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Outsiders of Hagnopolis: unbelief, fear, and religion in Thomas More's *Utopia*

Abstract: This paper deals with unbelief and its relationship with fear and religion in Thomas More's *Utopia*. It stresses the fact that Epicurean and radical Aristotelian theses challenged Christian notions about immortality, Providence, and divine Judgement. The examples of Niccolò Machiavelli and Pietro Pomponazzi, contemporaries of More, are set to show a heterodox connection between these theses and the notion of fear of eternal punishment. More's account of the Utopian religion, on the contrary, distinguishes between human fear and religious fear. This distinction enables him to highlight the threat to spiritual and civic life posed by those who deny the soul and divine retribution.

Keywords: *Utopia*, unbelief, fear, religion

Résumé: Cet article traite de l'incrédulité et de sa relation avec la peur et la religion dans l'*Utopie* de Thomas More, et souligne que les thèses épicuriennes et aristotéliciennes radicales ont remis en question les notions chrétiennes d'immortalité, de Providence et de jugement divin. L'étude s'appuie sur les exemples de Machiavel et de Pomponazzi, contemporains de More, pour montrer une connexion hétérodoxe entre ces thèses et la notion de peur et de punition éternelle. Le récit que fait More de la religion utopienne établit, au contraire, une distinction entre la peur humaine et la peur religieuse. Cette distinction lui permet d'insister sur la menace envers la vie spirituelle et civique que posaient ceux qui niaient la présence de l'âme et la rétribution divine.

Mots clés: *Utopie*, incrédulité, peur, religion

Utopia has been celebrated as a hallmark of modernity for its defense of freedom of belief and tolerance on behalf of public peace.[1] However, a key aspect of the modern Western world is the freedom to hold or not to hold religious beliefs; hence, the "modernity" of Thomas More's

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[1] See, for example, James Hankins, "Religion and the Modernity of Renaissance Humanism," in *Interpretations of Renaissance Humanism*, ed. Angelo Mazzocco (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 137–53; Sanford Kessler, "Religious Freedom in Thomas More's Utopia," *The Review of Politics* 64.2 (2002): 207–29.

book does not seem coherent with its enforced belief system and its powerful tirade against unbelief—still during the libertarian and radical phase of the French Revolution we can see an echo of this tension with the purge of the Jacobin's atheist wing at the hands of the creator of the Supreme Being's cult, Maximilien Robespierre.[2] This article will thus focus, not on the speculative modernity of *Utopia*, but on the early-modern preoccupation with unbelief.[3]

One may wonder why Utopus's only constraint in matters of religion is precisely not to have one. The three religions current in Utopia during Raphael Hythlodaeus's visit—adoration of celestial bodies, the cult of divinized men, and rational Monotheism—share with the newly arrived Christianity the belief in immortality, Judgement, and Providence, principles that the Utopians attach to theology and consider according to reason.[4] Utopian tolerance is the acceptance of different streams flowing from this theological high point. Hence, disbelief in these core notions is banned (*vetuit*) from Utopus's

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[2] For unbelief as a hallmark of modernity, in the sense of a rationally defensible and morally respectable position, see Michael Hunter and David Wootton, introduction to *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, eds. Michael Hunter and David Wootton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 1. For the clash between Robespierre and the Atheists, see Jonathan I. Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas: An Intellectual History of the French Revolution* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014), 479–502.

[3] A discussion approached from different angles by Marie-Claire Phélippeau, "Narrow is the Gate to Utopia," *Moreana* 49.187–8 (2012): 207–26; John Boyle, "Theological Designs: Religion in *Utopia*," *Thomas More Studies* 1 (2006): 68–71; James Nendza, "Religion and Republicanism in More's *Utopia*," *The Western Political Quarterly* 37.2 (1984): 195–211; Stephen J. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980), 11–73, and more emphatically in Stephen J. Greenblatt, "Utopian Pleasure," in *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History*, eds. Brian Cummings and James Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 305–20.

[4] *Utopia*, ed. Edward Surtz, S. J. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 92. Unless otherwise specified, quotations from *Utopia* are from this edition, hereafter cited in text. We are aware of the debate about the contested meanings of the connections between paganism and Christianity in More's book. For this, see, among many others, Arthur Kinney, "*Utopia*'s First Readers," in *Challenging Humanism: Essays in Honor of Dominic Baker-Smith*, eds. Ton Hoenselaars and Arthur F. Kinnet (Newark: Delaware University Press, 2005), 23–53; David Wootton, introduction to *Utopia, with Erasmus's The Sileni of Alcibiades*, ed. David Wootton (Indianapolis: Hacket Publishing, 1999), 1–34; Quentin Skinner, "Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* and the Language of Renaissance Humanism," in *The Languages of Political Theory in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Anthony Padgen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 123–58; Brendan Bradshaw, "More on *Utopia*," *The Historical Journal* 24.1 (1981): 1–27; Elliot P. Simon, "Thomas More's *Utopia*: creating an image of the soul," *Moreana* 18.69 (1981): 21–40. See also Jack Hexter, introduction to *The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, vol. 4, *Utopia*, ed. by Edward Surtz and Jack Hexter (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1965), lxviii–lxxvi.

legislation concerning religious (and civic) matters.[5] *Utopia* is, in this sense, an acknowledgement of the Renaissance problem of unbelief, and its pernicious effects on society and men. Now, it is important to highlight that More's fiction, as we shall try to show, places its analysis of religion and irreligion in connection with the notion of fear, and its impact on political organization, moral philosophy, and salvation.[6] This was a contemporary issue, related specifically to the problem of unbelief. Indeed, a heterodox relationship between fear, civic virtue, and religion appears in Epicurean and radical Aristotelian criticism of Providence, Judgement, and personal immortality. A brief comment on Niccolò Machiavelli's (d. 1527) and Pietro Pomponazzi's (d. 1525) positions will show how the passion of fear is celebrated only for its political and moral efficacy. More, of course, has another view: we will analyze how he confronts the problem of unbelief by discerning between human fear (that is, superstition) and religious fear (essential to society and the salvation of the soul). Because the Utopian unbeliever, denying immortality and Judgement, lacks any trace of religious fear, he has no stimulus for virtue; hence, he poses a danger to himself and the community. In a fundamental way, he is not a part of this ideal society. He thus might be referred to as an outsider of Hagnopolis, Guillaume Bude's coined name for the holy city of Utopia, if certainly not Heaven, at least en route to it, as David W. Baker aptly put it.[7]

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With Lucien Febvre's *The Problem of Unbelief* (1942) under historiographical bombardment, many recent scholars have opted to

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[5] Thoma Moro, *Libellus vere aureus nec minus salutaris quam festivus de optimo reipublica statu, deque nova insula Vtopia* (Lovanii: Theodorici Martini Alustensis, 1516), 95 (cited hereafter as *Vtopia*).

[6] For the notion of fear and its importance in the theological and philosophical debates of early Modern Europe, see Daniel Kapust, "On the Ancient Uses of Political Fear and its Modern Implications," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 69.3 (2008): 353–73; David Wootton, "The fear of God in Early Modern Political Theory," *Historical Papers/Communications historiques* 18.1 (1983): 56–80; Piero Camporesi, *The Fear of Hell: Images of Damnation and Salvation in Early Modern Europe* (Cornwall, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990); Jean Delumeau, *Le péché et la peur. La culpabilisation en Occident: XIII–XVIII siècles* (Paris: Fayard, 1983), and *La Peur en Occident, XIVe–XVIIIe siècles: Une cité assiégée* (Paris: Fayard, 1978).

[7] For Budé's letter —which appears in the second edition of *Utopia*—see David W. Baker, *Divulging Utopia: Radical Humanism in Sixteenth-century England* (Amherst: Massachusetts University Press), 56; David Wootton, "Friendship Portrayed: A New Account of *Utopia*," *History Workshop Journal* 45 (1998): 36–7.

affirm the presence of diverse metaphysical and religious heterodoxies in the sixteenth century, and to assign them a vital role in the early modern crisis of belief.[8] Labeling these dissidences, however, is complex, as a brief survey of the secondary literature suggests.[9] Here, we shall simply name this dissidence with the generic term "unbelief," and we will relate to it, not doubts about the existence of God but doubts about his intervention in this world and his relationship with men. Briefly, unbelief in this period is connected with uncertainties about the immortality of the soul, divine Providence, and the existence of eternal Judgement.[10] These notions—themselves a result of the resignification of Platonic and Neo-platonic elements in the first centuries of the Christian era—nourish Christianity's metaphysical structure. They support the belief in divine retribution, that is, in a

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[8] Lucien Febvre, *Le problème de l'incroyance au XVIe siècl:. La religion de Rabelais* (Paris: A. Michel, 1942). Among other critics, see Ada Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014); Jean-Pierre Cavaillé, "Libertinage, irréligion, incroyance, athéisme dans l'Europe de la première modernité (XVIe–XVIIe siècles). Une approche critique des tendances actuelles de la recherche (1998–2002)," *Les Dossiers du Grihl 2* (2007), accessed February 2, 2015, doi: 10.4000/dossiersgrihl.279; Georges Minois, *Histoire de l'Athéism :. Les incroyants dans le monde occidental des origines à nos jours* (París: Fayard, 1998); Max Gauna, *Upwellings. First Expressions of Unbelief in the Printed Literature of the French Renaissance* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1992); François Berriot, *Athéismes et athéistes au XVIe siècle en France* (Lille: Editions du Cerf, 1984); Jean Wirth, "'Libertines' et 'Épicuriens': aspects de l'irréligion en France au XVIe siècle," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 39 (1977): 601–27. I will quote from the reprinted version, published in Jean Wirth, *Sainte Anne est une sorcière et autres essais* (Genève: Droz, 2003), 25–67.

[9] Hunter and Wootton, *Introduction to* Atheism, 2, use "atheism"; Palmer, 22, labels them "proto-atheist" ideas; Walter Stephens affirms late Medieval and early Modern fear of "sadducism" or "materialism" in his *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex and the Crisis of Belief* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002), 366; Gauna, 15, 35, has chosen "dissidence" or "skepticism" to point at attitudes and arguments that run contrary to Christian metaphysical orthodoxy; Silvia Berti, "At the Roots of Unbelief," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56.4 (1995): 562, talks about "incredulity", reserving "atheism" for Baruch Spinoza's challenge and its aftermath.

[10] There is a wide consensus here: Claude Bocquet, "Etienne Dolet: vivre pour la traduction, mourir pour une traduction," in *Etienne Dolet. 1509–2009*, ed. Michèle Clément (Genève: Droz, 2012), 144; John Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief in Medieval Europe* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 225, 229; David Wootton, "Lucien Febvre and the Problem of Unbelief in the Early Modern Period," *Journal of Modern History* 60.4 (1988): 26–7; Nicholas Davidson, "Unbelief and Atheism in Italy, 1500–1700," in Hunter and Wootton, 59; Julio Caro Baroja, *Las formas complejas de la vida religiosa: siglos XVI y XVII* (Madrid: Sarpe, 1985), 216; Alberto Tenenti, "Milieu XVIe siècle, Début XVIIe siècle: Libertinisme et hérésie," *Annales ESC* 18.1 (1963): 75–80. This is not an abstract definition: in 1535 the Synod of Strassbourg condemns "atheists" of the town for just these positions. See Wirth, *"Libertines" et "Épicuriens,"* 59–60.

transcendent Good and its system of eternal rewards and punishments in the afterlife.[11]

By the beginning of the sixteenth century, these core notions were already under debate, a process deepened by the reception of ancient philosophies during the late Middle Ages and the early Modern period. An evident example is that of Epicureanism, available in Cicero's *De natura deorum* and *De finibus*, in Ambrogio Traversari's Latin translation of book X of the *Lives* of Diogenes Laertius, and in Poggio Bracciolini's unearthing of Lucretius's *De rerum natura* in 1417, a poem whose equation of *religio* and *superstitio*, plus his attacks on *creatio ex nihilo*, immortality of the soul, Providence, future life, and fear of eternal torments showed the potential danger of this materialistic philosophy—still present throughout the period despite the resignification of Epicureanism attempted, for example, in Lorenzo Valla's *De voluptate* (1431) or Erasmus's *Epicureus* (1533).[12] Marsilio Ficino, for instance, wrote his *Theologia platonica* (1482) as much an apologetic defense of immortality and Providence as an attack on Lucretius's positions. Should he have survived, he would surely have celebrated the condemnation of Lucretian mortalism launched by the Synod of Florence in December of 1516—the same month *Utopia* was printed.[13] To these anxieties towards ancient materialism we may add the struggle with Aristotelian philosophy and its commentators. It is known that the bull *Apostolici Regiminis* (1513) warned against

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[11] For the reworking of Platonic and Neo-platonic elements in Christianity, see Jaroslav J. Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), and Etienne Gilson's classic book *L'esprit de la philosophie médiévale* (Paris: Vrin, 1932). I quote from the Spanish version: *El espíritu de la filosofía medieval*, trans. Ricardo Anaya (Buenos Aires: Emecé, 1952), 177–81. For the connection between these notions and *Utopia*, see Hugh Trevor-Roper, "Sir Thomas More and *Utopia*," in *Renaissance Essays* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1985), 42; Paul O. Kristeller, "Thomas More as a Renaissance Humanist," *Moreana* 17.65–6 (1980): 12.

[12] Palmer, 20. For the rediscovery of Lucretius, see Stephen J. Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern* (New York: Norton & Company, 2011); Alison Brown, *The Return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

[13] Denis J. Robichaud, "Renaissance and Reformation," in *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, eds. Stephen Bullivant and Michael Ruse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 191. In his youth Ficino wrote a commentary on the *De natura rerum*, which he then destroyed. See James Snyder, "Marislio Ficino's Critique of the Lucretian Alternative," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 72.2 (2011): 165–81; James Hankins, "Malinconia monstruosa: Ficino e le cause fisiologiche dell'atesimo," *Rinascimento* 47 (2007): 1–23. For the condemnation of the Synod of Florence, see Valentina Prosperi, "Lucretius in the Italian Renaissance," in *The Cambridge Companion to Lucretius*, eds. Stuart Gillespie and Philip Hardie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 215.

the radical Aristotelianism of the Italian universities. It rejected the unqualified teaching of pagan poetry and philosophy in matters concerning the soul and the unity of the truth (a disapproval of what historiography usually calls "double truth"), reaffirming natural and personal immortality. The bull supported its definitions with Biblical passages concerning eternal punishments and rewards (Mt 10: 28; Jn 12: 25).[14]

Let us see these heterodox positions regarding immortality, Providence and Judgement in connection with a problem that interests us here: the relationship between fear, religion, and civic virtue. For this, we need to turn to Niccolò Machiavelli and Pietro Pomponazzi, the first influenced by Epicureanism, the latter by radical Aristotelianism. We can trace a direct influence of Epicurean philosophy in Machiavelli's annotations on his hand-written copy of Lucretius's *De rerum natura*. Here, Ada Palmer has glimpsed an Epicurean fiber, a cosmological materialism alien to God's interventionist power, which allows Machiavelli to divorce moral philosophy from the realm of the divine.[15] Allison Brown has also pointed at the Lucretian influence on Machiavelli, especially to his reading of religion as the organization of the human fear of the divine, akin to Lucretius's equation between *religio* and *superstitio*.[16] We can encounter this approach in book I, chapter 11 of the *Discourses*, especially in the celebration of the Roman lawgiver, Numa Pompilius, who introduced the "fear of God" ("*timore di Dio*") as an essential instrument to keep men good and obedient—the political force of the fear of punishment is also present in *The Prince*: "*Il timore è tenuto da una paura di pena che non ti abbandona mai.*"[17]

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[14] See Luca Bianchi, *Pour une histoire de la "double vérité"* (Paris: Vrin, 2008), 118–48; Eric Constant, "A Reinterpretation of the Fifth Lateran Council Decree *Apostolici regiminis* (1513)," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 33.2 (2002): 353–79. Some have suspected that the Aldine edition of the *De natura rerum* published in 1500 played a part here, for example Felix Gisbert, "Cristianesimo, umanesimo e la bolla 'Apostolici Regiminis,'" *Rivista storica italiana* 79 (1967): 976–90. Allison Brown, 77–8, also connects the bull to the attack on Epicureanism.

[15] Besides his interest in atomist physics, suggested by his notes, Machiavelli writes "*deos non curare mortalia*" next to a passage of book II in which Lucretius denies any divine participation in the sublunar world. See Palmer, 81–8.

[16] Brown, 77–8, 87. See also John Najemy, "Papirus and the Chickens, or Machiavelli on the Necessity of Interpreting Religion," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60.4 (1999): 667.

[17] Corrado Vivanti, ed., *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio, seguiti dalle Considerazioni intorno ai Discorsi del Machiavelli di Francesco Guicciardini* (Torino: Einaudi, 2000), 92–3; Vittore Branca and Tommaso Albarani, eds., *Il Principe* (Milano: Mondadori, 1994), 84.

On the other hand, on September 1516, while Machiavelli was writing his *Discourses* and More was about to publish his *Utopia*, Pietro Pomponazzi finished his *De immortalitate animae*, a work influenced by radical Aristotelianism. A heterodox relationship between immortality and moral philosophy is here developed by linking the soul to the fear of eternal punishment, a topic akin to Machiavelli's "fear of God". In chapter XIV, Pomponazzi claims that the majority of men need fear and hope as incentives for avoiding evil and doing good; thus, lawgivers established, for virtuous men, eternal rewards in the afterlife, and for wicked men, eternal punishments that would produce the most terrible fear ("*quae maxime terrerent*"). For this to work, the lawgiver needs to affirm the immortality of the soul, focusing on morality rather than truth ("*sanxit animam esse imortalem. Non curans de ueritate, sed tantum de probitate*").[18] As we can see, the human passion of fear, be that in Machiavelli's "*timore di Dio*" or in Pomponazzi's speculations on the soul, is a crucial element in their understanding of religion, a heterodox element that calls upon immortality, Providence, and Judgement not because of their intrinsic truth, but because of their success in molding obedience and civic virtue.[19] As it is known, such readings of institutionalized religion, infused with traces of Epicureanism and radical Aristotelianism, cast a shadow of suspicion over both authors, accused during their lifetimes and beyond their deaths of promoting unbelief.[20]

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Although More did not know Machiavelli nor Pomponazzi, *Utopia* belongs, as well as the *Discourses* and the *De immortalitate animae*, to the intellectual history of the reception and resignification of ancient philosophy in its relationship with unbelief. It is evident, as far as materialism is concerned, that the prohibition of unbelief in Utopia has Epicureanism as its target—an opinion shared by Stephen Greenblatt, Ada Palmer, Edward Surtz, and Hugh Trevor-Roper.[21] More knew this philosophy, as shown in his prefatory letter to the translations of Lucian

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[18] Both quotes in Pietro Pomponazzi, *Tractatvs de immortalitate animae* (Boloniae: Iustinianum Leonardi Ruberiensem, 1516), 103. For Pomponazzi's treatment of the problem of the soul, see the classic analysis of Martin Pine, *Pietro Pomponazzi: Radical Philosopher of the Renaissance* (Padova: Antenore, 1986), 55–234.

[19] Pierre Caye, "Les tourments de Prométhée. Philosophie, souffrance et humanisme chez Pietro Pomponazzi," in *Pomponazzi entre traditions et innovations*, eds. Joel Biard and Thierry Gondier (Amsterdam: Grüner Publishing, 2009), 125.

[20] For these accusations, see Berriot, 154, 370, 754; Gauna, 22, 36, 63.

[21] Greenblatt, "Utopian Pleasure," 313; Palmer, 27–30; Trevor-Roper, 42; Edward Surtz, "Epicurus in *Utopia*," *Journal of English Literary History* 16.2 (1949): 89–103.

(1506), which was addressed to Thomas Ruthall. He highlights the satirist's doubts about the immortality of the soul, linking them directly to Lucretius and opposing them to the certainties of Christianity.[22] We also know that More read Cicero's *De finibus*, an exposition of (book I) and an attack on (book II) Epicurean philosophy;[23] we have the textual presence of Amerigo Vespucci in *Utopia*, who refers to the Indians, men of common dwellings but also without God or temple, as "Epicureans."[24] On the other hand, regarding radical Aristotelianism, we find this marginal note inserted beside More's exposition of the Utopian's metaphysical principles: "*Animorum immortalitas de qua hodie non pauci etiam Christiani dubitant.*"[25] Was it More, Peter Giles, or Erasmus who added this? The important thing is that the note expresses anxiety over present-day Christians (*hodie*) in doubt about immortality, one of the principal tenets of their faith.[26] These scarce traces allow us to confirm that, at the moment he wrote *Utopia*, More was familiarized with the problem of unbelief.

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[22] Thomae Mori, *Opera omnia Latina* (Francofurti et Lipsiae: Christiani Genschii, 1689), 258: "*In quo non valde me movet, quod ejus animi fuisse videatur, ut non satis immortalitati suae confideret, atque in eo fuisse errore, quo Democritus, Lucretius, Plinius, plurimique itidem alii.*" For Lucian in the early Modern period, see Christiane Lauvergnat-Gagnière, *Lucien de Samosate et le Lucienisme en France au XVIe siècle: athéisme et polémique* (Genève: Droz, 1988). For More and Lucian, see Carlo Ginzburg, "The Old World and the New Seen from Nowhere," in *No Island is an Island: Four Glances at English Literature in a World Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 1–23; Bracht Branham, "Utopian Laughter: Lucian and Thomas More," *Moreana* 22.86 (1985): 23–43; Craig R. Thompson, "The Translations of Lucian by Erasmus and St. Thomas More (continuation)," *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 19.1 (1940): 28–35. Lucian is one of the authors Hythlodaeus took with him on his journey (*Utopia*, 105).

[23] Ana Cláudia Romano Ribeiro, "Intertextual Connections between Thomas More's *Utopia* and Cicero's *De finibus bonorum et malorum*," *Moreana* 51.195–6 (2014): 63–84. For the influence of Cicero in More, see Gerard Wegemer, "Ciceronian Humanism in More's Utopia," *Moreana* 27.104 (1990): 5–26.

[24] Amerigo Vespucci, *The First Four Voyages* (Memphis: General Books, 2010), 23. See also the "Letter from Cape Verde" (1501), in *Amerigo Vespucci: Pilot Major*, ed. Frederick J. Pohl (London: Frank Cass, 1966), 132: "Having no laws and no religious faith, they live according to nature. They understand nothing of the immortality of the soul." For Vespucci and More, see Alfred Cave, "Thomas More and the New World," *Albion* 23.2 (1991): 209–29.

[25] *Vtopia*, 65.

[26] If it was Erasmus's lament, his anxiety over disbelief would not rest confined to a *marginalia*: he again addressed it in a letter to the Bishop of Liege, Erard de la Marck, written at the beginning of 1519, in which he links this disbelief directly with the well-known radical Aristotelianism of the Italian universities. See *The Correspondence of Erasmus: Letters 842 to 992. 1518 to 1519*, eds. Roger A. B. Mynors and Douglas F. S. Thompson (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1982), Letter 916, 246.

Now, in which way does More's fiction deal with this threat? We think that the answer lies in his defense of Providence, immortality, and Judgement by focusing on the connection between religion, civic virtue, and fear. Given Machiavelli's and Pomponazzi's speculations on the same topics, we may suggest that *Utopia* is dealing with a contemporary issue. The approach, of course, is different: More discerns between an irrational human fear and a positive religious fear. Although it is true that Utopia is a tolerant city, it is no less true that it heads towards religious homogenization. Hythlodaeus contends that Utopians who believe in divinized men or in celestial bodies are gradually giving away their "superstitions," while the rational religion of the one God is gaining ground (131).[27] Now, if monotheism's total triumph is still pending, it is precisely because of the force of superstition:

> The other beliefs would all have disappeared long ago had not whatever untoward event, that happened to anyone when he was deliberating on a change of religion, been construed by fear as not having happened by chance but as having been sent from heaven—as if the deity whose worship he was forsaking were thus avenging an intention so impious against himself. (131)

Superstition as an irrational fear of *daimones*, or gods, is a notion ridiculed, among many others whom More read, by Plato in *Republic* and by Lucian in *Philopseudes*, one of the dialogues he translated from the Greek.[28] In the letter to Thomas Ruthall, he states explicitly the connection between *superstitio* and fear, revealing the social and individual perils of this sort of untrue religion, common in Christian Europe and hence a target in the humanist's crusade. In order to reach the Truth (*veritas*), More states, we must free ourselves of the "superstitious dread" (*superstitiosa forminide*).[29]

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[27] This thrust towards unity and monotheism hints at the readiness with which several Utopians embraced Christianity, showing, perhaps, the politics of toleration's ultimate goal. This is at least the interpretation of David J. Hood, "A Place Called 'Nowhere': Towards an Understanding of St. Thomas More's *Utopia*" (MA diss., University of Ottawa, 2009), 118, 120–2, accessed May 15, 2016, https:// www.ruor.uottawa.ca.

[28] For superstition in Classical Antiquity, with special attention to Plato, see Dale Martin, *Inventing Superstition: From the Hippocratics to the Christians* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 10–35, 51–78; Fabián Campagne, *Homo Catholicus, Homo Superstitiosus. El discurso antisupersticioso en la España de los siglos XV a XVIII* (Buenos Aires: Miño y Dávila, 2002), 37–53.

[29] *Opera omnia Latina*, 258–9. Erasmus shared these impressions with More. This can be seen not only in works such as *Antibarbari* and the *Parabolae*, but in his more general attacks on vain fear and false hopes instilled by monasticism and the cult of the saints. See James Tracy, *Erasmus: The Growth of a Mind* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1972), 56, 96; Carlos Eire, *War against the Idols. The Reformation of Worship from*

It is clear that superstition as human fear needs to be challenged, in Europe as in Utopia, in favor of religious and moral reform. But this kind of fear must be rooted out because it is a misplaced fear: it does not produce virtue, it does not account for the true God, and it is inane (or worst, harmful) regarding the true Judgement.[30] *Religious* fear, on the contrary, is a positive force in More's thought. This is evident, for example, from his unfinished *The Four Last Things* (c. 1522), built upon the meditation on death, Judgement, and hell (and of course, on hope of eternal bliss, which is another name for the fear of eternal pain), a meditation that would lead Christians away from sin.[31] It is also evident from the also unfinished *De tristitia Christi* (c. 1534–35), which supports the reasonableness of fear before death, showing Christ as the supreme model of the martyr, full of human fear and hope.[32] More reflected personally about this in the Tower: in a famous letter dated May 1534 he comforts Margaret Roper stating that fear of his own death is being tamed by "the fear of hell, the hope of heaven, and the passion of Christ." Concerning his conscience, he added in his final interrogation, "the difference standeth between beheading and hell."[33]

What about religious fear in *Utopia*? We find an example of this kind of fear in the record of the silent burials. Hythlodaeus affirms that "almost all Utopians are absolutely certain and convinced that human bliss will be . . . immense" (135); but others, especially when their diseases are terminal, fear the time of their deaths. The Utopians believe

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Erasmus to Calvin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 37; *The Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 23, *Antibarbari/Parabolae*, ed. Craig R. Thompson (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1978), 169, 173.

[30] Erasmus would summarize this position in passing, briefly but forcefully, in his polemics with the Protestants, distinguishing between "human fear" and "*religio* and fear of the divine wrath"; see Tracy, 225. Of course, Scholastic theology treated the problem of the fear of God and its connection to Judgement: see, for instance, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2a–2ae, q.19, a.1–12. I refer to the Spanish version: *Suma de Teología III*, eds. Ovidio Calle Campo et al. (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1990), 175–88.

[31] *The Four Last Things*, ed. Daniel O'Connor (London: Paternoster Books, 1903), 20, 26.

[32] *The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, vol. 14, pt. 1, *De tristitia Christi*, ed. by Clarence H. Miller (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976), 249. See Seymour Baker-House, "A Martyr's Theology of Assent: Reading Thomas More's *De tristitia Christi*," *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* 29.2–3 (2005): 58–9, 62; Katherine Gardiner Rodgers, "The Lessons of Gethsemane: *De Tristitia Christi*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas More*, ed. George M. Logan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 239–62.

[33] "To Margaret Roper," in *The Last Letters of Thomas More*, ed. Alvaro De Silva (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 65; "More's Final Interrogation, 3 June 1535," in *A Thomas More Source Book*, eds. Gerard B. Wegemer and Stephen W. Smith (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2004), 350.

that he who behaves this way is desperate, hopeless, as if his soul was raved by "a secret premonition of impending punishment" (136); they believe that God will not be pleased with those who do not hasten obedient to His call. This fear has a considerable effect in the community: in front of these desperate men, the Utopians "are filled with horror" (136), and pray for their souls after burying them in silence. This passage acquires all of its force by introducing, immediately, a Utopian *ars moriendi*: when men die "cheerfully and full of good hope," their funerals are festive; the citizens commend "their souls to God," and describe their virtues, because nothing is "more gladly spoken of than his cheerful death" (136).

We think that these passages may stand as a key to understanding the problem of unbelief in *Utopia*, which, like superstition but in the exact extreme opposite, is associated with fear, religion, and behavior. The lesson is clear. On the one hand, there is the fear of death of those who recognize themselves as sinners; this dread, in turn, nourishes the community's own fears regarding eternal punishments for evildoers. On the other hand, there is hope in a future existence, if one is dying after a virtuous life; this death is met with individual and communal joy. We find no trace of *superstitio* in this fear and this hope. Far from it, we encounter a powerful bond between the individual's morals, passions, and behavior, and its effects on the community.

These individual and collective attitudes towards burials stem from the core theological–metaphysical frame sanctioned by Utopus, the belief in a providential divinity, and its punishments or rewards. Indeed, true *felicitas*, the ultimate purpose of human life, requires belief in the immortality of the human soul, which participates in the divine and responds to Him (92).[34] The question of *felicitas*, as it is well-known, is central in *Utopia* and is linked to *voluptas*. In something akin to a paradoxical Epicurean Stoicism, or even a Christian Epicureanism infused with a Platonic scent, we witness a twist in the hedonic calculus that imposes a hierarchy of desires, encouraging the election of the higher *honesta volupta* (92, 100).[35] With this emphasis on superior, spiritual pleasures, which feeds on the theological–metaphysical structure highlighted above, More presents his reception of Epicurus,

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[34] See Giuseppe Gangale, "Utopia and Providence in the Humanism of Thomas More: 'Man is a God for Man, if he Knows his Duty,'" *Moreana* 48.183–4 (2011): 200. These metaphysical principles ensure the Utopian's hopes in eternal and future happiness (*Utopia*, 94, 99, 108, 134, 135, 146).

[35] For the notion of "Epicurean Stoicism," see Elizabeth McCutcheon, "More's *Utopia* and Cicero's *Paradoxa Stoicorum*," *Moreana* 86 (1985): 16, and Wegemer, 8; for "Christian Epicureanism," Phélippeau, 217. See, also, M.–M. Lacombe, "La Sagesse d'Epicure dans l'*Utopie* de More," *Moreana* 8.31–2 (1971): 174.

at once embracing it and distorting it. This double movement of celebrating *voluptas* while taming its dangerous Epicurean derivations brings to mind William J. Bouwsma's thesis regarding the complex Renaissance dialectic between freedom and order.[36]

More's faith in man's educability is fundamental for the construction of this qualified pleasure. Education induces to a specific way of life, to a particular moral behavior and thinking, exerting tutelage over the impulses of man's fallen nature, which is one of More's central concerns.[37] It comes as no surprise that this education is entrusted to the priests, "God's interpreters" (109) and "censors of morals" (139). They are in charge of the development of children, youths, and adults, teaching them "good opinions, which are also useful for the preservation of their commonwealth" (139–40)—this is a clear example of the indissoluble connection between morality, public virtue, and religion in Hagnopolis. Now, as we have seen from the example of the burials, fear is a crucial element of Utopia's religion: the priests exclude sinners from divine services, a punishment "more dreaded", which exerts "a secret fear of religion" (140); no Utopian attends the Trapermini if he has not been reconciled and cleansed his heart, "for fear of swift and great punishment" (143); finally, during the service, the elders see that the younger acquire "a religious fear toward the gods, the greatest and almost the only stimulus to the practice of virtues" (144).[38]

This fear is not the same fear as the one suffered by the *superstitiosi* Utopians. It is religious fear, one that leads to civic virtue and thus to the salvation of the soul. This is why unbelief, the exact opposite of superstition (given the unbeliever refusal to fear in a proper way), is banned in Utopia. By refusing to accept the metaphysical-political pillar of the providential Judgement of the immortal soul, the materialist unbeliever cannot aspire to virtue, and so not only his soul but the whole of the community is endangered. Alien to divine retribution, the unbeliever reduces his fears and hopes to

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[36] Hanan Yoran, "More's *Utopia* and Erasmus' *No-place*," *English Literary Renaissance* 35.1 (2005): 23; Ribeiro, 77–80, 84; Lacombe, 172–3, 178, 181; McCutcheon, 14–16. William J. Bouwsma, *The Waning of the Renaissance: 1550–1640* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000). I quote from the Spanish version: *El otoño del Renacimiento: 1500–1640*, trans. Silvia Furió (Barcelona: Crítica, 2001), 10–11.

[37] For the importance of education in *Utopia*, see Wayne A. Rebhorn, "Thomas More's Enclosed Garden: *Utopia* and Renaissance Humanism," *English Literary Renaissance* 6.2 (1976): 140–55; Thomas White, "Aristotle and *Utopia*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 29.4 (1976): 665.

[38] Greenblatt points at this need of fear in *Self-Fashioning*, 56, and "Utopian Pleasure," 394.

earthly affairs: "Who can doubt that he will strive either to evade by craft the public laws of his country or to break them by violence in order to serve his own private desires when he has nothing to fear but laws and no hope beyond the body?" (135). This is the civic-metaphysical reason for the prohibition of unbelief, which hints at an ancient preoccupation (present, for example, in Cicero's *De finibus*) with the moral and social consequences of the lack of religious fear, a preoccupation updated in early Modern times.[39] Those who transgress this norm, traitors to their own human dignity and reason, are compared to beasts, and their opinions labeled as "madness" (134–5).[40] While not punished physically, they are deprived of citizenship and kept apart from public affairs, offices, functions, and honours.[41] To avoid moral infection, they are forbidden to share their opinions "in the presence of the common people." Nevertheless, unbelievers are encouraged to discuss their ideas with priests and important people; by doing so, they may finally yield to reason (135).[42]

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

When the foundations of the commonwealth are under threat, Utopia restricts freedom of choice and thought so as to keep with its suffocating strain to conformity and its enforced, institutional quest for virtue.[43] In this vein, the island instils in its citizens the belief in the

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[39] Note that Cicero's *De finibus* rejects Epicurean maxims related to men's liberation of "fear of gods, death, and pain" ("*liberarent eos deorum et mortis et doloris metu*"). He affirms that Epicurus grants a licence for debauchery ("*luxuriae licentiam*") for those who succeed at abolishing fear, inciting them to conceal their deeds and appear virtuous. For the quotes, see the Latin–French edition *Des termes extrêmes des biens et des maux*, vol. 1, books 1–2, ed. Jules Martha (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1928), 2.7.21, 68; 2. 22.70, 98.

[40] Let us remember that Ficino, in *Theologia platonica*, uses religion to distinguish between humans and beasts: "*Quid ergo reliquum est, quod omnino solius sit hominis? Contemplatio diuinorum. Nullum enim bruta prae se ferunt religionis indicium.*" And then: "*Cultusque diuinus ita ferme hominibus est naturalis, sicut equis hinnitus, canibusque latratus.*" See Marsilio Ficino, *Theologia platonica* (Parisiis: Aegidium Gorbinum, 1559), 243.

[41] It is interesting to point out that in his *Institutio principis Christiani* (1516), Erasmus proposed similar measures for religious outsiders. Indeed, he advises the Prince to treat as foreigners those who are not Christians, but to avoid physical punishment: "*At Christiani principis est, nullum pro extero ducere, nisi qui sit alienus a Christi sacramentis, ac ne hos quidem iniuriis lacessare.*" We quote from a later edition: Desiderius Erasmus, *Institutio principis Christiani saluberrimis referta praeceptis* (Basilea: Froben, 1518), 92.

[42] The danger of moral infection would be addressed by More during his debates with the Protestants. See Wegemer and Smith, 285–6.

[43] Greenblatt, *Self-Fashioning*, 38, 40; Skinner, 146; Hood, 85; Kinney, 33.

divine, with fear if needed, to lead men to civic virtue, and from there to salvation. Fear, as we have tried to show, is a key aspect of More's fiction, an aspect related to the problem of unbelief. It is important here to recall the distinction between human and religious fear. We do not think that *Utopia* is, as James Nendza and John Boyle have expressed, an example of some "outright deception," of a "political religion" whose principles are advanced not because of their truth but because of their political efficacy.[44] This could be said about Machiavelli's and Pomponazzi's understanding of the relationship between human fear and organized religion, a feature connected with Epicurean and radical Aristotelian positions. Indeed, both the notion of "*timore di Dio*" and the idea of the soul as a political invention have obedience and moral behavior as their main goals. Briefly, we do not find in them any metaphysical foundation for the experience of fear. Now, it is true of course that More's commonwealth demands certain beliefs, which have a cohesive force in civic affairs; but we must bear in mind that the vertex of morality is, for the Utopians, not solely (communal) happiness in this life, but because of this happiness, the eternal salvation of their souls—a feature absent in Machiavelli and Pomponazzi. Because Utopia's institutions revolve around soulcraft, those who deny the existence of their souls and the divine Judgement awaiting them are strangers on the island. The unbeliever, lacking religious fear, does not possess stimulus for virtue. An enemy of reason and nature, he has escaped Utopia's moral, political, and religious system. Deprived of citizenship, cast aside from his fellow men, unbelievers show themselves as outsiders of Hagnopolis.

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[44] Both quotes are from Nendza, 202–3, 208; see Boyle, 69.

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