

Cohesive Cooperative Community

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Community, society, civilization, humanity – all facets of the jewel of human existence, without which we might still be roaming the planet as hunter-gatherers in search of our next meal. Fortunately, humans made the transition from that lifestyle to that of community. Thomas More presents a description of an ideal society in *Utopia* wherein the individual works for the good of the community and personal freedom shapes the collective interaction among the population. This paper will compare some of those ideas and compare them to the society in which More lived.

The first facet of More's society is one where every individual works for the good of the community. Each citizen assumes a personal responsibility for the common good and provides a certain amount of work in cultivating the land so that food is available for all. Each also has a skill or trade to provide other goods and services. Each city had at its center a marketplace where all products of the community's labor were brought together so that the needs of all members were met. There was no private property and all goods were shared. In England during More's time, there were certainly skilled craftsmen, artisans, and farmers, but the system was one of trade and not one of altruism – a system that required an exchange of value in one form or another such as gold, silver, or barter and one that was only available to those who could pay the costs.

The next feature is the dress and appearance of the members. In More's ideal, everyone wears the same sort of clothing and the impression is one of uniformity and lacking in embellishments, jewelry or other adornments with the only differences being between the male and female sexes and to indicate marital status. In most European cities the contrast between the simple dress of the peasant class and the costumes, precious stones, gold and coiffures of the

nobles and affluent citizens as well as great differences between the dress of men and women would have been immediately apparent.

The next face of the jewel deals with pleasure not only of the mind but also that of the body. In *Utopia*, More wrote “the pleasures of the mind lie in knowledge, and in that delight which the contemplation of truth carries with it” (Sayre 649). Knowledge and truth were no less sought after in Europe and England but would not have been accessible to everyone. Only the more affluent individuals or families had education due to their wealth or position and also the leisure time to pursue it since they were not required to toil in the fields or in other trades. As for bodily pleasures, there were probably less differences between More’s ideal and reality. At the top of the list are eating, drinking, and sex or as he wrote “that which arises from satisfying the appetite ... that leads us to the propagation of the species” (Sayre 649). The last item being where the largest contrast would have been observed. Sex was not talked about openly in polite society.

The next dimension that More wrote about as a pleasure of the body was that of music. He described music as having “a secret, unseen virtue [that] affects the senses, raises the passions” (Sayre 649). European music during the early sixteenth century was only beginning to take on very complex characteristics such as multiple, complementary melodies and voices. More might not have regarded the contemporary music as inspiring as what he envisioned since he may have perceived it as more reserved and contemplative rather than being able to elevate a person to the divine. The Roman Catholic Church had a strong influence on the development of music insofar as how it was used during mass. What began as simple melodies and chants would be transformed in the years after More into some of the most complex and inspiring choral music of the age that has endured to the present day.

The final aspect that is presented here is a subject that continues to spark debate even today — freedom of religion. More wrote extensively about that subject and in *Utopia* he states that nobody should be punished for their religious beliefs and that every religion should want to be in harmony with all others and with society. More opposed the Protestant Reformation, which is a seemingly contradictory position to that which he promotes in his ideal society. More felt that public harmony was greatly affected by arguments over religious issues or doctrine and that society “suffered much by daily contentions and irreconcilable heats” (Sayre 628). More wrote *Utopia* in 1516 before Martin Luther posted his *Ninety-Five Theses* in 1519. More was also a counselor to Henry VIII who “felt obliged to rebuke [Martin Luther], for he was wary of precisely the kind of religious division More had warned about . . . working its way into England” (Sayre 628). It is ironic that Henry VIII later began the separation from the Roman Catholic Church in England.

More’s ultimate goal may have been to suggest that an ideal society is unattainable and that public harmony is more important. There are certainly qualities that are appealing in the community that More described and that are worthy to implement. Human society is always changing and may move closer to that kind of ideal – embracing what is good and equitable and eschewing what is divisive and destructive.

Works Cited (Bibliography)

Sayre, Henry M. *The Humanities. Culture, Continuity and Change*. Book 3. Saddle Rock, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2012. Print.