to all the trouble of extracting it from cucumbers?

In the description of the second project, Swift presents a less offensive character but a more offensive project. Here, Swift's way of writing differs from the description of the first

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<sup>55</sup> See, for example, Dolores J. Palomom 'The Dutch Connection: The University of Leiden and Swift's Academy of Lagado', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 41.1 (1997), 27-35 (p. 27). Douglas Lane Patey, 'Swift's Satire on "Science" and the Structure of *Gulliver's Travels*', *ELH* 58.4 (1991), 809-39 (p. 811) Lynall, *Swift and Science: The Satire, Politics and Theology of Natural Knowledge, 1690-1730*, p. 38;

<sup>56</sup> Voltaire, *Philosophical Letters*, ed. by John Leign (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), p. 38. The English version was published in 1733.

<sup>57</sup> Stephen Hales, *Vegetable Staticks* (London: W. and J. Innys, 1727), pp. 63-66. Matjorie Nicolson, *Science and Imagination* (Ithaca: Great Seal Books, 1956), pp. 146-48.

<sup>58</sup> Hales, *Vegetable Staticks*, p. 67.

project. Instead of revealing the content of the project immediately, Swift gives the readers an overwhelming sensory image: ‘a horrible Stink’ and a student whose hands and clothes are ‘dawbed over with Filth’.<sup>59</sup> This delay in revealing the content of the second room intimates Gulliver’s reluctance to examine the revolting room carefully. It is near the very end of the paragraph that Gulliver finally realizes the content of the project: reconstituting the original food out of human excrement. Yet when the readers and Gulliver are supposed to be at the peak of their disgust, the language takes a drastic turn. Swift lets the projector describe to Gulliver the delicate process of reverting ordure, which involves ‘separating the several Parts, removing the Tincture which it receives from the Gall, making the Odour exhale, and scumming off the Saliva’.<sup>60</sup> The sharp contrast between the objective scientific language and the revolting project exposes the apparent insanity behind the immaculate method, and the irrationality of scientific reason.

Both the experiments in the Lagado Academy show that experimental science, rather than bringing one closer to nature and away from empty contemplation, shares with mathematical science the tendency to undermine common sense. This feature of Swift’s criticism of Bacon has received relatively little scholarly attention.<sup>61</sup> An exception is Kristin M. Girten’s nuanced interpretation of Baconian scientific principles. According to Girten, Bacon’s aspiration is to create ‘a boundary between the self and its objects of study’, to ensure scientific undertaking will not be distorted by the defect of the mind and become anthropomorphic.<sup>62</sup> She notes that the new philosophical systems of Bacon’s followers, such as Locke’s empiricism proposed in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, emphasize touch, instead of sight, as the ‘most comprehensive’ and ‘instructive of our senses’.<sup>63</sup> However, the grotesque image of a human covered in faeces, and the thought of being in ‘touch’ with excrement, does not aid reason and the shock of the experiment has the tendency to ‘scatter reason and swallow up certainty’. Swift is trying to denounce touch and reinstitute sight as the sense perception *par excellence* to ensure a separation of the object of study and the scientist himself, which is ‘along the lines that Bacon had suggested’.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*, p. 167.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>61</sup> D Patey follows the traditional criticism on Lagado and says that Swift is merely criticizing experiments that bear no practical value. See Patey, ‘Swift’s Satire on “Science” and the Structure of *Gulliver’s Travels*’, p. 817. John Shanahan argues that Swift approves of Bacon’s effort to bring down Scholastic systems, but parts company with Bacon who tries to set up his own system. “‘in the mean time’: Jonathan Swift, Francis Bacon, and Georgic Struggle’, in *Swift as Priest and Satirist*, ed. by Todd C. Parker (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2009), pp. 193-214 (pp. 206-8). Neither emphasizes the experimental science. Lynall, by contrast, thinks Swift is sympathetic to Baconian science, but it is hard to see how this conforms with the image of Lagado Academy.

<sup>62</sup> Kristin M. Girten, ‘Mingling with Matter: Tactile Microscopy and the Philosophic Mind in Brobdingnag and Beyond’, *The Eighteenth Century*, 54.4 (2013), 497-520 (p. 501).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 511

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 512-14

I believe that Girten's emphasis on sight points us in the right direction to understanding Swift's criticism of Bacon, yet to fully appreciate Swift's intention it is necessary to understand what is the significance of 'sight' in Baconian philosophy. According to Bacon, sight, as the traditionally most valued sense perception, plays a key role in the genesis of Aristotelian formal cause.<sup>65</sup> It is through looking that human beings grasp the shape of things and proceed to group things into species. Bacon considers this natural way of perception simplistic and formal cause to be a result of vulgar philosophy. He wants to dismantle formal cause in his natural philosophy and substitute it with natural law, which does not seek to answer what a thing is, but aims to reproduce an effect. However, natural law is not discovered when nature 'is free and unfolding in her own ordinary course', that is, not interfered with by human activities, but only when 'constrained by human art and agency', or the 'mechanical and the experimental art'.<sup>66</sup> In Bacon's natural philosophy, one does not look at nature, but rather at experiments. The dichotomy is not between sight and touch, as Girten suggests, but between vulgar philosophy of formal cause based on sight and the Baconian natural law based on experiment, between nature which 'is free and unfolding in her own ordinary course' and nature 'constrained by human art and agency'.

It is within this context that I believe one can see Swift's deeper criticism of Baconian philosophy and its effect on the projectors. The laboratories, or 'cells' in *Gulliver's Travels*, which the projectors inhabit not only isolate them from the outside world, but also isolate nature: they are not where nature runs her ordinary course but where nature is restrained. The projectors that Gulliver encounters have lost their common sense because they are preoccupied with experiments. As a result, rather than look for the natural way to obtain food and light, that is, through the cultivation of crops and the burning of fuels, the projectors seek to artificially contrive a way to revert the process of digestion and the growth of plant. The second criticism Swift levels against the Baconian philosophy is his attempt to do away with Aristotelian formal cause, which is closer to common sense than the natural law derived from experiments. Contrary to the shock that 'shatters reason' which Girten identifies as a weakness of Baconian science, the projector shows a stoic attitude towards human excretion and the prospect of extracting food from it, and the reason he can do this is precisely because he is solely fixated on the latent

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<sup>65</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 980a21-25. *The Works of Francis Bacon*, V, pp. 466-7: 'Forms seem to exist more than either matter or action; because the former is hidden, the latter variable; the former does not strike so strongly, the latter does not rest so constantly. These images [images of things existing as species and having forms] on the other hand are thought to be both manifest and constant; so that the first and common matter seems to be as an accessory and support; and action, of whatever kind, to be merely an emanation from the form; and altogether the first place is assigned to form'.

<sup>66</sup> Francis Bacon, *Outline of a Natural and Experimental History*, Aphorism 1.

process through which excretion turns into food. The fixation on this latent process, instead of seeing food and excretion as two distinctively different things, underlies the indifference of the Baconian scientists. If Aristotelian philosophy is vulgar, the Baconian alternative, Swift intimates, is mad.

In addition to the philosophical criticism of Baconian natural science, the Lagado episode also contains a social-political criticism. The goal of the first projector, who tries to extract light from cucumbers, is to ‘supply the Governor’s Gardens with Sun-shine at a reasonable Rate’.<sup>67</sup> The likely intention of the projector is to use this invention to find favour with the governor. Full of vanity, he expects appreciation and asks Gulliver to offer a present to show support for his ‘ingenuity’, all the while overlooking his selfishness in seeking donation only to further his personal advancement. This experiment becomes more despicable given that Lagado has been suffering from shortage of food: the farmland hardly yields ‘one Ear of Corn, or Blade of Grass’, and people’s countenance express ‘so much Misery and Want’.<sup>68</sup> The projector’s wasteful use of cucumbers does not create famine but adds to it. The cause of the famine is due to the eagerness of projectors to apply what they witness on Laputa to Lagado:

That these Persons upon their Return [from Laputa], began to dislike the Management of every Thing below; and fell into Schemes of putting all Arts, Sciences, Languages, and Mechanicks upon a new Foot. To this End they procured a Royal Patent for erecting an Academy of PROJECTORS in *Lagado*: and the Humour prevailed so strongly among the People, that there is not a Town of any Consequence in the Kingdom without such an Academy.<sup>69</sup>

The projectors are ‘driven equally on by Hope and Despair’. Their hope is that with new science, ‘one Man shall do the Work of Ten; a Palace may be built in a Week. [...] All the Fruits of the Earth shall come to Maturity at whatever Season we think fit to chuse.’ The utopian, unrealistic expectations of the new science do not originate from the people on the ground, but from the airy Laputa, and this poetical image corresponds to the historical fact that both Bacon and Descartes promised the new science will bring about material affluence. They are not just contemplative philosophers creating their own systems, but actively promote their system with the promise of

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<sup>67</sup> Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*, p. 167.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

utopia, and this, in turn has profound social-political consequences. The Lagado governor has not participated in the modern frenzy of projectors; his mansion is built 'according to the best Rules of ancient Architecture [...] with exact Judgment and Taste', and the countryside under his management has the most 'delightful Prospect' that Gulliver has witnessed. By contrast, Lagado, infested by the spirit of projectors, is filled with houses 'ill contrived' and 'ruinous' and people 'whose Countenances and Habit expressed so much Misery and Want'.<sup>70</sup> What Swift finds troubling regarding the new natural science, in addition to what appears to him as fallacies, is a unique tendency to proselytize and revolutionize society. Contrary to Bacon and Descartes' suggestion that those revolutions are spurred by charity, the true motivation can often be alloyed with unsavoury human passions, as attested by the greedy projector who aims at personal promotion.

In addition to the corrosive effect on morality, common sense and economic activities in society in general, Swift deepens his criticism of the utopian promise of new science by contrasting this hope with the fear created by the discoveries made during the advancement of learning. Gulliver observes that in Laputa, the scientists

Are under continual Disquietudes, never enjoying a Minute's peace of Mind. [...] Their Apprehensions arise from several Changes they dread in the Celestial Bodies. For Instance; that the Earth by the continual Approaches of the Sun towards it, must in Course of Time be absorbed or swallowed up. That the Face of the Sun will by Degrees be encrusted with its own Effluvia, and give no more Light to the World. That, the Earth very narrowly escaped a Brush from the Tail off the last Comet, which would have infallibly reduced it to Ashes.<sup>71</sup>

The paranoia of the scientists, put under the magnifying glass of Swift, is absurd and ridiculous. Yet behind this absurdity Swift paints a change in the intellectual climate: new natural science systems increasingly reveal the vastness of the cosmos and this, in turn, puts humanity far away from its centre. This centrifugal movement creates a sense of disorientation and insecurity. Since humanity is only a small part of the universe, it does not necessarily enjoy a privileged position; it is perfectly possible that the cosmos is entirely indifferent to humanity. This is illustrated in Fontenelle's *Conversations on the Plurality of the Worlds* (*Entretiens sur la pluralité des*

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 163.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

*mondes*), published in 1686, which Swift kept in his library and which sparked Temple to engage in the Ancient-Modern controversy. The work is a dialogue between a marquise and a propagator of the Cartesian theory of worlds as vortex with a fixed star like the sun as the centre.<sup>72</sup> When this student of Descartes explains the idea that each fixed star in the heavens is a world of its own, the marquis gives the following reply, which captures the reaction to the new science:

Here's a universe so large that I'm lost, I no longer know here I am, I'm nothing. What, is everything to be divided into vortices, thrown together in confusion? [...] All this immense space which holds our Sun and our planets will be merely a small piece of the universe? As many spaces as there are fixed stars? This confounds me – troubles me – terrifies me.<sup>73</sup>

Worse still, the marquise is to learn that suns will die and no longer give light, because the sun spots 'can thicken, join together, and adhere to one another' and finally form an 'ever-growing crust about the Sun', a case very similar to the second fear of Laputa scientists about the surface of sun covered by its own effluvia, and at this point the marquise begs mercy and does not want to hear more about the end of the world.<sup>74</sup> Scientific discovery does not simply bring about gospels for the welfare of human beings; it also brings disturbing insight into the relation between man and cosmos. The Laputan scientists are paralyzed by fear while the Lagado projectors are motivated by hope, but the only reason they are hopeful is that they are shut in their cells and absorbed by their own projects. The paradox of new science is that it promises progress and promotes hope but, at the same time, unveils a vast, indifferent and mortal cosmos that dwarfs any human endeavour to create a utopia and ultimately invalidates the principle of hope.

It is perhaps tempting to conclude from Gulliver's narration of the Laputan Scientists and the Lagado projectors that modern science is a failure and a fruitless effort and its utopia a false promise. The poverty of Lagado, the ill-constructed architecture on the flying island, and the moral anarchy of Laputa all seem to speak volumes against Baconian and Cartesian science. However, this impression receives a correction near the end of Book Three, where, at Gulliver's request, the governor of Glubbudubdrib summons the ghost of Aristotle to debate with the leaders

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<sup>72</sup> William LeFanu, *A Catalogue of Books Belonging to Dr Jonathan Swift*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Bibliographical Society, 1988), p. 18. Swift's copy is the fourth edition, published in Paris in 1698.

<sup>73</sup> Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle, *Conversations on the Plurality of the Worlds*, trans. by H. A. Hargreaves (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) p. 63.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

of modern learning. Instead of a picture of outright animosity, as is given in Swift's earlier work, *The Battle of the Books*, where Aristotle fires an arrow that pierces the skull of Descartes, the outcome of this battle of wits is much more ambivalent.

The passage in question can be found in the beginning of Book Three, Chapter Eight. The title of this chapter is 'Ancient and Modern History Corrected'. In this chapter, Gulliver recounts his meetings with ghosts both ancient and modern so that they can relate to him truthfully what has transpired in history. A crucial part of ancient history that needs to be corrected after this encounter is the image of Aristotle who has been tainted by his scholastic commentators. The commentaries, Gulliver learns, have distorted the image of Aristotle into a contentious philosopher. Modern philosophers such as Bacon freely take advantage of this misconception, and slander Aristotle as a philosopher who would destroy all philosophical systems so that his own may stand supreme, just like an 'Ottoman Turk' who would murder all his brothers in order to seize the throne.<sup>75</sup> Yet Swift does more than just isolate Aristotle from his commentators. Gulliver further asks the governor to summon Descartes and Gassendi to discuss natural philosophy with Aristotle. Rescuing Aristotle from his commentators is not Swift's sole purpose, but by doing so, Swift prepares for a true encounter between classical and modern natural philosophy, unobstructed by the cumbersome commentaries and the prejudices they create, an encounter Swift describes in the following manner:

This great philosopher freely acknowledged his own Mistakes in Natural Philosophy, because he proceeded in many things upon Conjecture, as all Men must do; and he found, that *Gassendi*, who had made the Doctrine of *Epicurus* as palatable as he could, and the *Vortices* of *Descrates*, were equally exploded. He predicated the same fate to *Attraction*, where of the present Learned are such zealous Asserters. He said that new Systems of Nature were but new Fashions, which would vary in every age.<sup>76</sup>

Aristotle's conversation with Descartes and Gassendi is noteworthy as Aristotle is much more civil towards the modern philosophers than his commentators, such as Dun Scotus whom Swift's Aristotle calls a 'Dunce'. He even acknowledges that some of their discoveries prove him wrong. To some extent, Descartes and Gassendi are his equals.

Descartes and Gassendi are equals of Aristotle because, according to Swift's Aristotle,

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<sup>75</sup> Bacon, *Novum Organum*, 1. 67.

<sup>76</sup> Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, pp. 184-5.

‘new Systems of nature’ are but ‘new Fashions’. By comparing natural philosophy to fashion, Swift’s Aristotle is silently denying the notion of ‘progress’, which the camp of the ‘modern’ relished so much. Fontenelle, in his *New Dialogues Between the Dead* (1683), a source which Swift possibly responds to with his own ‘dialogue’ between Aristotle and Descartes, repeatedly emphasizes the superiority of the modern in terms of their scientific achievement: in the imaginary dialogues, Apicius says that Galileo makes Rome seem ‘ignorant’ (*mon Siecle estoit ignorant*), and Erasistratus concedes to Harvey that ‘the moderns are better physicians than us and know nature better’ (*les Modernes sont meilleurs Phisiciens que nous, ils connoissent mieux la Nature*).<sup>77</sup> For Swift’s Aristotle, however, the reason why natural philosophy is like fashion is that natural philosophers have to ‘proceed in many things upon Conjecture, as all Men must do’. By this very admission, Swift’s Aristotle concedes that classical natural philosophy is not necessarily higher than the modern, but instead suggests that they are on equal footing.

Any criticism of Descartes and Gassendi in this passage is further qualified if we consider that unlike the scientists in Laputa, Descartes and Gassendi are not fearful of the conclusion of their philosophy but calmly accept it. Indeed, Swift’s Aristotle says that Gassendi makes the doctrine of Epicurus, a theory that flaunts the mortality of the world, palatable. Modern science does not necessarily result in fear, and there are great minds who can contemplate the fate of the universe with calmness, as the ghosts of both Descartes and Gassendi appear to do. Of course, having read Lucretius’ *De Rerum Natura*, Swift must have known that the first example of such brave philosophers is Epicurus himself.<sup>78</sup> What is to blame is not the new natural science and its discovery, which resembles the Epicurean system, but the fact that this new science has become popular and vulgarized when they are actively propagated by writers such as Fontenelle, whose *Conversations on the Plurality of the Worlds* distresses the fictional listener in the same way as the Laputan scientists are distressed by their discovery.

To conclude, the third book of *Gulliver’s Travels* does not aim at mocking specific philosophical doctrines of modern philosophers such as Descartes and Bacon. Instead, it targets the political consequences of their teaching. This book thus warns its reader against the danger of setting up any utopia based on new natural science as the ideal commonwealth: the Laputan’s Cartesian obsession with pure contemplation and ignorance of politics is detrimental to the morals of a commonwealth, and Baconian experimental science in Lagado impairs good common

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<sup>77</sup> Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle, *Nouveaux Dialogues des Morts*, ed. by Jean Dagen (Paris: Librairie Marcel Didier, 1971), pp. 187, 207.

<sup>78</sup> Swift has a copy of *De Rerum Natura* in his library and is said to have read the philosophical poem three times in 1697. See Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*, ed. by David Womersley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 4, note 4.



sense. Beyond the influence of science on thinking in general, Swift also denounces the ‘airy’ hope of utopia that Bacon and Descartes encourage with their philosophical system. In doing so, Swift significantly alters his initial criticism of the Moderns in his *Battle of Books*. His disagreements with the Moderns are political but not theoretical – Swift now settles the score with the modern scientists in the political-utopian travel literature instead of in the regal library. The moderate conversation between Descartes and Aristotle in Glubbdubdrib contrasts sharply with the biting satire on the Laputans as well as the brutal killing of Descartes during the battle between the Ancients and the Moderns. It is the tacit acknowledgement of the Moderns’s theoretical achievement, even though the practical realization of it is manifestly lacking, that forms a key reservation of Swift regarding the possibility of returning to a moral utopia based on the example of the Ancients in Book Four of *Gulliver’s Travels*.

### 3.4 Yahoos, Houyhnhnms, and the Problematic Ideal of Socratic Utopia

Book Four of *Gulliver’s Travels* narrates a utopia that is radically different from the flying island of Laputa. While Laputa is afloat due to the airy modern natural science, Houyhnhnmland is populated by rational horses who are always in conversation about what is virtue and the good life. The human being that most resembles the Houyhnhnms is Socrates, and Gulliver mentions him to the Houyhnhnms as the ‘highest Honour’ he can do to the ‘Prince of Philosophers’<sup>79</sup>. It is absurdly fitting that this utopia is populated by equine citizens, for Socrates himself can be said to have learned one of his most important lessons from viewing a horse, which prompts him to turn to investigate human good. According to Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus*, upon seeing the horse of Nicias, Socrates asked the groom whether the horse had any wealth, and when the groom, surprised, replied with a negative, Socrates understood that ‘it is lawfully permissible for a poor horse to become good if it has a soul by nature good’. Upon hearing this, Socrates sought to learn from Ischomachus, a virtuous gentleman, how ‘to become a good man’.<sup>80</sup> Prior to becoming interested in human things, Socrates was depicted by Aristophanes as a natural philosopher. Thanks to Nicias’s horse, as it were, Socrates manages what Cicero called his great work, to ‘bring down philosophy from the heavens and compel it to investigate human good’.<sup>81</sup> In Book

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<sup>79</sup> Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*, p. 249.

<sup>80</sup> Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, 11. 3 (translation by Carnes Lord). ‘Oeconomy’ is one of the topics of Houyhnhnm’s conversation.

<sup>81</sup> Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 5. 10.

Four of *Gulliver's Travels* Swift once again invokes the horses to bring down the airy Laputan natural philosophy and turns his story towards the investigation of virtue.

The utopia populated by Houyhnhnms offers a two-fold satire of the modern utopian project depicted in Book Three of *Gulliver's Travels* from the perspective of the classical ideal of Socrates. First and foremost, the Houyhnhnm's interest in 'Friendship and Benevolence', 'Order and Oeconomy', 'Bounds and Limits of Virtue' and the 'unerring Rules of Reason' contrasts with the Laputan obsession with mathematics and speculative natural science.<sup>82</sup> The second criticism of the modern utopian project is reflected in Swift's attempt to restore the function of the classical ideal society, like the Platonic commonwealth in *Republic*, which focuses on the education of the select individual rather than transforming society: the former function is entirely missing in the studies in Laputa, and the latter function is shown to lead to disastrous consequences in Swift's ironic depiction of the poverty of Lagado. The philosophical life, or the life according to reason, is overlooked and misrepresented by the Cartesian scientists fixated on innate ideas and Baconian scientists shut in their cells. Houyhnhnmland is Swift's attempt to resurrect the Socratic philosophical life. This resurrection of Socratic ideal, however, is ultimately tentative, for the most ardent praise of Houyhnhnms is delivered from the perspective of a gullible protagonist.

Sir Walter Scott is perhaps the first to note this peculiarity of Houyhnhnmland and to distinguish it from 'such ideal communities as the republic of Plato, and the Utopia of Sir Thomas More'. He considers that, unlike the other two, Houyhnhnmland is 'morally and physically impossible'.<sup>83</sup> Gulliver concedes as much, for he merely exhorts the Yahoo nations to imitate Brobdingnag, which is the 'least corrupted', and whose 'wise Maxims in Morality and Government, it would be our Happiness to observe'.<sup>84</sup> Not all can live according to the dictates of reason like the Houyhnhnms and it is not reasonable to expect that. Swift himself had noted that 'trifles, fopperies, and only imaginary goods' can be an 'incitement to virtue', and that in most human beings 'the motives of the best actions will not bear too strict an inquiry'.<sup>85</sup> Nonetheless, Gulliver promises to '[celebrate] the Praises of the renowned Houyhnhnms, and propos[e] their Virtues to the Imitation of Mankind'.<sup>86</sup> The two levels of imitation, namely, the imitation of the government and moral maxim of Brobdingnag, and the imitation of Houyhnhnms as life

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<sup>82</sup> Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, p. 259.

<sup>83</sup> *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift, D.D., Dean of St. Patrick's Dublin*, ed. by Walter Scott, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, 12 Vols (Edinburgh: A. Constable, 1824), XI, p. 12.

<sup>84</sup> Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, p. 273.

<sup>85</sup> Swift, *Prose Works*, I, p. 144. Swift further remarks that it is not a sign of the wise to simply dismiss those motives, for one will lose some natural ally to virtues.

<sup>86</sup> Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, p. 262.

according to reason *par excellence*, means that Houyhnhmland points to an ideal that transcends social reforms but remains possible for individuals who can be attracted to the life of reason.

However, while Swift attempts to resurrect the Socratic moral ideal, he does this in a radical fashion. Unlike Plato's *Republic* where the philosopher rules over the non-philosophers, Houyhnhmland is made up solely of philosophers, who lord over the irrational brutes known as Yahoos. The artistic decision of Swift to separate the rational from the irrational into the two species of Houyhnhnms and Yahoos allows him to depict rational-philosophical life with an extraordinary bluntness and makes it possible to divorce reason from humanity, as if the philosopher has no desire to care for the good of other fellow human beings and lacks common human affections. This decision is partially justified by the Socratic ideal Swift follows but it also fundamentally deviates from it. Indeed, several instances from the life of Socrates can be rewritten without appearing to be out of place in Houyhnhmland. On the day of his execution, Socrates decided to spend his remaining time with his disciples. When his wife visited him carrying their young child, Socrates had nothing to say other than 'take this woman away'.<sup>87</sup> Discourse with his philosophical friends takes precedence over his own wife and children. Similarly, the Houyhnhnms 'have no Fondness for their Colts or Foles'.<sup>88</sup> Even the decision to eradicate the Yahoos from the face of the earth is in line with a suggestion in Plato's *Laws*. When discussing the best way to settle a dispute within a family, the Athenian stranger provides three options:

Which would be better: the one who destroyed the wicked among them and set the better to ruling themselves, or the one who made the worthy men rule and allowed the worse to live while making them willing to be ruled? But I suppose we should also mention the judge who is third in respect to virtue [or, more literally, 'excellence', '*aretē*'] – if there should ever be such a judge – one capable of taking over a single divided family and destroying no one, but rather reconciling them by laying down laws for the rest of time and thus securing their friendship for one another.<sup>89</sup>

If we allow ourselves to be humoured by the jocular inhumanity of Plato, human society as we know it is like the third option, and merely third in terms of excellence; the land of the

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<sup>87</sup> Plato, *Phaedo*, 60a.

<sup>88</sup> Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, p. 250.

<sup>89</sup> Plato, *Laws*, 627e-628a (translation by Thomas L. Pangle).

Houyhnhnms is like the second option but with Yahoos as unwilling subjects; with the Houyhnhnms proposing to kill off the Yahoos, they seem to be moving towards the first. This symmetry by no means suggests that *Gulliver's Travels* is necessarily written with Plato's *Laws* in mind, but it does intimate a terrifying spiritual kinship. Nonetheless, this kinship points to a delicate but profound difference. If Socrates is only straightforward on the day of his execution, he is, to express it paradoxically, humane enough to conceal the coldness of reason. Instead, Swift decides to expose this coldness with the license of satire and turn Socrates inside-out.

The depiction of Houyhnhnmland as being made up of two radically different species, along with the peeling away of the apparent humanity of Socrates, allows Swift to use the Socratic ideal to enact a brutal vengeance against modern corruption as it is figured in the Yahoos. Critiques often equate Yahoos with mankind in general and debate the nature of Swift's misanthropy.<sup>90</sup> I argue, however, that a closer look at the text suggests that the Yahoos bear a specific connection with contemporary Europe, which has increasingly drifted away the virtues of the Ancients. While Gulliver considers the 'Human race in general' as '*Yahoos* in Shape and Disposition, perhaps a little more civilized, and qualified with the Gift of Speech', his examples are drawn almost exclusively from contemporary Europe.<sup>91</sup> The Houyhnhnm master heard, for instance, that

In most Herds there was a Sort of ruling *Yahoo* [...] who was always more *deformed* in Body, and *mischievous in Disposition*, than any of the rest. That, this *Leader* had usually a Favourite as *like himself* as he could get, whose Employment was to *lick his Master's Feet and Posteriors, and drive the Female Yahoos to his Kennel*; for which he was now and then rewarded with a Piece of Ass's Flesh.<sup>92</sup>

Gulliver, upon learning this, invites the readers to apply this observation to 'our *Courts* and *Favourites*, and *Ministers of State*'. Similarly, after Gulliver narrates how with great valour his fellow countrymen 'blow up a Hundred Enemies at once in a Siege, and as many in a Ship', the Houyhnhnm master responds that 'whoever understood the Nature of *Yahoo* might easily believe it possible for so vile an Animal, to be capable of every Action I had named'.<sup>93</sup> The

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<sup>90</sup> For example, Claude Rawson, *Swift's Angers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 127; John Richardson, 'Christian and/or Ciceronian Swift and Gulliver's Fourth Voyage', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 30.1 (2001), 37-49 (p. 45). Neil Chudgar, 'Swift's Gentleness', *ELH*, 78.1 (2011), 137-161 (p. 149)

<sup>91</sup> Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, p. 260.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 230.

Brobdingnagians who represented the ancient republic display the same abhorrence towards modern warfare and join the Houyhnhnms in condemning its practice:

The King was struck with Horror at the Description I had given of those terrible Engines [...] He was amazed how so impotent and grovelling an Insect as I (these were his Expressions) could entertain such inhuman Ideas, and in so familiar a Manner as to appear wholly unmoved at all the Scenes of Blood and Desolation.<sup>94</sup>

Even the titles of the individual chapters repeatedly remind the readers that the source of Gulliver's 'free Representation' of mankind is taken from contemporary England.<sup>95</sup>

For Gulliver, human history is thus a story of a downward spiral towards modernity. In Book Three, Gulliver stops on the island of Glubbudrib, or the island of sorcerers, to witness the ghosts of both ancient and modern times. Comparing the senate of Rome with a 'modern representative', Gulliver observes that 'the first seemed to be an Assembly of Heroes and Demy-Gods; the other a Knot of Pedlars, Pick-pockets, Highwaymen and Bullies'.<sup>96</sup> Gulliver also sees how the English Yeomen gradually lost their justice and love of liberty through the centuries.<sup>97</sup> Yahoos stand, as it were, at the end of the degeneration of mankind and opposite to the virtues of ancient simplicity. They are Swift's version of the 'last man' and history seems to race towards them.

In addition to the natural decline of men witnessed by Gulliver, modern philosophers such as Hobbes deliberately mould humans into Yahoos. Not only is the projector experimenting on and contaminated by faeces similar to the Yahoo with his 'strange Disposition to Nastiness and Dirt', but political writers actively redefine the human so that their behaviour and desire can hardly be distinguished from brutes. Before conversing with Gulliver, the Houyhnhnms are puzzled as to why the Yahoos harbour such hatred towards their own kind, and assume the reason is their hideous appearance. Significantly, and contrary to the majority of Book Four, where

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>95</sup> Consider the chapter titles of Chapter Five to Chapter Seven of Book Four: 'The Author at his Master's Commands informs him of the State of England', 'A Continuation of the State of England, under Queen Anne', and 'His Master's Observations upon the Constitution and Administration of England, as described by the Author, with parallel Cases and Comparisons. His Master's Observations upon human Nature'. The Houyhnhnm master's understanding of human nature comes from his own observation of Yahoos and the free representation of the state of England by Gulliver. In his letter to L'abbé Desfontaines, Swift says that Gulliver's book reflects the ill not of England alone, but the same vices and follies are to be found everywhere, 'at least in all the polite countries of Europe' (*'au moins tous le pays polis d'Europe'*). The focus on contemporary Europe again draws the connection between the Yahoos and the moderns.

<sup>96</sup> Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, p. 182.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 188.

Houyhnhnms enlighten Gulliver, here Gulliver has a lesson to impart. Only through the account Gulliver gives of human greed does his Houyhnhnm master understand the true reason behind the ‘Dissentions’ of the Yahoos: they each desire to have everything ‘to itself’, regardless of whether they need them or not. Through this, the Houyhnhnm finally makes sense of the constant infighting among the Yahoos, and their tendency to engage in a ‘civil war’ when they cannot raid their neighbourhood.<sup>98</sup> This tendency to war, and the desire to have everything to themselves, recalls how Hobbes depicts the state of nature in his *Leviathan*. In the natural condition, there is a war of everyone against everyone, and ‘it followeth that in such a condition every man has a right to everything, even to one another’s body’.<sup>99</sup> The violent hatred the Yahoos bear towards each other due to the desire to have everything to themselves and feeling threatened by others corresponds to Hobbes’s account of human beings living a life of ‘continual progress of the desire from one object to another, the attaining of the former being still but the way to the latter’ in the state of nature while constantly suffering from the fear of other human beings with the same goal trying to ‘destroy or subdue’ them.<sup>100</sup> This new definition of human nature, as much as the corruption of Europe, illuminates the abhorrent ‘modernity’ of the Yahoos.

Swift pits his super-rational Houyhnhnms against contemporary Europe and has them contemplate the extermination of Yahoos from the face of the earth. Yet the radical separation of Yahoos and Houyhnhnms in Houyhnhnmland ultimately contributes to the misanthropy of Gulliver and renders him incapable of perceiving the imperfection in the Houyhnhnms. While endorsing the Houyhnhnms as the rational ideal, Swift also tacitly points out the flaws of their rationality for readers who can see beyond the pessimism of Gulliver and his gullible adoration of the apparently wise horses.

The first flaw of Houyhnhnms concerns the coldness of their reason. This led Samuel Taylor Coleridge to find fault with the Houyhnhnms as ‘the misanthropic ideal of man – that is, a being virtuous from rule and duty, but untouched by love’:

There is likewise a true Yahooism in the constant denial of the existence of Love, as not identical with Friendship, and yet distinct always and very often divided from Lust. The best defence is that it is a Satyr; still, it would have been felt a thousand times more deeply if Reason had been truly portrayed and a finer imagination would have been

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 242.

<sup>99</sup> Hobbes, *Leviathan*, p. 80.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 57, 74.

evinced if the author had shown the effect of the possession of Reason and the moral sense in the outward form and gestures of the Horses.<sup>101</sup>

Coleridge's sentiment is still much echoed by modern scholars such as Edward J. Rielly and Kathleen M. Williams who find the Houyhnhnms' lack of charity and other humane emotions troubling.<sup>102</sup> This criticism of the Houyhnhnms is justified, but a closer look at the text also complicates this in important ways, showing that there are not one, but two types of Houyhnhnms: the Houyhnhnms in general and Gulliver's Houyhnhnm master. The former represents the purely rational life; the latter, who is changed during the course of his interaction with Gulliver, represents a middle ground that marries humanity with reason.

The conflict of the two types of Houyhnhnm is most clearly seen in the treatment of Gulliver. The general assembly think it 'not agreeable to Reason or Nature' to keep a Yahoo 'more like a Houyhnhnm than a Brute Animal', as if Gulliver's Houyhnhnm master could 'receive some Advantage or Pleasure in [Gulliver's] Company' and ask Gulliver's Houyhnhnm master to expel Gulliver or treat him as a common Yahoo.<sup>103</sup> The Houyhnhnm master himself confesses to Gulliver, however, that 'for his own Part he could have been content to keep [Gulliver] in his Service', for he finds that Gulliver manages to cure him 'of some bad Habits and Dispositions, by endeavouring [...] to imitate the Houyhnhnms'.<sup>104</sup> Gulliver immediately explains that

A Decree of the general Assembly in this Country, is expressed by the Word *Hnhloayn*, which signifies an *Exhortation*; as near as I can render it: For they have no Conception how a rational Creature can be *compelled*, but only advised, or *exhorted*; because no Person can disobey Reason, without giving up his Claim to be a rational animal.<sup>105</sup>

While Gulliver's Houyhnhnm master eventually submits to the general assembly, he does so not due to their decree being reasonable, but because he has been 'daily pressed by the *Houyhnhnms*

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<sup>101</sup> Jonathan Swift, *the Critical Heritage*, pp. 332-33.

<sup>102</sup> Edward J. Rielly, 'Irony in Gulliver's Travels and Utopia', *Utopian Studies*, 3.1 (1992), 70-83; Kathleen M. Williams, 'Gulliver's Voyage to the Houyhnhnms', *ELH*, 18.4 (1951), 275-86 (p. 275). Even supporters of Houyhnhnms are often taken back by those almost emotionless beings. See, for example, Irvin Ehrenpreis, 'The Meaning of Gulliver's Last Voyage', *REL*, 3 (1962), 18-38 and M. M. Kelsall, 'Iterum Houyhnhnm: Swift's Sextumvirate and the Horses', *Essays in Criticism*, 19 (1969), 35-45. However, in an earlier article, George Sherburn makes a compelling case that Houyhnhnms are fully capable of experiencing a variety of emotions such as indignation, see 'Errors concerning the Houyhnhnms', *Modern Philology*, 56.2 (1958), 92-97.

<sup>103</sup> *Gulliver's Travels*, p. 261.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

of the Neighbourhood to have the Assembly's *Exhortation* executed'.<sup>106</sup> The decision to expel Gulliver, then, is ultimately the result of an indirect compulsion. The Houyhnhnm master's hesitation reveals that the certainty of Houyhnhnm reason fails when it comes to decide human affairs. Human beings are endowed with the potential to become rational while constantly being in danger of falling prey to their Yahoo nature, but the rational Houyhnhnms are incapable of perceiving this middle ground and must be enlightened, as it were, by the presence of Gulliver. Not the decree of the general assembly but the briefly more humane attitude of Gulliver's Houyhnhnm master is likely to arouse the sympathy of the readers, and few will disagree with Gulliver's confession that 'in [his] weak and corrupt Judgment' the decision of the general assembly to force him to swim to his homeland 'might consist with Reason to have been less rigorous'.<sup>107</sup> Gulliver and his master thus join forces against the rigid judgment of the Houyhnhnm reason.

The problematic nature of Houyhnhnm reason, however, extends beyond mere human matters. Upon closer inspection, even the Socratic concern for morality will prove to be questionable in the light of the development of modern science. Gulliver presents Houyhnhnms as beings of supreme perfection. They are 'endowed by Nature with a general Disposition to all Virtues, and have no Conceptions or Ideas of what is evil in a rational Creature'. Their grand maxim is the cultivation of reason and their reason is such that it 'strikes [...] with immediate conviction'.<sup>108</sup> The reason why the Houyhnhnms' reason is so effective is two-fold: on the one hand, they are extremely virtuous and therefore their judgment is unaffected by passion, and on the other hand, their reason adheres to the precise boundary within which reason is effective and does not venture beyond that boundary, outside of which nothing can be ascertained: 'because *Reason* taught us to affirm or deny only where we are certain; and beyond our Knowledge we cannot do either'.<sup>109</sup> For the very same reason the Houyhnhnms laugh at the natural philosophy Gulliver relates to them, as they consider this philosophy to be no more than mere conjectures and useless.

While one might agree with the Houyhnhnms' sentiment that natural philosophy belongs to the realm of theory, it is a step too far to say that it is a kind of knowledge in 'Things, where that Knowledge, if it were certain, could be of no Use'.<sup>110</sup> For human beings are influenced by

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<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 249.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*



their understanding of nature: recall in Book Three, the natural scientists are disoriented by the prospect of the potential destruction of the Earth. It is a fundamental question whether the world is eternal, as Descartes argues with his vortex, or ephemeral as in Aristotle's system, and whether the world is teleological or non-teleological and mechanistic. The Houyhnhnms' understanding of nature is limited, as we notice that they only have conversations on the visible operations of nature. In this sense, they seem to be in a pre-enlightened status. However, once men have realized that life is only a brief moment followed and preceded by infinity of time, and once they grasp that Earth is but a mass of atoms, they cannot simply retreat to a common-sense understanding of cosmos as exemplified by the Houyhnhnms who comfortably call Earth their 'mother' – an all too 'anthropomorphic' understanding of nature. Gulliver's praise of Houyhnhnms' problematic self-sufficiency proves to be an unattainable nostalgia that cannot help but manifest in a resentment against the discovery of modern science.

The key problem with the Houyhnhnms is the questionable self-sufficiency of their reason. The doctrine that life can be guided by reason alone requires that one dismiss things that are beyond reason or cannot be ascertained by reason as inconsequential to the understanding of a good life. This is challenged by the new natural science that upset the anthropomorphic understanding of nature. The progress of natural science, however, cannot be simply ignored, as Swift has already shown. Moreover, if the good life cannot be understood without a knowledge of the whole, the Houyhnhnms' claim that there is a precise boundary between what is certain and what cannot be ascertained becomes problematic, for the certain knowledge of the part cannot be divorced from a certain knowledge of the whole. The Houyhnhnms' reason and its characteristics are ultimately fictional. Even from a practical point of view, knowledge of nature is still necessary.

Unaware of those difficulties, Gulliver proves to be gullible in the land of Houyhnhnms, but this is prepared by his previous appalling experiences in Laputa and Lagado. His tour in Lagado Academy is enough to persuade him of the futility of projectors, and the folly he observes in the Laputan scientists will only provide further ground for his prejudice against modern science. Moreover, Gulliver reveals his practical nature when he complains of the lack of practical geometry in Laputa. All these elements combined easily tip the scale in favour of the Houyhnhnms and their bias against things that do not seem to have apparent practical value. Perhaps in the end Gulliver rushes in where Swift fears to tread. At any rate, Swift does not simply dismiss natural philosophy. In a small, undated note which he made to inform an unidentified lady of what he thinks of Aristotle, Swift writes that Aristotle 'writ upon logic, or the

art of reasoning, upon moral and natural philosophy [...] and seems to be a person of the most comprehensive genius that ever lived'.<sup>111</sup> This praise of Aristotle is in sharp contrast to the neglect of natural philosophy in Houyhnhnmland.

Houyhnhnmland is indeed 'morally and physically' impossible, as Sir Walter Scott comments: it is morally impossible because of the inhumane rationality, and it is physically impossible because it utterly lacks the science of physics. The Socratic Houyhnhnms articulate a critique of the modern utopian project. However, if the Socratic ideal is called upon to divert the course of the modern fascination with natural science, the ideal itself is called into question by the very enemy it intends to combat. The result is deadlock, rather than resolution. Still, while the perfection of the Houyhnhnms is fictitious, the effort to excavate the Socratic ideal is not necessarily Sisyphean. Swift at least opens the inquiry into the best way of life against the complicated background of classical moral philosophy and modern science. If the answer must remain obscure, Swift manages to restore a crucial aspect of classical utopia that is hidden by works such as *New Atlantis*: a concern for the potential transformation of the individual rather than the society.

### 3.5 Conclusion

In 1735, one early anonymous commentator parodied the style of Doctor Bentley and tried to demonstrate that Houyhnhnms indeed existed: 'I shall undertake to convince the Learned, by sufficient Testimonies, that such a Nation as he calls the Houyhnhms [sic], was perfectly known by the *Antients*'.<sup>112</sup> This crucial connection between the Houyhnhnms and the Ancients, here wrapped in a larger joke, was, however, gradually lost when the misanthropy of Swift became the focus of the reception of *Gulliver's Travels*, commented upon by eminent figures such as Samuel Johnson and Sir Walter Scott, as well as when the Houyhnhnms' decision to exterminate the Yahoos was seen in the twentieth century to bear too much similarity to the genocide committed by the Nazis, a resemblance commented on by Claude Rawson.<sup>113</sup> By placing *Gulliver's Travels* within Swift's interest in the quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns, we find that the anonymous author's comment in the midst of his parody is nevertheless apt and that Swift's long

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<sup>111</sup> Swift, *Prose Works*, XI, p. 185.

<sup>112</sup> Jonathan Swift, *the Critical Heritage*, p. 97.

<sup>113</sup> Rawson, *Swift's Angers*, p. 128.

satire is not a mere expression of this author's pessimism but a comprehensive reflection on the ancient and modern approach to utopia. The highly biased Gulliver scoffs at modern science and its attempt to improve society through the 'projectors', and idolizes the Socratic Houyhnhnms. While this anti-Modern rhetoric is an essential part of *Gulliver's Travels*, in the calmer moments of the debate between Aristotle and Descartes the clear superiority of the Ancients is also put in doubt. By displaying the clash between the Socratic Houyhnhnmland and the scientific utopia of Laputa, Swift shows that the development of science, while far from being sufficient to bring about the ideal society, becomes an essential part of thinking on utopia that makes the ideal increasingly elusive. In this sense, Swift's writing has departed in a distinctive way from his classical and modern predecessors. Imitating More's *Utopia* in its satirical use of first-person narration, *Gulliver's Travels* diverges from the classical-minded More and makes clear there is 'no place' for a simple nostalgia for the Ancients.

## Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore the relation between theory and practice in utopian writings through the case studies of More's *Utopia*, Bacon's *New Atlantis* and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. It has investigated how the three authors engage with the inheritance of classical political philosophy, and how this interaction shapes their drastically different outlooks on the desirability of utopian political reform. More specifically, it has argued that the competing attitudes towards utopian practice result from the way those writings inherit or reject the critical scepticism in classical political philosophy regarding the feasibility of the ideal commonwealth. This critical scepticism is already prominent in Plato's *Republic*, which shows that the commonwealth that is perfect in justice is nonetheless a compromise between the wise and the unwise, and that the realization of the best way of life, that is, a life dedicated to the pursuit of truth, is beyond even the best commonwealth. Accepting this, in turn, undermines the desire to establish the best commonwealth and is a catalyst for a defence of moderation instead. The triad of writers this thesis explores – More, Bacon, Swift – engage with the utopian dilemma in different ways. Only Bacon really abandons scepticism and turns resolutely to a practically-oriented vision.

However, this thesis has also recognised that the sceptical aspect of utopian writings does not exhaust the utility of the genre, for the act of depicting the ideal commonwealth also has the benefit of illustrating the ills of existing societies, and of leading the individual beyond the prejudices that social life inevitably instils in him or her. What underlies the complex web of justice, practice and theory is ultimately a two-step liberation: a liberation from the prejudices of the existing society through looking at a version of the perfectly just society, and a liberation from idea of the perfectly just society through the affirmation that the individual can aspire to a kind of perfection and fulfilment that transcends utopias.

In my three chapters on More, Bacon and Swift, I have investigated how classical observations on the ideal society are adapted, subverted, and, finally, elevated to the degree of hyperbole. This process is often signaled by the way those authors employ first-person narration and by the presence or absence of irony in their utopian writings. More's *Utopia* encapsulates Platonic scepticism on the perfect commonwealth. This scepticism is highlighted by the fact that the person delivering the vision of the ideal state in the first person is named Hythlodæus, meaning 'the babbler of nonsense'. No less significant is the subtle irony of the character 'More',

who exposes Hythlodæus's misunderstanding of Plato even though Hythlodæus claims to be an admirer of that classical philosopher. Through the debate between 'More' and Hythlodæus, *Utopia* depicts two contrasting attitudes on how to approach the ideal society: civil philosophy which forever sees a gap between the ideal and the reality, versus the desire to live in the ideal society. The civil philosophy of 'More' is based on two interconnected observations that are similar to Plato's: the exchange of truth can take place in the 'private conversations of close friends', but one cannot expect truth to win over the entirety of mankind, for 'it is impossible to make everything good unless all men are good', which is an unreasonable expectation.<sup>1</sup> The lasting difference between the close friends of 'More' and mankind in general means that the moderation exemplified by civil philosophy is ever relevant.

In contrast to 'More', Hythlodæus is totally absorbed by the vision of Utopia and is highly critical of existing society to the extent he cannot live outside Utopia. If the Platonic tradition of utopia asks one to ascend from the existing society to the perfectly just society and eventually transcend it, Hythlodæus fails to take the final step due to his moral fervour, his unmitigated desire for justice and his imitation of Christ in speaking what he believes to be undiluted moral truth. By allowing Hythlodæus to give an uninterrupted description of Utopia, More lets Hythlodæus unwittingly display the inevitable self-contradictions in such a society, and even Hythlodæus has to admit that Utopia at times deviates from his moral ideal and he has to practice moderation, as in the case when he considers the difference between Christianity and the religious practice in Utopia.<sup>2</sup> In this roundabout way, the first modern utopian literature reaffirms the basic insight of the classical tradition on the limits of the best society, and urges moderation in the face of a zeal for justice inspired partly by Christian religion.

If in More's *Utopia*, the role of the philosopher is to uphold the Platonic ideal and practise civil philosophy, this basic tenet is deliberately subverted in Bacon's *New Atlantis*. Bacon's own utopia challenges the classical tradition in two ways. First and foremost, Bacon's utopia, ostensibly acting as a criticism of the inhumanity of the conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism, no longer aspires to investigate the best state of the commonwealth. It drastically limits the scope of utopia to providing a solution – a revised conception of charity – for one specific historical problem: religious zealotry. That Bacon's utopia is a practical and serious project is reflected by the absence of irony in *New Atlantis*: the anonymous first-person narrator is not haunted by wordplay on his name that undermines his authority. This seriousness is further

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<sup>1</sup> More, *Utopia*, pp. 34-5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

substantiated by the thematic consistency between *New Atlantis* and other works by Bacon (such as *The Advancement of Learning*) on issues such as science, charity and religion. In proposing a practical, serious utopia, Bacon seemingly accomplishes the combination of ideal and reality, of theory and practice, but in fact he side-lines the question of the gap between the best commonwealth and actual society. Despite the humanity of Bacon's Bensalem, the moral ideal of this utopia is mundane, rooted firmly in the bodily needs and desires of humankind, and it aspires only to unite people of different faith around the mutual appreciation of worldly needs.

The second way Bacon challenges classical utopian thinking is with his attack on the pursuit of individual perfection. In order to align the philosophers' role with the establishment of utopias such as Bensalem, Bacon launches a devastating campaign against the classical moral ideals represented by the writings of Seneca, Aristotle, and Plato. Using the aegis of Christianity, Bacon argues that those pagan philosophers misplaced the end of human happiness in the contemplative life, and he urges people to find true happiness in the afterlife promised by Christianity and to devote their lives to Christianity. Meanwhile, as noted above, Bacon redefines Christian charity and shifts its primary focus from the love of God to the love of man, or, more specifically, to the love of worldly goods and one's family. He attacks the stoic moral ideal but elevates the Epicureans for their ability to secure pleasure in the face of ever-changing odds. Through this manoeuvre, Bacon effectively uproots the pursuit of individual perfection and replaces it with a curious mixture of Christian charity, Epicureanism, and worldly desire. The dualism between the perfection of contemplative life and the active life has been the key principle behind civil philosophy and moderation. By deviating from this dualism, Bacon prepares readers to accept the combination of theory and practice and a total devotion to active life. In Bacon's *New Atlantis*, the philosopher no longer transcends the utopian commonwealth, but is the highest embodiment of its aims: by devoting their theoretical pursuits to the needs of humanity through natural science, Baconian scientists are comfortably at home in Bensalem, much more so than Hythlodæus is in Utopia.

Against the background of Baconian revolution, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* stands out as a particularly prominent reflection on the inherent problems of modern utopia. Deeply familiar with the classical tradition, Swift contrasts the Baconian philosophers trapped in their academy with the Houyhnhnms who embody the rational ideal of Socrates. I have thus argued here that it is not entirely correct to associate the Houyhnhnms solely with the misanthropy of Swift. Seen from the perspective of that fusion of philosophers and society advocated by Bacon, the drastic difference between the Houyhnhnms and Yahoos can be understood as an attempt to restate the

classical position on the difference between the highest individuals and the rest of society. The hyperbolic presentation is necessitated by Bacon's attack on the pursuit of rational perfection. As if to counter the practice-oriented nature of the Baconian utopia, the land of Houyhnhnms in *Gulliver's Travels* is emphatically not meant to be transformed into reality. It is a fictional, exaggerated representation of what the world would be like if the ruling residents were like Socrates, More and his friends. The shocking presentation of the Houyhnhnms is based on the tenets that informed the civil philosophy of More and Plato – the contrast between the goodness of the few and the majority of the vulgar, but delivered in Swift's caustic satire and no longer masked by the politeness and moderation of civil philosophy. The seemingly tyrannical rule of the Houyhnhnms and the 'Yahoooness' of mankind both serve to remind the readers of the fundamental untenability of the best society, a reality that was increasingly blurred by the Baconian pursuit of utopia.

However, hyperbole does not substitute for argument. Swift may have scored a rhetorical victory against the Baconian philosopher in his depiction of Yahoos and of Laputa, but this victory is far from absolute: the narrator Gulliver is just like Hythlodæus, a person so devoted to his utopia that he is blind to its pitfalls, and the name 'Gulliver' hints that those who take his word too seriously will expose themselves as gullible. Gulliver has shown the danger of modern science, but the basic tenets of modern science remain popular. If the apparent superiority of the Houyhnhnms over the Baconian scientists seems to advocate a turn from natural philosophy to the classical moral philosophy exemplified by Socrates, the deeper problem is how this approach is still feasible when the understanding of man, society and man's place in the universe is so deeply altered by the propagation of new science. The new science increasingly confuses the distinction between human and animal due to the Hobbesian emphasis on desire instead of virtue. On the other hand, the new science also radically questions the meaning of life when man is placed in an indifferent and non-teleological universe. Those radical findings had, in Swift's time, become much more accessible to the general public thanks to writers such as Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle who actively promoted them. Socrates famously transformed from a natural philosopher in Aristophanes' *Clouds* to the moral philosopher in the writings of Plato and Xenophon, and in doing so Socrates aims to turn away from fruitless speculations to the familiar territory of politics and morality.<sup>3</sup> A modern Socratic turn, advocated by Swift, would be much more difficult, for politics and morality have been so deeply entangled with speculation. What

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<sup>3</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 19a-b

emerges from *Gulliver's Travels*, then, is not only the apparent victory of the ancients but also a scepticism as to whether their model can still be followed.

In reading these three early modern utopian works as considered responses to the classical framework of theory and practice laid out in Plato's *Republic*, and, in the case of Bacon and Swift, to More's *Utopia* as well, this thesis offers new interpretations of these writings both collectively and individually. Collectively, the study of the three utopian writings reveals contrasting attitudes as to whether utopia should be put into practice according to two considerations: firstly, whether utopia should be considered the best society or a solution to a specific problem, and, secondly, whether contemplative life should be merged into active life. This nuanced but important difference has not been sufficiently appreciated by liberal thinkers such as Karl Popper, James Simpson and Isaiah Berlin, nor has it been highlighted by utopian scholars such as Barbara Goodwin and Ruth Levitas. Consequently, the moderate and sceptical utopia of More is usually grouped with the revolutionary utopia of Bacon.<sup>4</sup> Individually, the thesis has offered different readings of the three examples of utopian literature. It challenges the perceived wisdom that More's *Utopia* is the first example of modern utopian literature. It has reconsidered the position of science in Bacon's *New Atlantis* and has argued that Baconian science and utopia should be understood in relation to the general background of Bacon's devotion to charity. In its final chapter, this thesis has also argued that Swift's supposed misanthropy in *Gulliver's Travels* should be viewed in relation to the contrast between ancient projectors and classical moral philosophers.

More broadly, my reading of *Utopia*, *New Atlantis* and *Gulliver's Travels* shows that the frameworks which juxtapose personal liberty and utopian authoritarianism or which regard utopias as blueprints for social reforms do not adequately grasp the central issues in those utopian writings. Rather, what underlies each work is a unique rethinking on the problem of contemplation and action that is shaped by the impact of Christianity, as in the case of More and Bacon, and modern natural science, as in the case of Swift. The conflicting attitudes towards theory and practice in those writings are produced by the confluence of classical heritage and

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<sup>4</sup> Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, new edn (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 53, 63-64, 84. James Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution*, *The Oxford English Literary History*, II (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 33, 192-94, 236-37. Barbara Goodwin and Keith Taylor, *The Politics of Utopia, a Study in Theory and Practice* (Bern; Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 100-4. Ruth Levitas, *Utopia as Method, the Imaginary Reconstitution of Society* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 18-19. *The Concept of Utopia* (Bern; Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 209-11.



specific historical-intellectual contexts. The utopian impulse becomes prominent only when Bacon chooses to marry intellectual pursuit with the practical concern of religious zealotry in his time, unlike More and Swift whose scepticism and appreciation of the Platonic approach prevented them from embracing utopian projects uncritically. The way More responds to the Christian zealot Hythlodæus and the way Swift criticizes Bacon shows how classical political philosophy can offer an alternative criticism of utopia that does not rely on the protection of individual liberty at the heart of a Western liberal tradition.

This alternative criticism of utopia based on classical political philosophy is highly pertinent to the Chinese concern that underlies this thesis. As I have discussed in the Introduction, my interest in utopian writing is informed by the Chinese experience of the Cultural Revolution. The possible application of civil philosophy to mitigate the dangers of the utopian impulse in China, a country without a solid liberal tradition, requires fuller study, but pending such study, I would like to point out two possible factors that make this new approach relevant to China. Firstly, it does not rely on the theoretical framework of liberalism that juxtaposes utopian revolution against individual freedom, an approach that is increasingly infeasible in China, as mentioned in the Introduction of this thesis. Secondly, it offers a unique possibility to connect with the Chinese intellectual tradition that bears a rough similarity to Western classical political philosophy. This similarity concerns Confucianism and Daoism, and has not received adequate attention from the West.<sup>5</sup>

Chinese thought prior to the downfall of the Qing Dynasty (1911) is characterized by a prominent coexistence of Confucianism and Daoism. Confucianism, the official ideology since the Former Han Dynasty (206 – 9 B.C.E.), values the need for scholars to devote their learning to the public good and political life and to practise key virtues such as benevolence (‘仁’) and righteousness (‘义’).<sup>6</sup> By contrast, Daoism is keenly aware of the limit of politics and values a trans-political life that is characterized by being at one with nature. Confucius, despite his teaching, is said to be a great admirer of Laozi, the founder of Daoism, and traditional Chinese

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<sup>5</sup> Recent studies that cover the connection between ancient Chinese and Western thought often focus on the metaphysical issues rather than the topic of contemplative life and active life. See, for example, Steven Burik, *The End of Comparative Philosophy and the Task of Comparative Thinking: Heidegger, Derrida and Daoism* (New York: SUNY Press, 2009), pp. 33-48, where Daoism is studied in conjunction with Heideggerian interpretation of pre-Socratic discussion of ‘Being’; Ji Zhang, *One and Many: A Comparative Study of Plato’s Philosophy and Daoism Represented by Ge Hong* (Honolulu, University of Hawai’i Press, 2012), pp. 145-182, where Plato’s theory of form is studied in conjunction with Zhuangzi’s philosophical thought.

<sup>6</sup> Han Yu, a key Confucian literary figure in traditional Chinese culture, describes the characteristics of the true Confucian way as follows: ‘We consider benevolence as goodness, the appropriate practice of goodness is righteousness. The true way is to follow these two virtues’ (‘博爱之谓仁，行而宜之之谓义，由是而之之谓道’). 《韩昌黎文集》(《The Prose Works of Han Changli》), 上海：上海古籍出版社，1986, 13页。

intellectuals are often known to hold the ideal of ‘outwardly Confucian while being privately Daoist’ (‘外儒内道’).<sup>7</sup>

The prominent presence of both Confucianism and Daoism in the Chinese tradition mirrors the division between the practical and contemplative life in the early Western classical tradition, inherited by More and Swift. Both traditions understand that the devotion to public life is important but nevertheless acknowledge a way of life that transcends politics. While contemplative life and Daoism remain in many respects essentially different, both serve to mitigate the total devotion to politics and thus undermine the desire for utopian revolution. Through the analysis of the work of More and Swift, this thesis has excavated the tension between theory and practice inherent in those early modern utopian writings, and this could contribute, I would like to tentatively suggest by way of conclusion, to a practical reassessment of traditional Chinese thought as an indigenous and possibly more effective antidote to revolution in China.

In addition to the similarity between classical Western political philosophy and traditional Chinese thought on the topic of active life, the way Bacon collapses the tension between theory and practice also bears a strong resemblance to the evolution of Chinese thought behind Chinese utopian experience in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Very much like Bacon’s transformation of utopian writing to address the specific problem of his time, namely, religious conflict, the introduction of science and Western ideology took place in China when it faced a much graver problem: the downfall of the Qing Dynasty and the search for an alternative intellectual resource for China to survive foreign invasions. In the wake of an urgent crisis, Bacon revised the relation between theory and practice so that philosophers could step back from the life of contemplation and become the key to realising the ideal commonwealth. According to Liu Xiaofeng, a similar trend has taken place within Confucianism due to the challenge of Western civilization to the position of China. Important Chinese thinkers such as Liang Qichao (1873-1929) increasingly favoured a much more radical interpretation of Confucianism that combines the concern for public good with the need to totally revamp China’s political system and culture.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Sima Qian (c.145 BCE-c. 87 BCE), one of the most important traditional Chinese historians, recorded in his *Historical Records* (《史记》) that after meeting with Laozi, Confucius said Laozi was like an unfathomable dragon. This shows that a deep entanglement between Daoism and Confucianism was already present early in Chinese history.

<sup>8</sup> 刘小枫, 《儒教与民族国家》(‘*Confucianism and Nation State*’), 上海: 华东师范大学出版社, 2007, 162-3, 168页。Liu Xiaofeng, *Confucianism and Nation State* (Beijing: Huaxia Press, 2007), pp. 162-3, 168. Cf. Liang Qichao’s definition of revolution: ‘Revolution is the total change of all the former aspects of a nation. Everything of the past dies with yesterday, and everything of the future begin their lives today’ (‘变革云者, 一国之日, 举其前此之现象而尽变尽革之, 所谓从前种种, 譬犹昨日死; 从后种种, 譬犹今日生’). 《梁启超文选》(‘*Selected Works of Liang Qichao*’), 夏晓虹编, 卷上, 北京: 中国广

Liu further argues that the writings of Liang Qichao were accessible to Mao Zedong, and this radicalized Confucianism provides the cultural root for the latter's embrace of Marxism and its teaching on revolutions. Bacon's drift away from the dualism of theory and practice as a response to crisis thus provides a unique reference point for understanding the deeper roots of the revolutionary spirit in China.

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播电视出版社，1992，174页。Revolution (革命) in Chinese initially referred to the cyclical progress of dynasties in history and did not have the modern connotation of radical political change.

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