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GREEK NONSENSE IN MORE'S *UTOPIA**

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ABSTRACT. *This article locates Sir Thomas More's* Utopia *within the broader context of the sixteenth-century Greek revival in England. More and the other humanists whom Erasmus befriended during his time in England became the first Englishmen to learn Greek and to make a polemical point of preferring Greece to Rome. During the period of* Utopia*'s preparation and publication, this circle's Hellenism took on a new intensity, as several of its members were called upon to defend Erasmus's controversial project of using the Greek New Testament to correct the Vulgate. Responding to opponents of the new Greek learning, the Erasmians launched a particularly energetic attack on Roman philosophy. It is argued that* Utopia *intervenes in this quarrel by dramatizing a confrontation between the values of the Roman republican tradition and those of a rival commonwealth theory based on Greek ethics.* Utopia *suggests that, when seen from a Roman perspective, Greek advice looks like 'nonsense'. But, for More, that 'nonsense' yields the 'best state of a commonwealth'.*

I

At the end of Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*, the character 'More' rejects Raphael Hythloday's suggestion that the Utopians have achieved the *optimus reipublicae status* ('the best state of a commonwealth'):

> When Raphael had finished his story, I was left thinking that not a few of the laws and customs he had described as existing among the Utopians were really absurd. These included their methods of waging war, their religious practices, as well as other customs of theirs; but my chief objection was to the basis of their whole system, that is, their communal living and their moneyless economy.[1]

This passage represents a pivotal moment in More's text. At issue is whether 'More' the character should be identified in this instance with More the

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[1] Thomas More, *Utopia*, ed. George M. Logan, Robert M. Adams, and Clarence H. Miller (Cambridge, 1995), p. 247. All quotations from *Utopia* in Latin and English are taken from this edition (hereafter cited as 'More'). On occasion I have modified the translation for accuracy's sake; where this is done, it is duly noted. 'Haec ubi Raphael recensuit, quamquam haud pauca mihi succurrebant quae in eius populi moribus legibusque perquam absurde videbantur instituta, non solum de belli gerendi ratione et rebus divinis ac religione, aliisque insuper eorum institutis, sed in eo quoque ipso maxime quod maximum totius institutionis fundamentum est, vita scilicet victuque communi sine ullo pecuniae commercio.'

author, and whether in consequence we are meant to take the Utopian example as the true 'best state of a commonwealth'[2] or as part of a rhetorical exercise. There is much to be said for both positions, but we should at least begin by noticing that, within the economy of the text, 'More's' rejection of the Utopian system as 'absurd' is precisely the result the reader is led to expect. Every time Raphael outlines the sort of Utopian advice he would give if he were a councillor, his interlocutor dismisses it as absurd or out of place, and adds that such advice would be greeted with derision by his fellow Europeans. In Book I, Hythloday observes that, if he gave his sort of advice in court, he would be 'either kicked out forthwith, or made into a laughing stock', and More readily agrees.[3] Later, when Raphael asks 'More' whether men would greet his proposals with deaf ears, 'More' replies 'with completely deaf ears, doubtless' because Hythloday's stance is 'outlandish'.[4] A frustrated Hythloday is forced to insist that his advice should not be rejected as 'outlandish to the point of folly' and his ideas as 'outlandish and absurd' simply because they run counter to 'corrupt custom'.[5] None the less, he knows full well that they will be, and the reader is not surprised when 'More' ends up rejecting Hythloday's advice as nonsensical and contrary to *publica opinio*.

But 'nonsense' is not an innocent idea in *Utopia*, and, while many scholars have stressed More's indebtedness to the Lucianic tradition of *serio ludere* ('playing seriously'), the fact that 'nonsense' constitutes a structuring force in the text has gone largely undiscussed. More's network of Greek puns do not simply entertain; they organize. Hythloday is a distributor (δαίων) of nonsense (ὕθλος),[6] and almost everything he describes from his travels has a name coined from Greek words connoting 'nonsense' or 'non-existence' (a quality which renders things nonsensical): the Polylerites are people of much (πολύ) nonsense (λῆρος); the Achorians are people without a country (ἀχώριοι); Utopia is 'no place' (οὔτοπος) – a pun on 'happy place'

[2] The phrase 'de optimo reipublicae statu' is found in Cicero, *De legibus* I.15. In this passage, Atticus explicitly compares Cicero's enterprise to what 'was done by your beloved Plato' (*Platonem illum tuum*). See Cicero, *De re publica*, *De legibus*, ed. and trans. C. W. Keyes (Cambridge, MA, 1928). The classic Greek discussion of the distinction between the 'best possible political community' (ἡ κοινωνία πολιτικὴ ἡ κρατίστη πασῶν) and those communities which actually exist is found in Book II of Aristotle's *Politics* (1260b27). See Aristotle, *Politics*, ed. and trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA, 1932).

[3] More, p. 83. 'aut eiciendum aut habendum ludibrio'.

[4] Ibid., p. 95. I have altered Adams's translation here. 'surdissimis, inquam, haud dubie: neque hercule miror … Quid enim prodesse possit aut quomodo in illorum pectus influere sermo tam insolens.'

[5] Ibid., p. 99. 'ita non video cur videri debeat usque ad ineptias insolens … Equidem si omittenda sunt omnia tamquam insolentia atque absurda quaecumque perversi mores hominum fecerunt ut videri possint aliena, dissimulemus oportet apud Christianos pleraque omnia quae CHRISTUS docuit.'

[6] See Nigel Wilson, 'The Name Hythlodaeus', *Moreana*, 29 (1992), p. 33. Some scholars have wanted to derive 'daeus' from δαίος, meaning 'hostile' or 'wretched', but also (very occasionally) 'knowing' or 'cunning'. This interpretation draws strength from the fact that νέμω, not δαίω, is the regular Greek verb meaning 'to distribute'; however, I tend to prefer the first alternative.

(εὔτοπος) – and the title of its governor is Ademus, an official 'without people' (ἄδημος); the river Anyder is without water (ἀνύδωρ), and runs through Amaurot, the unknown city (ἀμαυρός).[7] As we have seen, however, the content of Hythloday's account is 'nonsense' *from a particular point of view*, namely that of 'More' and those whom he represents. But the name 'More' is the most significant pun of all: *Utopia*'s readers would remember Erasmus's dedication to More in *The praise of folly* (*Moriae encomium*), in which he attributes the inspiration for his panegyric to 'your family name of More (*Mori cognomen tibi*), which is as similar to the word for Folly (*Moriae vocabulum*), as you yourself are far from that quality',[8] and concludes by exclaiming 'farewell, most learned More, and zealously defend your Folly (*Moria*)'.[9] More subsequently made frequent use of this pun,[10] and his readers would certainly have recorded that Hythloday's advice is dismissed as nonsense by a *moros*.[11]

So More's word-play leaves us as witnesses to a dialogue between a speaker of nonsense and a fool, and it is our task to determine who the true *stultus* is. A possible way out of the impasse is to recall two facts. First, the title of More's tract, *De optimo reipublicae statu deque nova insula Utopia*, indicates his agreement with Hythloday's claim that Utopia constitutes the *optima forma reipublicae*.[12] And second, Hythloday is not the first speaker of ὕθλος in the Western tradition: Socrates receives this epithet in a famous passage in the *Republic*,[13] and the conceit that Socratic and Platonic advice will always be laughed at by those still in 'the cave' (i.e. Europe) is, as we shall see, one of the structuring

[7] For an account of More's toponymy, see James Romm, 'More's strategy of naming in the *Utopia*', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 22 (1991), pp. 173–83. Romm despairs of identifying any organizing rubric for More's nomenclature, largely because certain names seem to allow for an ethical, as well as a 'nonsensical' reading. But Romm interprets the organizing principle of 'nonsense' too narrowly: once we allow for the importance of point of view, we can see how More's meaning can be conveyed both by 'no place' terms and by terms which seem to be nonsense, but actually contain moral significance. Ultimately, however, we should be wary of agonizing over these names to the point where we miss the joke.

[8] Clarence H. Miller, ed., *Opera omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami*, IX (Amsterdam, 1979), p. 68. All translations from Erasmus's Latin are my own. 'Mori cognomen tibi gentile, quod tam ad Moriae vocabulum accedit, quam es ipse a re alienus'.

[9] Ibid., p. 70. 'Vale, disertissime More, et Moriam tuam gnaviter defende.'

[10] See Richard Marius, *Thomas More* (London, 1999), p. 88. One prominent example is More's 1515 *Letter to Dorp* (Daniel Kinney, ed., *The complete works of St. Thomas More*, XV (New Haven, 1986)), where he comments that Erasmus dedicated *The praise of folly* to 'my patronage'. See also letter 1087 from More to Erasmus (1520) in which More responds to the *Antimorus*, a diatribe against him written by Germain de Brie. P. S. Allen and H. M. Allen, eds., *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami*, IV, no. 1087 (Oxford, 1922).

[11] Dominic Baker-Smith notes parenthetically that the name Morus 'implies a family relationship to Folly', but neglects to identify the implications of this fact for interpreting More's text. See Dominic Baker-Smith, *More's Utopia* (New York, 1991), p. 52.

[12] More, p. 241.

[13] In Book I, Thrasymachus characterizes Socrates's thoughts on justice as ridiculous, and exclaims 'I won't accept it if you speak such nonsense as that' (ὡς ἐγὼ οὐκ ἀποδέξομαι ἐαν ὕθλους τοιούτους λέγῃς) (336d). English translations from Plato are taken from Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, eds., *Plato: the collected dialogues, including the letters* (Princeton, 1989). In this case, however, I have substituted my own translation for Shorey's less literal one. The Greek texts are taken from John Burnet, ed., *Platonis opera* (5 vols., Oxford, 1901–7).

elements in *Utopia*, as it was in *The praise of folly*. In the confrontation between 'More' and Hythloday we have a clash between a man trapped in the cave and one who has seen the sun. But for More, a founding member of the group of 'baby Greeks' (*Graeculi*) Erasmus so jovially satirizes, this confrontation is dramatized as a battle between Greece and Rome – between the values of the Roman republican tradition and those of a rival commonwealth theory based on Greek ethics. *Utopia* suggests that, when seen from a Roman perspective, Greek advice looks like 'nonsense'. But, for More, that 'nonsense' yields the *optimus reipublicae status*.

II

The political structure of the island of Utopia, with its governors,[14] senates, and assemblies, would surely have reminded More's readers of the standard 'mixed constitution' recommended by Polybius, and authorized in Renaissance Europe by the stability of the Venetian regime. But republicanism in the Renaissance was far more than a set of claims about political structures: it was an ethical position.[15] Accordingly, in order to locate *Utopia* as precisely as possible within the intellectual landscape of the period, it becomes essential to identify the ethical framework of Utopian republicanism. In this respect, the most striking fact about More's text is its comprehensive rejection of the civic ideology Quentin Skinner has dubbed 'neo-Roman'. Synthesized out of the *Codex* of Justinian and the works of Cicero, Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus, this intellectual tradition provided the framework for the republicanism of the Italian city-states, and later made prominent appearances during the English Civil War and Interregnum.[16] On this Roman view, liberty is a status of non-domination, to be contrasted with slavery; it is both a good in itself and a necessary condition for human achievement. Liberty encourages virtue, which in turn yields justice. The concept of *iustitia* at issue here is authoritatively defined in the Roman *Digest* as the 'constant and perpetual aim of giving each person *ius suum*',[17] and is characterized by Cicero in *De officiis* 1.7 as an imperative to do no harm, and to respect private property.[18] Dedication to

[14] There is no 'governor' (*princeps*) of Utopia as a whole; rather, each city's *phylarchs* (who represent thirty households each) elect that city's governor. See More, pp. 122–3.

[15] This claim has been most recently disputed (unsuccessfully I think) in the case of English republicanism by Arihiro Fukuda in his otherwise excellent *Sovereignty and the sword: Harrington, Hobbes, and mixed government in the English Civil Wars* (Oxford, 1997). See Jonathan Scott's incisive review in *English Historical Review*, 115 (2000), pp. 660–2.

[16] See Quentin Skinner, *The foundations of modern political thought*, 1 (*The Renaissance*) (Cambridge, 1978); idem, 'Machiavelli's *Discorsi* and the pre-humanist origins of republican ideas', in Gisela Buck, Quentin Skinner, and Maurizio Viroli, eds., *Machiavelli and republicanism* (Cambridge, 1990); idem, 'Political Philosophy', in Charles B. Schmitt, Quentin Skinner, Eckhard Kessler, and Jill Kraye, eds., *The Cambridge history of Renaissance philosophy* (Cambridge, 1988); idem, *Liberty before liberalism* (Cambridge, 1998).

[17] 'Iustitia est constans et perpetua voluntas ius suum cuique tribuendi.' *Digest* 1.1.10. See also *Institutes* 1.1.1.

[18] For Ciceronian and Stoic views on property, see Julia Annas, 'Cicero on Stoic moral philosophy and private property', in Miriam Griffith, Jonathan Barnes, eds., *Philosophia togata I:*

justice thus understood allows the cultivation of the common good (*commune bonum*), which produces concord (*concordia*) and peace (*pax*), and enables the *civitas* to seek *gloria*, its highest good.[19] Finally, implicit in all of this is that individuals should reject *otium* and embrace *negotium* (the *vita activa*), performing their *officia* to their friends and family, promoting the *gloria* of their *civitas* or *patria*, and securing *honor* for themselves.[20] In short, neo-Roman authors embrace republican government because they regard living in a free state as the only means of achieving virtue, and identify active civic participation as the only defence against enslavement.

In his important study of *Utopia*, George Logan argues that More's dialogue should be seen as an attempt to muster Greek 'city-state theory' to defend the 'traditional humanist' or neo-Stoic programme.[21] Now that Skinner and others have excavated that traditional, neo-Roman story more effectively, however, we can recognize that this is not the case. More was not criticizing the practices of contemporary republican theory from within the neo-Roman framework, but rather using the description of Utopia to reject that framework altogether. Machiavelli, who was writing the *Discorsi* as More was writing *Utopia*, furnishes an instructive comparison. Although Machiavelli's republican theory is utterly subversive across the spectrum, it none the less continues to inhabit the basic categories set out above. Machiavelli may turn the conventional content of *virtus* upside down, but his *virtù* still remains an instrument for the acquisition of *gloria* and *grandezza*. He still praises the *vivere libero*,[22] and insists that the central mission of a republic and a free people is

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essays on philosophy and Roman society (Oxford, 1989), pp. 151–73. For the neo-Roman exaltation of wealth and money-making, see James Hankins, 'Humanism and modern political thought', in Jill Kraye, ed., *The Cambridge companion to Renaissance humanism* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 126–7.

[19] Jacob Burckhardt long ago commented on the fundamentally Roman character of the Renaissance preoccupation with glory. In the chapter on 'Glory' in his great study of Renaissance culture, he writes that 'the Roman authors, who were now zealously studied, are filled and saturated with the concept of fame, and … their subject itself – the universal empire of Rome – stood as a permanent ideal before the minds of Italians'. See Jacob Burckhardt, *The civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore, with an introduction by Peter Burke (London, 1990), p. 104. See also Markku Peltonen, *Classical humanism and republicanism in English political thought: 1570–1640* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 34ff, and Skinner, 'Political philosophy', p. 413ff.

[20] For a helpful analysis of Roman ideology, see A. A. Long, 'Cicero's politics in *De officiis*' in André Laks, Malcolm Schofield, eds., *Justice and generosity: studies in social and political philosophy: proceedings of the sixth Symposium Hellenisticum* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 213–40. Long writes, 'What do I mean by Roman ideology? I refer to the system of values expressed by such terms as *virtus*, *dignitas*, *honestas*, *splendor*, *decus* and, above all, *laus* and *gloria*. All of these words signify honour, rank, worth, status. They indicate at the limit what a noble Roman would give his life for. This Roman honour code … was a value system demanding both achievement in public life and public recognition of that achievement' (p. 216).

[21] George M. Logan, *The meaning of More's 'Utopia'* (Princeton, 1983), p. 111.

[22] Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*, ed. Giorgio Inglese, introduzione di Gennaro Sasso (Milano, 1984), p. 68.

actively *mantenere lo stato* – to avoid *servitù*.[23] He notoriously suggests that Christianity is antagonistic to a civic life dedicated to *gloria*, but leaves no doubt that glory wins the day and remains intact as the goal of civil association.[24] In short, the subversiveness of Machiavelli lies in his radical reappraisal of the traditional neo-Roman categories.

More's text, as we shall see, mounts an attack on these categories and asserts a different, fundamentally Greek ethical framework for political life. As Montesquieu observed acutely in *De l'esprit des lois*, More 'wanted to govern all states with the simplicity of a Greek city'.[25] This is not to repeat the familiar and obvious claim that Plato plays a significant role in *Utopia* and furnishes the source for Utopian communism. It is rather to stress that, for More, the abolition of private property was not the means to Roman *iustitia* and, thence, to Roman *gloria*, but rather part of an entirely separate schema – one that is essentially Greek and sharply divergent from *Romanitas*.[26] This Greek view (accessible from either Plato or Aristotle) does not particularly emphasize freedom (ἐλευθερία) as a value, and, to the extent that it does, it invariably has in mind the state of living according to one's nature.[27] It assumes that the purpose of civic life (and indeed the purpose of human life) is not glory, but happiness (εὐδαιμονία, *felicitas* or *beatitudo* in Latin), defined as the human fulfillment achieved completely through contemplation. But most important for our purposes, it also exhibits a sharply contrasting theory of justice. Justice

[23] Ibid., p. 126. 'Perché avendo una città che vive libera duoi fini, l'uno lo acquistare, l'altro il mantenersi libera, conviene che nell'una cosa e nell'altra per troppo amore erri.'

[24] Ibid., p. 298. 'Pensando dunque donde possa nascere che in quegli tempi antichi i popoli fossero più amatori della libertà che in questi, credo nasca da quella medesima cagione che fa ora gli uomini manco forti, la quale credo sia la diversità della educazione nostra dall'antica, fondata dalla diversità della religione nostra dalla antica. Perché, avendoci la nostra religione mostro la verità e la vera via, ci fa stimare meno l'onore del mondo; onde i Gentili, stimandolo assai e avendo posto in quello il sommo bene, erano nelle azioni loro più feroci.'

[25] xxix.19. See Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois*, ed. Victor Goldschmidt, II (Paris, 1979), p. 308. 'Thomas More … voulait gouverner tous les Etats avec la simplicité d'une ville grecque.' The translation is my own.

[26] In one sense, therefore, this essay constitutes a partial response to the claim advanced by Paul Rahe that Skinner's 'neo-Romanism' is a misleading historical category, since no significant differences exist between Greek and Roman political philosophy. This essay will try to make the case that More and his circle perceived the differences only too well, and self-consciously mounted a Greek critique of Rome. See Paul Rahe, 'Situating Machiavelli', in James Hankins, ed., *Renaissance civic humanism: reappraisals and reflections* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 270–308.

[27] See, for example, Plato, *Gorgias* 467a–468e, *Republic* 431a (IV), 515c (VII), and *Laws* 860d (IX); see also Aristotle *Ethics* 1110b (III.1), 1138b9 (V.11). Aristotle argues in *Politics* 1283a (III.7) that, while wealthy men (πλούσιοι) and free men (ἐλεύθεροι) 'are indispensable for a state's existence' (because a state cannot consist entirely of poor men or of slaves), 'justice (δικαιοσύνη) and civic virtue (πολιτικὴ ἀρετή) are indispensable for its good administration (οἰκεῖσθαι καλῶς)' and are, thus, of greater value (since the state aims at the good life). This tepid endorsement, however, does not approach the Roman and neo-Roman glorification of *libertas* (nor that of the broader Athenian political culture which Aristotle was criticizing). Skinner discusses this issue in 'The republican ideal of political liberty', in Buck, Skinner, and Viroli, eds., *Machiavelli and republicanism*, p. 296. All references to Aristotle's *Ethics* are found in Aristotle, *Nicomachean ethics*, ed. and trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA, 1926).

(δικαιοσύνη), on this Greek view, is not a matter of giving each person *ius suum* in the Roman sense,[28] but is rather an arrangement of elements that accords with nature. In the case of the state, justice is instantiated by the rule of reason in the persons of the most excellent men; it results in a social existence which teaches citizens virtue. This view of justice as a natural balance among elements in turn leads to a completely anti-Roman endorsement of property regulations.[29] If property is allowed to flow freely among citizens, both Plato and Aristotle reason, extremes of wealth and poverty will inevitably develop. The resulting rich and poor will both be corrupted by their condition: the rich will become effeminate, luxurious, and slothful, while the poor will lose their public spirit.[30] These corrupt souls will no longer defer to the rule of the best men, an 'unjust' regime will develop, and virtue will be undermined.[31]

This 'Greek view', as I have set it out, is clearly a minimal and composite summary, designed to highlight a certain orientation shared by Plato and Aristotle. In presenting it, I do not intend to minimize the extent to which

[28] In *Republic* I, Plato begins from Simonides's view that 'it is just to give each person those things which are owed to him' (τὸ τὰ ὀφειλόμενα ἑκάστῳ ἀποδιδόναι δίκαιόν ἐστι) (331e) (the translation is my own), but then interprets it in a revolutionary, holistic sense. For Plato, a person's 'due' is his natural place within a rationally balanced, organic whole. As a result, Plato prefers to speak of justice as the natural ordering of elements – not, as in the Roman tradition, the protection of private property and the prevention of bodily harm.

[29] It is true that, in the subset of particular justice which Aristotle calls 'distributive' (ἐν ταῖς διανομαῖς), we have a forerunner of the Roman standard of giving each person *ius suum*. But Aristotle makes clear that his theory of justice, like Plato's, is intimately connected to a claim about nature. For Aristotle, distributive justice in the political sense concerns giving each person the role for which his nature suits him. Aristotle argues that all citizens *qua* rational human beings have sufficient virtue to participate in governance, but that it is just (i.e. natural) that the best men be given political offices. Likewise, in Book I of the *Politics* we learn that there are natural slaves, and that it is just to go to war in order to put these unfortunates in their proper (i.e. natural) place. In Aristotle's world-view, a state is in a natural condition only when it is governed according to justice – that is, when reason and virtue rule in the persons of the wisest and best men. Thus, Aristotle's idea of distributive justice is not the Roman notion. It is, in fact, quite revealing that, although Aristotle rejects the communism of Plato's guardians in Book II of the *Politics* (and stresses the importance of property for the exercise of certain virtues), he nonetheless maintains in II.6 that levels of property must be kept proportionate in order to prevent the aggrandizement of wealth over virtue (1270a19–40). This passage introduces a theme that recurs throughout the *Politics*: political authority should rest with those who most contribute to the good life (i.e. the virtuous), rather than the wealthy, and only temperate property distribution secures this end (see esp. 1267b5 (II.4), 1281a5 (III.5), and the analysis of agricultural democracy at 1318b7–1319a19 (VI.4)). For Aristotle's views of property, see Fred D. Miller, Jr, *Nature, justice, and rights in Aristotle's* Politics (Oxford, 1995), esp. pp. 327–31.

[30] See, for example, *Republic* 421d–422a (IV), *Laws* 729a (V), 742e–743c (V), 744d–745b (V), and *Politics* 1295b4–1296a22 (IV.9). It should be noted, however, that, despite Plato's comments on the effects of wealth in *Republic* IV, his 'oligarchic man' becomes avaricious, rather than opulent (*Republic* 554a–555a (VIII)).

[31] Aristotle argues that a state exhibiting extreme disparities in wealth may have one of two degenerate destinies: either it will become an 'unmixed oligarchy' (ὀλιγαρχία ἄκρατος), or the poor might revolt and establish 'extreme democracy' (δῆμος ἔσχατος) (*Politics* 1295b39 (IV.9)). Both resulting situations will soon develop into tyranny. Indeed, in cases where one citizen or a very small number of citizens possess inordinate wealth, Aristotle goes so far as to recommend ostracism as a pre-emptive measure (1284b15–43 (III.13)). See also *Republic* 550c–553a (VIII).

medieval, Renaissance, and early modern thinkers posited deep divisions between Plato and Aristotle, nor, indeed, to suggest that the works of Plato and Aristotle alone constitute 'Greek thought' (any more than the works of Cicero, Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus constitute 'Roman thought').[32] The intention is, rather, to emphasize that authors who took Plato or Aristotle for their model could (and often did) emerge with a substantially different kind of republican theory. In particular, they might, for the reasons set out above, come to base their republican frameworks either on the abolition of private property or on some mechanism designed to secure its egalitarian distribution – two proposals wholly anathema to the neo-Roman view, which rejects any political interference in property distribution as a violation of its principle of justice.[33] Indeed, it is precisely on this issue of property distribution that several significant Renaissance and early modern thinkers *did* insist on the compatibility of Plato and Aristotle. Erasmus, for example, observed that, while Plato advocated a society without private property, Aristotle had simply 'tempered' this view a bit by arguing that 'ownership and title should be in the hands of certain individuals, but that, in every other respect, all things should be held in common, in accordance with the proverb [i.e. that 'among friends all things are common property'] for the sake of utility, virtue, and civil society'.[34] Likewise, James Harrington, who listed More among his favorite philosophers and whose *Oceana* bears the mark of *Utopia*,[35] would later insist that Plato's *Laws* and Aristotle's *Politics* were of one mind in endorsing agrarian laws.[36]

[32] Plato and Aristotle are singled out in this article because they constituted by far the most important sources for Greek ethical and political theory in Renaissance and early-modern Europe – not because these two authors reflected the mainstream of Greek political philosophy. Indeed, Josiah Ober does well to remind us that Plato and Aristotle were critics, rather than purveyors of mainstream political ideas and values. See Josiah Ober, *Political dissent in democratic Athens: intellectual critics of popular rule* (Princeton, 1998). For a discussion of a different kind of 'Greek republicanism', see my '"True liberty": Isocrates and Milton's *Areopagitica*', forthcoming in *Milton Studies*, 40 (2001).

[33] In Robert Nozick's vocabulary, we have here a quarrel between a 'historical' theory of justice and a 'patterned', or 'end-result' theory. See Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, state, and utopia* (New York, 1974), pp. 153–5. It is worth noting that even Seneca (himself an extremely rich man), whose *De otio* endorses significant aspects of the Platonist case and several of whose essays take a negative view of excessive property, emerges in *De vita beata* (XXIII.1–5) with an impassioned defence of private property and limitless money-making based on Roman *ius*. Seneca, *Moral essays*, II, ed. and trans. John W. Basore (Cambridge, MA, 1932). For an excellent discussion of Seneca's views of property see Miriam T. Griffin, 'Seneca *Praedives*', in idem, *Seneca: a philosopher in politics* (Oxford, 1976), pp. 286–314.

[34] M. L. van Poll-van de Lisdonk, M. Mann Phillips, and Chr. Robinson, eds., *Opera omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami*, XX (Amsterdam, 1993), p. 84. 'Aristoteles libro Politicorum ii. temperat Platonis sententiam volens possessionem ac proprietatem esse penes certos, caeterum ob usum, virtutem et societatem civilem omnia communia iuxta proverbium.'

[35] J. G. A. Pocock, ed., *The political works of James Harrington* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 395.

[36] Ibid., pp. 166, 234–5, 382, 412, 460. It is, incidentally, worth noting that Roman authorities such as Cicero, Livy, and Lucan uniformly condemned the Gracchan agrarian laws, whereas Plutarch, Appian, and the other Greek historians praised them extravagantly.

More's attraction to this Greek value system, and his antipathy to its neo-Roman counterpart, were as much cultural as theoretical, and, in order to understand them, we have to reconstruct a particular aspect of his intellectual context: his association with the Erasmian circle. These Oxford–London humanists, whom Erasmus befriended during his periods of residence in England (the longest of which lasted from 1509 to 1514), became the first Englishmen to dedicate themselves to the study of Greek, and to make a polemical point of preferring Greece to Rome.[37] Members of this Graecophile coterie (whom More dubbed *Graecistes*)[38] included William Grocyn (More's tutor and the first lecturer in Greek at Oxford),[39] John Colet (founder of St Paul's school, and author of the Platonizing Oxford lectures on Paul's Epistle to the Romans), Thomas Linacre (the doctor-turned-priest who helped introduce Erasmus to Greek studies), William Lily (author of a pioneering Latin grammar, and More's partner in translating Greek epigrams into Latin elegiacs), Richard Pace (a diplomat and Greek scholar) and, of course, More himself.[40] From 1514 to 1520, the general period of *Utopia*'s preparation and publication, this circle's advocacy of Greek culture took on a new intensity, as several of its members were called upon to defend Erasmus's controversial project of using the Greek New Testament to correct the Vulgate. As an irate 1518 letter from More to the University of Oxford makes clear, opposition to this form of Biblical criticism, and to the Greek learning which had engendered it, had indeed reached a fever pitch:

> I have recently heard it reported by a number of people in London that certain scholars at your university, prompted either by hatred of Greek learning, by a misguided devotion to some other sort, or (as I think more likely) by a shameless addiction to joking and trifling, have formed a deliberate conspiracy to call themselves Trojans. One of them, who is said to be riper in years than in wisdom, has assumed the name 'Priam', another the name 'Hector', another the name 'Paris' or else that of some other Trojan, and the rest have been doing the same, for the sole purpose of jokingly setting themselves up as a faction opposed to the Greeks to make fun of the students of Greek learning … [One of these 'Trojans'] openly called everyone a heretic who wished to pursue Greek learning, and he went on to brand lecturers in Greek as 'archdevils', and students of Greek (in a more modest and wittier vain, as he thought) as 'underdevils'.[41]

[37] Marius, *Thomas More*, p. 72; *Complete works*, xv, p. lxxxi.

[38] See, for example, More's *Letter to Dorp* (1515) in Kinney, ed., *Complete works*, xv, p. 96.

[39] Grocyn, however, preferred Aristotle to Plato, and Linacre contributed to the Aldine Aristotle. See Peter C. Bietenholz, Thomas B. Deutscher, eds., *Contemporaries of Erasmus: a biographical register of the Renaissance and Reformation*, II (Toronto, 1986), pp. 135–6.

[40] Other associates included Richard Croke, Richard Foxe, William Latimer, Thomas Lupset, Cuthbert Tunstall, and Christopher Urswick. Bietenholz and Deutscher, eds., *Contemporaries of Erasmus*, I, p. 327.

[41] Kinney, ed., *Complete works*, xv, pp. 132, 142. I have taken Kinney's translation here. 'Ego quum Londini essem, audivi iam nuper saepius, quosdam scholasticos Academiae vestrae, sive graecarum odio literarum, seu pravo quopiam aliarum studio, seu quod opinor verius, improba ludendi nugandique libidine, de composito conspirasse inter sese, ut se Troianos appellent. Eorum

The Erasmian circle responded energetically to this sort of abuse, and to the more scholarly criticism of the new Greek learning emerging from the universities (in particular, the University of Louvain). Erasmus himself led the way forward. In a 1515 reply to Maarten van Dorp, his famous antagonist, he announces that 'without Greek, the study of the liberal arts is lame and blind'.[42] He echoes these comments in the 1516 epistle dedicatory to his translation of Theodore of Gaza's *Grammatica institutio*. In that context, he bemoans the University of Cologne's hostility to Greek studies and invites the dedicatee, Johannes Caesarius, to reflect on the burgeoning Greek revival:

> I rejoice in our age, my dear Caesarius, in which we see Greek literature coming to life again everywhere! For as the neglect of Greek brought with it the 'total destruction' of all good disciplines and all elegant authors, we may have hope also that, with Greek studies being revived, those disciplines and authors will once again flourish.[43]

That same year he writes playfully that he hopes to transform his patron, John Fisher, 'from a Roman into a Greek; this is the "metamorphosis" I myself have undertaken'.[44]

But Erasmus's English defenders adopted a posture that was more overtly polemical. In the 1517 treatise *De fructu qui ex doctrina percipitur* (On the benefit of a liberal education), Richard Pace provides a representative statement of what emerged as the Erasmian party line:

> Whatever seems to have originated with the Romans, for example, in rhetoric and history, was all taken from the Greeks as if it were a loan. For Demosthenes and Isocrates produced Cicero, as great as he was in the art of oratory (Quintillian acknowledges this). In philosophy, indeed, Cicero called Plato and Aristotle the most learned of the Greeks, and he calls one of them 'divine' and the other 'most wise'. But philosophy among the Romans was so feeble that nothing could seem more stupid to

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quidam (senior quam sapientior ut ferunt) Priami sibi nomen adoptavit, Hectoris alius, alius item Paridis, aut aliorum cuiuspiam veterum Troianorum, caeterique ad eundem modum, non alio consilio, quam uti per ludum iocumque velut factio Graecis adversa graecarum studiosis literarum illuderent … quicunque graecas appeterent literas, aperte vocavit haereticos: ad haec lectores earum diabolos maximos denotavit, auditores vero, diabolos etiam illos, sed modestius, et ut ipsi videbatur, facete, minutulos.' For this episode's place in the rise of Erasmianism in Oxford and Cambridge, see James McConica, *English humanists and Reformation politics under Henry VIII and Edward VI* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 88–93; see also Alistair Fox, 'Facts and fallacies: interpreting English humanism', in Alistair Fox, John Guy, eds., *Reassessing the Henrican age: humanism, politics and reform, 1500–1550* (Oxford, 1986), esp. pp. 12–14. For the broader European context of the debate over Greek, see Jean-Christophe Saladin, *La bataille du grec à la Renaissance* (Paris, 2000).

[42] Ibid., no. 337. 'sine his mancum ac caecum esse litterarum studium'.

[43] Allen and Allen, eds., *Opus epistolarum*, II, no. 428. 'Gratulor, mi Caesari, nostro saeculo quo videmus passim repullescere Graecas litteras. Nam ut harum neglectus omnium bonarum disciplinarum, omnium elegantiorum autorum πανολεθρίαν invexit, ita spes est futurum ut his renatis et illa reflorescant.'

[44] Ibid., no. 452 [to Andrew Ammonius]. 'Interim e Latino Graecum reddam; hanc μεταμόρφωσιν in me recepi.'

learned ears than to compare Roman philosophers to the Greeks. And I include Cicero in this group, if he'll forgive me for saying so.[45]

More evidently shared Pace's sentiments and polemical style. In his 1519 letter to the monk John Batmanson, he declares that the superiority of Greek culture is clear from 'those arts they call liberal, along with philosophy, in which subjects the Romans wrote next to nothing', and offers similar observations in his *Letter to Oxford* and in his own reply to Dorp (1515).[46] In short, for More and his circle, an impassioned defence of the Erasmian project and the new Greek learning carried with it a corresponding attack on Rome in general, and on Roman philosophy in particular.[47]

But More was not undiscriminating in his affection for Greek philosophy. He evinced the same marked preference for Plato over Aristotle shared by almost all of the Oxford–London humanists.[48] This circle was deeply influenced by the writings of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, the notorious syncretist,[49] whom the Erasmians admired for his thoroughly Platonic renunciation of the *vita activa*. In More's *Life of John Picus* (1510), for example, the protagonist appears

[45] Richard Pace, *De fructu qui ex doctrina percipitur*, ed. and trans. Frank Manley, Richard S. Sylvester (New York, 1967), p. 128. The translation is my own. 'Apud Latinos vero, quicquid apparet proprium, ut in arte dicendi, & in historia, hoc totum quasi mutuo sumptum est ex Graecis. Nam Ciceronem, quantus est in arte Oratoria (Quintiliano id confitente) fecit Demosthenes & Isocrates. In Philosophia vero, Plato & Aristoteles, quorum alterum divinum, alterum sapientissimum, ut doctissimos Graecos saepe appellat. Sed Philosophia adeo apud Latinos manca est, ut nihil possit esse eruditis auribus stultius, quam Latinos Philosophos cum Graecis comparare. Quo in genere, nec Ciceronem ipsum (quod eius venia dictum sit) excipio.' For an excellent discussion of Pace's *œuvre*, see Catherine M. Curtis's unpublished doctoral thesis, *Richard Pace on pedagogy, counsel, and satire* (University of Cambridge, 1996).

[46] Kinney, ed., *Complete works*, xv, p. 220. 'vel denique propter artes, quas liberales vocant, ac philosophiam, quibus de rebus Latini scripsere propemodum nihil'. See also p. 99 and p. 143. Richard Croke offered a similar statement of the Erasmian case in his July 1519 lecture at Cambridge, 'De graecorum disciplinarum laudibus oratio'. See Richard Croke, *Orationes Richardi Croci duae* (Paris, 1520).

[47] Needless to say, the attacks on Rome that we find in the writings of the Erasmian circle are polemical and, as a result, hyperbolic in character. An appreciation of the central role these comments play in the presentation of the Erasmian case does not entail taking them at face value. Indeed, to do so would be deeply mistaken. Erasmus himself annotated Cicero's *De officiis* and prepared an edition of Seneca, whom he admired.

[48] More did not, however, reject Aristotle along with scholasticism. He tried all his life to rescue Aristotle from the schoolmen, and to arrive at a temperate assessment of the philosopher's merit. As he puts it in his *Letter to Dorp*, 'Ad Aristotelem ipsum venio quem et ego et supra multos, ita cum multis amo, quem tu [Dorp] in memorata oratione tua videris non supra multos modo, sed pro multis quoque atque adeo pro omnibus amplecti.' See Kinney, ed., *Complete works*, xv, p. 100ff.

[49] Pico tangled with Ficino over the latter's attack on Averroës in the *Theologia platonica*, sought wisdom from occult, Arabic, and kabbalistic sources (a fact which More notably glosses over in his translation of the *Life*), and argued for the compatibility of Plato and Aristotle (for example, in *De ente et uno*). Kristeller suggested the term 'syncretist', rather than 'eclectic' to designate Pico's approach in order to differentiate it from that of the ancient eclectics (i.e. Pico never suggested that all great philosophers were in fundamental agreement). See Paul Oskar Kristeller, 'Introduction' to Pico's *Oration on the dignity of man* in Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr, eds., *The Renaissance philosophy of man* (Chicago, 1948), p. 220. See also Kristeller, *Eight Philosophers of the Italian Renaissance* (Stanford, 1964).

as a man whose mind was 'evermore on high cleued fast in contemplation & in thenserching of natures cownceill', unable to 'let down hit selfe to the consideration and ouerseing of these base abiecte and vile erthly trifles'.[50] Likewise, in a 1492 letter which More admired enough to translate, Pico insists to an interlocutor that he prefers 'the rest and peace of my mynde' to 'all your kingis palacis, all your commune besines, all your glory' (the phrase 'all your glory' is, incidentally, More's own addition).[51]

But perhaps even more important than Pico to the Erasmian circle was Marsilio Ficino, author of the first complete Latin translation of Plato's dialogues.[52] Colet corresponded with Ficino during a visit to Italy (1492–5),[53] and Erasmus drew heavily on the Florentine's work (especially the 1469 *Commentarium in Convivium*, *De amore*) in his *Enchiridion militis christiani*.[54] Indeed, although More was accomplished in Greek, it is probable that he too consulted Ficino's translations. To take only one example, Ficino's *argumentum* for the *Republic* summarizes Plato's theory that cities made up of rich and poor are not one city, but two, and describes the philosopher's novel approach to this problem:

> Whence he arrived step by step at his mystery, that everything should certainly be held in common. Some would not have less, nor truly others more. And it is from the former circumstance [i.e. some having less] that jealousies (*invidiae*), lies (*mendacia*), thefts (*furta*) are born, while extravagance (*luxuria*), pride (*superbia*), and sloth (*pigritia*) are born from the latter circumstance [i.e. some having more].[55]

[50] Anthony S. G. Edwards, Katherine Gardiner Rodgers, and Clarence H. Miller, eds., *The complete works of St. Thomas More*, I (New Haven, 1997), p. 68. More's text is a free translation of the biography written by Pico's nephew, Gianfranceso.

[51] Ibid., p. 86. This passage appears in the letter to Andrea Corneo which More translates and appends to his *Life*. Pico's Latin reads: 'meam animi pacem, regiis aulis, publicis negotiis … antepono' (p. 350). In his introduction, Edwards argues that More 'softened' Pico's letter by adding the thought that one could lead both an active and a contemplative life. However, this thought is present in the Latin, and More's brief addition appears to be a mere explanatory gloss. The text reads: 'Sed inquies, ita volo Martham amplectaris ut Mariam interim non deseras! Hac tibi parte non repugno, nec qui id faciunt damno vel accuso, sed multum abest ut a contemplandi vita ad civilem transisse error non sit, non transisse pro flagitio aut omnino sub culpae nota vel criminis censeatur.'

[52] Marsilio Ficino, *Platonis opera omnia* (Florence, 1484). For Ficino's translations of Plato and their influence, see James Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance* (Leiden, 1990), pp. 267ff.

[53] John B. Gleason, *John Colet* (Berkeley, 1989), pp. 47–52.

[54] See Maria Cytowska, 'Erasme de Rotterdam et Marsile Ficin son maître', *Eos*, 63 (1975), pp. 165–79. In *Enchiridion*, Erasmus writes, 'of the philosophers I should recommend the Platonists because in much of their thinking as well as in their mode of expression they are the closest to the spirit of the prophets and of the gospel' (John W. O'Malley, ed., *The collected works of Erasmus*, LXVI (Toronto, 1988), p. 33). It is important to recall that both More and Erasmus were anxious to exploit the similarities between Christian and Platonic terminology: for example, when they use the word *felicitas* – a marked term in this article – they are happy to have their readers take that term as part of two different, yet intrinsically similar discourses (although *beatitudo* was the more pious term for 'happiness'). Indeed, the case of *felicitas* represents a surprising omission in Hexter's otherwise excellent discussion on the role of Christian terminology in *Utopia*. See Edward Surtz, J. H. Hexter, eds., *The complete works of St. Thomas More*, IV (New Haven, 1965), p. lxxvff.

[55] Marsilio Ficino, *Platonis opera* (Florence, 1517), p. 232. 'Unde sensim descendit ad mysterium suum ut omnia videlicet sint communia, ne alii minus, alii vero plus habeant, & inde invidiae,

This is not at all far from Hythloday's insistence that Platonic communism would eliminate theft (*furta*), frauds (*fraudes*) and a host of other crimes and seditions,[56] along with pride (*superbia*), and jealousy (*invidia*).[57] And, as we shall see, Ficino's characterization of Platonic 'justice' as 'the order and health of the society' (*civitatis ordo atque salus*) is very much the view of justice we encounter in *Utopia*.

But the text which most nearly anticipates More's Platonic reassessment of *Romanitas* is certainly Erasmus's *The praise of folly*. In Logan's phrase, Erasmus's encomium represents a sort of hall of mirrors in which the personification of Folly hails herself as the determining force in human affairs, and as the source of all blessings – leaving it to the reader to recall that some of what Folly praises *is* folly to praise. Many of the issues raised by Folly are picked up again in *Utopia* (often in precisely the same terms, as in the case of the 'problem of counsel' and the Utopian rejection of hunting), but the correspondence between the approaches to Greek theory in the two texts is perhaps the most striking. Throughout Erasmus's mock panegyric, Folly insists that her gift of *stultitia* is what allows human beings to lead happy lives: in a foolish world, only fools are happy. Accordingly, she argues that the Greek philosophers led unpleasant, impractical lives because they did not accept her gift; they chose wisdom instead. Folly first addresses the subject in chapter twenty-four, attacking both Greeks and Romans, but reserving her worst venom for Socrates (on whom she unleashes every Aristophanic weapon in her arsenal):

> As evidence of how useless philosophers are when it comes to the practices of real life take Socrates himself, dubbed the one wise man by Apollo's oracle, but chosen with little wisdom, since when he tried to do something in public life, he had to give up amidst the hearty laughter of all men … For while he philosophized about clouds and ideal forms, measured the feet of a flea, and wondered at the voice of a midge, he learned nothing at all relevant to civic life.[58]

Folly expands on this theme considerably, lamenting that philosophers are not foolish enough to be able to perform the essential *officia* of Roman ethics:

> He [a philosopher] is not at all able to be of any use to himself, to his country, or to his

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mendacia, furta, & hinc luxuria, superbia, pigritiaque nascantur.' A similar passage from Lucian's *Cynicus* (which More translated into Latin in 1506) also seems to anticipate this aspect of More's argument in *Utopia*. In More's Latin, the Cynic declares: 'Aurum vero, argentumque ne desideram unquam, neque ego, neque meorum amicorum quisquam. Omnia nanque mala inter homines ex horum cupiditate nascuntur, & seditiones, & bella, & insidiae, & caedes. Haec omnia fontem habent plus habendi cupidinem.' Gold and silver are particular targets of *Utopia* for precisely these reasons (More, p. 149ff). See Craig R. Thompson, ed., *The complete works of St. Thomas More*, III (Part 1), (New Haven, 1974), p. 21.

[56] More, p. 245.

[57] Ibid., p. 247.

[58] Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, IX, p. 98. 'Qui quidem quam sint ad omnem vitae usum inutiles, vel Socrates ipse, unus Apollinis oraculo sapiens, sed minime sapienter iudicatus, documento esse potest, qui nescio quid publice conatus agere summo cum omnium risu discessit … Nam dum nubes et ideas philosophatur, dum pulicis pedes metitur, dum culicum vocem miratur, quae ad vitam communem attinet non didicit.'

own family, because he is ignorant of public business, and entirely out of touch with popular opinion and the practices of the masses. From which cause he unavoidably incurs hatred, without question due to the great gulf between normal life and minds like his. For what happens among mortals that is not full of folly, done by fools, among fools?[59]

Erasmus's implication is devastating: in a bitterly ironic paraphrase of Callicles's argument in the *Gorgias*,[60] Folly argues that philosophers live unhappy lives and are laughed at and scorned because their wisdom prevents them from being viable in a world of fools (Erasmus's μώροι). Philosophy is incompatible with *popularis opinio* (recall that 'More' condemns Hythloday's advice because it is contrary to *publica opinio*). And although Folly mentions Cicero briefly in her list of useless philosophers,[61] the passages quoted above along with Folly's suggestion that these philosophers lack *decorum*[62] reveal that Folly is engaged in a Ciceronian critique of Greek philosophy – precisely the sort of critique 'More' offers in *Utopia*.

Folly, we should recall, does not claim credit for the content of Greek philosophy, but, rather, for what occurs when Greek philosophers attempt to act in the 'real world' of fools. And what happens in *The praise of folly* when someone tries to give Platonic advice in that real world? An important passage from chapter sixty-six provides the answer:

> And so what is likely to come to pass for those men is, I believe, what happens in Plato's myth to those who are chained in a cave and wonder at the shadows of things, and also to that escapee who returns to the cave and announces that he has seen the true things and that those men are much mistaken who believe that nothing else exists besides the wretched shadows. And indeed this wise man commiserates and deplores the insanity of those men who are gripped by such a great error. But those men laugh at him as if he were deranged, and throw him out.[63]

The *miserae umbrae* which beguile the captives, it turns out, are nothing other than the ethics of Roman republican theory.

In chapter twenty-seven, Folly asks 'what state ever adopted the laws of Plato or Aristotle, or the teachings of Socrates?'[64] None, she replies, because they are all too busy chasing Roman *gloria*. She proceeds to identify two sets of

[59] Ibid., p. 100. 'Usqueadeo neque sibi neque patriae neque suis usquam usui esse potest, propterea quod communium rerum sit imperitus et a populari opinione vulgaribusque institutis longe lateque discrepet. Qua quidem ex re odium quoque consequatur necesse est, nimirum ob tantam vitae atque animorum dissimilitudinem. Quid enim omnino geritur inter mortales non stulticiae plenum idque a stultis et apud stultos?'

[60] See *Gorgias* 484d.

[61] Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, IX, p. 98.

[62] Ibid., p. 100.

[63] Ibid., p. 190. 'Itaque solet iis usuvenire, quod iuxta Platonicum figmentum opinor accidere iis, qui in specu vincti rerum umbras mirantur, et fugitivo illi, qui reversus in antrum veras res vidisse se praedicat, illos longe falli, qui praeter miseras umbras nihil aliud esse credant. Etenim sapiens hic commiseratur, ac deplorat illorum insaniam, qui tanto errore teneantur. Illi vicissim illum veluti delirantem rident, atque eiiciunt.' Recall that Hythloday predicted he would be 'thrown out' (*eiciendum*) for the same reason (More, p. 83).

[64] Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, IX, p. 102. 'quae civitas unquam Platonis aut Aristotelis leges aut Socratis dogmata recepit?'

martyrs to the Roman *patria* as her acolytes, and launches into a brutal satire of the Roman *vita activa*, claiming it as an instance of folly. Cicero's famous dictum in Book II of the *De officiis* that *summa et perfecta gloria* depends on 'the affection, the confidence, and the mingled esteem of the people'[65] is surely Erasmus's target:

> Besides, what was it that prevailed upon the Decii, so that they offered themselves of their own free will to the gods of the underworld? What dragged Q. Curtius into the chasm, if not vain glory, the sweetest Siren, but one denounced passionately by those wise men of yours? What could be more foolish, they ask, than for a man seeking office to flatter the mob, to purchase support with gifts, to pursue the applause of all the fools, to be pleased with their acclamations, to be carried about in triumph as if he were some image to be gazed at by the people, and to stand in the forum cast in bronze. Add to these things adopted names and family-names. Add divine honors bestowed on little men, and even the most wicked tyrants being transformed into gods in public ceremonies … This is the folly which spawns states; dominions are established by it, as are magistracies, civil religion, councils, and law courts. Nor is human life anything other than some game of folly.[66]

Folly could hardly be more clear: in case we were unsure which kind of *inanis gloria* we were talking about, Folly makes sure we know it is the sort of *gloria* for which men organize *civitates* and *imperia*, *consilia* and *magistratus* – that is, the institutions of *Romanitas*.

In the Erasmian framework, Platonic philosophy is thought ridiculous by those living amidst the ethical categories of Roman theory – what Folly later calls the 'middle, quasi-natural affections' such as love of country and family, when valued for themselves and not as manifestations of the *summum bonum*.[67] The Platonism Erasmus opposes to *Romanitas* is deeply metaphysical, drawn, as we have seen, from Ficino and from the broader context of the Greek revival in England. Erasmus uses Folly to demonstrate that the Roman *vita activa* is incompatible with an interior life lived on correct, Platonic terms. None the less, Erasmus does not hesitate to identify the social and political implications of his Platonism. In the *Adagia*, he explains Plato's use of the proverb 'friends

[65] Cicero, *De officiis*, ed. and trans. Walter Miller (Cambridge, MA, 1997), p. 198.

[66] Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, IX, p. 102. 'Tum autem quae res Deciis persuasit, ut ultro sese diis manibus devoverent? Quid Q. Curtium in specum traxit nisi inanis gloria, dulcissima quaedam Siren, sed mirum quam a sapientibus istis damnata? Quid enim stultius, inquiunt, quam supplicem candidatum blandiri populo, congiariis favorem emere, venari tot stultorum applausus, acclamationibus sibi placere, in triumpho veluti signum aliquod populo spectandum circumferri, aeneum in foro stare? Adde his nominum et cognominum adoptiones, adde divinos honores homuncioni exhibitos, adde publicis ceremoniis in deos relatos etiam sceleratissimos tyrannos … Haec stulticia parit civitates, hac constat imperia, magistratus, religio, consilia, iudicia, nec aliud omnino est vita humana quam stulticiae lusus quidam.' A similar passage appears in *Enchiridion* (O'Malley, ed., *The collected works of Erasmus*, LXVI, p. 27); the Decii and Curtius are discussed in identical terms in the *Ciceronianus* (O'Malley, ed., *The collected works of Erasmus*, XXVIII, trans. and ed. Betty I. Knott (Toronto, 1986), p. 385). See also Augustine, *City of God* IV.20.

[67] Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, IX, p. 191. 'Deinde sunt quidam affectus medii quasique naturales, ut amor patriae, charitas in liberos, in parentes, in amicos'.

have everything in common' (τά τῶν φιλῶν κοινά) by stating that 'through this passage [Plato] tries to demonstrate that the happiest state of a commonwealth consists in the common ownership of all things'.[68] 'If it were only possible for mortals to be persuaded of this', Erasmus muses, 'in that very instant war, envy and fraud would depart from their midst'.[69] However, Erasmus was under no illusions: 'But it is exceedingly strange that this community of possessions advocated by Plato should so displease Christians that they attack it with stones, since nothing ever said by a pagan philosopher is more similar to the judgment of Christ'.[70] In 1519, three years after the initial publication of *Utopia*, More would offer an extended discussion of precisely this theme:

> God showed great foresight when he instituted that all things should be held in common; Christ showed as much when he tried to recall mortals again to what is common from what is private. For he perceived that the corrupt nature of mortals cannot cherish what is private without injury to the community, as experience shows in all aspects of life. For not only does everyone love his own plot of land or his own money, not only does everyone cherish his own family or his own set of colleagues, but to the extent that we call anything our own it absorbs our affections and diverts them from the service of the common good.[71]

More's solution to this problem, like Plato's, was Utopia, the land without private property where the entire community was one large family.[72] In composing a Platonic account of the *felicissimus reipublicae status* which could

[68] Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, xx, p. 84. 'Quo loco conatur demonstrare felicissimum reipublicae statum rerum omnium communitate constare.' David Wootton adduces this passage in his excellent discussion of Erasmus's 'proto-Utopianism'. See Wootton, 'Friendship portrayed: A new account of *Utopia*', *History Workshop Journal*, 45 (1998), pp. 25–47. See also Wootton, 'Introduction', to Thomas More, *Utopia*, *with Erasmus's the sileni of Alcibiades*, ed. and trans. David Wootton (Indianapolis, 1999), p. 8.

[69] Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, xx, p. 61. 'Quae si mortalibus persuaderi queat, ilico facessant e medio bellum; invidia, fraus, breviter universum malorum agmen semel e vita demigret.' This discussion bears a striking resemblance to a passage from Pace's *De fructu* (indeed, Pace mentions the *Adagia* several times in his work): 'Apud homines vero, ubi abest aequalitas, ibi adest magna confusio, innumeras ingenerans pestes, ut avaritiam, dolum, fraudem, & id genus alias, quas longum esset recensere … Porro communitas illa quam Pythagoras in amicitia postulavit, non nisi aequabilitas intelligenda est, astipulante ipso Platone, sic scribente in sexto de legibus, ἰσότης φιλίαν ἀπεργάζεται, id est, aequalitas amicitiam facit' (Pace, p. 58).

[70] Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, xx, p. 84. 'Sed dictu mirum quam non placeat, imo quam lapidetur a Christianis Platonis illa communitas, cum nihil umquam ab ethnico philosopho dictum sit magis ex Christi sententia.' Recall Hythloday's observation that Jesus's doctrines would seem strange (*aliena*) among contemporary Christians (More, p. 98), and his comment that 'neque mihi quidem dubitare subit quin vel sui cuiusque commodi ratio vel CHRISTI servatoris auctoritas … totum orbem facile in huius reipublicae leges iamdudum traxisset … ' (p. 245).

[71] Kinney, ed., *Complete works*, xv, p. 279. I have modified Kinney's translation here. 'Multum providit deus cum omnia instituere communia, multum Christus cum in commune conatus est rursus a privato revocare mortales. Sensit nimirum corruptam mortalibus naturam non sine communitatis damno deamare privatum, id quod res, omnibus in rebus docet. Nec enim tantum suum praedium amat, aut suam quisque pecuniam, nec suo duntaxat generi studet, aut suo quisque collegio, sed ut quicque est quod aliquo modo vocemus nostrum ita in se illus affectus nostras a communium cultu rerum sevocat.'

[72] More, p. 147.

stand up to the neo-Roman tradition, More was taking up the task Erasmus had begun. The Utopians, we should recall, also put up statues of their great men in the market-place.[73] But their great men are of a very different sort, and their statues are put up for very different reasons.

III

The dichotomy between Greece and Rome is made explicit from the very outset of More's text. Hythloday is first introduced as a 'stranger', much like the 'strangers' (ξένοι) who serve as Platonic alter-egos in the *Sophist*, the *Statesman*, and the *Laws*. Giles then explains to 'More' that Hythloday has not sailed around (*navigavit*) like Palinurus, the unfortunate watchman of Roman epic, but rather like the Greek Ulysses, or 'even more' like Plato.[74] The allusion is most likely to the account of Plato's travels found in Cicero's *De finibus* and Diogenes's *Lives*,[75] and later presented as the *Navigatio Platonis* in Ficino's text.[76] Both Ulysses and Plato surveyed the manners of different societies (Homer introduces Odysseus as the man who 'saw the cities of many men, and knew their minds'),[77] but Hythloday, like Plato, has studied them as a philosopher. Giles then tells 'More' that, while Hythloday is not ignorant of Latin, he is extremely learned in Greek.[78] In fact, Giles reports, Hythloday has studied Greek instead of Latin because his main interest is philosophy, and 'he recognized that, on that subject, nothing very valuable exists in Latin except certain works of Seneca and Cicero'.[79] More himself makes a similar statement in his *Letter to Oxford*: 'For in philosophy, apart from those works which Cicero and Seneca left behind, the schools of the Latins have nothing to offer that is not either Greek or translated from Greek.'[80] But when Hythloday recommends books to the Utopians, he goes even further. He states clearly that 'we thought that, except for the historians and poets, there was nothing in Latin that they would value'.[81] This more extreme iteration, as we have seen, anticipates a passage from More's *Letter to a monk*. On that occasion, More

[73] Ibid., p. 195.

[74] Ibid., p. 44.

[75] Cicero, *De finibus* v.87 (see Cicero, *De finibus bonorum et malorum*, ed. and trans. H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA, 1967), p. 490); Diogenes, *Lives* III.6 (see Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of eminent philosophers*, II, ed. and trans. R. D. Hicks, vol. I (Cambridge, MA, 1966), p. 281).

[76] Ficino, 'Militia et Navigatio Platonis Trina'.

[77] Homer, *The Odyssey*, ed. W. B. Stanford, I (London, 1958), 1.3. 'πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω'. A further indication that we are to connect Hythloday and Odysseus in this manner comes in Peter Giles's prefatory letter. Speaking of Hythloday, he writes 'homo mea quidem sententia regionum, hominum, et rerum experientia vel ipso Ulysse superior' (p. 25).

[78] More, p. 45.

[79] I have altered the translation here. 'qua in re [philosophia] nihil quod alicuius momenti sit, praeter Senecae quaedam ac Ciceronis, exstare Latine cognovit'.

[80] 'Nam in philosophia, exceptis duntaxat his, quae Cicero reliquit et Seneca, nihil habent latinorum scholae, nisi vel graecum, vel quod e greca lingua traductum est.' See Kinney, ed., *Complete works*, XV, p. 143. I have modified Kinney's translation here.

[81] More, p. 181. 'nam in Latinis praeter historias ac poetas nihil erat quod videbantur magnopere probaturi'.

argues that 'speakers of Latin write practically nothing' in 'those arts they call liberal, along with philosophy'.[82] Accordingly, Hythloday gives the Utopians most of Plato's works, and some of Aristotle's – none of Cicero's or Seneca's – and continues by noting that the Utopian language is related to Greek.[83] This opposition between Greece and Rome works itself out through the same sort of clash between ethical systems that we located in *The praise of folly*.

Thomas White's study of More's use of Plato in *Utopia* identifies a wide range of Platonic references in the text, and this present analysis will not attempt to reinvent the wheel.[84] Rather, it will hope to assess how More structures the Utopian story around the essentially Greek value system we have identified, and opposes it to *Romanitas*. In this respect, it is best to begin at the beginning. Book I occupies itself with the 'problem of counsel', a standard humanist topic which inevitably relates to the quarrel between *otium* and *negotium* to which we have already alluded. This theme is announced unmistakably by all the prefatory letters which various humanists appended to the 1517 and 1518 editions of the text. Erasmus's letter (first included in 1518) raises the issue in the guise of a standard *captatio benevolentiae*, an attempt to earn the good-will of the reader by pointing out what a busy man the author is, and under what

[82] 'quibus de rebus Latini scripsere propemodum nihil'. Kinney, ed., *Complete works*, XV, p. 220. Neither Kinney nor the editors of the Cambridge *Utopia* text adduce this passage when discussing Hythloday's second comment.

[83] More, p. 181. This is my primary reason for doubting John Parrish's daring claim that the name 'Utopia' should be read as a nod to the penultimate sentence of Seneca's *De otio*, in which the ideal republic is said to be 'nusquam' (nowhere) (John Michael Parrish, 'A new source for More's "Utopia"', in *Historical Journal*, 40 (1997), pp. 493–8). Parrish is correct that More referred to his treatise as 'Nusquama' in his correspondence throughout the early fall of 1516 (see, for example, letters 461 and 467 in Allen and Allen, eds., *Opus epistolarum*, II). But, unlike 'Utopia' (an original coinage), 'nusquam' is a ubiquitous adverb, making any specific source for More's initial title difficult to establish. Indeed, Baker-Smith points out that, in Ficino's version of *Republic* IX, Glaucon tells Socrates that his republic 'in terris vero nusquam, ut arbitror, exstat' (Baker-Smith, *More's Utopia*, p. 97). Moreover, several of the Utopian positions Parrish derives from the Stoics to support his case are not exclusively Stoic. For example, to account for Utopian communism he cites Diogenes's comment from the 'Life of Zeno' that 'by friendship they [the Stoics] mean a common use of all that has to do with life'. But this is a common Greek saying. In the *Adagia*, Erasmus points out that the proverb τὰ τῶν φιλῶν κοινά is found in Plato's *Laws*, and makes other appearances in the works of Aristotle, Cicero, and Pythagoras (Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, XX, p. 86). Also, while Zeno's *Republic* embraced communal property (and communal wives), later Stoics such as Chrysippus, Panaetius, and Posidonius rejected this aspect of Zeno's system (as did Seneca himself). My own thought about the title is that More may have had in mind the most famous gag in Greek literature: Odysseus's declaration to Polyphemus that his name is Οὖτις, 'Nobody' (*Od.* IX.366). This (along with the pun on 'eutopia') would help explain the otherwise perplexing fact that More employs the negating adverb 'ou'. The implication of the Homeric allusion would be clear enough: 'Outis' is not nobody, and 'Outopia' is not simply nowhere.

[84] Thomas White, 'Pride and the public good: Thomas More's use of Plato in *Utopia*', *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 20 (1982), pp. 329–354. See also Surtz's discussion of Plato in Surtz and Hexter, eds., *Complete works*, IV, p. clviff, and Baker-Smith, 'Uses of Plato by Erasmus and More', in Anna Baldwin and Sarah Hutton, eds., *Platonism and the English imagination* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 86–99.

harried conditions the work was produced. But, as a preface to *Utopia*, this is more than a *topos*.

> Apart from the cares of a married man and the responsibilities of his household, apart from his official post and floods of legal cases, he [More] is distracted by so many and such important matters of state business (*tantisque regni negotiis*) that you would marvel he finds any free time (*otium*) at all for books.[85]

Guillaume Budé follows suit, and observes that reading about the *mores* and *instituta* of the Utopians made him disdainful of his *negotium* and his obsession with *industria oeconomica*.[86] It is, however, More's own letter which frames the issue most explicitly:

> Well, little as it was, that task [of writing *Utopia*] was rendered almost impossible by my many other obligations (*negotia mea*). Most of my day is given to the law – pleading some cases, hearing others, arbitrating others and deciding still others; this man is visited for the sake of duty (*officii causa*), that man for the sake of business (*negotii*); and so almost all day I'm out dealing with other people, and the rest of the day I give over to my household; and then for myself – that is, my studies – there's nothing left.[87]

The reader is being prepared for a humanist showdown between the Roman values of *officia* and *negotium* and the Greek *vita contemplativa*.

In Book 1, as Skinner has shown conclusively, the figure of 'More' becomes the *porte-parole* for the Ciceronian *vita activa*, and counters Hythloday's defence of *otium* with virtual quotations from the *De officiis*.[88] What is remarkable about *Utopia*, however, is not simply that Hythloday defends *otium*, but *why* he does. In response to 'More's' insistence that he should become a councillor, Hythloday argues (clearly echoing Erasmus's Folly) that Latinized Europeans will not accept Greek advice. Hythloday understands that 'More' and his ilk will find Utopian advice absurd (just as, he notes, Dionysius of Syracuse found Plato's absurd)[89] because they have been imbued with Roman views on justice and the ends of civic life – two positions that Hythloday spends the whole of *Utopia* attacking from a Greek perspective. He asks, 'what if I told them the

[85] More, p. 5. 'Praeter rem uxoriam, praeter curas domesticas, praeter publici muneris functionem et causarum undas, tot tantisque regni negotiis distrahitur, ut mireris esse otium vel cogitandi de libris.'

[86] Ibid., p. 9.

[87] Ibid., p. 33. I have modified the translation of this passage. 'Sed huic tamen tam nihilo negotii peragendo, cetera negotia mea minus fere quam nihil temporis reliquerunt. Dum causas forenses assidue alias ago, alias audio, alias arbiter finio, alias iudex dirimo, dum hic officii causa visitur, ille negotii, dum foris totum ferme diem aliis impertior, reliquum meis; relinquo mihi, hoc est literis, nihil.'

[88] Quentin Skinner, 'Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* and the language of Renaissance humanism', in Anthony Pagden, ed., *The languages of political theory in early-modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1987), esp. pp. 132–5. Baker-Smith largely follows Skinner in his analysis of Book 1 (Baker-Smith, 'Uses of Plato by Erasmus and More', pp. 98–102). He rightly emphasizes the self-conscious Platonism of those who defended the *vita contemplativa* against the Ciceronian *vita activa*, but neglects to locate that Platonist commitment within the context of a wider ethical and political theory, or to acknowledge the explicit critique of *Romanitas*. As a result, he concludes (incorrectly, I believe) that 'More' is an Augustinian critic of Plato (p. 225), and that *Utopia* represents a confrontation between Platonism and Augustinianism.

[89] More, p. 83.

kind of thing that Plato practises in his republic, or that the Utopians actually practise in theirs', and answers that, no matter how superior, 'here they [the practices] would seem alien (*aliena*)'.[90] His views are only confirmed when 'More' champions a 'philosophia civilior' (one more suited to the *vivere civile*) over what he dismisses as Hythloday's 'philosophia scholastica' (where *scholastica* is clearly another 'nonsense' word).[91] Hythloday is forced to conclude that, in attempting to advise Europeans 'deeply immersed as they are and infected with false values from boyhood on'[92] and languishing in the grasp of *stultitia* (another nod to Erasmus),[93] he would simply end up acquiring the disease he was trying to cure.[94]

'More' begins with the Ciceronian claim that, in becoming a councillor, Hythloday would advance his own interests as well as those of his family and friends[95] (see *De officiis* 1.5), and proceeds to offer the standard humanist observation that a 'philosophic nature' is suited to advise princes[96] (a view, 'More' tells Hythloday, that is shared by 'your Plato')[97] – and, later, that it is every good man's *officium* to do so.[98] Hythloday replies that he would not part with his precious *otium* (his ability 'to live as he likes', a privilege Cicero rejects as un-civic)[99] on that account, since courtiers are incredulous and defensive when 'a man should suggest something he has read of in other ages or seen in practice elsewhere' (part of his constant insistence that his advice would be ill-received by Europeans).[100] When 'More' retorts that he should not be so impatient to 'pluck up bad ideas by the root', but should rather aim to make the regime as good as possible, Hythloday replies that such conduct would

[90] Ibid., p. 99. 'Quod si aut ea dicerem quae fingit Plato in sua republica aut eta quae faciunt Utopienses in sua, haec quamquam essent (ut certe sunt) meliora, tamen aliena videri possent.'

[91] Ibid., p. 95. The contrast between this Ciceronian *philosophia civilior* and Platonic political theory is picked up in precisely these terms by Thomas Starkey in his *A dialogue between Pole and Lupset* (c. 1530). Starkey has Pole explain to Lupset that 'we loke not for such hedys as plato descrybeth in his pollycy for that ys out of hope wyth us to be found … but aftur a more cyvyle & commyn sort'. See Thomas Starkey, *A dialogue between Pole and Lupset*, ed. T. F. Mayer (London, 1989), p. 108.

[92] More, p. 83. 'perversis opinionibus a pueris imbuti atque infecti penitus'. Compare Hythloday's prediction that his advice will be assailed for contravening 'perversi mores' (p. 99).

[93] Ibid., p. 101.

[94] Ibid., p. 97.

[95] Ibid., p. 51. This argument is also advanced by Callicles during his exchange with Socrates in *Gorgias* 483b–486d – a discussion which largely mirrors the debate between 'More' and Hythloday in Book 1.

[96] More, p. 53.

[97] Ibid., p. 81. This is a particularly significant detail, since Hythloday has not yet referred to Plato directly. Here, without being told, 'More' reveals his awareness that Hythloday is ventriloquizing Plato.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Ibid., p. 51. See Cicero, *De officiis* 1.70. Interestingly, this is an aspect of the debate More stresses repeatedly in his *Life of John Picus*. In the biography itself, More writes of Pico that 'liberte a boue all thing he loued to which both his owne naturall affection & the study of philosophy enclined him' (*Complete works*, 1, p. 68), and in the letter to Corneo we read that philosophers 'love liberte; they can not bere the prowde maners of estates: they can not serve' (p. 85). The first clause of this second passage is More's own interpolation (the Latin is simply 'mores pati & servire nesciunt'). Baker-Smith provides an illuminating account of the similarities between the letter and Book 1 of *Utopia*, although he does not stress the theme of 'liberte' in the earlier work. See Baker-Smith, 'Uses of Plato by Erasmus and More', esp. pp. 18–20, 99.

[100] More, p. 53.

simply force him to imitate the degeneracy of the multitude. He illustrates his point by taking an image out of the *Republic*:

> This is why Plato in a very fine comparison declares that wise men are right in keeping away from public business (*a capessenda republica*). They see the people swarming through the streets and getting soaked with rain; they cannot persuade them to go indoors and get out of the wet. If they go out themselves, they know they will do not good, but only get drenched with the others. So they stay indoors and are content to keep at least themselves dry, since they cannot remedy the folly of others (*alienae stultitiae*).[101]

The analogy to which Hythloday refers is found at the end of a passage in Book VI – one which surely must have been in More's thoughts when he composed this debate. Earlier in the passage, Plato writes as follows:

> [The enlightened few realize] that no one can do anything sound, so to speak, concerning the business of cities, nor is there an ally with whose aid the champion of justice could escape destruction, but, rather, that he would be as a man who has fallen among wild beasts, unwilling to share their misdeeds and unable to hold out against the savagery of all, and that he would thus, before he could in any way benefit his friends or the state, come to an untimely end, useless to himself and others – for all these reasons I say the philosopher remains quiet, minds his own affair.[102]

In its emphasis on the inability of a philosopher to help his friends, himself, or the state by entering public service in a commonwealth not ruled by philosophers (and its rejection of 'More's' sort of collusion as 'sharing the misdeeds' of the rulers), this passage encapsulates the debate between 'More' and Hythloday – and reveals it to be a debate between Cicero and Plato, between Rome and Greece.[103]

Moreover, Plato's portrayal of the philosopher as a 'champion of justice' in the midst of those who argue over the 'shadows of justice'[104] frames the

[101] Ibid., p. 101. 'Quamobrem pulcherrima similitudine declarat Plato cur merito sapientes abstineant a capessenda republica. Quippe quum populum videant in plateas effusum assiduis imbribus perfundi, nec persuadere queant illis ut se subducant pluviae tectaque subeant: gnari nihil profuturos sese si exeant quam ut una compluantur, semet intra tecta continent, habentes satis quando alienae stultitiae non possunt mederi si ipsi saltem sint in tuto.'

[102] *Republic* 496c (VI). I have altered the translation here. '…καὶ οὐδεὶς οὐδὲν ὑγιὲς ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν περὶ τὰ τῶν πόλεων πράττει οὐδ' ἔστι σύμμαχος μεθ' ὅτου τις ἰὼν ἐπὶ τὴν τῷ δικαίῳ βοήθειαν σῴζοιτ' ἄν ἀλλ' ὥσπερ εἰς θηρία ἄνθρωπος ἐμπεσών, οὔτε συναδικεῖν ἐθέλων οὔτε ἱκανὸς ὢν εἷς πᾶσιν ἀγρίοις ἀντέχειν, πρίν τι τὴν πόλιν ἢ φίλους ὀνῆσαι προαπολόμενος ἀνωφελὴς αὑτῷ τε καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἂν γένοιτο _ _ ταῦτα πάντα λογισμῷ λαβών, ἡσυχίαν ἔχων καὶ τὰ αὑτοῦ πράττων…' Consider also Hythloday's claim that 'there is no way for you to do any good when you are thrown among colleagues who would more readily corrupt the best of men than be reformed themselves. Either they will seduce you by their evil ways, or, if you remain honest and innocent, you will be made a screen for the knavery and folly of others' (More, p. 101).

[103] Brendan Bradshaw provides an excellent account of the relationship between the 'More'/Hythloday debate and *Republic* VI, although he neglects to comment on 'More's' Ciceronianism, or to emphasize that More imports an extremely specific thought from his source (i.e. that the advice of philosophers will seem like nonsense to those in the cave) which has implications for our overall view of *Utopia*. Bradshaw also concludes that 'More' is the victor in the debate. See Brendan Bradshaw, 'More on Utopia' in *The Historical Journal*, 24 (1981), pp. 1–27.

[104] *Republic* 517d (VII). 'περὶ τῶν τοῦ δικαίου σκιῶν'.

extensive discussion of *iustitia* in Book I and its distinctive treatment in Book II. In the midst of the debate on *negotium*, Hythloday recounts how he participated in a discussion on the punishment for theft at the court of Cardinal Morton, More's patron and the only European in *Utopia* who appreciates Greek advice. Hythloday repeats his argument that the practice of hanging thieves is unjust and ineffective, and offers two principal reasons. First, the punishment is disproportionate; second, 'it would be much better to enable every man to earn his own living, instead of being driven to the awful necessity of stealing and then dying for it'.[105]

This second objection is fleshed out extensively and develops into an attack on Roman 'iustitia' (giving each person *ius suum*) and a defence of Greek δικαιοσύνη.[106] In the Platonic framework, as we have seen, 'justice' indicates an arrangement of elements that accords with nature; it relies on σωφροσύνη, or 'balance', which produces 'harmony' and prevents the corruption of the established order; the arrangement of the whole, when just and balanced, reflects itself on to the souls of the citizens and moulds their characters. Justice is, indeed, in Ficino's phrase, the *civitatis ordo atque salus*, and just institutions are essential for the cultivation of virtue. Logan notices More's focus on 'institutions' or 'root-causes', but attributes it mistakenly to a 'scholastic' strain in his thought.[107] There is no trace of the scholastic idiom in *Utopia*; we find no references to *ius naturale*, *lex naturalis*, *iurisdictio*, *dominium*, *imperium*, *universitas*, or any of the other standard scholastic vocabulary (which, lest we forget, both Erasmus and More ridicule mercilessly).[108] On the contrary, More has Hythloday articulate a fundamentally Greek, holistic concept of justice which he proceeds to oppose to the more narrow, ad hoc Roman notion. Nor should we be surprised that it is Cardinal Morton's fool who comes to Hythloday's aid when he has finished speaking – and that More chooses the uncommon word *morio* to designate the fool so that he can pun on μόριον, 'councillor'.[109]

It quickly becomes apparent that Hythloday's 'justice' does not consist in giving each person what belongs to him (and punishing those who take what

[105] More, p. 57. 'potius multo fuerit providendum uti aliquis esset proventus vitae, ne cuiquam tam dira sit furandi primum dehinc pereundi necessitas'.

[106] Thomas White tries to connect More's 'justice' to Aristotelian distributive justice and, more broadly, to ideas about the 'common good'. While helpful, however, his analysis ignores the most basic, holistic sense in which More intends the term – and, thus, the explicit critique of Roman *ius*. See Thomas White, 'Aristotle and *Utopia*', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 29 (1976), p. 657.

[107] Logan, *The meaning of More's 'Utopia'*, p. 79.

[108] For an analysis of the scholastic idiom during the sixteenth century, see Annabel Brett, *Liberty, right and nature: individual rights in later scholastic thought* (Cambridge, 1997), and Richard Tuck, *Natural rights theories: their origin and development* (Cambridge, 1979), esp. ch. 2.

[109] More, p. 77. For an instance of the word being used in this way, see Aristotle, *Politics* 1282a37 (III.6): '…τῶν δὲ ῥηθέντων ἕκαστος μόριόν ἐστι τούτων (λέγω δὲ μόριον τὸν βουλευτὴν καὶ τὸν ἐκκλησιαστὴν καὶ τὸν δικαστήν)'. Wootton is correct to point out that the word is 'unusual' in Latin, and I believe this is a plausible solution to the conundrum. See Wootton, *Utopia*, p. 29.

is another's by *ius*), but in producing a natural and harmonious institutional arrangement:

> Restrict the right of the rich to buy up anything and everything, and then to exercise a kind of monopoly. Let fewer people be brought up in idleness. Let agriculture be restored, and the wool-manufacture revived as an honest trade, so there will be useful work for the idle throng … Certainly unless you cure these evils it is futile to boast of your justice (*iustitia*) in punishing theft. Your policy may look superficially like justice, but in reality it is neither just nor expedient (*speciosam magis quam aut iustam aut utilem*). If you allow young folk to be abominably brought up and their characters corrupted little by little, from childhood; and if then you punish them as grown-ups for committing the crimes to which their training has consistently inclined them, what else is this, I ask, but first making them thieves and then punishing them for it?[110]

Hythloday endorses the Platonic notion that justice as an arrangement of the soul is produced and reinforced by justice in the arrangement of the state. The justice 'they' boast of in punishing theft is Roman *iustitia* – applying a punishment for a crime that has been committed. But Hythloday argues that this *iustitia* is hollow; he later says that he finds 'no trace' of justice in the 'justice of the nations'.[111] When souls are unjust (that is, not balanced according to nature) education (which we should recall is *part* of the institutional arrangement, as well as, more broadly, a result of it) is to blame. Accordingly, Hythloday praises the practice of the Polylerites (those people of 'much nonsense'), who force thieves to make restitution (a practice reminiscent of the one Plato endorses in the *Laws*)[112] and insist that the purpose of punishment is educative. Plato had written that 'the purpose of the penalty [δίκη] is not to cancel the crime – what is once done can never be made undone – but to bring the criminal … to complete renunciation of such criminality (ἀδικίαν), or at least to recovery in great part from the dreadful state',[113] and Hythloday extols the Polylerite custom in similar terms: 'It is clear how mild and practical they are, for the aim of the punishment is to destroy vices and save men. The men are treated so that they necessarily become good, and they have the rest of their lives to make up for the damage done.'[114]

This notion of justice as δικαιοσύνη, in turn, becomes the essential justification for Utopian communism as praised by Hythloday in Book I, and then described in Book II. The Utopians agree with Plato that, in a just society,

[110] More, p. 67. 'Refrenate coemptiones istas divitum ac velut monopolii exercendi licentiam. Pauciores alantur otio, reddatur agricolatio, lanificium instauretur ut sit honestum negotium quo se utiliter exerceat otiosa ista turba … Certe nisi his malis medemini, frustra iactetis exercitam in vindicanda furta iustitiam, nempe speciosam magis quam aut iustam aut utilem. Siquidem quum pessime sinitis educari et mores paulatim ab teneris annis corrumpi, puniendos videlicet tum demum quum ea flagitia viri designent quorum spem de se perpetuam a puerita usque praebuerant, quid aliud, quaeso, quam facetis fures et iidem plectitis?'

[111] Ibid., p. 243.

[112] *Laws* 857a (IX).

[113] Ibid., 934a–b (XI).

[114] More, p. 75. 'Qui quantum habeat humanitatis et commodi facile patet, quando sic irascitur ut vitia perimat, servatis hominibus atque ita tractatis ut bonos esse necesse sit, et quantum ante damni dederunt tantum reliqua vita resartiant'.

'no one can ever be reduced to poverty or forced to beg',[115] and, therefore, they have abolished private property.[116] Hythloday shares their view, and argues that a society based on private property cannot be just:

> But as a matter of fact, my dear More [*mi More* – note the pun], to tell you what I really think, wherever you have private property, and money is the measure of all things, it is hardly ever possible for a commonwealth to be just or prosperous – unless you think justice can exist where all the best things (*optima*) are held by the worst citizens (*pessimi*), or suppose happiness can be found where the good things of life are divided among the very few, where even those few are always uneasy.[117]

This passage introduces three interconnected claims about why private property produces injustice, all dependent on the Greek tradition. The first has to do with rulership. Hythloday and the Utopians – like Plato – take it as axiomatic that justice requires the rule of the better over the baser: in a Platonic universe, there are those naturally suited to rule (Hythloday uses the image of shepherds who rule for the good of their flock, recalling Plato's treatment of rulership in the *Republic* and the *Statesman*),[118] just as there are those who are suited by nature to soldiering, or weaving, or any other τέχνη (art). This Platonic claim about just rulership represents the point of contact between *Utopia* and the humanist tradition of equating *virtus* with *vera nobilitas*.[119] Articulated in a series of important fifteenth-century treatises (such as Buonaccorso's *Controversia de nobilitate*, and Poggio Bracciolini's *De nobilitate*), this trope developed in opposition to the scholastic tradition of equating *nobilitas* with *longae divitiae* (that is, long-established wealth), and its attendant *splendor* and *magnificentia*.[120] Taking aim at the schoolmen, humanists declared (citing a variety of classical authorities) that true worth was not determined by pomp and pedigree, but by personal virtue.

Because the contrary position is rooted in scholastic sources (and because the phrase itself derives from Juvenal, Horace, and Cicero), the temptation is to see the ideology behind *virtus vera nobilitas* as essentially Roman. But we should recall that the notion is as Platonic as it is Ciceronian (Cicero, after all, took the concept from Plato),[121] and that the scholastic defence of *longae divitiae* was itself

[115] Ibid., p. 145. See *Laws* 936c (xi).

[116] Hexter and others have stressed, however, that while Plato's communism in the *Republic* may be restricted to the class of guardians, More's is generalized. See Surtz and Hexter, eds., *Complete works*, iv, pp. ixxxvii, cixff. None the less, More leaves no doubt that he views the abolition of private property as a Platonic measure.

[117] More, p. 101. 'Quamquam profecto, mi More (ut ea vere dicam quae meus animus fert), mihi videtur ubicumque privatae sunt possessiones, ubi omnes omnia pecuniis metiuntur, ibi vix umquam posse fieri ut cum republica aut iuste agatur aut prospere, nisi vel ibi sentias agi iuste ubi optima quaeque perveniunt ad pessimos, vel ibi feliciter ubi omnia dividuntur in paucissimos, nec illos habitos undecumque commode, ceteris vero plane miseris.'

[118] Ibid., p. 93. See, for example, *Republic* 345c (i), and *Statesman* 261d.

[119] Skinner discusses this issue from a different point of view ('Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*', pp. 135–47).

[120] Ibid., p. 137.

[121] See *De officiis* 2.20. Skinner points out that Poggio made this connection. See Skinner, 'Political philosophy', p. 423.

a bowdlerization of Aristotle's claim in *Politics* IV that 'nobility (εὐγένεια) means ancient wealth (ἀρχαῖος πλοῦτος) and virtue (ἀρετή)'.[122] Aristotle's statement relies on a discussion in Book III, in which he argues that the well-born and wealthy should rule because manual labourers 'cannot practise the pursuits in which goodness is exercised'.[123] He does not deny that *virtus* constitutes *vera nobilitas*: he simply asserts that the *banausoi* are rendered incapable of achieving virtue by the material conditions of their lives. And while it is certainly true that Aristotle (not unlike Cicero)[124] offers a qualified defence of *magnificentia* (μεγαλοπρέπεια) in *Ethics* 1122a (IV.2), he argues explicitly in *Politics* IV that rule by the 'middle class' is best, because both extreme wealth and extreme poverty corrupt.[125] Thus, as Jacob Burckhardt observed almost 150 years ago,[126] it was entirely possible to defend the equation of *virtus* with *vera nobilitas* from an Aristotelian perspective. Indeed, when Thomas Starkey addresses the issue in his *Dialogue Between Pole and Lupset*, he does precisely that. Starkey has Pole endorse Aristotle's position that external, worldly goods are required for the cultivation of virtue, but has him add that 'vertues of the mynd … passe and excelle al vertues & powarys of ther body, & al other ryches & wordly tresore, as thos thyngys wych be chefely & above al other to be extymyd & regardyd' (this is a simple paraphrase of *Politics* 1280a26-1281a8).[127] Ultimately, both Aristotle and Plato agree that the just polity is one in which the most virtuous men rule.

More, in turn, uses the *virtus vera nobilitas* trope to assert the connection between rulership and δικαιοσύνη, and to insist that the abolition of private property is necessary for that connection to be realized. In Utopia, Hythloday

[122] *Politics* 1294a21 (IV.6).

[123] Ibid., 1278a21 (III.3).

[124] Cicero, *De officiis* 2.16–17. It is worth noting that Cicero cites Aristotle as his source for a temperate assessment of *magnificentia*.

[125] *Politics* 1295a39–1296a22 (IV.9).

[126] 'From a theoretical point of view, when the appeal was made to antiquity, the conception of nobility could be both justified and condemned from Aristotle alone.' See Burckhardt, *The civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, p. 231.

[127] Starkey, *A dialogue between Pole and Lupset*, p. 25. Starkey plays an important role in the English reception of Greek ethics. In his *Dialogue*, he has Pole argue very much like Hythloday, even using Plato's 'rain simile' (*Republic* 496d (VI)) to defend *otium* – although he attributes it to Plutarch (p. 16). Lupset clearly speaks for the author in this first section, and he rejects Pole's argument; he urges Pole to 'folow not the exampul of plato, of whose ordur of commyn wele no pepul apon erth to thys days coud ever yet attayn, wherfor hyt ys reputyd of many men but as a dreme, & vayne imygynatyon wych never can be brought to effect' (p. 18). None the less, Starkey has Pole carry out an exercise very reminiscent of the one Socrates performs in the *Republic* (although in reverse, since Pole moves from man to state, rather than from state to man). He agrees with More (and the Greeks) that 'felycyte' is the end of civic life (p. 38), and that the 'just pollycy' and the 'veray & true commyn wele' consist 'not in the helth of one partycular parte thereof, but in the gud and natural affecte & dysposyton of every parte couplyd to other', where every part does its own 'offyce & duty, to them appoyntyd & determyd' (p. 39) – and where, as in any Platonic state, reason rules over the appetitive and the spirited (pp. 33–4). Justice for Starkey lies in 'the dew proportyon of the … partys togyddur, so that one parte ever be agreabul to a nother, in forme & fastyon quantyte & nombur' (p. 33). In short, we have justice as δικαιοσύνη. He also agrees with More that poverty amidst luxury 'ys the mother of envy & malyce dyssensyon & debate, & many other myschefys ensuyng' (p. 34).

tells us, 'virtuti pretium sit' – virtue has its reward.[128] The Utopians, indeed, find it downright bizarre that 'a dunderhead who has no more brains than a post, and who is as vicious as he is foolish, should command a great many wise and good men, simply because he happens to have a big pile of gold coins'.[129] In a society of private property, however, where 'money is the measure of all things' and the wealth goes to the *pessimi*, the worst citizens will tend to rule, thus producing an unjust arrangement by definition (that is, rule by the appetitive over the rational – which Hythloday, following Plato, calls contrary to 'nature').[130] Hythloday rejects the claim that simple legislation will prevent public offices 'which ought to go to the wise'[131] from going to the wealthy, and identifies such usurpations as the inevitable result of private property. But because all their property is held in common, the Utopians are able to favour the most excellent members of society – those who should rule by nature.[132] In domestic matters (in conformity with both Platonic and Aristotelian doctrine),[133] 'wives act as servants to their husbands, children to their parents, and generally the younger to their elders',[134] while government is reserved for those who 'from childhood have given evidence of excellent character, unusual intelligence, and a mind inclined to the liberal arts'.[135] This small Platonic elite is excused from labour, and left to cultivate itself for future service to the *respublica*.[136]

Hythloday later adds to this first argument by claiming that the unnatural rulership brought about by private property topples the institutional arrangement of the state by causing it to lose sight of its own nature. In Greek thought, the state aims at αὐτάρκεια (self-sufficiency), and, for Plato, justice is above all the natural ordering of the elements which are necessary to produce this quality. In the *Republic*, when Socrates builds *Kallipolis* from scratch, self-sufficiency dictates that the very first, most essential members of the society are the farmers, the builders, the weavers, and other craftsmen.[137] However, in a society of private property, Hythloday argues, this natural priority is subverted:

Now isn't this an unjust and ungrateful commonwealth? It lavishes rich rewards on so-

[128] More, p. 101.

[129] Ibid., p. 155. 'usqueadeo ut plumbeus quispiam et cui non plus ingenii sit quam stipiti nec minus etiam improbus quam stultus, multos tamen et sapientes et bonos viros in servitute habeat, ob id dumtaxat quod ei magnus contigit aureorum numismatum cumulus'.

[130] Ibid., p. 163.

[131] Ibid., p. 103.

[132] More emphasizes this aspect of Utopian political thought in a letter to Erasmus dated 31 October 1516. Professing himself to be gratified that men such as Giles and Busleyden approve of his treatise, he writes 'in illa republica nostra illi tales viri, litteris ac virtute tanti, principes plane essent futuri; quum in suis quanticumque sint (sunt sane magni) magnos tamen habeant nebulones authoritate ac potentia pares, ut ne dicam superiores' (Allen and Allen, eds., *Opus epistolarum*, II).

[133] See *Republic* 412c (III), *Politics* 1254b (I).

[134] More, p. 137.

[135] Ibid., p. 155. I have altered the translation here; Adams's 'devotion to learning' fails to capture the particular kind of learning implied by 'bonas artes'. 'hi videlicet in quibus a pueritia egregiam indolem, eximium ingenium, atque animum ad bonas artes propensum deprehendere'.

[136] Ibid., p. 131.

[137] See *Republic* 370d (II).

called gentry, goldsmiths and the rest of that crew, who don't work at all or are mere parasites, purveyors of empty pleasures. And yet it makes no proper provision for the welfare of farmers and colliers, labourers, carters, and carpenters, without whom the commonwealth would simply cease to exist … Before, it appeared to be unjust that people who deserve most from the commonwealth should receive least. But now, by promulgating law, they have transmuted this perversion into justice.[138]

Private property and the warped rulership that accompanies it undermine the connection between justice and self-sufficiency – they subvert the natural ordering of the essential elements which compose the state.

But above all, as we have come to expect, Hythloday argues that communism is essential for justice because private property and its accompanying institutions corrupt the souls of citizens. In Platonic thought, no one emerges unscathed from this process: in the *Republic*, Socrates argues that wealth brings 'luxury' and 'idleness',[139] while poverty makes the poor unable to discharge their natural functions, denying them happiness. Likewise, Hythloday observes that wealth makes the rich 'rapacious, wicked, and useless',[140] and, as for the poor, 'bitter necessity, then, forces them to think that they must look out for themselves, rather than for the people'[141] – and, as we have seen, turns them into criminals. Utopian communism prevents all of this, Hythloday argues, and ensures that the citizens are brought up with 'sound principles' which 'their education and the good institutions of their republic both reinforce'[142] – that is, the Utopians preserve justice in its true, Greek sense.[143]

It only remains to point out that, for Hythloday and the Utopians, the purpose of justice is to produce happiness (Greek εὐδαιμονία) – the quality which they agree with the Greeks in identifying as the end of human and civic life. *Felicitas* is among the most ubiquitous words in More's text, and is often explicitly opposed to forms of *gloria*.[144] The Polylerites, for example, have a

[138] More, p. 243. 'An non haec iniqua est et ingrata respublica, quae generosis, ut vocant, et aurificibus et id genus reliquis aut otiosis aut tantum adulatoribus et inanium voluptatum artificibus, tanta munera prodigit? agricolis contra, carbonariis, mediastinis, aurigis et fabris, sine quibus nulla omnino respublica esset … Ita quod ante videbatur iniustum, optime de republica meritis pessimam referre gratiam, hoc isti depravatum etiam fecerunt, tum provulgata lege, iustitiam.'

[139] *Republic* 422a (IV).

[140] More, p. 103. 'rapaces, improbi, atque inutiles'.

[141] Ibid., p. 241. 'eoque necessitas urget ut sui potius quam populi, id est aliorum, habendam sibi rationem censeat'.

[142] Ibid., p. 213. I have replaced Adams's 'society' with 'republic' in this instance, in order to reflect More's concern with constitutional structures. 'Postremo rectae opiniones (quibus et doctrina et bonis reipublicae institutis imbuti a pueris sunt) virtutem addunt.'

[143] We are now in a position to dispute Hexter's claim that, for More, 'equality is justice' (Surtz and Hexter, eds., *Complete works*, IV, p. cxxiii). We should say rather that the abolition of private property (and the level social order it creates) is *necessary* for justice. Justice itself is the rational ordering of all elements which contribute to self-sufficiency. Athanasios Moulakis endorses Hexter's position, see, 'Pride and the meaning of *Utopia*', *History of Political Thought*, 11 (1990), p. 247.

[144] Thomas White, among others, observes that happiness is the aim of Utopian life in his study of More's Aristotelianism. The hope here is to build on that common observation by noticing that,

system of justice which has allowed them to 'live in a useful rather than splendid manner, more happy than renowned or famous … they are hardly known by name to anyone but their immediate neighbours'.[145] Anonymity is not, to say the least, a pillar of the Roman value system; but the Polylerites aim for happiness, not glory, so it does not disturb them.

This is even more true of the Utopians, who have understood that happiness (*felicitas*) cannot be achieved without justice – and that justice requires the abolition of private property.[146] Only if goods are held in common can mortals live happily (*feliciter*),[147] which explains, for Hythloday, why the Utopians live more happily than Europeans – indeed more happily than any other commonwealth.[148] Again, at the end of Book II, Hythloday claims that, as a result of their 'structures of life', the Utopians live 'the most happily' (*felicissime*), and he contrasts this 'happiness of the Utopian republic' to the wretchedness of all societies built around private property. As for glory, the Utopians (again echoing Erasmus's Folly) despise the *gloria* won in battle,[149] and, when they are forced to fight, they have no thought of *laus* (praise) or *fama* (fame).[150] Rather, in direct opposition to Cicero's injunction in the *De officiis* (1.41), they make unrepentant use of *fraus* (fraud) and overwhelming *vis* (force) in order to end their wars as quickly as possible: they traffic in assassinations, bribes, seditions, mercenaries, and various other instruments of *ars et dolus* (skill and cunning) in order to carry the day.[151] They endorse these practices, not (as Machiavelli does in *Il Principe*) because they believe that *vis* and *fraus* will ultimately secure them *gloria*, but because glory is not the point of their actions. In their ethical system, the 'first concern' is to identify the nature of 'human happiness', and then pursue 'true happiness' (*vera felicitas*) as the primary goal of human life.[152] It is in this context that the Utopians intervene in the debate between *otium* and *negotium* (a debate which, we should recall, is waged in terms of *felicitas* in Book I):[153]

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in this respect, More is challenging the traditional values of *Romanitas*, and, thus, of the republican tradition as understood in his lifetime. See White, 'Aristotle and *Utopia*', p. 640. See also similar comments in Logan, *The meaning of More's 'Utopia'*, p. 185.

[145] More, p. 71. I have modified the translation here: 'haud perinde splendide atque commode, felicesque magis quam nobiles aut clari degunt. Quippe ne nomine quidem opinor praeterquam conterminis admodum satis noti.'

[146] Ibid., p. 101.

[147] Ibid., p. 103.

[148] Ibid., p. 179.

[149] Ibid., p. 202. See, for example, Erasmus, *Opera omnia*, IX, p. 96.

[150] More, p. 205.

[151] Ibid., pp. 205–17. Thus, More takes Plato's case for 'happiness' to its logical conclusion in a way that Plato never did. See Surtz on the un-Platonic military practices of the Utopians (Surtz and Hexter, eds., *Complete works*, IV, p. clix). The classic work on the Erasmian and Utopian rejection of military glory remains Robert P. Adams, *The better part of valor: More, Erasmus, Colet, and Vives, on Humanism, war and peace, 1496–1535* (Seattle, 1962). Adams's analysis, however, is coloured by his argument that the Erasmian political programme was almost exclusively 'neo-Stoic'.

[152] More, p. 161.

[153] See, for example, Giles's claim that being a counselor would make More 'happier' (*felicior*). More, p. 51.

The structure of their republic is dedicated above all to this objective: that, as far as public needs permit, all citizens should be free to withdraw as much time as possible from the service of the body and devote themselves to the freedom and culture of the mind. For in that, they think, lies the happiness of life (*vitae felicitas*).[154]

With this connection between justice, happiness, and the *vita contemplativa* established, our story comes full circle.

[154] Ibid., p. 135. I have replaced Adams's translation of the first sentence. 'quandoquidem eius reipublicae institutio hunc unum scopum in primis respicit: ut quoad per publicas necessitates licet, quam plurimum temporis ab servitio corporis ad animi libertatem cultumque civibus universis asseratur. In eo enim sitam vitae felicitatem putant.'