



4-2016

Political Utopias of the Renaissance: An Analysis of Thomas More's *Utopia*, Johann Valentinus Andreae's *Christianopolis*, and James Harrington's *The Commonwealth Of Oceana*

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POLITICAL UTOPIAS OF THE RENAISSANCE: AN ANALYSIS OF
THOMAS MORE'S *UTOPIA*, JOHANN VALENTINUS ANDREAE'S
CHRISTIANOPOLIS, AND JAMES HARRINGTON'S *THE*
COMMONWEALTH OF OCEANA

by

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
Political Science
Western Michigan University
April 2016

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Brittany Page Brake, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 2016

Utopian works have entertained generations throughout history. Much like more recent genres including science-fiction novels or movies, utopian works stimulate the mind and ultimately cause its readers to question whether an author's design of such a place, or society, is possible in the real world. While some may perceive the purpose of utopias to be completely fantasy-driven, there is a great deal of scholarly literature that dedicates itself to proving otherwise. More specifically, many scholars argue that utopias are serious and practical, ultimately aimed at re-shaping the entire political structure of a society.

This thesis aims to understand the more pragmatic side of utopian writing by determining the political purposes of three specific utopias: Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), James Harrington's *The Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656), and Johann Valentin Andreae's *Christianopolis* (1619). These Renaissance-period utopias are explicitly framed by their authors to make drastic changes to the political culture of their time and to prescribe practical solutions to alleviate political problems that they endured. After employing a close reading of the primary sources and secondary works, I argue that these three utopias are intensely political and illustrate that utopias are much more than fictional societies, but places and ideas that were intended to be implemented and incorporated into our world and the political structure that it encompasses.

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DEDICATION

To My Parents:

To my father: I lost him in 2003, but during his time in this world he was never short in guiding me at a young age to always give my best, to always try to do what is right, and reminding me that whatever I do to do with unforgiving passion. Three lessons that I hope to abide by for the rest of my life.

To my mother: She has always tried to provide others with what they want, but she has never fallen short of giving me what I need: decades of nothing but encouragement, support, laughter, and love. In my book, there is nothing in this material-driven world that can ever compare.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis was only made possible with the help and support of many people during different stages of my life. First, I have to thank my advisor Dr. Emily Hauptmann. Throughout the entirety of this project and my graduate career she has always been inspiring, helpful, and best of all, positive. I am honored and grateful to have her as my advisor. I also thank my committee members, Dr. Jacinda Swanson and Dr. Kevin Corder, for taking time out of their busy schedules to join me alongside this project. To my friends in the department, thanks for listening to my ideas and arguing with me in the classroom. The latter has truly become one of the best ways for me to learn what I am unsure of and not to mention one of my favorite pastimes.

To my lifelong friends: Will Bauerschmidt, Gabi Hoffman, Jackie Tomlin, Alec Biehl, Ashleigh Pierce, Brandon Nesiba, and Shelby Cummings. Hopefully each of them are aware that I will always cherish the fact that they would often read drafts of my paper just to suggest great ideas and changes to ensure that I had the best draft possible. I am forever grateful for all of their friendships and help. In addition, I thank Dr. Dan Betti for years of constant criticism and encouragement to be the very best that I can be as a scholar and a person. He will probably never be able to comprehend how much his presence, actions, humor, and words have meant to me, no matter how much I wish he could. Nonetheless, he truly has been one of the most important people to me during this project, along with my other

Acknowledgments--Continued

academic ventures, and to be sure, my life. Lastly, I want to extend a huge thanks to my brother Darrick and my sister-in-law Kimberly. I am forever in debt to them for everything they have ever done for me. During the writing of this project, and before, both were constantly helpful and motivating. I truly could not have asked for two better role models to guide me. There is no doubt in my mind that wherever I go I am the culmination of all of those aforementioned, and therefore so is my success.

Brittany Page Brake

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Is it possible for utopias to have real world political purposes? For the most part, utopias and utopian literature are not considered pragmatic, real world, matters. If anything, utopian works are sought out simply for a reader only to imagine the way the world could be by escaping reality behind the pages of a book. However, the following chapters will show that utopias are much more than make-believe stories that let our imaginations run wild. In fact, as this work will illustrate, utopias are mostly inspired by serious problems in reality, explicitly in the political sector.

In order to demonstrate this, this thesis will focus on three different utopias from the Renaissance period. The reason for this is due in part to the enormous influence of the first utopia that I analyze, Thomas More's *Utopia*, on other authors during that particular time, including the other two I discuss. Without probably knowing or trying, More's writing of *Utopia* caused a surge of other works very similar to his own and encouraged those living during the Renaissance in Europe to speak out against the political suffering that citizens were enduring under unequal rule. Specifically, More's work directly influenced the other two authors analyzed, James Harrington and his work *The Commonwealth of Oceana* and Johann Valentin Andreae's *Christianopolis*. Although, More's work is the most famous of the three, looking at these three utopias together reveal the clearest picture of the political purposes of these influential pieces, especially

since they were written during the age of the Renaissance¹, refer to similar political situations, and effectively all build upon More's ideas.

However, while these utopias mattered to the citizens living during the Renaissance, the question arises: in what way do these utopias apply to the politics of today? Looking back through each of the works, all of the authors have political issues and problems that they addressed in which still plague governments today. Thomas More's *Utopia* mentions numerous political tribulations that our current society is unable to decipher.

First and foremost, More presents his reader with the question: what is the proper punishment for criminals who steal from others? Should these criminals be killed immediately upon being caught to teach the rest of society a lesson, as representatives of the English government in the book seem to suggest? Like most supporters of the death penalty today, the English government in More's work, claimed that the criminals were tainted at heart and no matter how much rehabilitation they were given they would repeat their unlawful acts again. On the other hand, More's central character, Raphael Hythloday proposes in his vehement debate with the Cardinal from England that criminals be recognized and somehow rehabilitated. As many proponents of rehabilitation programs claim, like Hythloday in *Utopia*, people are imperfect and during dire times they will do whatever necessary to live, if this means stealing, then so be it. While criminal acts are not to be condoned, Hythloday, like many anti-death penalty advocates, asserts that human life is to be valued and regarded as the highest good. And

¹ The Renaissance spanned from the 1400's to the 1700's. In this case, More, Harrington, and Andreae are all writing in the late 16th and early 17th centuries.

so, knowing that mankind is inconsistent, Hythloday claims that there have to be programs to correct behaviors to avoid criminals from repeating the same crime repetitively. Yet, just as the characters in the work have difficulty in agreeing upon one right way to discipline criminals, our current society continues to debate the best way to prevent criminal acts from happening again. While the punishments might have changed, the ethical reasoning behind each side of the debate remains similar in the sense that today some side with Cardinal Morton from England, while others plead that criminals can be rehabilitated successfully.

Further, More's *Utopia* gives an answer, albeit an incomplete one, to the question of what is the best type of government in society. Is it a of system democracy? Or perhaps a monarchical form of government? For More, the answer is a form of socialism that caters to the needs of the entire community, rather than a single tyrant or group of leaders. Socialism in *Utopia* has the ability to prevent inequality between citizens and class groups from continuing. More's work maintains that there has to be a complete breakdown of hierarchical structures in government in order to assure to make room for virtue in society. No one citizen is revered more than another for their amount of material possessions, wealth, or status, simply because in *Utopia* all of the citizens are allotted the same of everything. More's work addresses the serious problem of valuing goods over virtue and morality in society and corrected the problem in his utopia by making goods worthless and principled values indispensable. In More's world, virtue, morality, and equality were the key to making a society just and a government thrive. Such notions described by More that our current society is still trying to piece together.

In the sections to come, More's work will be extensively analyzed by authors of the featured secondary literature. Some academics have claimed that More's distaste for haughty pride within leadership and government is what drove him to compose *Utopia*, but other scholarship will cite that it was More's belief in humanism that inclined him to write about ideas of virtue and morality being reinstated into society. Still, other authors of the secondary works will try to argue that *Utopia* was intended to be a real place, not a fictional story. Such authors will claim that while More's ideas seemed radical at the time, he took quite a risk in writing *Utopia*, and he himself was well aware of the possibility of death for such unusual concepts. But, in order to mask his true beliefs and avoid certain immediate death, his ideas are forever captured in the character Raphael Hythloday in the pages of *Utopia*.

On the other hand, in *Christianopolis*, by Johann Andreae there is a familiar assessment of how overconsumption ruins morality in societies, similar to the one offered in More's *Utopia*. Andreae claims, like More, that money and goods should not be the object of everyone's appetite, but rather a rededication to virtue. However, while More's utopian work dismisses any formal religion, Andreae calls for the serious and unrelenting worshiping of Christianity and science. While More looks to create equality among the citizens of the utopian state, Andreae focuses more on virtue at the individual level. Citizens have to take responsibility for their own actions and morality; each person in *Christianopolis* must choose whether or not he or she wants to live in "the gated community" that dedicates itself to God. If they do not then they are left to the harsh and material-filled world outside where they are allowed to live without restraint, but meaninglessly, according to Andreae. *Christianopolis* focuses on rehabilitating those

people who are lost in the never-ending cycle of consumption and meaninglessness who want to change their lives through educating themselves by dedicating their entire life to God and science. Andreae's work hopes to remove lavish goods in order to remove inequality and predetermined notions of status. These things are replaced with an understanding that there is a hierarchy, but it is one where God is the ultimate leader and then man. For Andreae, man could ever rule as justly as God does and there is much more to life than buying and selling goods and services by replacing such acts with enriching citizens' minds with God and science.

Much like More's critics, scholars of *Christianopolis* suggest that Andreae wrote because it was an open outlet for him to espouse his personal beliefs, especially his Hermetic conceptions. These ideas, which tied together to science and religion, were what Andreae based the entire city of Christianopolis on in the work, but they were also concepts that he hoped would become popular in his own time and life. Moreover, a number of the authors in the secondary literature note that Andreae implemented God and science into his fictitious society in the strictest sense possible because he hoped to reestablish the hierarchy of society and government by putting God at the top and mankind below. This structure, he hoped, would help man to understand his place in the world, which was under God, and to live freely from the material driven world that man had turned it into.

As More and Andreae's works face problems of injustice and inequality, so does James Harrington's *The Commonwealth of Oceana*. Harrington's piece looks to ensure that citizens are no longer powerless in relation to their government. Just as today where many citizens who live under oppressive governments have no real say in what their

government is doing or how it operates, Harrington had seen firsthand what happened when so-called governments had excluded their citizens from any political engagement. Harrington, having lived through a tumultuous time under the English Civil War, presumed that the only way there could be a balanced relationship between the citizens and the state is if they were given some form of power to claim as their own. To fix such a problem, Harrington, a civic republican, suggested that there be land ownership by the people, not just the state. For him, this solution would alleviate problems because the citizens would be an active member in the government, since by owning land they would also own a piece of political power, which in Harrington's time was typically reserved for rulers and governments. What is more, Harrington's *Oceana* speaks to the continuous battle that often occurs in states where a government reigns supreme and its people are left to subject to its every rule. In such a state, Harrington would propose that government must give its citizens a stake in exercising power. But in the modern world what constitutes as power is not as clear as it was in Harrington's time period. Should citizens today be given more representation? Land? Leadership roles? The answers are not as apparent in the modern world, but that does not mean that there is an absence of one.

In the sections on Harrington's *Oceana* the secondary literature will agree that Harrington wrote with the intent for his agrarian law to become an actual policy in the English government. However, the influence of his plans will be argued amongst scholars of the secondary works. Some scholars will claim that it was all Machiavelli who Harrington looked up to for guidance, but as will be discussed others say that Plato should be given a majority of the credit for Harrington's concepts and notions of a balanced government. Regardless, *Oceana* is dedicated to fixing a torn government, no

doubt based on the real English Civil War, by giving citizens a stake in power. Though Harrington's ideas were never taken up by England, academics note that there was a suitable reason for why it was rejected: competition with Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes' *Leviathan* had been published years earlier and presented a very different argument from the one found in *Oceana*, but the secondary literature will suggest that it was more than just that Hobbes published his work before Harrington did, but that it was the difference in content and style of which both authors wrote their political plans.

Significance of Research

Although these writings are centuries old, the issues and problems being discussed in these works continue to exist in our current political world. Among those problems that we still struggle with are: inequality amongst citizens, unjust practices and laws, and the seemingly never-ending battle with power overshadowing virtue in government and society. As history can attest, the aforementioned problems are the root cause for many wars, deaths, and fallen governments. The research in this study continues to be important and relevant to the discourse of political science, specifically in political theory. Each of the utopian works examined in this study not only proposed theoretical solutions to problems during times of political distress and dissent, but each also suggested practical reasons for changing what seemed to be a permanently disproportionate political structure and the benefits of such change.

The particular utopian works featured here have withstood the test of time and illuminate normative issues central to political science. To be sure, each work tries to persuade to its reader that the political realm *ought* to operate in particular ways instead

of only portraying how unfit rulers force it to work in bad or corrupt ways. Moreover, these works are not just fantasy, but were based on actual events with real situations that directed authors like More, Harrington, and Andreae, to write their works in hope of changing the political structure of the world in which they lived in during the Renaissance. Yet, while the political structures these authors knew differs from those experienced by many today, these works are still applicable to and give those living in the 21st century a better understanding of the political issues we still endure today. In doing so, the reader will hopefully be able to observe that utopias possess political purposes and those political purposes are not merely to entertain, but to generate possible solutions to problems in the political arena. Further, I argue that utopias should be viewed as serious pieces of work, no different from other political works like pamphlets or treatises. All of these genres propose a change in the political environment that usually aims to shift the direction of power.

Methodology

In this work I engage in closely reading and analyzing both the relevant primary and secondary literature. The utopian literature addressed in this thesis allows for a basic understanding of the plot and the themes of each of the utopias discussed. While the utopias featured are not long, they are extremely dense and, at times, complex. In the secondary literature, I have attempted to look at a wide array of recent scholars who discuss the various political purposes of each of the utopias examined. For the most part I rely heavily on scholarly literature from political science, but I have not excluded those who take a more historical approach to the works and their authors from my research. The goal of this study has been to compile competing views of the political purposes of

these specific utopias to demonstrate the numerous political reasons recent commentators have offered for why utopias are written and why they are politically important.

Furthermore, in this work I make a clear effort to systematically report each scholar's views about the political purposes of the utopias mentioned. Where there is overlap or a disagreement between scholars I attempt to explain the variance in a clearer way and compare the disparity in order to show all sides of the argument. This, of course, is a stylistic choice made to benefit the reader in order to keep the ideas that each author espouses clear.

CHAPTER II

Discussions with Hythloday: An Introduction to *Utopia*

"It is a general rule that the more different anything is from what people are used to, the harder it is to accept." –Thomas More, *Utopia* (1516)

The text of *Utopia* is divided into two sections. The first section of the work is dedicated to a recalled, but nevertheless detailed, account of a conversation that occurs between the characters Raphael Hythloday, John Cardinal Morton, otherwise known as the Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord Chancellor of England, and a layman. The conversation is evoked when acquaintances of Hythloday's, More and Peter Giles, propose that a such a wise man as himself, "[...] could best perform such a service by joining the council of some great prince, whom you would incite to noble and just actions...your influence would be felt, because a people's welfare or misery flows in a stream from their prince, as from a never-failing spring" (More., 8). Hythloday vehemently disagrees with More and Peter Giles' suggestion declaring their proposal preposterous. Hythloday is sure that princes, when confronted with new ideas like his own about government, will always proclaim, "The way we're doing it is the way we've always done it, this custom was good enough for our fathers, and I only hope we're as wise as they were" (More., 8). However, Hythloday's excuse for sitting out the game of politics is not sufficient enough for More and Peter Giles, so he is persuaded to explain his cynical position at greater length.

Hythloday recalls his discussion with Cardinal Morton and the layman as an intense back and forth debate over justice and injustice within England. The main focus of the discussion pertains to the Cardinal questioning as to why there are still so many thieves in England when there are, “[...] twenty at a time being hanged on a single gallows” (More, 9). Hythloday reminds the Cardinal that theft should not be observed as a crime serious enough to be punishable by death. To be sure, Hythloday values the lives of citizens over the possession of material goods and rightfully so, since goods are so easily disposable and people of course are not. Further, he insists that by killing thieves it will not prevent others from committing a similar crime, but only further demonstrate the cruelty of the state towards its people who are obviously in need of rehabilitation. However, after an unsuccessful attempt at persuading the Cardinal and the layman that executing criminals is not the appropriate way to distribute justice, Hythloday leaves the discussion with an even more cynical view of English political policies and the men who carry them out.

Overall, book one of *Utopia* is a look into the nature of justice and human nature through the characters of More, Peter Giles, and Hythloday. In the work, Hythloday’s view of human nature is quickly revealed as cynical and disheartening by the author even before his encounter with the Cardinal and layman. His perception of man is negative since in his own experience mankind has proven to be cruel and unforgiving in its approach to human life. Hythloday observes that mankind perceives that it should be regarded higher than the divine and finds that in doing so man is probable to change the laws that God had laid out for man which prevented man from more killing and injustice in the first place. More straightforwardly, for Hythloday, the replacement of divine law

with that of man's is dangerous because man is unpredictable and unknowing of what is best in society.

Book one also assesses the notion of progress in society and how it can be thwarted due to the stubbornness of men who possess power. Powerful leaders perceive the way that they control the polity as the best way possible, so they susceptibly become blind to curiosity and alternative options for how to rule. Of course, in doing so, such leaders are prone to halt their society from any sort of political progress because they believe that their form of rule is supreme. This idea is what ultimately prompts the introduction and description of the island of Utopia by Raphael Hythloday in book two.

Book two of *Utopia* is best characterized as Hythloday's account of the best society, better known as the island of Utopia. After experiencing what Hythloday attributes as the most unjust and backwards society, he reveals to More and Peter Giles the just practices of the Utopians. According to Hythloday, the citizens who inhabit the island, known as the Utopians, are thought to operate under the most egalitarian political and social policies known to any existing society. The island is described by Hythloday as an agriculturally centered place where all of the citizens farm, regardless of their gender or their age. All citizens are also taught another trade, "[...] such as wool-working, linen-making, masonry, metal-work, or carpentry" (More, 36). Hythloday tells More and Peter Giles that although the citizens are required to learn different trades, Utopians are prohibited from working themselves to death since the state only requires a six hour limit per day that citizens dedicate to work.

For the rest of their time on the island, Utopians are encouraged to engage in intellectual life by attending scholarly lectures, but are never forced to do so. There is no real time or place for the citizens to take part in inappropriate acts since, “[...] there is no chance to loaf or to kill time, no pretext for evading work; no taverns, or alehouses, or brothels; no chances for corruption, no hiding places, no spots for secret meetings” (More, 45). The goal in Utopia is to keep the citizens busy and to prevent them from participating in any activity that is not useful, just, or academic in nature. To be sure, even the constitution of Utopia asserts, “[...] whenever public needs permit, all citizens should be free, so far as possible, to withdraw their time and energy from the service of the body, and devote themselves to the freedom of and culture of the mind” (More, 40). Being able to free themselves intellectually is what the Utopians perceive as real freedom and happiness in society.

To keep the Utopians virtuous and productive the social and political rules of the island attempt to remove all traces of things or ideas that can cause sins like haughty pride or greed. In order to prevent the worse form of pride and money-hungry citizens who compete and bring each other down, the island of Utopia uses no form of currency. Instead, in Utopia gold and silver is not valued like it is in other parts of the world, but it is viewed as a common thing much like copper or as plastic in our own time. Utopia does not want its citizens to overvalue unimportant things or goods in life because they want to place their focus on virtue, wisdom, and equality for all citizens.

However, removing the presence of currency in Utopia is not the only way the Utopians try to eliminate unnecessary objectifications of their society. Clothing in Utopia is also restricted by every citizen being forced to wear a cloak to both, “[...] be better

protected against the cold, nor would he appear in any way better dressed” (More, 40).

Utopians wear matching clothing because they believe there is no need to wear anything else.² The cloak is simple, provides warmth, and covers the whole body. The citizens are not worried about fashion or wearing the finest clothing or jewelry because, based on their moral philosophy, they perceive it to be foolish and childish.

Hythloday tells More and Peter Giles that the Utopians, “are surprised that gold, a useless commodity in itself, is everywhere valued so highly that man himself, who for his own purposes conferred this value on it, is far less valuable” (More, 48). The Utopians, like Hythloday, are confused on why people value goods over human life. Unlike other societies, the Utopians have read literature that has caused them to stray away from praising those with the most material possessions, but rather to praise the man who is most wise and virtuous. For guidance the Utopians look to religion, and while there is no one appointed religion, the Utopians all agree, “That the soul of man is immortal, and by God’s goodness it is born for happiness; that after this life, rewards are appointed for our virtues and good deeds, punishments for our sins” (More, 50). Further, this source of happiness does not only stem from virtue and good deeds, but also in taking part in pleasure. However, pleasure in this sense, as Hythloday describes it, is not to be understood in simply the physical sense, but in terms of ‘good and honest pleasure’. ‘Good and honest pleasure’ means helping out a fellow person when they are in need and doing good deeds for the sake of doing good deeds. This of course is what drives the Utopians to be egalitarian in all aspects of society. This is precisely why the Utopians find it preposterous that people in other parts of the world are able to value one man

² Unless one is a slave or criminal. Then they are forced to wear shackles and a gold ear piercing.

higher than another simply based upon the clothes that he wears or the amount of worthless possessions that he owns. Rather, value, for the Utopians, is found in the man who is rich in intellectualism, wisdom, and goodness.

The book concludes with Hythloday continuing to describe the many customs of the Utopians, but in doing so he is always quick to remind More and Peter Giles that behind everything the Utopians do there is a justifiable reason. The Utopians do not make up laws and other practices just for the sake of making them up or to benefit those in power positions, but because they are just and sought to promote equality, happiness, and a sense of community amongst the polity. It is for this reason, Hythloday claims, that other places in the world will always try to take over the island of Utopia, but only because they are envious of how wonderful and perfect the society is in nature and in practice. While More and Peter Giles do not concur with all of the policies of Utopia, they are left to marvel what England *could* and *would* be like if only they were able to implement a few of them.

More about More and his *Utopia*

The political purpose of *Utopia* has continuously been contested amongst scholars since its debut in the early sixteenth century. Some inquire if More literally desired such a society as the one the famous Raphael Hythloday describes while others declare that More's work is just an extremely creative way to observe and criticize the problems of a distressed Renaissance England. However, if the latter is the actual reason that More wrote *Utopia*, then one must ponder as to why he even wrote the second part of the book since the first part is more than adequate in criticizing the unjust practices of England

during his lifetime. And yet, there are those who conclude that *Utopia* was written purely for More's enjoyment. To be sure, advocates of this view point out that not everything written has some intricate meaning behind it, so it seems that it is plausible for some to presuppose that More might have actually written *Utopia* for pure pleasure.

Yet, in any case, there is no doubt that Thomas More's words and ideas within the work are politically driven. After all, the piece has become a staple in philosophy and political theory courses. Furthermore, it is the intention of this section to analyze and understand the political purpose of More's famous *Utopia*. It is important to remember that the goal of the following section is *not* to understand why More wrote *Utopia*, for that would be simply impractical.³ Rather, the following section considers the numerous political implications that More includes in his work. By doing such an investigation, one is able to better understand More's possible underlying political motives, as well as those of a changing England during the height of the Renaissance.

What is the political purpose of Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*?

As a starting point, Quentin Skinner, by far, has provided one of the most in-depth reports on More's political reasoning for *Utopia*. Skinner contends that More's political motives are intertwined with his Renaissance humanist perspective. Humanism⁴ emerged during the Renaissance and, for the most part, called for political leaders to incorporate

³ As the discussion in the beginning paragraph suggests the reason as to why More wrote *Utopia* is purely based upon subjective viewpoints because no one is actually sure as to why he wrote it. However, to explore these different viewpoints I suggest first consulting Young (2013) 75; for a different view, see White (1978) 135-150. Both offer fantastic possible explanations to the curious reader. There are of course, hundreds of more works that fit into this discussion, as well.

⁴ Humanism found its roots in Italy, but then made a surge into northern Europe during the early 1400's until around the mid-1600's. The basic premise behind humanism is that humanists hoped to get rid of a focus on texts that encouraged people to value pleasure over virtue. Instead, humanists wanted to bring the focus of political and social affairs back closer to the Christian model, where virtue and divinity mattered most. See Skinner (1978) for a more in-depth explanation, notably chapters 2 and 3.

virtuous elements into their governmental systems (Skinner, 214). More importantly, humanism included the belief that kings were not suited to rule alone, but they needed philosophers to guide them through the political process (Skinner, 216). The idea being that philosophers, who were thought to be more virtuous and wise, would be able to prevent a king or prince from making impetuous decisions causing devastation to the entire society.

Furthermore, the hope for most humanists was that by having a philosopher as a political advisor, a king might be kept from abusing his citizenry with the power entrusted in him (Skinner, 216). On the humanist perspective, Skinner notes, “They characteristically considered the question in terms of the favourite humanist debate about the rival merits of *otium* and *negotium*—the life of quiet and contemplation versus the life of activity and business” (Skinner, 217). Humanists, like Sir Thomas More, agreed that a life dedicated to virtue and learning far surpassed a life that concerned itself with public affairs⁵ (Skinner, 217). In regards to what a life in public affairs looked like, Skinner concludes, “[...] the chief reason for preferring a life of *otium*⁶ is said to be that public affairs are well-known to be governed entirely by hypocrisy and lies” (217). It is for this very reason that humanists desire virtue to be implemented into governments and the leaders who rule them. By implementing virtue into government there is hope for humanists that political life will not be led by deceptive leaders, but all who hope to work together morally.

⁵ Although, this point is quite perplex since More, himself, was directly involved in political affairs.

⁶ Again, “*otium*” is latin for taking time to think, or contemplating an thought.

So how does humanism apply to Sir Thomas More and the political purpose of *Utopia*? Skinner reminds his audience that More was, in fact, a northern⁷ humanist. Such places that constituted as northern humanists countries included areas as France, England, and Germany.⁸ However, More should be viewed as a distinct representative of humanism because while he believed in the cause, he simultaneously was one of its biggest critics (Skinner, 256). Skinner contends that More criticizes his fellow humanists most famously in *Utopia* through the interaction of his created characters: Raphael Hythloday, More⁹, and Peter Giles. Thus, according to Skinner, More's political purpose within *Utopia* was to assess humanism while demonstrating to his colleagues that there were, indeed, still problems that still plagued Western Europe, specifically England¹⁰.

In *Utopia*, More evaluates humanism, as well as the political structure of the Renaissance, by first analyzing the inequalities between wealth and status. As a humanist, as Skinner points out, More finds it absurd that instead of virtue being viewed as the greatest good, wealth and pedigree ultimately always take precedence over it (Skinner, 258). To further illustrate More's discontentment, Skinner reminds his readers, "He invariably speaks of these 'so-called gentlefolk', who are 'commonly termed gentlemen and noblemen', in his heaviest tones of sarcasm. And he always opposes their outlook with the claim that the only true nobility—the only valid title to be honoured or respected—lies in the possession of virtue" (Skinner, 258). Of course, in *Utopia*, Raphael Hythloday is the one who rightly points out how inadequately kings and princes rule over

⁷ The difference being that More was a humanist from England and not from Italy.

⁸ Most of the northern humanists were of course influenced by their Italian successors. Skinner (1978) names more specific figures and universities were humanists thought derived and flourished in chapters 4 and 7.

⁹ More the character is not to be confused with, or to represent the actual opinions of, Sir Thomas More, himself.

¹⁰ Look to Skinner (1978), especially chapter 7.

lower class citizens when left to themselves without any guidance. In a philosophical discussion with the characters More and Peter Giles, Hythloday firmly states:

If a king is so hated or despised by his subjects that he can rule them only by mistreatment, plundering, confiscation, and pauperization of his people, then he'd do much better to abdicate his throne—for under these circumstances, though he keeps the name of authority, he loses all the majesty of a king. A king has no dignity when he exercises authority over beggars, only when he rules over prosperous and happy subjects (More, 24).

The discussion leads to Hythloday swearing that no government, nor people, can be as satisfied as the Utopians, until the focus is shifted from wealth and lineage and turned towards virtue.¹¹

Skinner suggests that More's attack on the 'so-called nobility' was not some intentional politically or socially charged low blow to the aristocracy, in fact, Skinner resists any such argument. Instead, Skinner is inclined to argue that More's push to discuss virtue, wealth, and lineage, is directly related, again, to his humanist critique (Skinner, 259). More's anger stems from the fact that noblemen were at the centerpiece of everyday life. These men, or rulers, who held power over the commoners were the ones who were revered and thought to possess virtue. However, much to More's chagrin, the men who were supposed to be leading virtuously by example, were not really leading with anything, but greed and disrespect for those who were considered politically and

¹¹ Look to book two of *Utopia* by More.

socially beneath them. Consequently, as wealth and lineage became the main focus, virtue was forced out of political and social life.

What is more, Skinner asserts that Sir Thomas More gives two plausible reasons why wealth and pedigree cannot solely be depended upon if a society intends to sustain itself happily and virtuously (Skinner, 259). More's first reason is that where there is a political hierarchical structure within a society, it will end up being ruled by people with the most insidious of motives (Skinner, 259). Here, More's rationale is unique in the sense that he, unlike many other humanists of the time, was not attempting to suggest that the aristocracy could be helped and ultimately change¹² their ways. Rather, More's recommendation is that it is not simply the aristocracy that needs to be modified, but the entire hierarchical structure. Skinner discusses that More's disgruntlement with having a political and social pyramid-type system meant that there would always be a divide amongst the citizenry (Skinner, 260). For More:

The rich and powerful can be relied on to be 'greedy, unscrupulous and useless', while the poor are generally 'well-behaved, simple' people whose industry is essential to the community, but whose habits of virtue and deference serve to ensure that they are always cheated of their just deserts. The inevitable outcome is that 'so-called gentlefolk', who 'are either idle or mere parasites and purveyors of empty pleasures' run the commonwealth in their own vile interests, while 'farmers, colliers, common labourers, carters and carpenters without whom there

¹² For the most part, it was Christian humanists, like Thomas More and Erasmus, who thought that change could be made if everyone worked at it hard enough.

would be no commonwealth at all' are first of all 'misused' by their contemptible masters and are then abandoned to 'a most miserable death' (Skinner, 260).

In other words, the rich take complete control and advantage of those so-called citizens, who while considered to be worthless to the rich, whom are the true bearers of responsibility by keeping the society alive with their manual labor skills. It is clear to Sir Thomas More that such people who are considered to be a part of the aristocracy are ultimately corruptible because the position that they hold in the hierarchical structure has forced them to be that way (Skinner, 260). Vice versa, More believes that those so-called citizens who are considered to be poor, or parasitic, are left to serve and obey orders from their aristocrat counterparts, and hope to die gracefully (Skinner, 260).

Further, the second reason that Sir Thomas More defends his humanistic position has already slightly been touched upon. More argues that it is simple impossible for hierarchically structured societies to be virtuous (Skinner, 260). Skinner states, that for Sir Thomas More, "No hierarchical society, he claims, could ever in principle be virtuous: for in maintaining 'degree' we encourage the sin of pride; and in encouraging the sin of pride we produce a society founded not on the virtues but on the most hideous vice of all" (Skinner, 260). According to More, pride is the leading cause for unhappiness in a society because it prevents any chance of real egalitarianism for its citizens (Skinner, 260). As an alternative, pride only ensures that citizens will be divided and treated unjustly due to the hierarchical structure in which it lays the foundation within a commonwealth. Pride, when employed by the aristocracy, is used as a weapon against the poor. Conversely, when the poor look to the rich for leadership, but only find pride, they

are led to believe that only wealth and prestige matter. Thus, as far as More is concerned, there is no room for virtue in the hierarchical structure of such a society.

So what does Thomas More expect from the seemingly permanent political and social structure that Europe has fallen victim to? As mentioned, Skinner argues that with *Utopia* Sir Thomas More aspired to inspire change to the political and social climate of Renaissance England by implementing humanist beliefs into government institutions and the ruling classes (Skinner, 255-61). However, More was quick not just to criticize the problems that he observed; he also suggested a way to make a compromise between virtue and government. More introduces his proposal in *Utopia* when the character Hythloday declares that the possession of money and private property are the reason for injustice and all of the problems in any one commonwealth (Skinner, 260-61). Skinner restates More's rationale by saying, "The answer is obvious: it is the unequal distribution of money and private property which enables a few people to lord it over everyone else, thereby feeding their own pride and ensuring that deference is paid not to virtue but merely to rank and wealth" (Skinner, 260). More's prescription for the problem is to completely eradicate and form of currency or private property (Skinner, 261). From More's humanist view, once a society is able to remove money and private property then it also takes the next step in removing the worst type of pest from its society, better known as, pride. Furthermore, once pride is out of the picture, it allows for that society to make room for virtue. Once virtue is reinstated into political and social life then there is a real chance for an egalitarian society to take shape because money and private property do not exist to fuel the sinful haughty pride of those who are in a position of power (Skinner, 261).

In regards to this proposed solution, Skinner again directs attention to what Sir Thomas More is implying with his humanist convictions. The political purpose of *Utopia*, according to Skinner, is evident in the way More's fictional Utopian society operates. More describes the Utopian society as egalitarian, virtuous, and humble, since its members have abolished private property and money (Skinner, 261). Skinner declares, "It will by now be evident that the starting-point of More's enquiry is one that he shares with many other humanists. He believes that one of the most urgent tasks of social theory is to discover the root causes of injustice and poverty" (Skinner, 261). However, More already discovered what the root cause of injustice and poverty are, or so he believed. It seems that his outlet to expose and criticize both the political hierarchical structures of Europe and his fellow humanists for not standing up against them, is found within the books of *Utopia* (Skinner, 262). From Skinner's perspective, it was no coincidence that More nicknamed the Utopian society 'the best state of a commonwealth', the principles that the Utopians valued and abided by are identical to the ones in which Sir Thomas More cherished and sought in the real world (Skinner, 262).

Skinner is not alone in thinking that humanism is the political purpose of *Utopia*. George M. Logan is also a firm believer in the idea that Thomas More based *Utopia* on his deeply-humanistic principles, but More did so distinctly. To begin, Logan approaches his argument by in a similar fashion to Skinner's by acknowledging that Sir Thomas More was, indeed, a humanist thinker and the political purpose of *Utopia* was to espouse his complex humanist convictions to Europe (Logan, 254). However, unlike Skinner, Logan goes as far to claim that, "[...] *Utopia* suggests that More's critique of humanist political theory and its classical sources (for it is these sources that he directly engages) is

much broader, since it takes the form of showing how the application of analytic methods appropriated and refined from Greek political theory [...]” (Logan, 257). Whereas Skinner primarily focuses on More straying from the original concept of humanism, Logan asserts that Skinner does not go deeply enough into the mind of Thomas More and his political motive for *Utopia*.

Instead of only observing Thomas More as purposely sending a message to his fellow humanists, Logan says that his message is much broader and directed not only towards Christian humanists, but to secular humanists as well (Logan, 258). In regards to his point Logan writes, “To Christian humanists, More directs an object lesson in the proper approach to the analysis of social problems, a lesson that suggests the extreme difficulty of achieving solutions to them” (Logan, 258). By this, Logan means to specify that most Christian humanists held the belief that most of the problems that Europe endured could be reformed overtime with hard work and persistence (Logan, 258). However, as he indicates and what Sir Thomas More addresses in book one and book two of *Utopia*, the people who were able to actually bring about change in the political and social arenas were already corrupt and had no particular interest in rearranging policies and social life as they knew it since they were the ones who were benefitting the most from the original structure of society (Logan, 258).

What is more, for him, *Utopia* speaks directly to secular humanists by, “[...] demonstrating that the rational pursuit of political expediency, quite independent of moral considerations, normally dictates policies identical to those dictated by morality” (Logan, 258). Basically, while secular humanists assume that political edicts are driven by pragmatic rationale, in all actuality they are unsuitable and inadvertently immoral, as

well. Thomas More demonstrates this problem when Raphael Hythloday disagrees with the laws that are implemented against those who steal in a heated discussion with Cardinal Morton and a layman. Logan recalls, “The supposedly expedient European solutions to the problems of theft and poverty are in fact as inexpedient as they are immoral, while the pursuit of self-interest by immoral means on the part of the monarch is, as Hythloday’s imaginary council meetings suggest, as destructive to the monarchs as to their people” (Logan, 259).

While Quentin Skinner and George M. Logan’s interpretations focus on Sir Thomas More’s dedication and critique of humanism as the political purpose of *Utopia*, Thomas I. White goes as far to argue that perhaps illustrating the dangers of *pride* is the sole political purpose of the book. White comes to this conclusion since he observes that a primary objective of *Utopia*, “[...] is to show the source of social evil” which ultimately, at the base, lies pride (White,, 43). He alludes to the fact that in the beginning of the book, More is set on focusing in on specific social practices such as, unjust economic practices, greed, and land ownership (White,, 43-4). Of course, as he suggests, while it seems that More’s true motive is to blame political and economic practices for their part in corrupting leaders who rule governments, such as private property and the possession of wealth, his purpose is much deeper (White,, 44). White reveals that More’s goal is not simply to blame a political or economic institution for the problems in society, but to take a swing at the very sin that has demolished all of the Christian virtues from both the political and social community (White,, 44-5).

However, is it conceivable that just one sin, or what More would probably deem as the ultimate sin, is solely capable of creating devastation in Renaissance Europe

between its leaders and those subject to rule? White describes that Sir Thomas More had no doubt in his mind that pride was responsible for the difficulties in Renaissance Europe. The term “pride” during More’s life was not understood in the modern sense, as in someone is proud of the hard work they do or proud of his or her family (White,, 45). Instead, pride connoted that a person was arrogant or egotistical about themselves and their life (White,, 45). Even more important, is the way that Thomas More interpreted the definition of pride since, “More does not mean a private “delight of self” or personal feelings of self-satisfaction. The attitude More decries requires other people and is always at someone else’s expense. It is not just feeling good about yourself. It is feeling good because you feel superior to someone else, a fact which is captured well in the Latin *superbia* and its Greek root υπέρβιος” (White,, 45). When understood in this frame of mind, pride is clearly capable of intensifying a division between those who are wealthy and those who are less fortunate, or a division caused by what White describes as an innate feeling of “delighting in others inferiority and misfortune” (46).

In his argument, White illustrates that Thomas More believed that there were only two circumstances to blame for the development of a person’s haughty pride. The chief reason why pride spread through those who were in power quicker than anyone else is because they possessed wealth and power which only fueled their prideful side (White,, 46). White explains, “More thinks that simply having more wealth than other people will tempt us to think that we are better than they are. More apparently believes that having more money than others will encourage us to think that we are entitled to it—and that we are entitled to it because we are superior to them in some fundamental way” (White,, 46). More’s reasoning is not unique in this regard, since it is confirmed by his fellow

humanists, who also criticized the unfair distribution of wealth that led to a separation between those who rule and those who are subject to the edicts made specifically to control them.

When the second characteristic of what More describes as “pride”, is paired with the desire for wealth and material possessions, the situation only becomes more precarious. Thomas More believed that the second aspect of pride is prompted by the desire to possess glory, or what he called “the vain praise of the people” (White,, 47). Essentially, Thomas More was vehemently distrustful that when people are put into positions of power they feel enabled to separate themselves from those who virtually have no say in significant matters (White,, 47). For one, as White discusses, those in power feed off of their superiority and appetite for more wealth and material possessions and are never able to be satisfied no matter how much more they are given (White,, 47).

White argues that More’s two books in *Utopia* are intended to denote the problem of pride, in book one, and then his solution to the problem, as seen in book two with his description of the island of Utopia (White,, 48). In the first book, pride can be seen as the central concern by looking to Raphael Hythloday’s discussion of the political and economic situation that was igniting a surge of poverty, crimes, and confusion between the classes of citizens (White,, 49). Hythloday’s description in book two elucidates the solution to the problems of Renaissance Europe by spelling out the political system created by the Utopians (White,, 49-51). In book two, Hythloday tells Peter Giles and More that the Utopians are able to prevent conflict between citizens because they have adopted a form of communism. White explains the significance of this by stating, “Raphael claims that the lack of private property and the even distribution of

goods is the key to the Utopians' happiness. This obviously prevents the accumulation of wealth or material goods in a way that allows anyone to see that his life is significantly different from anyone else's from a material standpoint (White,, 50). By eliminating private property and overconsumption, the Utopians are able to prevent a perpetual system of power-hungry citizens from developing in their society.

However, the Utopians do more than just exclude money and private ownership from their culture. White brings attention to the fact that the Utopians remove other selfish practices in both the political and social realms to prevent pride from burgeoning. White describes such prohibited practices in the political realm:

First, we find them in the political domain, where anything that brings either special attention or special treatment to the individual officials is checked. Campaigning for office is forbidden. Officials' living conditions are only slightly better than those of the rest of the citizenry. The officials' power is restricted so that it will be used for the public good, not their own interest. And the number of officials is limited so that the dangers of the temptations which come from political responsibility are restricted to a small group (White,, 51).

While the list for prohibited behaviors is long for the political system, it is just as extensive for their social system, as well. White reminds his reader that in Utopia:

Institutions are shaped so that people are discouraged from thinking of themselves as especially different from one another. Whenever possible there are no signs of

distinction¹³ or status symbols. Their clothes are similar, the houses are all the same, and they are even exchanged by lot every decade. Praise is bestowed for being willing to put aside individual concerns in order to advance others' interests, not for being a special individual set apart from others. The overall society is even regulated in order to prevent factions from developing. After all, pride can also afflict groups, and More saw the need for preventing the possibility of one group's coming to believe that it is superior to another group (White,, 51).

All in all, Utopian society seriously discourages any form of self-praise in both its political and social systems. White's argument that demonstrating the perils of pride in government and the society it oversees is the political purpose of Thomas More's *Utopia* is backed by his understanding of the intricate development of the work through both book one and book two.

For White, the dangerous presence of pride in politics demonstrates the real driving force behind *Utopia* because as every turn in the plot, the character of Raphael Hythloday, who White perceives Thomas More to live vicariously through, is constantly trying to remove pride from the equation. White reminds his reader, "'Pride" is Thomas More's shorthand description of a proclivity in people to develop an insufferable arrogance when confronted with situations in which they can find someone falling short in comparison to them—especially in terms of money, esteem, or power" (White,, 53).

According to White's argument, Thomas More's comprehension of pride is evident in

¹³ This excludes criminals. Those who commit crimes in Utopian society are subject to losing a chunk of their ear and wear special clothing denoting that they have done an unjust act. They are, for all intents and purposes, marked as different to of course show that they are criminals. However, on an ironic note, it seems that such a system also forces criminals to be different to illustrate to society that such people possess the least worth much like how the rich separate themselves from the poor.

Utopia as seen in book one, and his desire to prevent pride from making a grand appearance is even more obvious with his fictional story of the Utopian people and their society in book two.

Additionally, in perhaps a more familiar sounding argument in regards to utopian literature, R. S. Sylvester claims that the political purpose of *Utopia* is to imitate the political system that More describes and to implement it into English society. Sylvester's evidence lies first in the title of the work, "Utopia," meaning nowhere in Greek (Sylvester, 290). However, before Thomas More named his piece "Utopia" he referred to it as "Nusquama" in Latin, also meaning nowhere (Sylvester, 290). Yet, the importance of changing the name from Latin to Greek, as Sylvester asserts, points to Thomas More's identification with the character Raphael Hythloday who in the book dedicates his life to learning about Greek culture (Sylvester, 291). Further, the original title better known as "Concerning the best state of a commonwealth, and concerning the new island, Utopia; a truly golden little book, no less beneficial than entertaining, by the distinguished and eloquent author Thomas More, citizen and sheriff of the famous city of London", is more than an amusing title. It is meant to show that such a place should or could exist (Sylvester, 291).

With this in mind, Sylvester is also hard-set on believing that Thomas More's real beliefs are imitated by the characters of Raphael Hythloday and More by reminding the reader of the following:

When More created Hythlodæus¹⁴, he also created himself, so to speak, by introducing a character with his own name into his book. This fictional “Thomas More” is indeed very much like the historical Thomas More, the author of *Utopia*, and it might well seem that the presence of such a character, a first person narrator at that, who argues with Hythlodæus in Book I, would serve to warn us against identifying More’s deepest beliefs, as the author, with those views which Hythlodæus presents. Yet, in actual fact, as any reader knows, the effect is just the opposite. The fictional “Thomas More” grants the truth of many of Hythlodæus’ arguments (Sylvester, 295).

According to Sylvester, Thomas More’s political purpose for *Utopia* is to create a real image of what he describes in his work into the political system of England, which is usually perceived as nonsense or a fantasy due to both the title of the book and the true meaning of Raphaels’ last name of Hythloday, or “well-learned in nonsense” (Sylvester, 296). Still, for Sylvester, Thomas More’s intention was not to create some fantasy world to be enjoyed by his peers, but to illustrate that when searching for the best example of a commonwealth, the political and social policies of the island of Utopia are the only ones that should be imitated by Renaissance Europe because he believed that they were superior and better suited to relieve the problems that those living in Renaissance England were enduring under a misguided political system.

By writing *Utopia*, Sir Thomas More was able to describe his view of Renaissance Europe, albeit negative, and show his disapproval in regards to the political

¹⁴ Depending on the translation, the character’s name is either spelled Hythloday or Hythlodæus. Either way, the name still means nonsense in English.

and social organization that had developed from the medieval period right into the Renaissance through the characters of More and Raphael Hythloday (Sylvester, 300). Further, Sylvester offers that to fully comprehend *Utopia* and what it contributes to the political arena, readers and scholars must be able to imagine that such a place could exist a place where there are values, just practices and policies, and a sense of egalitarianism, like on the island of utopia. This, he says, is the only way that we can understand Thomas More's political reasoning for *Utopia*.

Yet, American scholar Russell Ames takes a different approach when evaluating More's political reasoning for *Utopia*. His take on the sixteenth-century masterpiece is that it was not imitation that drove More to write *Utopia*. As Ames views it, much of *Utopia* has been over-generalized and made more complex than it already appears to the modern reader (Ames, 4). One of his chief complaints is that many scholars consider More's work as a push for society to be socially modeled after the island of Utopia and to politically adopt a communist policy. Ames follows this up by stating, "Most critics of *Utopia* have spent so much time trying to prove either that communism won't work, or that More was not a communist, that they have ignored the immediate and practical significance of his economic criticism" (Ames, 9).

However, for Ames, the aforementioned hyper-critical interpretations per example the ones of More's political purpose are completely incorrect. For the political purpose of *Utopia*, as Ames observes, is, "[...] not an accident of individual genius but a product of capitalism's attack on feudalism¹⁵, a part of middle-class and humanist criticism of a

¹⁵ Feudalism took place in the middle ages. It consisted of three parts: a lord, a vassal, and the fief. A lord owned the land. A vassal could be granted the land of the lord after exchanging their labor. Finally, the fief is better known as land. The system was complex and often unjust.

decaying social order” (Ames, 6). Ames asserts that his thesis speaks directly in opposition to some of the claims that during More’s time the middle class had some form of power that was equal to the power possessed by the nobility (Ames, 23). If the middle class would have had power, Ames argues, then More would not have needed to write *Utopia*, since the critique being made in the book is primarily against the aristocracy and in support of the middle class (Ames, 23). Instead, Ames suggests, “If, however, the middle class was yet subordinate, often opposed to the princely state, suppressed and rebellious, then the *Utopia* may be considered practical revolutionary propaganda, written and published by a man of unusual courage and integrity” (Ames, 23). Ames understanding of *Utopia* seems to say that More did, in fact, write with purpose and to intentionally throw his politically charged ideas of improving society, at his contemporaries and not just for the pure enjoyment of writing.

What is more, for Ames, the political purpose of *Utopia* is what he comprehends as direct result of the transitioning political economy in England. During the time More wrote *Utopia* Europe was transforming from feudalism and just barely beginning to understand and implement capitalism, but feudalism had not been completely banished (Ames, 23). Ames reminds his readers that , “There had, of course, been a long period of the decay of feudalism: the waning of the exclusive medieval towns, the weakening of the guilds, the growth of unequal land holdings among peasants, the improvement of tools and techniques, the increase of commodity production” (Ames, 24). Meaning that, while the feudal system was not at its peak during the writing of *Utopia*, it still had a firm grip on the English economy and the politics surrounding it. It was not until later centuries, more like the sixteenth and seventeenth, that manufacturing and capitalism was able to

take precedence in England and Europe as a whole (Ames, 29). The author continues this point by confirming that, “[...] peasant agriculture was yet the base of the economy and, among capitalists, as was stated above, usury and merchant capital were dominant, while manufacture was an appendage to them (Ames, 29). Therefore, the middle class in England was not the prominent class during More’s time because feudalism, which as he argues, was actually better suited for the peasant class and, as always, the nobility since the middle class was too busy being taxed by the aristocracy and unable to benefit from the feudal system (Ames, 25). In short, the argument that the middle class had been able to support the monarchy with capitalism is incorrect. The middle class did not have enough leverage to change the feudal system in England and the peasants were still stuck in a cycle of poverty and despair, but naturally the nobility was still able to thrive.

According to Ames, More’s writing of *Utopia* was a direct shot at the aristocracy and feudal system, rather than an agreeance with the monarchy. More’s dislike for the nobility and feudalism is clear in *Utopia* when reading the commentary of characters Hythloday and even at some points that of More and Peter Giles. Ames acknowledges the fact that some believe that More did not hope for or desire reform in England, but he counter argues with, “[...] it takes hope, as well as recognition of evil, to make a reformer; and hopelessness does not accord with the practical nature of much of Utopia’s satire and suggestion, with the buoyant spirit of Book II, with the successes of More’s career, nor with the Erasmian¹⁶ hopes of 1514-1517 (Ames, 34). More’s political purpose of *Utopia*, for Ames, was to attack and suggest reform to the current feudal system

¹⁶ Desiderius Erasmus was a close friend of Thomas More’s during the 16th century. He served as a priest and, like Thomas More, was a humanist.

because, “The new monarchies were despotic, constantly consolidating, and seeking broader areas to control [...]” (Ames, 34).

More’s understanding of the world in desperate England during the sixteenth century sheds light on his political purpose for *Utopia*: to suggest change to the political and economic realms and to bring about more equality between the classes as to improve life in a place he loved. Ames notes that More, indeed, did have to force himself to write *Utopia* in the style that he did since, “[...] Thomas More was a business, political, and literary representative of a class which, though influential, and strong in defense, was not yet at all capable of seizing power, and had to fight cautiously. Its criticisms of existing conditions were often held back or had to be disguised, a fact which explains many characteristics of *Utopia*, including its literary form as a fantasy” (Ames, 35). The fact that More wrote *Utopia* as a fantasy was due to the realization that had he wrote it any other way then he most certainly would have been severely punished for suggesting reform to the political, economic, and social status of England during the early sixteenth century.

Chapter Conclusion

The contribution of *Utopia* completely transformed the way that authors wrote about their political community. This is evident in the surge of utopian-like works that were produced during the Renaissance not long after the publication of More’s work. It was More’s ability to describe the hardships and complexities of the political community and his knack for presenting a new world, a utopian world, with possible practical political remedies to his reader that continues to fascinate. This is evident in the amount

of scholarship that is dedicated to disambiguating the political purposes of More's island. Quentin Skinner and George M. Logan look to explain *Utopia* as a result of More's humanist beliefs that hoped for society to return to studying the classical works in which humanists believed that held all of the secrets to living a moral life.

Other scholars such as Thomas I. White understand *Utopia* from a narrower viewpoint and claims that More's main problem is with pride and its effects on people, especially those in power positions. Pride, as More viewed it, had the ability to completely ruin not only the character of a human being, but also to engulf an entire society and cause it to destroy itself from the inside out. More's constant focus on the problem of pride throughout his work is the impetus for White's argument and it serves to be a solid one. And yet other authors like, R. S. Sylvester and Russell Ames, contend that More truly hoped that England would become like the island of Utopia. Sylvester asserts that Raphael Hythloday is not simply a fictional figure, but a character who More lives vicariously through in the book. Russell Ames builds off of similar ideas to Sylvester's stating that contrary to popular belief, More's work was meant to be taken seriously, but had to be written indirectly so that he would not be punished for such radical ideas.

All of the theories presented by the authors abovementioned are tenable, but no one argument is completely right or wrong. To understand More's work, readers must understand that it was a combination of all of the ideas presented here that make the work so interesting and complex. More was a humanist and he did despise the sense of haughty pride that many rulers flaunted. It is possible that More wrote *Utopia* in hopes for England to copy the rules and ideas he suggests, but regardless even if he did then he was fully aware that by publishing something so offensive to the kingship would surely get

him punished. More's audacity to publish words and ideas, whether have true intention behind them or not, that directly contradicted the laws of his government over time eventually enticed people to be fascinated by what he did write and to be left to wonder if such ideas would ever really work.

However, whether More's intention was to have the island of Utopia to come to fruition or not, More's capacity to offer his audience an alternative solution to political problems is what makes *Utopia* an important piece of political literature. To be sure, the only real barrier that prevents a utopian society and the egalitarian ideas that it espouses, as More describes, are the people who say it is not possible.

CHAPTER III

An Introduction to *The Commonwealth of Oceana*

"To go my own way, and yet to follow the ancients, the principles of government are twofold: internal, or the goods of the mind; and external, or the goods of fortune." –

James Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656)

James Harrington wrote *Oceana* to criticize the unbalanced government of England that had just transformed from the rule of Charles I of England to the Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell. Harrington was an opponent of Cromwell's, since he was quite close to Charles I of England. However, Harrington also found fault in Charles I because he felt that a monarchy prevented a balanced government, or a government that shared power with its people. The book is a utopia in the sense that Harrington creates an ideal constitution and commonwealth that enforce his agrarian law proposal and criticizes England and Cromwell for what Harrington perceives as their errors, misguidance, and monopoly of power in the real English government.

In his utopia, the commonwealth of Oceana¹⁷ is ruled by, "the most victorious captain and incomparable patriot, Olphaus Megaletor¹⁸" (Harrington, 71). Olphaus Megaletor rules the commonwealth, but he rules alongside the people by taking into

¹⁷ Oceana is meant to represent England in the work.

¹⁸ The name assigned in the book to sarcastically represent Oliver Cromwell. Olphaus Megaletor is a much smarter ruler in the book and actually works to balance the government, two characteristics that Harrington criticized Cromwell for lacking.

consideration their opinions and concerns in order to create equal laws. The commonwealth has a number of edicts, but the most important rule is the agrarian law. Harrington's agrarian law proposal in *Oceana* specifically declares, "[...] every man who is at present possessed, or shall hereafter be possessed, of an estate in land exceeding the revenue of £2000 a year, and having more than one son, shall leave his lands either equally divided among them, in case the lands amount to above £2000 a year to each, or so equally in case they come under, that the greater part or portion of the same remaining to the eldest exceed not the value of £2000 revenue" (Harrington, 104). What is more, his agrarian system proposed that all men living in the commonwealth would be able to possess land, but never would the land be handled by only a few men or a single landholder, like a king. Landownership was a privilege granted only to men and Harrington notes in his work that the agrarian law of *Oceana* recognizes the following:

And if a man has a daughter or daughters, except she be an heiress or they be heiresses, he shall not leave or give to any. One of them in marriage, or otherwise, for her portion, above the value of £1,500 in lands, goods, and moneys. Nor shall any friend, kinsman, or kinswoman add to her or their portion or portions that are so provided for, to make any one of them greater. Nor shall any man demand or have more in marriage with any woman. Nevertheless an heiress shall enjoy her lawful inheritance, and a widow, whatsoever the bounty or affection of her husband shall bequeath to her, to be divided in the first generation, wherein it is divisible according as has been shown (Harrington, 104).

This agrarian system, according to Harrington, is how his *Oceana* prevents the government from possessing all of the power in the state. Women, of course, are

excluded in this division of land and are left to rely on men for goods and money, but for the male citizens of the commonwealth they are granted land and self-sufficiency. In terms of power relations, the male citizens of Oceana are land owners and therefore also have a stake in the power of the government.

The Commonwealth of Oceana is broken up into three sections, but the utopia begins with a description by Harrington of the characteristics of different styles of governments and what an ideal government looks like. To do so, he designates two characteristics of what governments are made up of: goods of the mind and goods of fortune. Goods of the mind, he says, are those in which, “[...] are natural or acquired virtues, as wisdom, prudence, and courage” (Harrington, 17). Conversely, goods of fortune are in the form of riches or goods that symbolize wealth or power (Harrington, 18). It is a combination of these traits within a government that help it to rule, but if one characteristic is valued more so than another then there is an imbalance in the stability of the government. This imbalance is best understood that if goods of fortune are most valued then power belongs to those who are rich and those who lack riches also lack power in their government and society. Harrington explains a variation of this notion by stating, “To begin with riches, in regard that men are hung upon these, not of choice as upon the other, but of necessity and by the teeth; forasmuch as he who wants bread is his servant that will feed him, if a man thus feeds a whole people, they are under his empire” (Harrington, 18). To him, man is obsessed with the goods of fortune because man has to be in order to remain in control of his position in society and to provide himself with essential goods that ensure his livelihood, like food, shelter, and clothing.

The goods of fortune are essential to Harrington due to his observation that people should be able to hold power as individual citizens rather than the government possessing all of the authority. Harrington understands that the power-struggle between citizens and their government is rooted in the idea of dominion. According to Harrington, “Empire is of two kinds, domestic and national, or foreign and provincial. Domestic empire is founded upon dominion. Dominion is property, real or personal; that is to say, in lands, or in money and goods” (18). His perception of what constitutes real power is translated as property, or more specifically, land. Land, for Harrington, is significant in that it is “[...] held by the proprietor or proprietors, lord or lords of it, in some proportion; and such (except it be in a city that has little or no land, and whose revenue is in trade) as is the proportion or balance of dominion or property in land, such is the nature of the empire” (Harrington, 18). More straightforwardly, land is what gives an empire its power and when it is held solely by the government rather than dispersed amongst the citizenry, then Harrington declares the empire a monarchy.

Conversely, Harrington proposes that a state would fare better if they took the form of a commonwealth. Commonwealths, as Harrington describes them, are when, “[...] the whole people be landlords, or hold the lands so divided among them that no one man, or number of men, within the compass of the few or aristocracy, overbalance them, the empire (without the interposition of force) is a commonwealth” (Harrington, 19). With this definition in mind, commonwealths are able to prevent an imbalance in their government, or a power-struggle between the citizens and their government, since they provide the citizens with a stake in power, or dominion of the empire, by allowing them

to own land. What is more, the commonwealth should implement and exercise agrarian law.

For Harrington, agrarian law is the best chance of keeping a balanced state and this form, he writes, was even preferred by the divine since, “[...] God himself, divided the land of Canaan to His people by lots, and is of such virtue, that whenever it has held that government has not altered, except by consent; as in that unparalleled example of the people of Israel, when being in liberty they would needs choose a king. But without an Agrarian law, government, whether monarchical, aristocratical, or popular, has no long lease” (Harrington, 20). In his observation, Harrington believes that when a government solely possesses land then it creates a cleavage between the state and its citizens which is very difficult to fix. In most cases, Harrington notices, once a government has seized control of the land and taken away power from the citizens it takes a real chance with its own fate since, “[...] to fix the balance, is to entail misery; but in the former, not to fix it, is to lose the government” (Harrington, 19).

To better illustrate his point, Harrington compares his ideas to Machiavelli’s conception of how to maintain stability in government. The author asserts, “Wherefore, as in this place I agree with Machiavel, that a nobility or gentry, overbalancing a popular government, is the utter bane and destruction of it; so I shall now show in another, that a nobility or gentry, in a popular government, not overbalancing it, is the very life and soul of it” (Harrington, 22). Therefore, if there is no effort to balance the society then there are only two possibilities. One, both the government seizes power by owning all of the land and thus takes a risk at the citizens turning on it causes its ultimate demise. Or,

alternatively, the citizens control the land and there is complete chaos because there is no government in place to regulate and control land ownership.

To prevent these possibilities from occurring, Harrington's proposes that by implementing a commonwealth with agrarian law there will be stability between the citizens and their government. In *Oceana* Harrington declares, "But in governments that admit the citizen or subject to dominion in lands, the richest are they that share most of the power at home; whereas the richest among the provincials, though native subjects, or citizens that have been transplanted, are least admitted to the government abroad; for men, like flowers or roots being transplanted, take after the soil wherein they grow" (Harrington, 23). Moreover, when citizens and government consciously and persistently try to keep balance in the society by sharing power, or land, then there is a greater chance for the people, the government, and the society to succeed more so than it ever could without total cooperation by all actors aforementioned. With these notions in mind, the author ends his first section by informing his reader that, "A council without a balance is not a commonwealth, but an oligarchy; and every oligarchy, except it be put to the defense of its wickedness or power against some outward danger, is factious. Wherefore the errors of the people being from their governors, if the people of Oceana have been factious, the cause is apparent, but what remedy?" (Harrington, 70).

The cure to such unbalanced government is, of course, found within the constitution of the commonwealth of Oceana. By splitting up land amongst the citizens then there is an understanding between the government and its people that both rule together, instead of a sole powerholder who creates a divide between him and his people. Harrington observed that during his life in England, the people were always disconnected

from their government and this caused an irrevocable divide between the citizens and the leadership. The only way he perceived that fragmented government could be prevented in the real world was by implementing agrarian law in a commonwealth in his ideal world.

A Brief History of *Oceana*

The Commonwealth of Oceana was published around 1656 shortly after the end of the English Civil War. Harrington wrote *The Commonwealth of Oceana* after traveling across Europe, and it is said that while visiting Venice, Italy he found the inspiration he needed to write his famous work.¹⁹ The exact date in which James Harrington returned to England is a mystery.²⁰ However, Harrington did come back to England²¹ sometime before the end of its civil war and what he observed prompted him to write *Oceana*. Unlike *Utopia*, James Harrington's utopia is written in a much more practical sense. Whereas More, his characters, and interpreters of *Utopia* question whether an island like Utopia can ever exist, Harrington as well as his critics are quite aware that *The Commonwealth of Oceana* was an actual hopeful blueprint for England to follow after enduring an extended period of civil and political turmoil.²²

However, like More and *Utopia*, there are numerous different types of claims in regards to what the political purpose of *The Commonwealth of Oceana* was during the late Renaissance. Did Harrington model his ideal world solely after the Machiavellian²³

¹⁹ Smith (1971) notes that Harrington was unhappy with the circumstances and fled for awhile.

²⁰ However, Smith (1971) notes that Harrington had to have arrived back to England before the beginning of the English Civil War.

²¹ Smith (1971) makes it clear that those dates are still completely unclear.

²² Smith (1971) even goes as far to argue that he thinks that *Oceana* is often wrongly characterized as a utopian work. We disagree on this point.

²³ Niccolo Machiavelli served as a historian and politician in Italy in the early 16th century. He is most famous for political writings such as *Discourses* and *The Prince*. Machiavelli's civic republicanism had quite an influence on the way that Harrington thought about politics and society.

model to solve the problems of England? Was his political intent to illustrate that, much like the ancients, greed lays the path for an unbalanced society and government? Did he write the politically charged *Oceana* in order to demolish and forever banish the monarchy in England? It is the purpose of this section to explore the possible political reasons for James Harrington's *The Commonwealth of Oceana*. In doing so, I hope to establish that just as with Thomas More's *Utopia*, by which Harrington was no doubt inspired, that there are multiple political reasons for different utopias. Some reasons are practical and others theoretical. Regardless, it is still important and influential to the political structure of our current system.

The Political Purposes of *The Commonwealth of Oceana*

In his work, *The Machiavellian Moment*, British scholar J. G. A. Pocock calls Harrington's *Oceana*, "[...] a moment of paradigmatic breakthrough, a major revision of English political theory and history in the light of concepts drawn from civic humanism and Machiavellian republicanism" (Pocock 384). There is unanimous agreement among scholars that James Harrington was a republican thinker, but as far as his political reasoning for writing *Oceana* leaves much to be discussed. As Pocock sees it, Harrington's political purpose with *Oceana*: "[...] was to erect these perceptions into a general history of political power in both Europe and England, founded on the Machiavellian theory of the possession of arms as necessary to political personality" (Pocock 385). More clearly, to Pocock, Harrington's political purpose for *Oceana* was to implement a form of a Machiavellian based political system to help combat the political problems of the monarchy and the feudal system in England.

To sort Pocock's argument out we must first look to what he discusses as the, "Machiavellian theory of the possession of arms" to form a clearer picture of what Harrington had in mind when he proposed *Oceana*. It comes as no surprise that James Harrington was influenced by Machiavellian thought, particularly since he found much of his inspiration for writing *Oceana* while spending time in Italy. Machiavellian thought touches upon numerous angles within political theory, but Pocock clarifies that what Harrington is referring to is Machiavelli's idea of bearing of arms in which he explains, "The Florentines had stressed that if a man bore arms not for himself but for another, he was incapable of citizenship, since the use of arms—the crucial act in asserting both power and virtue—must be at his command if he was to be at the republic's; and they had perceived the transition from Roman republic to empire in terms of the rise and fall of armed individuality" (Pocock 386). That is, if a man did not bear arms for himself then he was unable to belong to, nor benefit from, the political community in which he lived because he was unable to assert power or act virtuously individually and was therefore dependent upon the nobility to assert power and to decide what constituted as virtue. Furthermore, Pocock asserts that with *Oceana* Harrington was able to pick up where Machiavelli had left off:

Harrington's acquaintance with English legal antiquarianism permitted him at this point to add a further dimension—one which, as he put it, Machiavelli had very narrowly missed: the bearing of arms, once it was seen as a function of feudal tenure, proved to be based upon the possession of property. The crucial distinction was that between vassalage and freehold; it determined whether a man's sword was his lord's or his own and the commonwealth's; and the function of free

proprietorship became the liberation of arms, and consequently of the personality, for free public action and public virtue (Pocock 386).

Here, Pocock illustrates the political reasoning of *Oceana* by acknowledging how Harrington combined Machiavelli's theory of bearing arms by proposing that land was essentially tied into the concept of "arms". For him, land needed to be owned and possessed by the people or the vassals, rather than the lord's or in Harrington's *Oceana*, the monarchy. The spread out distribution of land would give citizens a slice of power and true membership to the commonwealth. This point is emphasized by Harrington as he explicitly argues in *Oceana* that he believes the unequal distribution of land is what ultimately ends up ruining a government and the people who obey it.

Further, in regards to his political proposal in *Oceana*, Harrington modifies his own understanding of political institutions and distinguishes them from Machiavelli's when he disagrees with him that governments are destroyed solely by moral corruption (Pocock 387). Pocock explains Harrington's understanding of governmental decay by noting, "When a government became "corrupt," he thought, it was less because the citizens had ceased to display the virtues appropriate to it than because the distribution of property that should determine it (387)." Again, land for Harrington is a crucial possession and it should not only be owned and allocated by a monarch or any one individual but the land should belong to the people. Pocock continues this point by reminding that in *Oceana* Harrington did, "[...] hold that only a democracy of landholders—that is, only a society where a *demos*, or many, of landed freemen held land in relative equality—possessed the human resources (Machiavelli might have said the *materia*) necessary to distribute political authority in the diversified and balanced ways

that created a self-stabilizing *politeia*²⁴; and such a commonwealth, he contended, might prove theoretically immortal” (Pocock 388). Harrington’s ideal society is where land is central to the people and their freedom, not simply a resource used to make profit.

Moreover, Pocock argues that Harrington’s agrarian system was designed so that, “When land was acquired, it was in order to bequeath it: to found families or *oikoi*²⁵ based on a security of inheritance, which set the sons free to bear arms and cast ballots in the muster of the commonwealth. As with Aristotle, the end of land is not profit, but leisure: the opportunity to act in the public realm or assembly, to display virtue” (Pocock 390). The purpose of land, in *Oceana*, was to be passed down through the generations and to be dedicated towards personal use, rather than to provide economic return for the owner. As the author reminds the reader, “The end of property was stability and leisure: it anchored the individual in the structure of power and virtue, and liberated him to practice these as activities” (Pocock 391).

For Pocock, the political purpose of *Oceana* is clearly explained by Harrington when he introduces his vision for England. His image for England in *Oceana*, based on Harrington’s own modification of Machiavellian thought, was intentional and he admitted that he was hopeful for it to be implemented into policy. In doing so, Harrington desired to get rid of any trace of the feudal system and to instill republican agrarian ideas to disperse the land held by the few among the many.

As highlighted above, *Oceana* was definitely not a work like *Utopia* in that Harrington did not attempt to disguise his opinion that his agrarian system would suit

²⁴ Greek for a group of citizens who live together in a city-state.

²⁵ Greek for household" or family

England better than the republic already put in place by Cromwell²⁶. In an interesting analysis, Eric Nelson depicts James Harrington differently in direct opposition to J.G.A. Pocock, when he portrays him as sympathetic not only to the Machiavellian school of thought, but even more to the ancient Greek one when he describes his agrarian solution. Nelson determines that Harrington's main concern lies with England's political system because it values status and wealth more than the treatment of citizens and English society altogether (Nelson, 88). It is obvious in *Oceana* that Harrington observed problems with the political English structure and opted for drastic and rapid change, but as Nelson points out James Harrington's real political purpose for *Oceana* was to address greed, virtue, and his "balance of justice" within his political blueprint for England by proposing his practical solution of an agrarian system by merging concepts from both the Romans and the ancient Greeks, especially from Plato, to find a balance between government and virtue (Nelson, 89).

In *Oceana*, Nelson directs attention to Harrington's political purpose by first nodding to an important portion of the book that Nelson is convinced only gets touched upon by scholars because it speaks to Harrington's true ideal for England. However, after looking deeper into the text, Nelson is persuaded that there is more to the passage than meets the first glance and declares that the paragraph is actually the beginning of Harrington's Greek view (Nelson, 88). Nelson writes, "Harrington introduces and

²⁶ Oliver Cromwell continues to have interesting opinions formed about his militaristic rule during the English Civil War and before. However, Harrington's ties to the monarchy and Charles I, did not make him a fan of Cromwell's take over. Ironically, while Cromwell appears as a character in *Oceana* under the name, Olphaus Megaletor, and is portrayed as the only lawgiver who then retires to allow the Commonwealth to thrive without him, in real life he disapproved of *Oceana* and denied it publication. Harrington would then make sure in the beginning of his work to dedicate *Oceana* to Cromwell.

encapsulates his treatise with the lines: “Thirsty Tantalus²⁷ grasps at streams escaping from his lips. What are you laughing at? With the name changed, the story is told about you” (Nelson, 88). The section can be perceived to speak directly towards England, a view held by many scholars including Pocock, Judith N. Shklar, Russell Smith, John G. Dow. But Nelson digs deeper to illustrate that these short sentences are not the words of Harrington’s, but rather from an important poem in *Satires* by Horace²⁸ (Nelson, 88). Horace’s poem is meant to highlight that greed is a nasty sickness that consumes man in the most negative way and that man should, “[...] set the bounds to the quest of wealth, and as you increase your means let your fear of poverty lessen, and when you have won your heart’s desire, begin to bring your toil to an end” (Nelson, 88). To Nelson, Harrington specifically used this poem because he viewed England in danger of becoming the next greedy Tantalus and sided with the Greeks when it came to understanding the evil behind greed (Nelson, 88).

Furthermore, to prevent England from becoming the next unquenchable Tantalus, Harrington looks to the Greeks for guidance in terms of political systems. One of the main proposals that Harrington sets forth in *Oceana* is his idea for England to adopt an agrarian system. The agrarian system proposed in *Oceana* sought to act as a remedy to the problems of land ownership in England. In his proposal, Harrington explains that land ownership should not be reserved for one, or by a few, but by many men who take care of

²⁷ Tantalus was supposed to be a mythical creature. The story goes that while forced to suffer in Hades he was forced to live in water that was up to his chin, thus making it impossible for him to ever drink the water. The connection is that no matter how bad Tantalus wants the water he cannot drink it because he is insatiable and will always want more. Much like how when greed works within a person’s mind, or in this case England, once someone, or a group of people, has a little bit of something they will always want more and can never be satisfied. It truly is a vicious cycle.

²⁸ Horace was a popular Roman poet and wrote *Satires* around 33 B.C.

and cherish the land.²⁹ Such a system he thought would improve life and relations within a commonwealth and essentially create balance within the government by restructuring the economic and political inequalities between classes (Smith, 23). In *Oceana*, Harrington describes the danger of individual land ownership by declaring:

But there be other confusions, which, being rooted in the balance, are of longer continuance, and of worse consequence; as first, where a nobility holds half the property, or about that proportion, and the people the other half; in which case, without altering the balance there is no remedy but the one must eat out the other, as the people did the nobility in Athens, and the nobility the people in Rome. Secondly, when a prince holds about half the dominion and the people the other half (which was the case of the Roman emperors, planted partly upon their military colonies and partly upon the Senate and the people), the government becomes a very shambles, both of the princes and the people. Somewhat of this nature are certain governments at this day, which are said to subsist by confusion (Harrington, 14)

In order to resolve the problem, Harrington suggested that the land be broken up, thus preventing the monopolization of land. However, to break up the land, Harrington developed his own system, but relied on the Greeks and Romans for guidance. Scholar Russell Smith remarks that:

His proposals were intended to be enforced in an agrarian law, which he tabulated for his idealized England—*Oceana*. By this measure the policy of breaking up

²⁹ This point is also made by Russell Smith, but not as in-depth.

large estates was to be pushed one stage further. The details were to be arranged after a valuation of the land had been made, but the provisional idea was to allow no one to possess land above the value of 2000 pounds in England and Ireland, or 500 pounds in Scotland, where the risk of the soil being monopolized by a few chieftains was especially great. Harrington estimated the total rent of the land of England and Wales at ten million pounds, so that the total number of landowners would never fall below five thousand. It would probably be far larger in view of the absurdity of imaging five thousand men clinging to the possession of the exact maximum legally allowed to them, with everybody else looking on (Smith, 30).

As Harrington observed the situation, land in England was historically only preserved by the wealthy and it caused there to be a discrepancy between the classes of the wealthy land owners and the poor non-land owners. By employing an agrarian system, Harrington hoped to prevent the aristocracy from holding what he thought the most precious and most powerful possession anyone could have from the citizenry: land.

While it is true that Harrington did base his system of agrarian law on that of the Romans (Nelson, 94), Nelson claims that Harrington was more inclined to construct his agrarian system through the eyes of a Greek, rather entirely through the lens of a Machiavellian model, as J.G.A. Pocock seems to suggest. (Nelson, 93). Nelson offers an example of Harrington's explicit admiration of Greek sources Nelson when he writes:

In short, he uses Plutarch's³⁰ account to arrive at a general principle about the relationship between the distribution of wealth and the assignment of political

³⁰ Plutarch was a Greek writer who lived around 45 A.D and was a Platonist.

dominance. Behind this assertion lurks a claim drawn from Harrington's Greek source about avarice and its destructive effects: the hoarding of large fortunes topples commonwealths (Nelson, 95).

Harrington's understanding that greed and the one sided distribution of wealth between classes is the chief problem in the toppling of empires and commonwealths is an attribute, Nelson suggests, borrowed from the Greek view of the world.

Harrington does not stop there. In order to find a sort of balance between government and virtue in *Oceana*, Nelson argues that Harrington even looked to Thomas More due to his explicit Greek values in *Utopia*. Here, J.G.A. Pocock original argument contradicts Nelson's argument and instead states that, "*Oceana* is not a utopia in More's sense because it does not portray a no-place or *outopia*, an imaginary island in unknown seas, but a fictionalized yet instantly recognizable England" (Nelson, 102). Pocock is unable to view *Oceana* in the same light as *Utopia*, or admit that More's work had a deep theoretical influence on Harrington or that More could have been suggesting that *Utopia* could be a real option for England. Nelson rightly points out that Pocock and his:

[...] comments misrepresent the character of *Utopia*, and, as a result, obscure *Oceana*'s deep structural and theoretical reliance on More's text. More never claims that *Utopia* constitutes as "a state of ideal perfection," but, rather, the *optimus reipublicae status*—precisely the sort of "best possible state". [...] the claim that *Utopia* is a simple "nowhere" in contrast to Harrington's fictionalized England ignores the fact that *Utopia* is also a "possible England"—an England transformed by Greek ethics (Nelson, 102).

The similarities between the Greek influence in both *Utopia* and *Oceana* are evident for Nelson. The fact that Pocock is unwilling to acknowledge that the political structure of *Utopia* might not have been intended to be what More actually wanted for England to adopt apparently warrants him to reject any further connection of More to Harrington which seems to Nelson, and myself, to be an incorrect observation. In fact, Pocock is only able to go as far as saying that Harrington's Greek influence is based on his economic perspective. Pocock does admit, "But a good argument can be adduced to suggest that his economics were Greek and based on the relations of *oikos* to *polis*" (Pocock 390). However, Nelson³¹ goes further and is able to admit that while no one is sure of More's motives, to assume that he did not influence Harrington's writing of *Oceana* is an obvious mistake. Even Harrington, himself, admits that More is among the political theorists he admires are such people as (Nelson, 105). Nelson reminds his reader that Harrington and More share the view that, "[...] rulership is determined by property. It is simply a matter of nature that the richest men will have the greatest political power ("empire," rather than "authority" in Harrington's terminology)" (Nelson, 123). Both Harrington and More understand that the richest men are also the most corrupt and therefore virtue is not central in their governments under their control. Furthermore, just as Thomas More turned to virtue and ethics as espoused by Greeks like Plato to perfect his *Utopia*, so does Harrington.

Nelson continues to discuss Harrington's political purpose in *Oceana* by illustrating his admiration for Plato and his Greek preferred form of political life. It is

³¹ In this debate, I am inclined to agree with Nelson. It seems that Pocock understands the relationship between More and Harrington, but he stops short of Nelson's argument that Harrington looked very closely to More and of course Plato. If you read both of the works by Plato and Harrington, respectively, there is clear evidence that Harrington is just reciting what Plato is discussing. As from the perspective of Nelson, the evidence is difficult to combat.

crucial to understand Harrington's Greek and Platonic influence in *Oceana* since these are essential to understanding his proposed agrarian system and his ideal society. Nelson points to Plato and demonstrates the uncanny similarities between *Oceana* and several Platonic dialogues. First, in regards to the distribution of wealth Harrington, imagined his *Oceana* having around 5,000 landowners so as to spread the distribution of land and wealth amongst all of the citizenry. Of course a similar proposal was made by Plato in his *Laws*³² when, "He proposes a virtuous community of 5,040 landholders "who can be armed to fight for their holdings" and among whom the land is sensibly divided" (Nelson, 116). Furthermore, in *Oceana*, Harrington dismisses the possibility of dowries and desires the land to be passed down in the family. Again, Plato can be found proposing a very similar procedure when in the *Laws*, "Plato adds that a single individual should be entitled to amass up to four times the value of the standard land allotment, but that, if he accumulates more than that amount, he should be forced to consign the surplus to the state and its gods" (Nelson, 117). Scholar Russell Smith also finds, like Nelson, that Plato's *Laws* and Harrington's *Oceana* have striking similarities. Smith admits that Harrington was influenced by Plato and, "[...] it is difficult not to believe that he was influenced by the second best republic of the Greek philosopher" (Smith, 73). However, at the same time Smith is convinced that Harrington was not trying to replicate Plato's *Laws*, in which Nelson outright disagrees with him on this point by briefly stating that "He too, however, neglects to notice the deep structural similarities between the two texts" (Nelson, 116).

³² The *Laws* is the last of a long list of Platonic dialogues. The discussion focuses on, you guessed it, the laws of society and what role laws play in politics, philosophy, religion, and life in general. The society Plato proposes in his *Laws* dialogue is known as his second best form of a society, since the society he proposes in the *Republic* is considered the best.

In addition, and perhaps on a deeper, but directly related, issue, Nelson continues his argument by illustrating how Harrington mirrors Plato when he writes in *Oceana*, “[...] government is no other than the soul of a nation or a city” (Nelson, 117). The Platonic dialogue *Timaeus*³³, to which Harrington alludes, speaks of a creation of the universe where, “The soul of the world is harmonized when its elements are balanced according to reason, and its ‘perfect balance’ is what prevents it from decaying” (Nelson, 118). In *Timaeus*, Plato describes that God has given the universe its own soul and that it is responsible for alleviating corruption that causes chaos by creating order with reason and in doing so it is able to generate a sense of balance in the world. Nelson continues the discussion by stating, “This balanced arrangement is called “justice,” and, when God turns to create man’s soul on the model of the ordered cosmos³⁴, he imbues man with the same sublime proportions. However, in order to prevent undue perfection in his creature, God commands his underlings to warp the “circles” of man’s soul, toppling reason from its throne” (Nelson, 118). In a simplified version, God makes sure that man is not perfect, but tainted at first so that he can learn to correct himself with reason. This, as Nelson notes, is to make sure that, “He must imprint the cosmic pattern onto his soul, and, also, onto the soul of his polity: “by learning the harmonies and revolutions of the universe, each man, should correct the courses of the head which were corrupted at birth...so that having assimilated them he may attain to that best life which the gods have set before mankind” (Nelson, 118). According to Platonic thought, then, if man was to be made in a perfect image of the universe then there would be no room for improvement

³³ *Timaeus* is one of Plato’s middle dialogues that was written around 360 BC.

³⁴ For a helpful and an extremely interesting analysis, or at least one of my favorites, of Plato’s dialogues and a discussion of cosmopolitanism look to Betti (2010), specifically, pages 100-104 and 176-181. Also, in general, chapters 5, 6, and 7.

and everything in the universe would be determined and ruled by reason, but that would also deem man as equal to, or just as reasonable, than the universe since it would possess the same soul.

So how does *Timaeus* relate to Harrington and the political purpose of *Oceana*? According to Nelson, “Throughout *Oceana* and Harrington’s other works, the soul of the state is envisioned as an image of the soul of man, and the soul of man is seen as patterned on the cosmos. In the “Preliminaries³⁵” we are first told that the “life of motion” of “the soul of man” is “perpetual contemplation or thought”” (Nelson, 118). Like Plato, Harrington thought that the soul of man is not his own, but a reflection of the soul of the universe. This also meant that, the soul of the state was dependent upon the soul of man and naturally, the cosmos. Nelson states that Harrington, “[...] later adds that “to be raised upon contemplation of natural things” is “natural to man as he is a philosophical creature” and that the “form of government” consists “in contemplation of, and in conformity to the soul of man” (Nelson, 119). Again, the point is that the state is a direct reflection of man and man of the cosmos and this creates a unification of all three or what Nelson contends, it creates a “balance” between them and this is what creates justice according to Platonic thought and Harringtonian thought, as well. This “balance” in *Timaeus* is reason and chaos and the same is found in Harrington’s *Oceana*.

More concretely, in *Oceana* much like *Timaeus* Harrington accepts that the “balance” in a society can only be achieved when reason is regarded as the highest law. Nelson adds that, “The rule of reason is the will of God, and, as a result, Harrington adds in the “Preliminaries” that “where, by the lusts or passions of men, a power is set above

³⁵ A section of *Oceana*.

that of the law, deriving from reason which is the dictate of God, God is in that sense rejected or deposed” (Nelson, 120). By acting only out of greed or coveting for material possessions, Harrington and Plato agree that by rejecting reason a person is also rejecting the divine since reason is essentially the command of the divine for citizens to abide by in the universe. Therefore, for Harrington, like Plato, reason is divine universal law. Nelson continues to cite Harrington’s Platonic influence in *Oceana* by reminding us that:

Harrington claims, like Plato, that the state is ruled according to reason when it is governed by the best men. In the “Preliminaries” Harrington claims that, even in a commonwealth of only twenty people, “there will be such difference in them that about a third will be wiser, or at least less foolish than all the rest.” This third, “as stags that have the largest heads,” will “lead the herd,” and the other citizens will “hang upon their lips as children upon their fathers” (“a commonwealth,”

Harrington agrees with More and Plato, “is but a great family”) (Nelson, 120).

Harrington is clear that no matter how large or small that a commonwealth is there will always be varied opinions among those who rule. The hope is that the “stags with the largest heads” who “lead the herd” will rule effectively, equally, and within the bounds of reason, leaving different opinions behind, so as to keep the commonwealth balanced. Nelson notes that Harrington is again reminiscent of Platonic thinking when he states, “[...] where men excel in virtue, the commonwealth is stupid and unjust if accordingly they do not excel in authority: wherefore this is both the advantage of virtue, which hath her due encouragement, and the commonwealth, which hath her due services” (Nelson, 121). When those who rule abide by reason and maintain virtue as their primary concern then the commonwealth is sure to excel and succeed, but when those who rule do not

exercise virtue then the commonwealth is sure to fail and suffer. This is also found to be the case in More's *Utopia* when, "[...] if *virtus*³⁶ does not constitute *vera*³⁷ *nobilitas*³⁸, the state is rendered "unjust" because the rational ordering of its elements is toppled³⁹" (Nelson, 121). In all three cases, for More, Harrington, and Plato when reason and virtue are not a part of the state then the government is already tainted and on a sure path to pure corruption and failure because it lacks "balance" or justice.

However, in order to prevent a government from failing, Harrington strays away from Platonic thought since he does not think that philosopher kings⁴⁰ should be in complete control of the state. His problem with Plato's proposal is that while philosopher kings are wise they can still be corrupted, and if they were to be then it would create a disproportionate rule among the wise and naturally the state (Nelson, 121). Nelson mentions Harrington's revision in *Oceana* in regards to Plato's suggestion by stating, "[...] it refers to the circumstance in which the counsel of the natural aristocrats is able to guide the commonwealth effectively. But, Harrington reaches the paradoxical conclusion that, in order to institute such a regime, he must assign to non-aristocrats the power to make final decisions" (Nelson, 122).

Of course in Harrington's political proposal in *Oceana* power translates into the equal distribution of land ownership (Nelson, 122). This, Nelson says, is how Harrington is able to help keep both wealth and power distribution at equal levels amongst the poor and the rich. The author declares, "Harrington argues that the agrarian excludes

³⁶ Latin for virtue.

³⁷ Latin for truth or true.

³⁸ Latin for nobility.

³⁹ In Latin the saying is, *virtus vera nobilitas*, or virtue is true nobility.

⁴⁰ In Plato's *Republic* society is ruled by philosopher kings because they are thought to be the wisest of all other men.

“ambition and covetousness” because it “taketh away the greatest of worldly cares.” It “gives us the sweat of our brows without diminution” [...], it “prepares out table,” it makes our cup overflow,” and eases our worries by “providing for our children” (Nelson, 122). Harrington’s agrarian system is able to prevent a corrupted government because from the beginning it deletes all traces of greed and coveting which, to him, More, and Plato, are the main causes that governments succumb to evil and failure. Harrington, like More and Plato, is completely opposed to the worshiping of material goods and believes that desiring such things is what leads men to deceive others.

Harrington wants to replace avarice with moderation, or temperance, which can help balance the state and its citizens because it prohibits wealth and power from being beyond the reach of the poor and keeps total control out of the hands of the rich. Again, Nelson argues that Harrington looks directly back to Plato for assistance on this very point and declares, “Plato compares imbalance in the soul to “a body which has one leg too long, or which is unsymmetrical in some other respect” and, as a result, is unable to do its work and “stumbles through awkwardness.” Likewise, Harrington deems that a “political body is rendered any fitter for industry, by having one gouty and another withered leg, than a natural” (Nelson, 123). The unsymmetrical soul, or man, cannot live life to the best of his abilities because he is plagued by his deformity. In this case his deformity is his unnecessarily extreme longing for wealth or power which prevents him from living the best life that he can because it denies him temperance, or in this case, symmetry.

What is more, Harrington, like Plato in his *Republic*⁴¹, is quite aware that when there is a large disparity between the rich and the poor then there is really what he contends as, “[...] “two commonwealths”—a city of the rich and a city of the poor—and that corruption follows when there are “some who have no need of their trading, and others that are not able to follow it” (Nelson, 123). To be sure, Harrington is cognizant, again just like Plato, that in order for a state, or a polis, to be just and to work efficiently then it must be unified. This unification is not only based on the polis, but the souls of the universe, man, and the state must all be unified if the polis hopes to be a just society. Nelson ends the argument on the fact that, “[...] when the state maintains an equal distribution of wealth, however virtue becomes the sole recognized claim to political power and the soul of the state is, thus, governed according to reason. The republic may then become “perfect and immortal” like the cosmos itself” (Nelson, 124).

It should be clear, from Nelson’s view, that Harrington’s political purpose with *Oceana* was to address greed and virtue in his agrarian system based on Greek, mostly Platonic thought, and the ideas of Thomas More. Harrington’s *Oceana*, according to Nelson, was a reincarnation of Greek thought and More’s *Utopia* because Harrington made virtue and justice central to his political solution. *Oceana* instills and progresses the Platonic view that the state is only as good as the men within it and it is up to them to use what the soul of the cosmos has imprinted upon him to use reason to make the state the best that it can become. In short, as Nelson notes, for Harrington the state cannot be just, or the best, if there is a disproportion in wealth and power, or in his view, land.

⁴¹ More specifically, book 4 of the *Republic*, but traces of this argument are found made by Socrates throughout the entire work.

In a completely different observation, author Judith N. Shklar is convinced that the political purpose of *Oceana* is, “[...] to show that Harrington’s utopian society was not only a possibility but a necessity, because there were no viable alternatives. Of these there were two that had to be demolished, the ancient constitution and Hobbes’⁴² *Leviathan*. The latter was for Harrington far more important, [...], because he fully understood its intellectual strength” (Shklar, 671). More straightforwardly, Harrington and Hobbes were writing during a period of turmoil in England that prompted serious political reform. Both men attempted to recommend their solutions to the problems of a war torn England, but chose to do so in differing ways. Hobbes approached political distress by looking to human nature for the answers to the problems and Harrington did the complete opposite by trying to avoid discussions of human nature altogether. However, while both were competing for their solution to be applied to real world problems, Harrington knew that his solution would only be taken seriously if he was able to beat out Hobbes by approaching the political discussion in his own way.

Harrington and Hobbes did not agree on the best course of political action (Shklar, 673). Shklar indicates that the main reason Harrington differed from Hobbes was due to his republican ideology. Hobbes, of course, believed that a monarchy would be the solution to England’s problems, but Harrington cringed at the idea of rule by kingship, since it placed one individual in control. What is more, Shklar illustrates that Harrington perceived Hobbes as a threat because he implemented a certain level of psychology in his proposal in *Leviathan*. Shklar explains that, “To say that Hobbes had not investigated the nature of power is, however, far from true. With horrified fascination he saw it

⁴² Thomas Hobbes famous work *Leviathan* gained importance for his proposal of a social contract.

everywhere. For him, however, it was not a quantity, like Harrington's interest, but a human disposition (Shklar, 673). Harrington observed Hobbesian thought to be mistaken since it did not look power from a more logical view. Harrington's understanding of power came from a combination of the interests of the many, or the people, and what gave rise to their interests; otherwise he believed that land was ultimately what would allow for the people to regain and maintain power (Shklar, 673).

Hobbes, of course, is adamant that power is a crucial part of all relationships in life. However, as Shklar points out, "The one thing, however, that Hobbes never did, unlike Machiavelli and Harrington, was to admire or praise power. He hated it as he was obsessed by it" (Shklar, 673). What is more, while Hobbes was obsessed with power and the relationships it effects, Harrington rarely, if ever, discussed human nature in his discourse (Shklar, 674). The fact that Hobbes was able to present power and human nature in support of his proposal for a monarchical government caused Harrington to inevitably lack a piece of his argument for a commonwealth, in which he knew was a piece that he would have to make up for in order to keep up with Hobbes dedication to human nature in *Leviathan*. Yet, for Harrington, it was not human nature that people should be concerned about, rather a better assessment of how political institutions and government worked was to first understand what the central features were of such power-centered institutions.

Once the problem within the institution was discovered, Harrington believed, a practical solution could be discussed and applied and the commonwealth could move forward and divorce itself from the problem completely. And while Harrington is known for his admiration of Machiavelli, Shklar explains that Harrington's adaptation of

Machiavelli's ideas caused him to think that, "Men can be bad and the commonwealth can still be perfect, because stability depends on "interests and orders," not on morality. Not for him Machiavelli's cycle of corruption, or the flight of virtue from one place to another. It was not a decline in virtue, but changes in the balance of property, that brought republics down" (Shklar, 675). Unlike, *Utopia* or other works of the Renaissance period, the absence of virtue was not a primary concern of Harrington's because he did not foresee virtue as the reason that republics fell throughout history, but the unequal balance of power between the citizens living in society.

With this in mind Harrington used *Oceana* to set himself apart from other thinkers of his time, especially Hobbes so he could make his argument more widely accepted and hopefully see it implemented into policy. To do so, Harrington relied on his republican thinking. More specifically, he turned away from only human nature and personal feelings as a basis for his arguments and instead focused on historical and political facts. Shklar notes Harrington's contribution by stating, "'The autonomy of politics" for Harrington meant that once the stable rule of common interest was established, "political architecture" and institutional "invention" could build a perfect and eternal republic. There was no need to worry about convictions, dispositions, and passions (Shklar, 674). In *Oceana*, Harrington's construction of the best commonwealth does not concern itself with the worries of human nature or the psychology of the public opinion. Rather, Harrington's goal was to make sure that, "[...] no inconvenient psychological factors be allowed to disturb the clear course of history" (Shklar, 674). Moreover, Harrington looked to create and maintain an indestructible republic be built to maintain the natural course of history, for him that meant he needed to rid it all outside influences that might

affect his republic and its path (Shklar, 674). Scholar John G. Dow argues similarly to Shklar when he concludes that *Oceana* was, indeed, a work that was intended to stand the test of time and it was done so only by his logical and pragmatic thought process. For example, Dow says:

We may have warmer admiration for some who struck doughty blows in the heat of the battle and who, if they fell, fell with something of starry splendor. But when we observe the unbiased temper with which Harrington approached the intricate questions of the time, the perspicacity which he brought to disentangle them, and the breadth of wisdom with which he elaborated his solution, we may find atonement for that aloofness which is not always a fault (8).

By removing outside influences, such as psychological elements or a focus on human nature, Harrington's intention for *Oceana* was able to take a more logical and practical approach to building a strong commonwealth that could withstand the test of time. A goal that obviously failed to come up short.

Chapter Conclusion

James Harrington hoped his agrarian law system would help create a balance of power between citizens and their government. Unlike More's *Utopia*, there is no doubt that Harrington truly desired that his agrarian law be adopted by the English government to give the people some power. However, what is disputed amongst scholars is where Harrington's idea for his agrarian law system derives from. J. G. A. Pocock asserts that it was Machiavelli who laid the groundwork for Harrington to propose a similar version of agrarian law that would help to create a balance of power in society. Yet, with the amount

of evidence that Eric Nelson and Russell Smith provide, it seems that Harrington's premise for agrarian law may not have derived solely from Machavelli, but also from Plato. Based on the similarities between Harrington's work, Plato's dialogues, and Machavelli's proposals, I believe that *Oceana* took ideas from both authors to make the best possible agrarian system possible to balance power as equal as it could.

Furthermore, although the aforementioned authors establish that agrarian law was Harrington's main concern. Judith N. Shklar and John G. Dow focus on how Harrington applied his theory in *Oceana* to the real world problems in England. At an intense time of scholarship during England after the English Civil War, Harrington was in direct competition with Thomas Hobbes and his attempt to understand government and human nature in *Leviathan*. While Hobbes argued for a government that could control flawed citizens, Shklar and Dow note that over the course of time, long after both of their deaths, it was the downfall of Harrington when he regrettably omitted any interest in human nature and behavior in *Oceana*, and stuck to logical and rational approaches in his writings. Harrington's reluctance to discuss matters of human nature, Shklar and Dow say, lacked any real connection to the human nature, thus Hobbes gained much more acclaim from his writings over time from scholars and Harrington's work was placed aside.

James Harrington looked directly to authors like Thomas More, Plato, and Machiavelli to craft his idea of a perfect society. With *Oceana*, unlike More's *Utopia*, Harrington desperately hoped that his ideal agrarian society would unite his readers and inspire England to implement his plans for a lesser divided polity. The combination of Harrington's Greek and Platonic world views ultimately shaped his understanding that

the system of government is not the sole problem in politics, but rather the men who put themselves above divine law, create injustice and an overall sense of a loss of virtue in politics and the society in general.

CHAPTER IV

Shipwrecked and Case Ashore *Christianopolis*: An Introduction

"But if you quietly put your faith in a clear conscious, you will yet take the greatest joy with you." –Johann Valentin Andreae, *Christianopolis* (1619)

Christianopolis is structured in the style of a guidebook or a set of edicts. Andreae methodically lists every aspect and detail of the utopian city that a reader could think to inquire about a place that he or she is just encountering for the very first time. Of the 100 chapters that Andreae writes, each one of them are specifically dedicated to a particular idea or distinguishing fact about *Christianopolis*. Ideas described range from the way citizens in *Christianopolis* eat, sleep, and work, all the way to more serious matters as in how they educate the youth, carry out justice, and govern the state.

The book begins as most utopias do with a lost man, or a traveler, trying to find his way after his ship, the Phantasy, takes on water from a dangerous storm. Inevitably, the wanderer is left to abandon ship in the Academic⁴³ Sea while most of his crew is killed by the raging waters. The wanderer, known as Cosmoxenus Christianus⁴⁴, luckily is stranded out to sea only to come in contact with a small island called, Caphar Salama, where the city of Christianopolis is conveniently located. When Cosmoxenus reaches

⁴³ The Academic Sea and the entire geography of Christianopolis is impossible to locate from his longitudinal and latitudinal numbers that he provides the reader with. Like More's Utopia, the act of doing this was probably intentional.

⁴⁴ Loosely translated as world stranger Christian or Christian world stranger.

land he is greeted by a welcoming citizen of Christianopolis and taken to the gates of the city to explore its intricacies.

Before entering the city Cosmoxenus remarks that the first question he is asked about by the citizen is in regards:

[...] to what extent I had learned to control myself and to be of service to my brother; to fight off the world, to be in harmony with death, to follow the Spirit; what progress I had made in the observation of the heavens and the earth, in the close examination of nature, in instruments of the arts, in the history and origin of languages, the harmony of all the world; what relation I bore toward the society of the church, toward a compendium of the Scriptures, the kingdom of heaven, the school of the Spirit, the brotherhood of Christ, the household of God (Andreae, 148).

Cosmoxenus responds that he has never fully considered such a multitude of conceptions at one time, let alone over the course of his life thus far. After establishing the former, the citizen takes Cosmoxenus inside the city gates to help him contemplate and hopefully incorporate the notions aforementioned to better the lost man's soul by furthering his understanding of God.

In order to fully present the ideas of Christianopolis to Cosmoxenus, the accompanying citizen hands the new wanderer off to three experienced guides, Beeram, Eram, and Neariam, who are responsible for introducing Cosmoxenus to the lay of the land. On their trip through the city the stranger is first taught that the city is ultimately ruled by God and then obeyed by man, in directly that order. God is at the center of

everything in Christianopolis, including the way the city is governed. The city of 400 God-loving citizens believe that man is unable to rule a city because he is prone to mistakes and deceitful interpretations of God's word.

In order to prevent a totalitarian form of government from forming or any other less desirable system that takes a chance by placing a single man in charge over God's commands, Christianopolis is ruled by a triumvirate. The three member government is composed of men who, "[...] must be loyal, prudent, and wise; yet some are designated for these ranks, or distinguished as being more exact. The chancellor announces all the decrees of the senators, repeats them, and makes them public. This man must be one of greatest tact and trustworthiness" (Andreae, 175). The first member of the triumvirate is Abialdon, who is the chief priest of the city and is held responsible for serving as an intermediary between the word and rules of God and interpreting them to the rest of the citizenry. Cosmoxenus describes Abialdon as, "[...] a man of fervent spirit, but forgetful of the things of the world, always doing, rarely speaking, intoxicated with God, abstaining from voluptuousness, guarding the flock, neglecting himself, first in merit, last in boasting" (Andreae, 180). Abialdon's role in the triumvirate is to lead the city in its religious practices. Since there is no separation between the church and the state, Abildon's position is to ensure that Christianity is implemented firmly in the society by teaching the citizens what God's word means by not simply telling them the rules and leaving them open to interpretation, but by practicing what he preaches. In doing so, Abildon is respected by the entirety of the city due to his dedication to serving God and his actions that reflect the rewards of the honest advice he passes on from God to the people of Christianopolis.

The second member of the triumvirate is Abiefer, the city judge. Abiefer's position is to ensure that the citizenry obeys the laws of Christ so as to keep political and social order within the city limits. Cosmoxenus describes Abiefer as, "For he feels that the best plan for a republic is one which agrees as nearly as possible with heaven; and being very pious himself, he believes that a propitious God is the salvation of a city, the destruction of the same a wrathful God" (Andreae, 183). Abiefer's duty is to protect the citizens from committing injustice which, in Christianopolis, is dismissing or disobeying the Godly rules of the city and God. The judge is not left to hand out sentences, since if a citizen is unable to follow the rules then he or she is thought to be able to be rehabilitated. Cosmoxenus notes that in the city when it comes to crime and punishment, "It is far more humane to tear out the first elements and roots of vice than to lop off the mature stalks. For anyone can destroy a man, but only the best one can reform" (Andreae, 165). The city and its inhabitants recognize that human beings are not perfect creatures, but for the most part they are flawed. Yet, unlike most cities, Christianopolis, and its triumvirs including Abiefer, led by example to demonstrate that during times of hardship or criminal acts, people deserve to be given the chance to correct their behavior, but not by hurting them, or by giving them time to stew and ponder about their irrational actions. Rather, the Christian triumvirs hope to correct the root of the misbehaved, so as to reintegrate them into society with complete acceptance and understanding in order to prevent the crime from occurring again.

The final leader of the triumvirate is the director of learning known as, Abida. Abida's role in the government is to use his high levels of education and wisdom of Christ to teach the citizens about God and the Christian way. Abida's characterization by

Cosmoxenus makes him out to be a similar figure to that of Plato's Socrates. The third triumvir is certain that he has no real knowledge of anything except for what he knows about God, and even that he is uncertain of (Andreae, 187). In regards to this point, Abida declares, "Only Christians have knowledge, but it is of God. All remaining things are foolishness, because they come out of one's self" (Andreae, 187). Abida perceives human beings to be consumed by all things that are unimportant and this is what creates pseudo notions of what is considered true and important knowledge.

However, Abida's role as a triumvir is an important one, since he not only is responsible for advocating for what knowledge is true or false, but also because his epistemology is the premise for the focus of religion and the study of science together in the city. Cosmoxenus states Abida's epistemological beliefs by describing that, "For he insisted that a close examination of the earth would bring about a proper appreciation of the heavens, and when the value of the heavens had been found, there would be a contempt of the earth" (Andreae, 187). This notion is what fuels the city to diligently study the scientific side of the earth, rather than only the religious and philosophical ideas of life on earth. Such ideas are important to Abida since he declares, "Arise, thou sacred science which shall explain to us Christ, that we may here learn things that are not to be unlearned, but to be increased and extended into all ages!" (Andreae, 187). Abida's role in the city is important, since he is responsible for distinguishing truth and facts from mere opinions to the citizenry. However, even more than that, Abida's self-designed mission is to concretely determine true knowledge by using religion and science for posterity.

What is more, the city is true to its word in that it tries to rid itself of any outside influences or unimportant matters. Things like material possessions and money are irrelevant in *Christianopolis*. Much like More's *Utopia*, the city does have a treasury, but besides that currency does not exist in the city. Similarly, in terms of private property, citizens do not own homes because they move from home to home as directed by the state (Andreae, 169). These rules assist the citizens in appreciating more important things than acquiring possessions and goods. The citizens are given the bare essentials because they are to ask for no more than what they need to live, to follow the Christian lifestyle they inhabit, and to praise God exhaustively.

Moreover, the commitment to Christian beliefs is seen in every inch of the city, including both the home and workplace. For example, in the mills and bakeries Andreae writes that, "All the bread which is necessary to supply the island is baked in these bake shops, and all flout is kept here...For though no one in the whole island ever goes hungry, yet by the grace of God or the generosity of nature, there is always abundance, since gluttony and drunkenness are entirely unknown" (Andreae, 152). Even in the meat shop there is a time to praise God for helping to provide the citizens with just enough, "[...] butter, lard, suet, grease, tallow, and other supplies of this kind; but also fish, dried and fresh, and all kinds of fowl, not only for the inhabitants but also for strangers and traveling merchants" (Andreae, 153). When the citizens are not gathering necessities or educating themselves they partake in public prayers throughout their day. Andreae describes that these prayers are:

"[...] offered each day, morning, noon, and in the evening, when thanks are given to God for blessings recived; and on bended knee and with folded hands, a

continuation of His aid and a worthy death are implored in a solemn formula. No one may be absent from these prayers except for the most urgent reason; parents bring all their children hither that they may learn even in infants' prattle to praise God. Then a reading from the Holy Scriptures is listened to, and the meeting, of about half an hour, is dismissed with a hymn (158).

Public prayers are done in the streets, but even at night there is never darkness in the city or in their homes. Andreae notes:

They do not allow the night to be dark, but brighten it up with lighted lanterns, the object being to provide for the safety of the city and to put a stop to useless wandering about, but also to render the night watches less unpleasant. They would strive in this way to resist the dark kingdom of Satan and his questionable pastimes; and they wish to remind themselves of the everlasting light (Andreae, 172).

The city is never dark and the citizens are always in the light in order to prevent crime or sin from occurring in the dark streets of the city. Without light the citizens are convinced that the devil will be able to influence the people to commit heinous acts and to lose sight of God and his message.

Further, the inhabitants of the city of Christianopolis also abide by Christian principles in their homes because they have seen the lavish lifestyles that other people in different lands live and the unhappiness that comes from:

Other people who house vanity, extravagance, and a family of that sort, and who heap up baggage of iniquity, can never live spaciouly enough. They burden

others and are burdened themselves, and no one measures their necessities, nay even their comforts, easily otherwise than by an unbearable and unmovable mass (Andreae, 156)

Rather than housing goods, the citizens in Christianopolis live in small houses in which none of the citizens own themselves and, “No one need be surprised at the rather cramped quarters; for there being only a very few persons, there is also need for only a very little furniture” (Andreae, 156). The purpose of the limited amount of items being in one’s temporary home is to encourage the citizens to see that more is almost always not better and that it is the true mark of a Christian to live with only the bare necessities.

After learning these rules, among others, Cosmoxenus’s tour of the city comes to an end. The traveler reveals to the reader that when he landed in Christianopolis he was a sinner and a lost man with no real understanding of life beyond his lust for material possessions among other things. However, after being introduced to the people of the city he finds it hard to leave, since he now observes that the life he led before his shipwreck was not really a life at all. To make things right for himself, the traveler decides to go back to his original home to recruit other citizens who want to be exposed to the beliefs and institutions of Christianopolis; and so he leaves the city and begins his new mission.

Who is Johann Valentin Andreae’s and What is *Christianopolis*?

Johann Valentin Andreae, (1586 until 1654)⁴⁵, published the mostly unknown utopian work, *Christianopolis*; while practicing theology as a chief pastor near Herrenberg, Germany (Dickson, 766). *Christianopolis* is written in a similar style to that

⁴⁵ For more on the history of Andreae’s life seek out: Donald R. Dickson, “Johann Valentin Andreae’s Utopian Brotherhoods”. *Renaissance Quarterly* 49. 4 (1996): 760-802.

of More's *Utopia* since the reader is again introduced to a mysterious place by ship where there is a society that is dedicated to the principles of justice and virtue and who operates under a form of socialism. However, unlike *Utopia* or *Oceana*, in *Christianopolis*, the Christian religion, is the dominating influence in all of the state's activities.

While *Christianopolis* has not been widely read or studied, the uniqueness of the work is crucial to the purposes of this thesis. *Christianopolis*, as a so-called true utopian-style work, will add to the importance of this project by illustrating that unlike other utopias of its time, Andreae's piece differs from *Utopia* and *Oceana* since it explicitly uses Christianity as the foundational basis for its utopian society. It is crucial that such a distinctive piece of history not be forgotten, but its political purposes examined more deeply, especially since there is still much to be learned from *Christianopolis* and its author. To be sure, Christianity is a central component in the work, but it is Andreae's focus on science and religion in the political realm that makes *Christianopolis* a necessary piece of scholarship to be evaluated amongst *Utopia* and *Oceana*.

The Political Purposes of *Christianopolis*

What, if any, were the political purposes for Andreae writing *Christianopolis*? As mentioned, the text itself reads much like More's *Utopia* in the sense that it is primarily based on a journey to a better, more wiser, more egalitarian, place. However, unlike More, but definitely similar to Harrington, there is hardly any doubt that Andreae wrote *Christianopolis* because he wanted a society to imitate its political and social structure. Like any other utopian work, *Christianopolis* seeks to escape from the reality of stressful and detrimental political situations in hopes of discovering another place that fixes these

problems and serves the needs of the people more fully. In this regard, scholar J.C. Davis asks, “Could it be that sense of travelling in hope is, in part at least, rooted in the western history of thought about the ideal society [...]?” (Davis, 2). To answer this question Davis analyzes how the traveler within the utopias of the Renaissance, specifically including *Christianopolis*, portray the traveler and his reasons for travelling.

In the case of *Christianopolis*, Davis clarifies that the travelers are, “[...] refugees seeking asylum from a world of “tyrannies, sophists and hypocrites.” (Davis, 14). Once in *Christianopolis*, though, people are not free to go as they please, “Before being allowed to explore the city under the rules already referred to, visitors to *Christianopolis* are tested as to their moral suitability, backgrounds, and character, and are subjected to an intellectual cross examination Once screened, they are given three attendants to guide their wanderings” (14). To ensure that not just any type of person is granted access to the city, Andreae attempts to evaluate possible candidates for citizenship so that the city can control what kinds of citizens are roaming around and if they are a good fit for the city and its rules. When citizens are allowed into the city of *Christianopolis* they are granted a guide to help them get acclimated to the rules of the city and of course to be guided in exploring the natural and divine world as much as possible. In a brief comparison, Davis explains that this kind of confinement of the travelers of *Christianopolis* sets it apart from the famous *Utopia* by More.

While travelers to and in *Utopia* are free to travel to other lands without supervision, they are required to get prior permission from the governor to do so (Davis, 15). Without permission citizens are subject to possible enslavement, but still travel is thought to be a positive experience for the Utopians and they do so often and do so in

groups. This group mentality ensures the Utopians that they are in a sense never alone and that wherever they roam their Utopian ideas and beliefs are useful to the world (Davis, 16). However, as Davis points out, this is not the mentality in *Christianopolis*. Rather, citizens in Christianopolis are taught that traveling without a guide, or traveling the unknown outside of the city, is a wrongdoing. To understand this point more clearly, Davis writes, “For those inhabitants of Christianopolis who fail to maintain that society’s standards, the punishment, “more bitter even than death,” is expulsion, to be sent on one’s travels” (Davis, 17).

For citizens in *Christianopolis* the worst punishment is to be alone, without any guidance from those in the city who dedicate themselves to Christian beliefs and making themselves cognizant of the complex inner workings of the world. To be sure, the thought of the unsure and unstable is what utopian travelers seek to escape in their native land and as Davis (17) rightfully points out, “Travel in the wilderness, the disorder and corruption, the sheer contingency of the extra-utopian world, can have few attractions for those whose second nature’s have been reshaped by order, predictability, and the harmonious calm of the ideal society.” Once the utopian traveler has been exposed to a place where the political and social rules are more stable and radical, in comparison to the former rules of their last city or society, then citizens are likely to desire to remain in the new ideal society where they can feel secure and safe. This very point is distinctly made in *Christianopolis* when the traveler warily thinks out loud to himself:

It could happen, and I fear it may really have happened, that I have placed too much emphasis on less important things and emphasized unimportant things; that I have related things the wrong way round; that I have been confused by my

admiration for these people, and that I was as good as excluded from the heart of the government of the community. What else would you expect of me? I am a young man, who does not yet understand the secrets of statecraft and see only the perfection of the exterior (Davis, 17).

In the end, the utopian traveler in *Christianopolis*, as in other utopias, is concerned that he may have been living in his own fantasy world the entire time before entering his ideal city. He wonders how he could have been deceived by the place that he lived in day in and day out and concludes that he was not really a part of the society of which he considered himself a true citizen.

In short, Davis contends that in utopian works like *Christianopolis*, or even More's *Utopia*, the traveler is always seeking to find an ideal world and really, simultaneously, himself. Unlike the traveler, the problem for readers of *Christianopolis*, *Utopia*, or *Oceana*, is that there is no real way to reenact such ideal places simply because they are not, in actuality, real and as Davis indicates, "Travel to utopian societies magnifies the problems of both the narrative of travel and the communication of the ideal. To verify a society's ideality can only be done by visiting it, and this visiting may only be done vicariously. [...] Travel—and utopia exposes both sides of the coin—may be a narrative of fall or renewal" (Davis, 19). However, it is the drive and desire for such ideal places that causes the likes of Andreae and others to write their fantasy, but realistically motivated, worlds. It should be considered that while the utopian works may start off as imagining a place that is "nowhere", there is always the possibility that it could become "somewhere".

On the other hand, author Jackson Spielvogel takes a different approach in his observation of Andreae's political intent and adds that *Christianopolis*, "presented visions of reconstituted Christian commonwealths that would begin a universal millennium on earth, a millennium based on science as a way to God" (Spielvogel, 188). Spielvogel is convinced that Andreae's political purpose was to write with the serious intent for imitation, based on his Hermetic beliefs, to take place in the real world from the fantasy of his text and continues with, "Andreae's utopia was meant to be a model for a real state, evidenced in Andreae's own attempts to put his ideals into practice as a Lutheran church official" (Spielvogel, 193).

The text is completely dedicated to Christian beliefs and the idea that the world should be theocentric. Again, Spielvogel contends that it is Andreae's combination of religion and science into one utopia that should be more closely looked into. In *Christianopolis*, society is to explore the world because the world is a way for the people to understand nature, science, themselves, and God (Spielvogel, 194). The text demonstrates that without God then nothing really makes sense and that goes for science as well, since science is essentially an extension of God's will. Spielvogel notes that one of the main purposes of the work is to place God at the forefront of every political and social institution and as the explanation for natural occurrences, because to Andreae, the world should rededicate itself to understanding everything from a pantheistic view.

Moreover, Spielvogel rightly questions why Andreae's utopian society focused so much on science and Christianity and contends that this focus is due to the Renaissance

revival of Hermeticism⁴⁶. Hermeticism, Spielvogel explains, is composed of two areas of thought, “One type stresses the occult sciences with emphasis on astrology, alchemy and magic. The other focuses on theological and philosophical beliefs and speculations. Some parts of the Hermetic writings are distinctly pantheistic, seeing divinity embodied in all aspects of nature in the heavenly bodies as well in earthly objects” (Spielvogel, 189).

From this explanation, it is clear that Andreae followed the latter school of thought based on his Christian beliefs. Andreae, indeed, uses science and religion to explain the world and from this Hermetic point of view demonstrates the will, or being, of God, through the eyes and actions of man. Spielvogel (190) clarifies:

For Renaissance intellectuals, the Hermetic revival offered a new view of mankind. They saw man created as a divine being endowed with divine creative power. Although his basic essence was spiritual, man freely chose to enter the material world (Nature) and thus was of a double nature—mortal through his body, but immortal through his essential being. Man could recover his divinity through a regenerative experience, by purification of the soul. Thus regenerated, he became again a Son of God.

According to the author, Andreae hooked onto these ideas and believed in them so much so that he made them the sole foundation for *Christianopolis*.

Further, his analysis declares that Andreae exposes his Hermetic beliefs even when he discusses education and politics by stating, “That “spark of divinity” within man

⁴⁶ For a much more complete analysis of Hermeticism look to: Wayne Shumaker, *The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance*. Berkeley Press. 1972. Or Jackson Spielvogel. “Reflections on Renaissance Hermeticism and Seventeenth-Century Utopias”. *Utopian Studies* 1.1 (1987): 188-197. Both authors go into discussions and make claims about Andreae that are fascinating, but require a deep understanding of Andreae and his peers of his time.

means that the citizens do not need to rely on books since “they find more within themselves” (Spielvogel, 194). The reason for man’s being is to seek to better understand the world, himself, and most importantly, God. Again, Spielvogel finds that for Andreae, “The Hermetic lessons were clear: the world was a living embodiment of divinity; humans, who also had that spark of divinity within, using mathematics and science, had the power to understand and hence dominate the world of nature” (Spielvogel, 195). This is what the author sees as Andreae’s political purpose for the world within the paragraphs of *Christianopolis*: to implement a Christian-centered, communal, place where the ideas from Renaissance Hermeticism seep into every inch of the political and social institutions.

In a more comparative analysis that relies less on Andreae’s Hermetic beliefs, Judah Bierman contends that what is different about Andreae’s political purpose compared to other utopias is that in *Christianopolis* he tried to reignite the Christian belief system and to place science and religion at the highest point possible in society. Of course, with Harrington or More, virtue was a necessary component in the society, but the religion of the people was not needed to be deemed correct if it was based on Christian beliefs. On this point, Bierman argues, “To an even greater degree than More’s *Utopia*, Andreae’s *Christianopolis* is dominated by a religious-social science; it is a Christian communist brotherhood where life according to nature corresponds to man’s Christian, moral nature” (Bierman, 496). What is more, the work focuses much more on science than any other utopian work of its time.⁴⁷ Whereas with *Utopia* virtue is the focal point and with Harrington’s *Oceana*, the equal distribution of land, science and religion

⁴⁷ Except for maybe Francis Bacon's (1916) , *New Atlantis*.

are what is literally emphasized in every institution in *Christianopolis*. Bierman (497) reminds the reader that with Andreae, “All the more significant, then, in the space given to scientific activity, in particular the emphasis on experiment, observations, practical testing, within the utilitarian framework.”

Further, when explicitly compared to *Utopia*, *Christianopolis* purposefully makes room for science and religion to work together within society. More, and really Harrington as well in some respects, is reluctant in his *Utopia* to place anything but virtue as the center of society because in his particular socialist vision, once religion, science, or any other subject takes precedence then the society favors it and it creates inequality amongst the citizenry. The point stressed is that while More’s *Utopia*, like many other utopias, features either a decentralized or centralized society⁴⁸, while Andreae’s work goes the extra mile and envisions, “[...] a place devoted to probing the physical world” (Bierman, 496). Yet, as the centrality of science sets *Christianopolis* apart from other utopias, especially the ones analyzed in this thesis, Andreae’s utopia is very similar to More’s and Harrington’s works, because at the core, *Christianopolis* is a place where people live together harmoniously. Here too there is not only a desire, but an imperative need to, remove lavish goods as a sign of success and power and then to create a more aesthetically pleasing lifestyle. This, as shown, is a common theme among all of the authors mentioned in this thesis’ all attempt to diffuse a hierarchical system of rule and to enforce a more egalitarian political regime.

Chapter Conclusion

⁴⁸ Bierman (1963) explains that More’s *Utopia* was exclusively decentralized because he focused his utopia on, “farms and towns” instead of simply one large city.

Christianopolis, while influenced greatly by Thomas More's *Utopia*, was unique in presenting a utopian world that strictly obeyed the Christian doctrine that it had adopted. Yet, while the Christian doctrine directed the rules and ideas of *Christianopolis*, Andreae did not dismiss the importance of scientific exploration in the natural world like many other utopian and religious writers of his time had done. J.C. Davis points out that *Christianopolis* is distinctive in that unlike most utopian works, the goal of the citizens is not to wander off of the island of Christianopolis to find a better life because the island, according to Andreae, is already perfect. Whereas More's work encourages citizens to leave their home to find *Utopia*, *Christianopolis* is a perfect place and according to Andreae there is no other place on Earth that can compare. Any other place in the world that does not abide by the same rules and laws as those enclosed within the gates of the city of Christianopolis are seen as forbidden and evil. Acts and rules outside of the city are perceived as material-driven and acts of sin simply because they do not possess a Christian framework. The goal in *Christianopolis* is not to search for a new place to live, but to search for yourself and God in the city that allows you to do so freely and constantly.

In his analysis, Jackson Spielvogel contends that what is special about *Christianopolis* is that Andreae expounds his Hermetic beliefs and connects on how important religion and science are for a society to thrive. This is also understood by Judah Bierman, who argues that Andreae, more so than anyone else during his time, imagined how Christianity and science could be implemented to the most extreme level possible. Unlike for More or Harrington, it is this combination that Andreae believes creates balance between not only citizen and government, but man and God.

Andreae's Hermetic beliefs led him to connect every aspect of *Christianopolis* to God because, for such believers as himself, God encompassed everything. That meant that the people of the city had to learn to recognize and accept that in their everyday lives. Spielvogel, like Davis, is also adamant that *Christianopolis* was meant to be a real place, Andreae's deep-seeded beliefs and words make it clear that he hoped for a place to imitate what he had written down and put it into action. It should come as no surprise that religion and science were crucial to Andreae, since his Hermetic beliefs that he espoused into his utopian vision hoped to align man, nature, and God into one. Overall, Andreae's *Christianopolis* presents the reader with a lost traveler who is lost, but ultimately this individuals is only able to find guidance by discovering himself through God and science.

CHAPTER V

Why Utopias Matter: Conclusion

What do the utopian works described in this thesis offer to the modern discussion of political problems? On a general level, utopias mostly serve as unrealistic abstractions for readers that are impractical because the works seek out a more perfect world which seems impossible. Erik Olin Wright, a leading scholar in utopian studies, explains that for the majority of people, “Utopia literally means ‘no-where.’ It is a place in the imagination of peace and harmony, of flourishing lives and happiness; it is a fantasy world where our ideals of a just and good society are fully realized. Utopia reflects the human longing for escape from the oppressions, disappointments, and harsh realities of the real social world” (Wright, 37). From this definition utopias seem unachievable because they only espouse plans and notions that seem too ideal for the contemporary world. Imagining how institutions could be completely virtuous and just, a world where communal living with shared goals amongst the citizenry reigns supreme, and the removal of material possessions is difficult, especially in the modern world where individualism and material goods are valued more sometimes than human life itself.

However, after analyzing *Utopia*, *Oceana*, and *Christianopolis*, it is clear that these three utopian works engage in solving political and social inequalities that each author had actually perceived to be unjust and experienced in the real world. Each author bases an ideal world off of political injustices in order to better the political system as they see fit in the physical world. Wright observes that, “Utopian visions, however, are more than just passive individual dreams. In the right circumstances, they can also become powerful collective ideas in political movements” (37). The power that lies within utopian works such as those discussed in this thesis is monumental. The ability of utopias is that they propose ideas that during times of political struggle or transition and can prove to be a major changing point for society and the citizens who live within it.

Though, many would argue that for the most part the ideas discussed here seem out of reach or absurd, those same skeptics would be the same people who agree that such ideas *could* or *would* make the political arena a more egalitarian and better place. In response to such skeptics, Wright assures that, “This dismissal is too quick. It may be that utopian visions are simplified sketches, but the ideals embodied in those dreams might still figure into the design of real-world institutions and social transformations” (Wright, 37). The possible solutions that utopias offer are important, since they can generate adaptations to preexisting ideas and can help to actually solve a political problem.

It is true that utopian works try to grant alternative solutions to problems that seem insurmountable; however, how else are such problems to be solved without proposing probable resolutions? Utopias grant the ability to brainstorm and implement ideas to citizens that would otherwise be never suggested or even thought about to fix problems in our complex world. However, to allow those ideas to come to fruition or to

be useful in the political arena, citizens have to open themselves to the possibilities. Or as Wright puts it, “The temptation is to be a cheerleader, uncritically extolling the virtues of promising experiments. The danger is to be a cynic, seeing the flaws as the only reality and the potential as an illusion” (38). The trouble is that a misunderstanding of utopias creates an impasse between modern citizens and utopias due to the skepticism that citizens have in change and new ideas. On this point, Wright says (42):

A skeptic might say: “Most ordinary people in the United States today are not deeply dissatisfied with the world as it is, and they certainly aren’t longing for more egalitarian and democratic forms of social interaction. Besides, equality and democracy are just slogans; in practice, efforts to create more equality just mean increased government coercion. More democracy is likely to lead to a tyranny of the majority.” I have three basic responses to such skepticism: First, the degree to which people are deeply dissatisfied with the existing conditions of life depends in part on whether they believe viable alternatives are possible. What psychologists call “adaptive preference formation” means that, in many situations, people adjust their aspirations to what they perceive to be unalterable reality. This is one of the reasons why it is important to expand our understanding of alternatives. Second, it is always possible that democracy will get hijacked for oppressive purposes and that increasing equality is accompanied by reductions in freedom. There are no guarantees...And finally, history is filled with surprises. A few years before the collapse of the Soviet Union, no one would have predicted the end of the authoritarian state socialist regimes. But here we are.

The purpose of utopias is to provide possible solutions to possible problems that can occur. All of the authors of the utopias mentioned in this thesis wrote their works while enduring political transition that caused them to seek out another way that their political system could be better or more egalitarian. When citizens in a state are living in oppressive conditions are they supposed to continue living in those conditions until the oppression randomly or suddenly stops? Of course not. But, if ideas are not generated about how to end the oppression and instate a state of egalitarianism, then the oppression will naturally continue.

To better illustrate the point that utopian ideas matter, even in the modern world, governments and citizens still struggle with many of the problems addressed by More, Harrington, and Andreae. Most recently, such problems include but are not limited to: intolerance of people and religions, power struggles between governments and their people, haughty pride among political leaders, displaced exiles with no place to call home, disagreements among the electorate on how to punish criminals, and establishing what is just. More's *Utopia* stressed a more egalitarian and virtuous⁴⁹ society that stopped relying on money or material possessions to signify power or invoke a sense of pride. His utopia proposed that criminals not be put to death immediately after committing a crime, but rather be rehabilitated to ensure that they do not repeat the same offense.

Similar ideas are also found in *Christianopolis*, where the city works together to help to try to rehabilitate lost souls who were trapped in a cycle of materialism and vanity. The traveler in *Christianopolis*, a lost exile, learns quickly that a world of materialism and intolerant people is the cause of much unhappiness and isolation in his

⁴⁹ Virtuous in the sense of the Christian doctrine.

former home. The traveler learns that not only does it take multiple people, who are truly dedicated to wisdom, virtue, and the word of God, to run such a place, but more so it takes people who are understanding of the fallibility of mankind and dedicate themselves to educating each other about the differences amongst men and their ideas.

Finally, Harrington's work illustrates that the power struggle between citizens and the government is a problem that can only be solved if the citizens have some claim to power. During the time that *Oceana* was written land was a true sign of what and who is powerful, but today what signifies as power is not the ownership of land as it was during Harrington's time. Regardless, when what is powerful is established by a ruler or a culture, then, Harrington's utopia voiced that both the government and the people must share power together, so that the society can remained balanced and not fragmented.

Unfortunately, for Thomas More, James Harrington, and Johann Valentin Andreae, there was no way for their ideas to be implemented into society freely and easily as some other ideas were. This was not because their ideas were not practical, but because their ideas attempted to make change in time period where oppressive rulers and corrupt systems prevented their works from being understood and accepted. To be sure, for their utopian ideas, Thomas More⁵⁰ and James Harrington⁵¹ died for their causes at the hand of their oppressive governments. Oppressive governments knew that the ideas espoused in utopian works were oppositional and they could spark a revolt amongst the people against them. Knowing how dangerous utopian works could be caused rulers like

⁵⁰ More was executed for a slew of reasons, but writing *Utopia* did not help prove his innocence.

⁵¹ Harrington was not executed for his crimes, but he did eventually go insane after being persecuted for his political writings for so long.

Henry VIII and Oliver Cromwell to vehemently oppose the writing of More and Harrington, respectively.

However, while the ideas central to these works were not widely accepted during the Renaissance, modern society has a real chance to benefit from these utopian works and their ideal worlds. Even though it is difficult for citizens to be open to change and new concepts, there is nothing to lose by taking utopian notions seriously. As Wright correctly points out, “The point of studying real utopias is to expand our menu of alternatives so that when historical opportunities for serious social innovations occur, we are in a better position to transform institutions and, hopefully, enhance the conditions of human flourishing” (42). After all, ideas or plans that seem outlandish or unachievable are sometimes the best ideas or courses of action that help us to succeed in a complex world.

Interestingly, modern society, for the most part, has deemed utopian works as impossible places in the real world because the works espouse ideal societies that seem too perfect to exist in nature. Yet, what exactly is perfect about the places mentioned by More, Harrington, and Andreae? The ideas proposed by these authors do not seem completely unattainable or unreachable; possibly, they are outlandish, but not completely unviable. Most of the suggestions and ideas to problems, as illustrated by the authors, do not suggest a perfect place where there is no crime, no punishment, nor some sort of restructuring or serious restriction on human nature. The notion that utopias try to solve impossible problems with preposterous solutions is a misconception, indeed. As previously mentioned, utopias attempt to demonstrate that there are alternative solutions to problems that have constantly impeded the progress of society throughout history. The

solutions offered by More, Harrington, and Andreae seemed heretical during their own time only because they were considered dangerous to those in power positions and possessed the ability to overthrow the hierarchical structures of government and the rulers who led them because they proposed shared equality and power between citizens and government. Today, the ideas contained in the utopian works addressed in this thesis seem bizarre to contemporary readers, simply for the reason that the suggestions warranted by More, Harrington, and Andreae present themselves as both unique and different from our own political and social structure. However, the delusion is not that what is suggested by utopian authors is unimportant, impossible, or strange to contemporary ears. The fallacy is thinking that the problems addressed in utopian works are not pertinent or worthy of generating new solutions in the modern world, since they clearly contain relatable problems and ideas.

With such relevant points in regards to modern society, why do these works, with the exception of More's *Utopia*, seem to be forgotten? Today the ideas contained in utopian works are set aside or thought of as simply only interesting, but not implementable. In the current world these works have earned the title of impractical due to the ideas seeming outdated or as irrelevant notions that cannot apply to modern problems. It appears that all the utopian texts discussed in this work have been disregarded for two main reasons: relevance and age.

The supposed irrelevance and the old age of utopian works has prevented them from gaining a modern audience to understand the importance of the messages and ideas they contain. The fact that the authors who were writing these pieces were responding to problems with solutions in a time period that was drastically different from the present-

day seems to have persuaded people in contemporary society that the ideas would not apply in present-time, because the citizens of today perceive the world to be drastically different from the time of More, Harrington, and Andreae. Further, a probable reason for utopian authors and their ideas being dismissed is because the age of the texts seem too archaic to modern ears, so there is a general feeling of skepticism towards the pertinence of the issues in the books.

While the world has not changed completely in some 400 years, a number of the issues that are taken up in the texts analyzed in this work present themselves as perhaps irrelevant. This is especially true in Harrington's *Oceana* when he proposes a redistribution of land and power between the citizens and the government. During Harrington's time, land was the central source of political power for citizens and governments, but with the emergence of the industrial revolution and the present notion that industry and corporations signify as what is powerful, the conception that land is power is no longer as pertinent as it once was throughout the Renaissance period.

Irrelevancy and an aging ideas are also evident in *Christianopolis*. Andreae's proposal for a place that strictly follows Christian principles and forbids secularization seems extremely difficult for the mostly secular modern political world to imagine possible. Not to mention, *Christianopolis* is presented by Andreae as a restrictive city, since no other religion is allowed to be practiced by citizens. This seemingly oppressive characteristic of the city puts it at a disadvantage, since its unwillingness and closed-mindedness to tolerate other religious and cultural practices, but its own kind, is a negative aspect to modern citizens who live in a growing pluralist and progressive world.

An alternative possible explanation as to why political utopias have been dismissed is the competition amongst authors and their works during the Renaissance. The clearest example of this viable explanation is the competition between Hobbes and Harrington during the mid-1600s. Hobbes wrote and published *Leviathan* 1651 and only a few short years later Harrington produced *Oceana* in 1656. Yet, it is obvious that Hobbes work survived over time since it continues to be discussed and read widespread while in comparison *Oceana*'s existence is barely known. The fact that Hobbes work famously lives on while Harrington's work is perceived as an oddity, is an interesting concept. However, as to why one work gained more popularity than the other, is a mystery in itself.

Conversely, More's work does not need an explanation for why it has faded; simply because it never has. *Utopia* has withstood the test of time and is continuously read by academics and non-scholars, alike. Whether it is the story of *Utopia*, or the curiosity of readers to interpret what is perceived as the genesis of the term and place, "utopia", people have continued to read More's ideas over the centuries. It is possible that since More's book has served as the primary text that which people compare all other utopias to that it has become the staple and standard for other utopian works to reach, but why the text has yet to diminish is difficult to determine.

However, this is not just a recent phenomenon. During the time that each of the works was published, then too the ideas, were being rejected but not exactly for the same reason as they are today. The root of these utopias being viewed as impractical was More, Harrington, and Andreae's focus on restructuring the state in such a way that the government was not the sole owner of control in the state, but instead the citizens had

some control in government, as well. Whether control be shared by allowing the citizens to own land or removing currency and the worth from material goods, the leaders who heard and read about such ideas when they were written were vehemently opposed to them, and for good reason. The ideas proposed by these utopian authors undermined the authority and structure of governments during the Renaissance. Megalomaniacal rulers like Henry the VIII and Oliver Cromwell were not concerned with pleasing the citizenry. For them, the only matters at hand were acquiring more territory and wealth, in order to solidify their positions as rulers. Therefore, proposals such as more equality for citizens and the idea of allowing lower classes of citizens to possess land were dangerous and ultimately ridiculed.

Without utopian works and the ideas that they generate humans are left to struggle with the problems that they create for themselves with no alternative solutions on hand. This is dangerous for contemporary society when one considers the possibility of totalitarian governments, intolerance, injustice, and the power struggle between people and government to combat all at once. Utopian works grant humans to look into possible solutions to real world problems that they endure. Yet, until citizens take utopian works seriously, they are left to ponder much like the characters from *Utopia*, Peter Giles and More, of what a better life could be like, instead of actually living it.

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