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More and the Republics of Plato

‘But now with Plato’s state I can compare,
Perhaps outdo her (for what he only drew
In empty words I have made live anew
In men and wealth, as well as splendid laws):

‘The Good Place’¹ they should call me, with good cause.’ (‘Six Lines on the Island of Utopia
Written by Anemolius, Poet Laureate, and Nephew to Hythloday by his Sister’)²

‘So let us first consider how our citizens [...] will live [...]. In the summer they will for the most part work unclothed and unshod, in the winter they will be clothed and shod suitably. For food they will prepare wheat-meal or barley-meal for baking or kneading. They will serve splendid cakes and loaves on rushes or fresh leaves, and will sit down to feast with their children on couches of myrtle and bryony; and they will have wine to drink too, and pray to the gods with garlands on their heads, and enjoy each other’s company. And fear of poverty and war will make them keep the numbers of their families within their means.’

‘I say,’ interrupted Glaucon, ‘that’s pretty plain fare for a feast, isn’t it?’

‘You’re quite right,’ I said. ‘I had forgotten; they will have a few luxuries. Salt, of course, and olive oil and cheese, and different kinds of vegetables from which to make country dishes. And we must give them some dessert, figs and peas and beans, and myrtle-berries and acorns to roast at the fire as they sip their wine. So they will live a peaceful and healthy life, and probably die at a ripe old age, bequeathing a similar way of life to their children.’

‘Really, Socrates,’ Glaucon commented, ‘that’s just the fodder you would provide if you were founding a community of pigs!’

[...] ‘All right [...] For though the society we have described seems to me the true one, like a man in health, there’s nothing to prevent us, if you wish, studying one in a fever.’

(Plato *Republic* 372a-d)³

There is no doubt that More (aided by his humanist friends Giles and Erasmus who assisted with its publication) situates both *Utopia* and the Utopia it describes at least partly in relation to, and in playful competition with, Plato’s *Republic*. In addition to the opening poem by ‘Anemolius’ (from the Greek *anemolios*, meaning ‘windy’), Peter Giles writes in a letter to Jerome Busleyden in 1516:

‘It is a place known so far to only a few men, but which should be known by everyone, as going far beyond Plato’s Republic’ (25). The ‘Giles’ who appears as a character in the text also

¹ ‘*Utopia*’ is a coinage from the Greek adverb *ou* (‘not’) and the noun *topos* (‘place’); it puns with another Greek compound in which *topos* is conjoined with the adverb *eu* (‘well’, although in compounds it translates as ‘happy’, ‘fortunate’).

² More 1995: 19. Unless I am specifically citing the Latin, I reference the page numbers of the English translation in this edition throughout. The actual author is unknown (More? Erasmus? Giles?). Baker-Smith (1994: 95) favours Giles.

³ Throughout, I have modified the translation of the *Republic* by Lee (Plato 2007).

compares Raphael Hythloday to both Ulysses and Plato (all three are explorers, whether geographically or intellectually), and the ‘Morus’ of the text, when speaking to Hythloday, refers to Plato as ‘your friend’. In this chapter we shall have cause to note plenty of features of the Utopian way of life – not just the communal living – which plainly both derive from, and play with, the *Republic*.

However, it is my main contention that More’s knowledge of Greek, and understanding of Greek thought and methodologies, allows him to engage much more deeply with the *Republic* – and Plato’s corpus overall – than is immediately obvious from the surface resemblances, and that in consequence it richly repays us to consider afresh Plato’s not one, but *two* imagined communities in the *Republic* – which I shall outline shortly - and reflect on what he is trying to do with them, in order better to understand More’s own deliberately elliptical approach and intentions. And an understanding of Plato’s idealized communities in general (particularly the two in the *Republic* but also touching on those in the *Timaeus*, *Critias*, *Politicus* and *Laws*) will in turn require us to locate them within the broader context of Greek thinking on imaginary communities from Homer and Hesiod in the eighth and seventh centuries BCE to Lucian in the second century CE.

I argue that such a perspective enables us better to appreciate More’s seriocomic tone, and see that its purpose is more complicated than simply to sweeten the medicine of the message with honey (as More suggests in his second letter to Giles in the 1517 edition). It will also help us understand better More’s complex deployment of the dialogue form and, above all, see how the uses of seriocomedy and dialogue *interconnect* in *Utopia* to form an exploratory pedagogic work which, I argue, is More’s deepest debt to Plato. *Utopia* is a work in which the description of Utopia in Book Two is consciously framed in dialogue both with Book One and also with all those, Greek and otherwise, who have speculated and will continue to speculate on the nature of the ideally structured and organized community, and the extent to which such communities either can or should be put into practice. Central to these discourses is an examination of how ideals relate to the daily exigencies of practical politics which More understood so well.

To substantiate my case, I first need to show both that More’s knowledge of Greek was good enough for such a deeper engagement, and also that he had sufficient access to Plato and other Greek writers in the Greek original as well as in Latin translation. As excellent scholarship already exists on both questions, I can be reasonably brief.⁴ But the case still needs to be clearly made. I then outline the main similarities between *Utopia* and the ideally just tripartite state constructed by Socrates in the *Republic*, a state composed of Philosopher Rulers (both Kings and Queens), their Auxiliary helpers (who live with the Rulers in communes and combine with them as Guardians of the State), and the Producers who provide food, clothing and housing for them all. As this is also fairly well-explored territory, I can be succinct; but again, the case still needs to be made. At this point, however, I diverge from any standard comparison between *Utopia* and the tripartite state, arguing that there are also important *differences*, and in addition that More makes use of many other Greek sources, Platonic and otherwise. Central to my argument is the claim that *Utopia* is in important respects similar not only to the tripartite state of the *Republic* but also to the original, apolitical, pastoral community described above in the

⁴ See, for example, Barron in Logan (ed.) 2011: 3-21; McConica in Logan (ed.) 2011: 22-45; Baker-Smith 1994: 86-99; Suthren in this volume.

quote from 372a-d, and that this bucolic vision in *Republic* Book 2 has been overlooked as an influence on More. This matters, because an understanding of the interrelation between the two idealized communities of the *Republic* helps us appreciate the complex ways in which Plato employs the dialogue form and ambivalence of tone for philosophical ends, and this in turn enables us better to understand More's own deployment of tone and dialogue in *Utopia*.

In 1439 the library bequest of Humfrey, Duke of Gloucester, arrived in Oxford, the main introduction of the university to the new humanist learning from the continent. The bequest included Decembrio's Latin translation of Plato's *Republic*. During More's two years of study at Oxford between c.1492-4 he would thus certainly have had access to Plato in Latin (and he may also have seen Ficino's Latin translation of Plato, first published in 1484). His stay also coincided with the lectures on the new learning given by William Grocyn; More may well have heard his lectures – Grocyn gave the first public lecture on Greek literature in Oxford in 1491 (McConica 2011: 25) – and he may even have studied with him. He may also have studied Greek with the scribe John Serbopoulos, who was producing Greek manuscripts in Oxford between 1484-1500 (McConica 2011: 26; Catto and Evans (eds.) 1992: 2.781; Weiss 1957: 173-4). But by whatever means he acquired some Greek while at Oxford, acquire it he did: according to Harpsfield, 'he wonderfully profited in the knowledge of the latin and greek tongues' (1558-9: 12; cf. Roper c.1557: 198).

More's classical studies (of Greek in particular) continued when in 1496 Grocyn was appointed vicar of St Lawrence Jewry in London, in the parish of More's family (an appointment which in itself may suggest that More and Grocyn had indeed met during More's stay in Oxford). In a letter to the grammarian and pioneering humanist teacher John Holt in 1501, More says that he is studying Greek with Grocyn very seriously, and indeed has put Latin aside for it (Rogers (ed.) 1947: 2; cf. McConica 2011: 26). (More may have got to know Holt while he was at Oxford, when Holt was Usher of Magdalen College School. Another connection was John Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury: Holt was schoolmaster to the boys in Morton's household in 1495, while More had been a page for Morton c.1490-92.) In addition to learning from Grocyn himself, More now had easy access to his large library of Greek and Latin texts.

During this period More also became friends with a humanist circle centred around Grocyn and dedicated to Greek studies, including Thomas Linacre, William Lily, William Latimer and John Colet. Linacre had travelled in Italy and acquired an extensive library of Greek books, while Lily had studied Greek and Latin in Rhodes. Latimer and Colet had also both travelled in Italy and Colet in addition corresponded with Ficino.⁵ Linacre was older than More and acted as teacher as well as friend: More says he read Aristotle's *Meteorologica* under his guidance. William Lily was his closest companion (they both lodged with the Carthusian monks in the London Charterhouse in the late 1490s) and they competed with each other in translating poems from the *Greek Anthology* into Latin. More's view of the members of this close circle is nicely illustrated in a letter of his to Colet in 1504: 'while you are away, [Grocyn] is the only master of my life, [Linacre] the director of my studies, [Lily] the dearest companion of my affairs.' (Rogers (ed.) 1947: 8-9).

This humanist circle was in its turn responsible for More's introduction to Erasmus when he first visited England in 1499, an introduction assisted by the fact that Erasmus' pupil William

⁵ Barron 2011: 11. For Colet's correspondence with Ficino, see Baker-Smith 1994: 88 and Sears Jayne 1963.

Blount, Lord Mountjoy, knew More's family. More and Erasmus became close friends and in 1505 they translated into Latin some of the dialogues of the Greek satirist Lucian, both relishing his incisive exposure of humanity's capacity for self-deception and hypocrisy cloaked by cultural convention. More was responsible for *Menippus*, *Philopseudes* and (probably) *Cynicus*. We shall be returning to Lucian later, but it is worth noting immediately that in the introduction to his translations (published in 1506) More commends Lucian for his seriocomic tone, saying that he perfectly exemplifies Horace's injunction 'to combine delight with instruction', an allusion to Horace *Satires* 1.1.24, '*ridentem dicere verum*', 'to tell the truth while laughing'.⁶ It is also interesting that in this 1506 introduction More approves of Lucian's critique of the 'fruitless contentions of philosophers' (CW 3, Part 1.3-9). Some particularly notable examples of this critique occur in the *True History*: when Lucian's travellers arrive at the Isle of the Blest, they find many of the old Greek heroes, poets and philosophers; Plato, however, is absent: 'allegedly he was living in his imaginary city under the constitution and laws that he drew up himself' (Costa 2005: 223). On the Isle of the Blest, too, all the women are held in common and no man objects, 'in which respect they are absolutely the best Platonists in the world' adds the narrator drily. However, while More is happy to concur with this (fairly) gentle mockery in 1506, it is a view that he will have revised considerably – although not entirely – when he comes to write *Utopia* in 1515 (see More 2016: xxiv).

More's Greek, then, is very good. Just as importantly, he has access to a wide range of Greek texts, first at Oxford and later in the personal libraries of Grocyn and Linacre. And from 1495 these libraries would have been hugely enriched by the heroic endeavours of the humanist scholar Aldus Manutius, who was the first to publish a very substantial part of the extant Greek corpus, and whom Linacre helped in preparing the first printed edition of Aristotle. As Suthren notes in this volume, *all* the texts that Hythloday introduces to the highly receptive Utopians appear in the Aldine Greek collection, and Hythloday explicitly specifies that the Sophocles is in 'the small typeface of the Aldine edition' ('*tum Sophoclem minisculis Aldi formulis*', 182); he later says that he showed the Utopians the books printed in Aldine letters ('*Nam quum ostenderemus eis libris chartaceis impressas ab Aldo literas*', 182). This is a deliberate anachronism as Hythloday's final voyage to Utopia was in May 1503, and not all the Aldine editions of the texts that Hythloday mentions had appeared by then. But the salient point is that they *had* been published by 1515; More is acknowledging his great debt to the Aldine enterprise. For our purposes the most relevant Aldine publications are Aristotle (1495-8); Hesiod (1496); Aristophanes (1498); Lucian (1503); Homer (1504); Plutarch (1509); and of course Plato (1513).

By 1515, then, More was not only highly proficient in Greek but also had considerable access not just to Greek texts in general but, specifically, to Plato's *Republic* in both the Aldine Greek edition and in the Latin translations of Ficino and Decembrio; and lectures that he gave in St Lawrence Jewry on Augustine's *City of God* c.1501 would also have directed him to ponder the *Republic* (see Barron 2011: 15, McConica 2011: 27). It is no surprise, therefore, that in depicting the Utopians' way of life More is able to call upon many precise details from the *Republic*, and particularly – though as we shall see certainly not only – from the second 'fevered' polis that Socrates describes from 372e, which in the interests of clarity I shall refer to as the 'tripartite state' to distinguish it from the first, simple, pastoral community described at the start of this chapter. As mentioned, as this is also reasonably well-covered ground (e.g.

⁶ CW 3, Part 1.3. More's works other than *Utopia* are quoted from More 1963-1997, referred to as CW.

Baker-Smith 1994: 86-99; White 1982: 329-54), I will again only provide the evidence necessary to build my main case. I am certainly not claiming that the *Republic* is More's only Greek source, or even his only Platonic one, and we shall be considering some of the other sources below. However, I want to focus on the *Republic* as I believe that More's relation to it is much richer than is usually understood.

The most obvious similarity between the tripartite state of the *Republic* and Utopia is the communal way of life, although we should note at once that in the former this is only practised by the two Guardian classes, the Philosopher-Rulers and the Auxiliaries, whereas in Utopia all the citizens participate (the slaves to a far lesser extent). Nevertheless, it is the communism that Hythloday emphasizes in Book One of *Utopia*, explicitly praising the communal way of life in the *Republic* (99). In both Utopia and the Guardian classes there are shared belongings and shared meals, and the shared living quarters of the Guardians are partly replicated in the large rural dwellings in Utopia in which at least forty adult men and women (plus two slaves) reside for two-year stints to work the land (and although in towns Utopians live in separate houses in family units, these houses are kept unlocked and the citizens are free to come and go between them as they please).⁷ In this and several other respects, Plato is influenced by Spartan practices (Schoeck 1956: 366-75). (It is also probable that the communism of the Utopians owes something to Vespucci's *New World* (Basel, about 1505, describing a voyage begun in 1501): Hythloday is said to have accompanied Vespucci on the last three of his four voyages. However, as stated, my focus here is on the clear and deliberate echoes of the *Republic*.)

Furthermore, the principal aim of these communal practices in both works is to create a deep sense of unity and harmony. In *Republic* 462b-c Socrates claims that social cohesion results from 'the common feelings of pleasure and pain which you get when all members of a society are glad or sorry at the same successes and failures' (see also 464d), and that 'the best ordered state is one in which as many people as possible use the words 'mine' and 'not mine' in the same sense of the same things.' In Utopia, too, all the citizens will feel equally at home everywhere (145), and 'the whole island is like a single family' (147; cf. Baker-Smith 2011: 153). Here too Plato is influenced by Spartan ideals: when the Spartan lawgiver Lycurgus returned from his travels, he is said to have remarked that 'All Laconia looks like a family estate divided among many brothers' (Plutarch *Lycurgus* 8.4; Plato's source, of course, cannot have been the 1st-2nd century CE Plutarch, but the story appears to be an old one). And the absence of a private life for both the Guardians and the Utopians means there will be no divided loyalties and no distractions: 'here, where there is no private business, every man zealously pursues the public business', enthuses Hythloday (241); compare *Republic* 417a, 420a and 463d-e.

This communal way of life is one of simplicity: in both states greed is seen as the root of most evil (253-5; *Republic* 373e). The Guardians are not even allowed to touch gold and silver (417a), and in Utopia the authorities deliberately devise a system for ensuring that gold is utterly despised, employing it for chamber-pots and prisoners' chains; jewels are similarly set aside as the playthings of very young children (149-51). (More's disparagement of gold and precious stones is also influenced by Lucian's *Nigrinus* which satirizes a rich man 'conspicuous for his vulgarity'; another source is Vespucci, who reports meeting inhabitants of the New

⁷ Shared belongings and shared living quarters: 137, 241; *Republic* 416d, 458c, 464b-c; shared meals 127, 139; *Republic* 416e, 464c. Free movement between houses: 119.

World who prefer feathers to gold or pearls (Markham 2010: 9 and Baker-Smith 2011: 147 n.9).) Intriguingly, the low status of gold in Utopia – compounded by Hythloday’s attack on useless goldsmiths (243) - throws a mocking light on the description of the work on the title-page as a ‘truly golden handbook’ – a key point and one to which we shall be returning.

It is also a way of life in which women are far more prominent than they were in Plato’s Athens or More’s England. Girls in Utopia and the Guardian classes both receive the same good education as the boys (155; *Republic* 451c-452a, 466c-d), and we also learn that adult women in Utopia are encouraged to attend public lectures as well as the men (127). Guardian women and women in Utopia both work outside the home (*Republic* 451e, 466c-d; More 1995: 125), and both groups of women are trained for and participate in war (*Republic* 452a, 466d, 471d; More 1995: 201, 2011). Indeed in both the Guardian classes and Utopia war is undertaken by family units, one of the most precise resemblances of detail between the two (*Republic* 466e; More 1995: 211-3). There are differences: women do not participate in ruling in Utopia as the Philosopher-Queens do in the tripartite state (*Republic* 540c), and there do not appear to be any female priests in the latter as there are in the former, although More qualifies this by noting that only elderly widows are eligible, and not often chosen (231). Nevertheless, the proposals outlined by Socrates in the *Republic* for the education of (Guardian) women and the utilisation of their potential would appear to be a profound influence on More.

The similarities do not only exist between Utopia and the way of life of the Guardians; there are also links between Utopia and the tripartite state as a whole. The emphasis on both communality and frugality, for example, results in strictures in both works on the size of the state (More 1995: 135; *Republic* 460a).⁸ In both communities there is job specialization (More 1995: 125; *Republic passim*, especially 369d-370c), although Utopia does not follow the strict ‘one person, one job’ principle deployed throughout the tripartite state: in addition to their particular jobs, all citizens in Utopia are also trained in farming, and as adults farm for at least two years. Class mobility is also possible in both states: in Utopia, a craftsman who devotes his leisure to study may be promoted to the class of scholars, while a disappointing scholar can be required to become a workman (131); and Socrates makes it clear that those born into the class of Producers, Auxiliaries or Rulers may be moved up or down as their potential and disposition develop (*Republic* 415a-c). More and the character of Socrates also share an intense dislike of both ‘drones’ - the idle rich and their hangers-on - and tyrants, and More agrees with Socrates’ claim that no-one who actually *wants* power should be allowed to have it (More 1995: 129, 243, 123, 195; *Republic* 564b-c, 562a-576b, 347b). Both utterly despise convention for convention’s sake (More 1995: 155; *Republic* 457a-b).

There are also broader connections between Utopia and the tripartite state in respect of some of their most fundamental values and ideals. Although at first glance the Utopians’ view that happiness is to be equated with pleasure owes most to Epicurus, the fact that happiness (*felicitas*) is identified specifically with the *higher* types of pleasure (163) is in fact precisely what Socrates says of flourishing (*eudaimonia*: there is no precise equivalent of ‘happiness’ in Greek) in *Republic* IX (580d-583a). Another key link is the rational religion of the Utopians, which has a family resemblance to Socrates’ quest to apprehend the divine and purely rational

⁸ Although this general point about concern to limit the size of the state in both works is true, the very precise restrictions specified in Utopia - 10-16 adults per household and 6,000 households per city - is in fact closer to *Laws* 740a-741a, which limits the *polis* to 5,040 households.

Forms, the perfect, unchanging and non-sensible paradigms of, for example, Beauty, Justice and the Good which account for and connect all the inevitably imperfect instances of beauty, justice and goodness that we can apprehend in our daily lives (though see below for the Utopians' attitude to the notion of Forms themselves). When discussing the religious principles of the Utopians, Hythloday states clearly: 'Though these are indeed religious principles, they think that reason leads us to believe and accept them' (161). Ficino is almost certainly a mediating factor here. Throughout his works, and particularly in the *Theologia Platonica* (1482) and *De christiana religione* (1474), he seeks to reveal and refresh a '*docta religio*' informed by '*pia philosophia*' (Hobbs 2019: 253-4). The rationality of Utopian religion is especially highlighted by Cassirer in his discussion of the debt to Plato in Renaissance thought (1953: 23, 108-10).

Highly significantly, in both the tripartite state and Utopia education is given much greater prominence than law (More 1995: 195; *Republic* 427a). Hythloday also stresses that it is only good to obey laws *if* they have been made by a wise ruler (165), and he attacks the unjust laws of contemporary European states with great force (245). In Book One he criticizes the tendency of such states to over-regulate in general. (101). Moral education is central to both works, and Hythloday's emphasis on the pliability of young minds and their capacity to be moulded seems a deliberate echo of key passages in *Republic* III. Here is Hythloday:

The priests do the teaching of children and young people. Instruction in morality and virtue is considered no less important than learning proper. They make every effort to instil in the pupils' minds, while they are still young and pliable, principles useful to the commonwealth. What is planted in the minds of children lives on in the minds of grown men and serves greatly to strengthen the commonwealth; its decline can always be traced to vices that arise from wrong attitudes. (231)

Compare Socrates at *Republic* 377a-b, discussing the primary education of the young Guardians:

And the first step, as you know, is always what matters most, particularly when we are dealing with those who are young and tender. That is the time when they are easily moulded and when any impression we choose to make leaves a permanent mark.

Hythloday also agrees with Socrates that this moral education is not just instilled by dedicated teachers and priests but is absorbed by the young from their entire social environment. He explicitly states that sound principles result from a combination of 'teaching' and 'the good institutions of the commonwealth' ('*quibus et doctrina et bonis reipublicae institutis imbuti a pueris sunt*', 212); while at *Republic* 400c-402a Socrates expands on the importance of environment with lyrical force, although his emphasis is not so much on institutions but on young children growing up surrounded by beautiful and noble works of art. The Utopians' dismissal of gold, silver and jewels is also said to arise from the combined influence of their institutions, education and reading (155).

However, while Utopia clearly shares many features with the tripartite state of the *Republic*, its relation to it is highly complex: as the ambitious opening poem suggests, it is anything but a carbon copy. Plenty is simply made up (see Logan 1983: 10-11; McConica 2011: 39, 45n54). And there are also specific *differences*: apart from the fact that in the tripartite state the communal way of life is only practised by the two Guardian classes, the communism of Utopia

is less radical: there is no community, for instance, of wives and children. It is true that there are communal nurseries in Utopia (141), but mothers feed and look after their own children within them; in the *Republic*, the children of Guardian women are taken away at birth and raised in state nurseries (460c-d). (It is possible that More may have vacillated on this issue: Erasmus writes of a lost dialogue in which More defended the community of wives put forward by Socrates in the *Republic* (Logan and Adams 2016: xvi) – but of course this may be one of Erasmus’ jokes.)

Another key divergence is that Utopians devotedly care for their sick and frail (e.g. 139-141, 241-3), whereas Socrates takes a much tougher line with those who are no longer able to serve the state (*Republic* 405c-408b). Utopians are also more open than the reclusive tripartite state both to new ideas (such as the introduction of ancient Greek texts) and also -within limits – to trade: the Utopians import iron, gold and silver, the last two for bribing foreign states and paying mercenaries (185). And their resistance to the whole notion of universals – mind-independent entities, such as ‘blueness’, in which (blue) particulars are grounded – would tellingly put them at odds not just with medieval scholasticism, but with the key metaphysical principle of the *Republic*, namely the perfect, unchanging, non-sensible Forms, knowledge of which both legitimizes and necessitates rule by philosophers. More (in this instance specifically More rather than Hythloday) has some fun mocking late-medieval logic in general and its universals in particular (157), but as these universals have their roots in Platonic Forms, he is inevitably mocking these too.

Also, as we have touched on, there are plenty of other Greek and Roman sources in addition to Plato: Aristotle; the Stoics and Epicureans; Tacitus; Plutarch.⁹ And, as we have also seen, these ancient sources are often filtered through Ficino. Cassirer emphasizes that Ficino’s *De amore* is ‘a source book of English poetics throughout the whole of the sixteenth century (1953: 111), but his influence extends far beyond poets, deep into the intellectual hinterland (Hobbs 2019). There are other Platonic sources too, apart from the *Republic*: in particular, the *Gorgias*, *Philebus* and *Laws*. To take just a few examples, the Utopians’ identification of the Good with the higher pleasures (163-179) is not only indebted to *Republic* 580d-583a – as we saw above – but also to *Gorgias* 494c and the *Philebus* (particularly 46 and 51) as well as to Epicurus (see Cassirer 1953: 110). The *Laws* is an even more important source. See *Laws* 739c-d, for example, for a strong defence of communism: the ideal is that ‘friends have all things in common’ and that citizens be unified by praising and blaming, and rejoicing in and being pained by, the same things; the laws should aim at creating this unity of feeling. Utopia also resembles the state envisaged in the *Laws* in the great respect paid to the elderly, as well as the stipulations we have already noted (n.8) regarding the size of households. Plato’s resonant myth of the island of Atlantis, depicted so vividly in the *Timaeus* and *Critias*, also strikes me as a powerful influence, in details as well as in general fantasy: Utopia is not dissimilar to Atlantis in shape, and the Utopians’ fondness for communal gardens and gardening (More 1995 119) also has echoes of Atlantis (*Critias* 117c) as well as the Garden of Epicurus, given to a

⁹ These other sources are well-referenced in the notes More 1995, and in the notes accompanying Paul Turner’s translation for Penguin Classics. The Stoics are the main sources for the Utopian ideal of living in accordance with nature (see Harris Sacks in this volume).

young Epicurus by his supporters, and where he established a community known as the Garden.¹⁰

At least as important, however (and to the best of my knowledge overlooked in the secondary literature) is the fact that in three key respects Utopia resembles not the second, fevered, tripartite state of the *Republic*, but the *original* idealised community, the one compared in our opening quote to a ‘man in health’ (369b-372e). The first key similarity is that in the original, pastoral community the simple and communal way of life applies to *all* the citizens, just as it does in Utopia, whereas in the fevered, tripartite state, as we have seen, it only applies to the two Guardian classes, the Philosopher-Rulers and their Auxiliaries. Also critical is the fact that the *reason* the original rural community in the *Republic* is compared to a man in health is because in this community only the healthy desires that are necessary for contented survival are satisfied (or even apparently felt); there is no mention of the ‘unnecessary’ desires (373b) of the bloated, tripartite state, which demand more sophisticated goods and diverse pleasures. (This is another respect in which Plato may well have been influenced by Spartan culture: Plutarch says that Lycurgus, the renowned lawgiver of Sparta, ‘banished the unnecessary and superfluous arts’ (*Lycurgus* ix.3).) In Utopia, too, it is strongly emphasized that the only goods produced are those which satisfy natural and healthy needs and pleasures (129-31). The third way in which Utopia is deeply in sympathy with this first rustic community is that, although there are fifty-four city-states (*civitas*, rendering the Greek *polis*) in Utopia, all the citizens are, as we have seen, trained in agriculture and spend at least two years working on the farms. More than this, there is throughout the island deep respect for rural life.

So there is clearly no straightforward correlation between Utopia and the second, tripartite state of the *Republic* (the state usually referred to as the Republic). Furthermore, the deliberate echoes of the *Republic* do not just occur in Book Two of *Utopia*, but apply to the work as a whole: the entire conversation, including that of Book One, begins with a chance meeting after a religious ceremony, just as the conversation of the *Republic* opens with Socrates and Glaucon walking up from the Piraeus, where they had been attending a religious festival to welcome the introduction into Athens of a new goddess (Bendis, a Thracian deity similar to Artemis, goddess of the moon, hunt and forest), and coming upon Polemarchus, Adeimantus and others. In Book One Hythloday also deploys a number of features of Utopia to critique current practices in England and other European states, in particular the profoundly unequal distribution of goods and labour, and the unnecessary suffering that results.

To work out what is going on, we need, I think, to take a step back and delve more deeply into what Plato – as opposed to the character of Socrates – is doing overall in the *Republic*: as we have seen, by 1515 More has acquired the deep knowledge of both Greek in general and the text of the *Republic* in particular to undertake such an exploration for himself. So let us return to the first, pastoral community of 369b-372d.¹¹ In the attempt to define justice and decide whether it is helpful or harmful to the individual, Socrates has proposed that they first consider justice on the larger canvas of the state, and argues that this can most effectively be achieved by constructing a community from scratch, in order to see precisely why, and how, political justice comes into being. He begins by constructing a simple classless community based on

¹⁰ More seems to have felt gardens to be an ideal location for philosophic reflection and debate: a garden in Antwerp is of course the setting for the conversation between Morus, Giles and Hythloday.

¹¹ For a more detailed discussion of this section, see Hobbs 2007, esp. pp. 180-185. .

economic need and exchange. Each individual is to specialize and devote their time and energies to a particular job, such as weaving, and exchange the products of their craft with those of, for example, the farmer. There is no political structure: there is just this one class of producers and consumers; there are also, as far as we can tell, no arts and no philosophy. It is a community at peace with itself and its neighbours: there is no poverty and no war.

The tone of the passage is very difficult to gauge. Is Socrates' account supposed to be a serious analysis, either of the actual, historical development of human communities, or at least of their economic and psychological origins? Or is it intended simply as a joke, perhaps a satire on the contemporary fashion for fantasies of a distant Golden Age or Reign of Cronos?¹² Such legends of former halcyon idylls had been popular at least from the time of Hesiod in the c. late eighth century BCE. In *Works and Days*, Hesiod specifically calls the men who lived in the blessed Reign of Cronos 'golden' (108-10), in bleak contrast to the degenerates of the current age: we have lost the gold from our natures and the idyll can never be recreated. The philosopher, poet and (self-styled) magician Empedocles may also have described a golden age in his *Purifications* (see Barnes 1987: 198-201). (And it is highly likely that of these More had at least read Hesiod, not simply because he was one of the most revered Greek poets and had been published by the Aldine Press in 1496, but also because he is mentioned very favourably by Lucian, one of More's (and indeed the Utopians') favourite authors: in Lucian's fantastical *True History*, the intrepid travellers arrive at the Isle of the Blest and see Hesiod crowned winning poet at the games – even though Homer was still said to be 'too good for them all' (II.22).)

Depending on both writer and immediate context, the tone of such legends can range 'from wistful nostalgia through critique of contemporary mores to absurdist parody' (Hobbs 2007: 183).¹³ Burnyeat (1999: 215-324), for example, focuses on Socrates' 'teasing' tone in this passage and his liberal use of irony, while Schofield (2000: 190-232) calls Socrates' account 'tongue-in-cheek' and 'a comic explosion'. A third option is that Socrates is combining satire with making a serious point: he could be genuinely attracted to this first, austere community – he does, after all, liken it to a 'man in health' – while at the same time enjoying making fun of some literary treatments of similar rustic scenes. Witness Barney (2001: 216-7) who emphasizes the 'parodic' nature of the passage, and Dillon (1992: 26) who writes that 'Plato appears to go out of his way to make fun of the simple society he has postulated'. Yet both these writers maintain that the picture has a serious import as well, or at least fulfils a serious role within the dialogue as a whole.

The question of tone is made even more intricate when we consider Glaucon's contemptuous response, dismissing it as a 'community of pigs' (probably a sly reference to the dessert of roasted acorns). It has sometimes been assumed that this derisive snort is firm proof that the pastoral community is intended solely as a parody, but this does not necessarily follow: Glaucon is no mouthpiece for Plato (nor, as we shall see, is the character of Socrates). The

¹² For a general discussion of the tradition of a Golden Age in Greek literature, see Baldry 1952: 83-92 and Guthrie 1957: 69-79.

¹³ For nostalgic treatments, see Aristotle *Athenian Constitution* 16.7; Athenaeus *Deipnosophists* VI, 267e-270a (although some of the texts that Athenaeus mentions are satirical). See also the vegetarian Peripatetic Dicaearchus appealing to the myth in support of his views in Guthrie 1957: 74 and Vidal-Naquet 1986: 285-7. Aristophanes mocks characters trying to restore the Reign of Cronos at *Clouds* 398 and 1070 and *Plutus* 581. Vidal-Naquet 1986: 285-301 contains a general discussion of ambivalent responses to the Golden Age; see also Brisson 1970: 402-38 and Dillon: 1992: 21-36.

historical Glaucon was one of Plato's brothers, and his character in the *Republic* often challenges Socrates' proposals (sometimes as devil's advocate to clarify the argument, as he admits at 358c), and he is always portrayed as a forceful supporter of a culturally sophisticated way of life: at *Republic* 399e he is tellingly called *mousikos*, 'cultured', a follower of the Muses. So while Glaucon intends his 'community of pigs' retort to satirize the rural community, Plato may also be gently teasing his urbane brother.

Socrates' response to Glaucon's challenge also requires careful appraisal and suggests that the pastoral community is not simply to be dismissed as a parody. He is adamant that it is this community that is the healthy one but says that if Glaucon wants him to construct a more bloated and 'feverish' state, then he can indeed oblige. And he does oblige, lavishly providing gastronomic delicacies and confectionary, perfumes and cosmetics, couches and tables, gold and ivory and a wide variety of the fine arts. Life will thus be more luxurious and comfortable, and indeed intellectually and aesthetically stimulating, but the increased size of the state will lead to encroaching on the territory of others, thereby provoking jealousy and resentment and war will result. The state which aims to satisfy the unnecessary as well as the necessary desires will no longer be at peace.

I believe that Plato (not just the character of Socrates) sees genuine strengths and weaknesses in both these imagined communities, the simple apolitical rustic community and the complex tripartite state that follows. And I submit that one of the very many things that Plato is trying to do with these two imagined communities is set them in *dialogue* with each other. This would fit in with the dialogue form of the work as a whole, in which Socrates is not only challenged rigorously by Glaucon and Adeimantus (another brother of Plato), but ferociously by the sophist Thrasymachus. It is absolutely fundamental to Plato's project that he never writes in his own voice: he always wants to open up discussion, not close it down, and thus always leaves space for future readers to enter the debate and think for themselves. Humour, such as that to be found in 372, plays a vital part in this open-ended dialogue form, as humour and wit also require interpreting. (It is worth noting that a fair amount of the humorous interjections in the *Republic*, as in 372d, come from Glaucon: witness his sardonic response to Socrates' lyrical description of the Form of the Good at 509a.) The similes and myths too require hermeneutic effort from us, such as the similes of the Sun, Divided Line and Cave which illustrate the relation between this imperfect and transitory world of the senses and the perfect, eternal, intelligible Forms (*Republic* 507a-518b), or the Myth of Er (613e-621c), which portrays the rewards and punishments of the afterlife, and how it is our individual human choices in this life which bring them about, not some arbitrary divine will.

In short, the account of the first rural community of 369b-372d and the responses both of Glaucon to it and of Socrates to Glaucon are in keeping with Plato's entire corpus: the tone is deliberately ambivalent and we are to be given no comforting authorial voice to settle the matter once and for all. There is no doubt that Plato wants us to think hard for ourselves in this section. The question is: what does he particularly want us to think about?

The elusive tone, and the often sceptical responses of Glaucon (and indeed Adeimantus) strongly suggest that not only is Plato prompting us to ask what the best form of human community might be; he also wants us to ask to what degree it is either possible, or even desirable, to seek to attain it, starting from where we are now. In addition, we are also being urged to consider how contemporary Athens fares against such an ideal community: witness

the vivid account in *Republic* 487b-497a of the prejudice against philosophy in contemporary society and how naturally philosophic natures become perverted within it; also the incisive portrait – simultaneously witty, affectionate and devastating – of the extreme variety of direct democracy practised in Athens (555b-558c). And throughout the *Republic* we are further impelled to reflect on how far the contemplative philosopher – who imagines the ideal – should get involved in the imperfect, practical business of trying to work towards that ideal: at 473d we have the famous proclamation by Socrates that there will be no end to the ills of humankind until philosophers become kings or kings become philosophers (as we have seen, it is later made clear in 540c that there are to be Philosopher-Queens too), and at 501a Socrates adds that the first thing the ruling philosopher-artist must do is wipe the slate clean. However, by 592a-b this optimistic mood has waned considerably, and Socrates and Glaucon now agree that philosophers can only usefully get involved in politics if the state is *already* perfected.

In all this, Plato is making his indelible mark on a debate regarding the ideal community – whether past or future – which as we have seen was a vibrant theme in Greek literature and thought since at least the time of Hesiod around 700 BCE, and – I would argue – from the written version of the *Odyssey* a little before that, where Odysseus’ travels to the Land of the Phaeacians (Books VII-VIII) and the Isle of the Lotus-Eaters (Book IX) can be seen as the first written contributions to this tradition. It is not a coincidence that it was during this period that Greek colonization and trade expanded considerably: Greeks were coming into contact with an increasing number of different ways of living and organizing states. (Hebrew tales of the Garden of Eden are emerging at around the same time.) Plato explores the theme of the ideal society and its surrounding questions not only in the *Republic*, but also in *Politicus* (269c-274e, describing the idyllic and mythical Reign of Cronos), and *Timaeus* (17a-27b), where there are two idealized states: although Atlantis in its early stages (before it is corrupted by greed and lust for power) is depicted as very enticing, the main object of Socrates’ praise is (the fantasy of) pre-historical Athens, which is ironically said to anticipate the tripartite state of the *Republic* that Socrates had outlined the day before ‘by some miraculous stroke of luck’ (25e). The island-state of Atlantis is further described in luscious detail in *Critias* 106a-121c. The whole of the *Laws*, meanwhile, constructs a semi-ideal ‘second-best’ state governed by allegedly perfect laws which we must strive towards if no ideal philosopher-ruler (or rulers) emerges; *Laws* 731 also paints an alluring picture of the mythical Reign of Cronos as a pattern to emulate. And the exploration continues after Plato: the semi-ideal state envisioned by Aristotle in *Politics* VII-VIII, the Stoic notion of the ideal cosmopolis of rational beings, Epicurus’ garden community of friends, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* 15.75-152 – where meat-eating precipitates humanity’s fall from grace – and Lucian’s *True History* are all important contributions to the genre. For our present purposes, the key point is that this topic takes the form of an open and on-going *conversation*, and Plato’s treatment of the topic is part of that conversation – a debate that he conducts with his predecessors and contemporaries within a number of his dialogues, especially the *Republic*, and which he also conducts *between* dialogues.

It is to the rebirth and development of this ancient conversation that More dedicates himself in *Utopia*. The point I wish to emphasize is that More’s deep engagement with the *Republic* (as well as the Platonic corpus in general) *strengthens the case* for a reading of *Utopia* which positions it as an open-ended, questioning and ambivalent work. Although in 1506 we saw More happy to join Lucian in mocking Plato, by 1515 he has come to understand him much more profoundly, and has imbued the lessons of the off-stage author, inviting readers into the

dialogue and requiring them to think and interpret for themselves. It is true that Hythloday seems to assume that Socrates in the *Republic* speaks for Plato (e.g. 99, 101), but this does not necessarily mean that More concurs; and even if he does, he has still taken on board the basic lesson of inviting readers into a complex dialogue of ambivalent tone which requires active interpretation and encourages the reader to contribute their own views. It is not just that *Utopia* takes the form of a dialogue between the characters of Morus, Hythloday and Giles (in which Books One and Two are further placed by More in dialogue with each other), or that the work contains within it accounts of other dialogues and debates, such as the ones in Cardinal Morton's house, or the French and Macarian Councils (see Shrank 2013; Houston 2014: 15). Nor is it simply that these dialogues within the text are extended beyond it by the marginal notes of the real Giles (or perhaps Erasmus).¹⁴ It is also, and crucially, that in *Utopia* More is in dialogue with the ancient world, conversing both with the imagined communities in the *Republic*, and indeed with the *Republic* as a whole, as well as with much else of the Platonic corpus and with many of the other Greek and Latin philosophical and literary works known to him. And just as Morus says of Utopia that he recommends selective adoption of its best features rather than wholesale imitation, so More adopts certain features of both the idealized communities of the *Republic*, and of other Greek imagined states, for the creation of his own Utopia.

More also inherits and modifies from Plato other specific issues: like Plato, he not only interrogates the imaginary ideal itself, but also raises the question of how the ideal should best relate to the actual. And, also like Plato, he supplies at least a partial answer to this question when he uses the ideal to critique contemporary Europe, and England above all. Another key Platonic inheritance is the linked question of whether to try to balance the contemplative and the practical life, and, if so, how. There is also an echo of the *Republic* in the sceptical, pragmatic voice of Morus, which is suggestive of the down-to-earth scepticism of Adeimantus.

Yet Morus is not More, and it is the elusiveness of More – which is at the heart of the ambivalent tone of the entire work – which I suggest More's deepest debt to Plato of all. 'Morus' is at most only half of More: in the Utopian language 'he' means 'I', so whenever More writes of Hythloday 'he said', he is also writing 'I said'. Morus and Hythloday both represent different aspects and approaches of More and show how he is wrestling with such thorny issues as the question of how far one should keep one's own hands clean, free from the messy compromises of politics. And to add yet another layer of complexity, Morus cannot even be simply associated with the pragmatic side of the argument: '*morus*' is also the Latin for 'fool', a happy coincidence which Erasmus had played with in the title of *In Praise of Folly*. More the off-stage author indeed combines features of both Morus and Hythloday, but he is more multivalent than either. Like Plato, he hides behind many mirrors. When Morus recommends taking the 'indirect approach' in counsel, More is giving us a strong indication of how to approach *Utopia* as a whole.

And the wit – of both Plato and More – plays a key role in their indirect approaches. Let us conclude by returning to More's second letter to Giles. In it More writes teasingly that *of course Utopia* is a factual account of a real place, but *had* he wanted to write a fiction, he might

¹⁴ In his letter to Busleyden which appears in all the early editions, Giles appears to claim that he wrote all the marginal glosses; on the title page of the 1517 edition, however, the glosses are attributed to Erasmus. See More 1995: 27 n.23.

well have chosen a pleasing style in which the truth, ‘like medicine smeared with honey’, entered the mind a little more agreeably (269). At the heart of this ironical jest lies the implication that jesting is simply honey. But this is only part of the story. Jokes and wit also act as a mask behind which the author and their true views can hide: jokes, like the dialogue form, require interpreting. More, writes his biographer John Guy, ‘was most witty when least amused’ (1980: 23). In the *Republic*, both Glaucon and Adeimantus poke – mostly affectionate – fun at Socrates, so that we don’t quite know how to respond to what Socrates is saying, and the character of Socrates is not even Plato. Ironical wit underpins the entire dialogue: the work which we call the *Republic* – *politeia* in the Greek – would be banned in the tripartite state that it depicts, as it does not meet the censorship criteria. Morus, the fool, agrees in part with what Hythloday – he, I – says, and finds other parts absurd – but we are not told precisely *which* parts. *Utopia* proclaims itself on its title page to be a ‘golden book’ – but we learn within it that gold is despised in Utopia and is used for prisoners’ chains and chamber pots. One of the main reasons the *Republic* is still debated is that, through the intricately interwoven devices of the dialogue form, myth, fantasy and wit, Plato requires hermeneutic engagement from his readers, and, crucially, he allows space for them to enter the discussion and put forward their own views. I submit that in respect of this most fundamental lesson of all, More has learnt well from his main source, and in consequence his longevity is likely to be as durable.

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