
Main Points Of Thomas More's Utopia

More's Inspiration

Thomas More's Utopia depicts a society that is meant to be perceived as perfect. The seemingly ideal island is home to citizens that live their lives according to a system that benefits the collective population. Since this is not a practice that is simple to adopt, the Utopians have several rules and practices that allow them to live in this way. It is apparent that More drew inspiration from monasticism and the works of literature describing it.

In Utopia, individuals are stripped of their individuality. They all dress in the same way, except that females and males dress differently from each other, and married people dress different than non-married people. More also states that "fashion never alters; and as it is neither disagreeable nor uneasy, so it is suited to the climate, and calculated both for their summers and winters," (78). It is not considered a necessity for them to be fashionable or have multiple amounts of clothing because they are only concerned about having something suitable and appropriate for working. This is similar to the monks, who had no way at all to distinguish one person from another based on clothing. Of course, the monks were all unmarried males, so they actually had no need for distinction whatsoever. In both the instance of the Utopians and the monks, clothing does not help to define any one person. No one is different and no one stands out, therefore, no one can be judged to be "better" or "worse" than anyone else because of what they wear.

The Utopians have a strict work policy. Each person must work in agriculture to fulfill the needs of their society. In this case, the prominent need is food. This also serves other purposes, such as preventing any one person to feel as though they are superior because they have a more important job. This is not to say agricultural work is the only job a Utopian can have. People also learn a specific trade that also benefits the society. Women and men do differ in this aspect, as the women do what is typically considered women's work, and the men carry out tasks that require more strength. Their work schedule also, and perhaps more importantly, prevents idleness, which is something that branches from monasticism. The Rule of St. Benedict states, in fact, "Idleness is the enemy of the soul. The brethren, therefore, must be occupied at stated hours in manual labor," (69). More brings up the same point in Utopia. They also work at stated hours and there is even a signified chief to prevent idleness in the Utopians. It is evident that More took direct inspiration from monasticism in this sense.

Of course, neither the monks nor the Utopians worked all day. There were hours in the day devoted to their jobs, and then there were hours that could be spent what we may consider leisurely, but to them, in both instances, was just another way to prevent idleness without working. Both could spend the time reading. However, the Utopians also had options for those who were not suited for reading. They could spend their tending to their gardens, listening to music, or playing strategic games (More 78-79). The rest of the hours of their days were devoted either to sleep or to eating.

The most noticeable resemblance between More's work and the principles of monasticism is the belief that no one person should own anything. In the instance of the monks, this was due to

the fact that their whole lives were devoted to God. The Rule of St. Francis states, "The brothers shall possess nothing, neither a house, nor a place, not anything. But, as pilgrims and strangers in this world, serving God in poverty and humility, they shall confidently seek alms, and not be ashamed, for the Lord made Himself poor in this world for us," (70). It was believed that living in poverty brought them closer to God, and that was their purpose. Utopia is similar in the sense that no one owns something that is only theirs. This is not due to the fact that they were attempting to get close to God, but it does help them fulfill their own purpose. It is evident throughout Utopia that the collective whole is more important than the individual. With that being said, the Utopians' purpose was to benefit that whole, which then of course would also benefit each individual. There is plenty of everything in Utopia and all that one has to do if they need to use something is ask for it, and then return it when they are done. More says, "It is the fear of want that makes any of the whole race of animals either greedy or ravenous; but besides fear, there is in a man a pride that makes him fancy it a particular glory to excel others in pomp and excess. But by the laws of the Utopians, there is no room for this," (82). Greed would require someone to care for themselves more than for the collective, so there is no need for any Utopian to be greedy because everything that they need is available to them at no cost. Like the monks, they do not even have a use for exchanging money between each other. Fulfilling their purpose in life is what both the monks and the Utopians have rules for in the first place. Without guidelines, either group would stray far from what they are conditioned to believe in.

More was highly influenced by monasticism and it is evident in Utopia. The principles and rules that the Utopians abide by resemble those of the monks to a great extent. However, Utopia is a story that will never become a reality and there are monks that have and still do live this way every day. The Utopians had more joy and pleasure in their lives than the monks, because pleasure was what they ultimately lived for.