Pleasure and Variety in Thomas More's *Utopia*

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The goal of this article is to provide a better understanding of the organization of pleasure (*voluptas*) in the moral philosophy and in the social practices of the inhabitants of Utopia, the fictional island created by Thomas More. For this purpose, we will focus on the classifications of pleasure into a series of species which tend to suppress the individual nature of pleasure and its connection to subjectivity in order to establish the traits of "natural pleasures," which fit perfectly the social organization of the island. Our main hypothesis is that this is accomplished by breaking the connection of pleasure and "variety" (*varietas*), which was firmly established by many of the authors (ancient or modern) that discussed this topic. In this article, we argue that the use of the Epicurean texts circulating at the beginning of the 16th century were instrumental in the elaboration of a theory of "negative pleasures" which are used to keep the homeostasis of the society in *Utopia*.
Keywords: *Utopia*, pleasure, Epicureanism.

Le but de cet article est de fournir une meilleure compréhension de l'organisation du plaisir (voluptas) *dans la philosophie morale et les pratiques sociales des habitants d'Utopie, l'île fictionnelle créée par Thomas More. Pour ce faire nous nous intéresserons à la classification du plaisir en une série d'espèces qui tendent à supprimer la nature individuelle du plaisir et sa connexion à la subjectivité de manière à définir des « plaisirs naturels », qui cadrent parfaitement avec l'organisation sociale de l'île. Notre hypothèse principale est*

que ceci s'accomplit grâce à la rupture opérée entre plaisir et « variété » (varietas), notion fermement établie par de nombreux auteurs (anciens et modernes) qui ont écrit sur le sujet. Dans cet article, nous démontrons que l'usage des textes épicuriens qui circulaient au début du XVIe siècle joua un rôle important dans l'élaboration d'une théorie de « plaisirs négatifs », pratiqués en Utopie pour maintenir l'homéostasis de la société.
Mots clés : Utopie, plaisir, épicurisme.

El objetivo de este artículo es proveer una mejor comprensión de la organización del placer (*voluptas*) en la filosofía moral y en las prácticas sociales de los habitantes de Utopia, la isla ficcional creada por Tomás Moro. Con este propósito, nos concentraremos en la clasificación del placer y su organización en una serie de especies que tienden a suprimir su aspecto individual y su conexión con la subjetividad para lograr definir los rasgos de los "placeres naturales", que encajan a la perfección con la organización social de la isla. Nuestra principal hipótesis es que esto se logra mediante la ruptura de la conexión entre placer y "variedad" (*varietas*), que estaba firmemente establecida por muchos de los autores (antiguos o modernos) que discutieron el tema. En este artículo, sostenemos que los textos epicúreos circulando a principios del siglo XVI fueron de gran utilidad en la teorización de los "placeres negativos" que son empleados en *Utopia* para mantener la homeostasis de la sociedad.
Palabras clave: *Utopia*, placer, Epicureísmo.

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Introduction

The nature of pleasure in More's *Utopia* has long been a subject of debate. Over fifty years ago, Edward Surtz[1] provided a detailed analysis of the section on moral philosophy, which helped to define its importance to understand the overall purpose of More's text.[2] Although Surtz had already identified Epicureanism as one of the key elements at play in the Utopian theory of pleasure, it was only in the recent wake of studies focusing on Lucretius and its Renaissance readers that this aspect became central for its understanding.[3] According to Stephen Greenblatt, More's *Utopia* should be considered as the best defense of Epicureanism produced by a Renaissance scholar, and thus, more important for understanding this tradition of

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[1] *The Praise of Pleasure: Philosophy, Education and Communism in More's Utopia*, Cambridge, Harvard UP, 1957.

[2] Surtz's overall interpretation of Utopian pleasure is based on his belief that the section on moral philosophy should be read as a *declamatio*, a sort of rhetorical exercise whose purpose was to incite a more serious discussion and to explore the different faces of a controversial topic. From his point of view, there is no doubt that "the final object of Utopian happiness is delight in the presence of God in the next life" *Ibid.*, 22.

[3] See Susanna Gambino Longo, *Savoir de la Nature et Poésie des Choses. Lucrèce et Épicure à la Renaissance italienne*, Paris, Honoré Champion, 2004; Allison Brown, *The return of Lucretius to Renaissance Florence*, Cambridge, Harvard UP, 2010; Violeta Prosperi, *Di soavi licor gli orli del vaso: la fortuna di Lucrezio dall'Umanesimo alla Controriforma*, Turin, N. Aragno, 2004; Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern*, New York, W.W. Norton & Cia, 2011; Gerd Passannante, *The Lucretian Renaissance. Philology and the Afterlife of Tradition*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2011; Ada Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*, Cambridge, Harvard UP, 2014. Only Greenblatt gives a place of preeminence to *Utopia*, but different aspects of the overall picture of the Lucretian Renaissance as was studies by all these authors will be relevant for our purpose in this article.

thought than other contemporary texts, such as Erasmus' *Epicureus.*[4] This revival of the epicurean aspects of *Utopia* also contributed to address one of the most traditionally debated aspects of the text: is the Utopian way of life truly Christian? How can a society that identifies pleasure with the greatest good be a good model for Christian societies to emulate?

Although many of the central characteristics of the Utopian view of pleasure have been exposed by these authors (along with several others), it is our belief that a careful examination of the criteria which More applies to divide the species of pleasure, along with a critical analysis of how the theory of pleasure of the Utopian thinkers relates to the practical life of the Utopians, as described by Raphael Hythloday, can reveal aspects of the text that have seldom been studied. In order to better understand these issues, we will put an emphasis on *variety* (*varietas*), which usually accompanies the exaltation of pleasure, but which is totally absent from the Utopians' ideology for a series of reasons we will attempt to establish. For this purpose, we will re-evaluate the importance of Epicureanism and the Lucretian revival in the organization of Utopian pleasures, focusing on the importance of the "hedonistic calculus" that determines which pleasures and pains should be chosen and which ones should be spurned.

The four kinds of Utopian pleasure

The description of the Utopian ethics ends with the hierarchical organization of pleasure in four different kinds or *species*. This is reminiscent of Plato's *Philebus*, where Socrates and Protarchus establish the relative importance of the different aspects of wisdom

[4] Erasmus' *Epicureus* was written in 1533 as a part of his *Colloquia Familiaria*. According to Greenblatt (*Ibid.*, 227), however, this text does not represent a true example of Renaissance Epicureanism and its use of the Epicurean doctrine should be considered only as a "sleight of hand" from Erasmus.

and pleasure for the attainment of the most perfect human life.[5] The highest kind of pleasures includes those that come from the realization and the remembrance of virtuous actions. More says that they "arise from the practice of the virtues and the consciousness of a good life."[6] More also says, in a previous paragraph which introduces the division between corporeal and mental pleasures, that these pleasures include "the pleasant recollection of a well spent life and the sure hope of happiness to come."[7]

In second place, the pleasures of intellectual contemplation come into play. The fact that More places the pleasures linked to action higher than those associated to purely intellectual endeavors sharply distances him from the Neoplatonic tradition, where the act of contemplation (often involving mystical elements) was sometimes linked to the Epicurean "katastematic" pleasures.[8] Marsilio Ficino, the most prominent Florentine Neoplatonist, had clearly stated the primacy of the intellectual pleasures in his commentary on the

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[5] The importance of the *Philebus* has been proved by Jones who argued that this text was the main source of inspiration for More in the section on moral philosophy. One of the main reasons for this is that both Plato and More put great emphasis on identifying the nature of false pleasures. He recognizes, however, that while the Utopians consider that the feeling of good health is a pleasure in itself, for Plato this could not be considered as such. See Judith Jones, "The Philebus and the Philosophy of Pleasure in Thomas More's Utopia" in *Moreana*, 31-32, November 1971.

[6] *Amplectuntur ergo in primis animi uoluptates, (eas enim primas omnium principesque ducunt) quarum potissimam partem censent ab exercitio uirtutum bonaeque uitae conscientia proficisci* (*CW* 4, 175/29-32). All the quotes from *Utopia* come from the *The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, vol. 4 *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More. Vol. 4. Utopia*, ed. Edward Surtz y Jack H. Hexter, New Haven, Yale UP, 1965.

[7] *Ad haec suauis additur bene actae uitae memoria & spes non dubia futuri boni* (*CW* 4, 172/11-12).

[8] According to Gerd Van Riel, the katastematic pleasures of the Epicureans were intermingled in the Neoplatonic theory of pleasure, although for Plotinus this feeling of peace and rest cannot be associated with the highest form of life. See Gerd Van Riel, *Pleasure and the Good Life. Plato, Aristotle, and the Neoplatonist*, Leiden, Brill, 2000.

Philebus, which More could have known by 1516.[9] These pleasures are defined as "the sweetness which is bred of contemplation of truth."[10] We can easily relate them with some of the activities the utopians performed in their leisure time, as for instance attending public lectures after work hours.[11]

The third and fourth places are for those pleasures related to the body. We will attempt to explain the reasons for this below. The bodily pleasures of the best kind are those that come from the absence of pain, and are, therefore, associated with good health: "Health, if assailed by no pain, gives delight of itself, though there be no motion arising from pleasure applied from without."[12] Finally, the fourth and last is the *species* of pleasure which come from "clearly perceptible sweetness." This type of pleasures, however, is not homogenous. It can be subdivided in pleasures of replenishment and renewal of our organs (eating, emptying our bowels, having sexual intercourse) and in pleasures that tickle our senses without implying the previous feeling of a lack or an excess. Such is the pleasure of music.[13]

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[9] Marsilio Ficino's first comments were on the *Philebus* and on the *Symposium*. The first of these commentaries, which shows the influence of his early interest in Lucretius and Epicurus, was never finished. See Michael Allen "Introduction", in Marsilio Ficino, *The Philebus Commentary*, Tempe, Arizona Center for Medieval Studies, 2000, 1-58 for further details on its publication and significance in the revival of Platonism in the West. Ficino was also the first to translate the *Philebus* into Latin, and it was probably trough this version that it arrived to England. See Sears Reynolds Jayne, *Plato in Renaissance England*, Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1995.

[10] *Animo dant intellectum, eamque dulcedinem quam ueri contemplatio pepererit* (*CW* 4, 172/10-11).

[11] Hythloday, while describing this custom, clarifies that those whose mind "*in nullius contemplation disciplinae consurgit*" (*CW* 4, 128/10-11) do not have any obligation to attend these readings.

[12] *Haec [sanitas] siquidem, si nihil eam doloris oppugnet, per se ipsa delectare, etiam si nulla extrinsecus adhibita uoluptate moueatur* (*CW* 4, 172/26-27).

[13] *Interdum uero uoluptas oritur, nec redditura quicquam quod membra nostra desyderent, nec ademptura quo laborent: caeterum quae sensus nostros tamen ui quadam occulta, sed illustri motu titillet afficiatque, & in se conuertat, quails ex musica nascitur* (*CW* 4, 172/19-23).

Outside these four *species*, the rest of the so-called pleasures are actually human misapprehensions. They are called *voluptates adulterinae, imago fucatae voluptatis, ineptas laetitias* and *efferae voluptates*, and they are not specifically linked to the body or the soul. More does not present a counterfeit pleasure that opposes to each one of the four true kinds. This would be indeed difficult to achieve, since the lowest kind of bodily pleasures seems too irregular to admit clear separations.

Overall, the Utopian classification of pleasures is not as transparent as it might seem at first sight. As many authors have shown, it combines (sometimes awkwardly) ethic theories from the Platonist, the Epicureans, the Stoics and the Christians.[14] From Plato (and particularly the *Republic* and the *Philebus*), More takes the characterization of the fourth kind; that is, the bodily pleasures of replenishment. The notion that *hedoné* can never be equal to the true good because it involves a previous feeling of a lack or an overabundance is one of the main arguments of Socrates against Calicles in *Gorgias* (491e-497a), and it is repeated and amplified in the *Republic* (9.583b-586c) and *Philebus* (31e-32a) with some minor variations.[15] However, the inclusion of music as a member of the same *species* of pleasure in the Utopian theory of pleasure is a point of divergence with Plato, since for the Athenian philosopher the fact that the joy produced by sounds and forms which are beautiful in

[14] George Logan (*The Meaning of More's «Utopia»*, Princeton UP, 1983, 170-173), who also refers to the Aristotelian influence, underlines the fact that all of these theories included ranking pleasures in one way or another. A recent study by G. Sissa identifies the combination of Platonism and Epicureanism as one of the proofs that show that Hythloday is a mask for Erasmus. See Giulia Sissa, "*Familiaris Reprehensio Quasi Errantis*. Raphael Hythloday, between Plato and Epicurus", in *Moreana* 49.187-88, June 2012, 121-50.

[15] See Beatriz Bossi, *Saber gozar: estudios sobre el placer en Platón : Protágoras, Gorgias, Fedón, República, Filebo*, Madrid, Trotta, 2008; René Lefebvre, *Platón, filósofo del placer*, Buenos Aires, Biblos, 2011.

themselves does not imply a replenishment of any kind is enough to name it a "pure pleasure."[16]

The most substantial difference with Plato, however, is the fact that the feeling of good health is acknowledged (with a lengthy argumentation) as a form of pleasure for the Utopians.[17] From our point of view, this difference shows that the theory of pleasure of Epicurus (particularly, as it can be found in his "Letter to Menoeceus") occupies a higher place in the Utopian organization of pleasure than the platonic sources. Epicurus is famous for saying that the highest form of pleasure comes from the absence of pain and from the absence of afflictions of the soul. This negative view of pleasure was heavily criticized by Cicero in his *De finibus bonorum et malorum* (II, 16) as a misleading use of words, but was still a very important argument for defending the moral legitimacy of Epicureanism.[18]

Epicurus divided pleasure into two different ways. On the one hand, he distinguished those pleasures associated with movement (kinetic pleasures) from static pleasures (katastematic). The first kind includes the same pleasures that Plato links to replenishment (*plerosis*). On the other hand, Epicurus presented a threefold division of desires: those which are natural and necessary, those with are natural but not necessary, and those that are neither natural nor necessary. Although this last division is originally thought for desire and not for pleasure, the two elements are inextricably linked, and

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[16] In *Philebus* 51d-e Plato defines those pleasures which are "unlike scratching" because they do not include any previous distress. In *Republic* IX, 584b, he talks about the pure pleasures of smell in a similar sense.

[17] Logan, *The Meaning of More's "Utopia,"* 169.

[18] Cicero's words are: "*si enim idem dicit, quod Hieronymus, qui censet summum bonum esse sine ulla molestia vivere, cur mavult dicere voluptatem quam vacuitatem doloris, ut ille facit, qui quid dicat intellegit? sin autem voluptatem putat adiungendam eam, quae sit in motu—sic enim appellat hanc dulcem: 'in motu', illam nihil dolentis 'in stabilitate'—, quid tendit? cum efficere non possit ut cuiquam, qui ipse sibi notus sit, hoc est qui suam naturam sensumque perspexerit, vacuitas doloris et voluptas idem esse videatur. hoc est vim afferre, Torquate, sensibus, extorquere ex animis cognitiones verborum, quibus inbuti sumus.*" (*De finibus* II, 16).

Seneca cites these categories as three forms of *voluptas* in one of his letters.[19] Some early Christian thinkers adopted the same division and reformulated it for their use. Nemesius, a Greek Father of the fourth century, included it in his *De natura hominis* and stated that sexual pleasure was of the second kind, since it is possible for a man to live a chaste life (XVIII, 37).[20]

The two criteria that More used for distinguishing pleasures are not the same that Epicurus had used. The difference between body and soul was less important for the Epicureans, who believed that everything was matter and the soul was mortal. Inside the body pleasures, however, More used the same division of kinetic and katastematic that Epicurus had used, and just as Epicurus, he privileged the last kind. Inside the soul/mind pleasures, however, the division between pleasures of intellectual pursuit and the pleasures of virtuous actions is not Epicurean. Epicurus and Lucretius placed cardinal importance to the way that scientific knowledge of nature is essential to free us from fear, which is a necessary condition to enjoy the static pleasures.[21] The virtues of prudence and justice were important for Epicurus as well, as he clearly states in the fifth of his "Sovran Maxims."[22] However, he does not use them as a criterion for dividing types of pleasure, as More does. The Utopian distinction between the first and second kind of pleasures seems to rely on the

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[19] Seneca refers to this classification in his *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium* (XXI, 11). In the second volume of the *Histoire de la sexualité* (*L'usage des plaisirs*), Michel Foucault stated that for the pre-Christian schools of ethics, there were no significant differences between the moral treatment of pleasure and desire. See Michael Foucault, *L'usage des plaisirs*, Paris, Gallimard, 1984.

[20] Richard P. Jungkuntz, "Christian Approval of Epicureanism", in *Church History*, 31, 1962, 279-93.

[21] Alberto Grilli, *Il problema della vita contemplativa nel mondo greco-romano*, Milan, Fratelli Bocca Editori, 1953.

[22] "It is impossible to live a pleasant life without living wisely and well and justly, and it is impossible to live wisely and well and justly without living pleasantly. Whenever any of these is lacking, when, for instance, the man is not able to live wisely, though he lives well and justly, it is impossible for him to live a pleasant life." (Diogenes Laertius, X, §140)

dispute within theology between the Intellect and the Will, and their respective capability to approach to God and/or to a blessed life. This was a very important topic of discussion during the 15th century, and it had been already linked to the problem of defining pleasure by Marsilio Ficino.[23] By stating that the highest form of pleasure is related to virtuous action, the utopians show that the Will should be granted the first place, which goes against the spiritual tendencies of Epicureanism, which privileged the withdrawal of the individual from the social turmoil.

Due to the fact that *Utopia* does not include any description of the way that the utopians imagine the experience of life after death, it is natural that the division of pleasure between "earthly" and "heavenly" does not appear. This division, which was used by some Christian authors to reject the allures of the world without condemning the hedonistic ideal in its entirety, is absent from More's fiction. Lorenzo Valla had placed great emphasis on this idea in his *De voluptate* of 1431, one of the possible sources of More's (and Erasmus') acquaintance with Epicureanism.[24] There is, however, a hint of this

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[23] Ficino links *voluptas* and *voluntas* consistenly in his *Philebus Commentary* and in his *Platonic Theology*, although in the first of these texts this type of pleasure (which comes from the satisfaction of appetite) is inferior to the pleasure of pure intellectual contemplation which arises from the perfect cognitive acts (*In Philebum*, I, XXXII). For the tension between the supremacy of Will and the supremacy on Intellect in his philosophy see Sears Reynolds Jayne *John Colet and Marsilio Ficino*, Oxford UP, 1963; Michael Allen "Introduction." Weiner states that More's privilege of the Will in *Utopia* is in line with Ficino's *De amore*. See Andrew Weiner, "Taking More Seriously: Humanism, Cultural Criticism, and the Possibility of a Past," in A. J Hoenselaars & Arthur F. Kinney (eds.), *Challenging Humanism Essays in Honor of Dominic Baker-Smith*, Newark, U of Delaware P, 2005, 54-74.

[24] Valla renamed his text *De vero bono* after 1433. It is likely that More had access to the 1512 edition by Josse Bade, entitled *De voluptate ac vero bono*. This edition contained the first version of the text, in which Antonio Beccadelli ("il Panormita") defended Epicureanism against the Stoicism of Leonardo Bruni. It is unlikely that Valla knew Lucretius' poem when we wrote this work, because it only began circulating around 1440. Valla's disciple, Pomponio Leto, was a very careful reader of *De rerum natura*. See Helen M. Dixon, "Pomponio Leto and His

idea in the religious sect of the *buthrescae*. According to Hythloday, the members of this *haeresis*

> entirely reject the pleasures of this life as harmful. They long only for the future life by means of their watching and sweat. Hoping to obtain it very soon, they are cheerful and active in the meantime.[25]

We are provided with no details about this future life, only that the belief that there are prizes and punishments in the afterlife, which correspond to our good deeds and our crimes, is firmly established in the Utopian society. This is very different in the aforementioned book by Valla, who lavishly described the joys of heaven in order to convince us to avoid the limitations of earthly delights.

The Utopian system for dividing good and bad pleasures is relatively clear. There is no doubt that the "good" pleasures are rational, natural, decent, true, and are in accordance with the fundamental dogmas of their religion. The "bad" pleasures are instead irrational, false, against nature, indecent, and they oppose the divine order of the world. The structuring of the four kinds of authentic pleasures that we analyzed in this chapter is overall clear as well, although it mixes different philosophical sources and uses a different criterion to internally subdivide the two big categories of mental and bodily enjoyments. The utopians disregard the logical subtleties of medieval philosophy and they have built their society on the basis of a transparent and extremely ordered way of life, so we cannot be surprised to find that their discussions about ethics are oriented towards the systematization of a stable hierarchy of goods. The application of the hedonistic calculus, mentioned three times during

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Teachers Lorenzo Valla and Pietro Da Montopoli. Evidence from Work on Lucretius" in *Italia Medioevale E Umanistica* LI, 2010, 267-328.

[25] *Eorum tamen haereses duae sunt, Altera caelibum, qui non Venere modo in totum abstinent, sed carnium esu quoque, quidam animalium etiam omnium, reiectisque penitus tamquam noxijs uitae praesentis uoluptatibus, future duntaxat, per uigilias ac sudores inhiant, eius propediam obtinenandae spe, alcres interim, uegetique* (*CW* 4, 226/2-7).

the section on moral philosophy that we have discussed, requires a certain degree of simplification in order to work in practical life. However, we might ask ourselves if it is really possible to organize pleasure in this way, and why it is so necessary for More to give us a detailed account of his imaginary society in this regard.

Madness, nature and *varietas*

The lack of individual traits is characteristic of the Utopian society. Hythloday begins his description of the island assuring us that "The person who knows one of the cities will know them all, since they are exactly alike insofar as the terrain permits."[26] According to Greenblatt,[27] the Utopian institutions are "cunningly designed to reduce the scope of the ego." As he also points out, Hythloday does not tell us the name of a single Utopian, unless we count Utopus. The inexistence of private property blocks any form of extravagance which may come from the possession of luxurious goods. For Surtz,[28] the central aspect of the Utopian moral philosophy is the egalitarian distribution of the *materia voluptatis*, in other words, the goods that make it possible for everyone to have a comfortable life.

Just as the goods are distributed in a way in which no one can have more than the others, the theory of pleasure indicates that each person must use the same goods in the same way. There is no room for variety (*varietas*) or for any type of hedonist inquiry which could amplify the limits established for the four kinds of true pleasure mentioned earlier. This goes against the common notion that variety is one of the key elements of pleasure, which could be found in Antique and contemporary sources. "*In varietate voluptas*" was a

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[26] *Vrbium qui unam norit, omnes nouerit, ita sunt inter se (quatenus loci natura non obstat) omnino similes* (*CW 4*, 116/22-23).

[27] Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*, U of Chicago P, 1980, 39.

[28] Edward Surtz, *The Praise of Pleasure*, 153.

common Roman proverb. In his *Platonic Theology*, Marsilio Ficino asserts that the search for novelty and *varietas* is one of the defining traits of the most famous hedonists in history (Xerxes, Midas and Sardanapallus).[29] Valla had stated something similar in his *De voluptate*.[30] Finally, *varietas* was an imperative of Renaissance painting, a fact that Leon Battista Alberti repeatedly points out in his *De pictura*.[31]

There are several reasons which can explain this careful exclusion of any form of multiplicity from the "hedonistic" principles of the Utopians. To defend the idea that their society supports some of the most fundamental principles of Epicureanism, More must make sure that these principles do not work against the sense of community of his imaginary society. Epicurus (at least in the texts that we and the Renaissance scholars of the 16th century know) was not particularly worried for the overall organization of society, and his moral teachings were rooted in the attitude of the individual in front of a world that he cannot control.[32] The famous image of the man who remains calm watching a shipwreck from the safety of the coast, which can be found in the beginning of the second book of Lucretius' *De rerum natura*, goes against the basic tenets of the Utopian moral system.[33] For them, pleasure can never be thought individually: it is

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[29] In XIV, VII he says that Sardanapallus and Xerxes "*summa praemi proponebant illis qui nova quotidie invenirent oblectamenta.*"

[30] "*Ceterum ut doceam vos tota ut aiunt via errare, natura mortalibus quam plurima bona proposuit. Nostrum est illis bene uti scire. [...] Adeo hec varietas ceder voluptati ut evenit in diebus et noctibus, sereno et nubilo, estate et hieme.*" (*De voluptate*, I, XIII, 19) This topic appears also I, XX, associated with the variety and beauty of the faces of women.

[31] José Emilio Burucúa & Nicolás Kwiatkowski, "Placer y artes visuales en Italia, del Medioevo tardío al Renacimiento" in *Eadem Utraque Europa*, 15, 2014, 79.

[32] According to Heller, *Utopia* is a demonstration of the impossibility of a society ruled by Stoic ethics, since the boo shows that in order to follow this ethic system the whole structure of the European societies would have to experience radical changes. See Ágnes Heller, *Renaissance Man*, London, Routledge, 2015, 118.

[33] The difficulties that More faced for combining Epicurean ethics with the social issues of the organization of a commonwealth were pointed out by Lacombe, who argued that the way that More attempts to solve this tension is by presenting the

always the result of a structured system of values that reproduce the organization of society. Because of this, it can be safely divided into the different *species* that we mentioned above.

We may consider this organization of pleasure as one of the most evident *biopolitical* features of the Utopian society. The theory of *voluptas* includes reflections on such basic elements for life as feeding, the value of good health, and sexual intercourse. Also, it is stated repeatedly that the ultimate root of the Utopian moral behavior is nature itself. This has been identified as one of the clearest demonstrations of the influence of Stoicism in the conception of More's imaginary society.[34] Besides this, it implies that any form of false pleasure is also unnatural in some way and must be therefore corrected with the combined help of moral philosophy and with the repressive devices of the Utopian community, which are based on public exposition and shaming.[35]

It is interesting to notice that the amount of text dedicated to each kind of pleasure is contrary to their respective values. The description of false pleasure is longer than the characterization of the two optimal bodily pleasures, which is in its turn longer than the brief descriptions of the pleasures of the mind. Although we stated above that the Utopians seemed to prefer the Will over the Intellect in their hierarchy of true pleasures, the importance assigned to moral philosophy to correct the deviations of those that failed to grasp them shows that this opposition should be balanced.

Outside natural pleasures, there are only two things: madness and the conspiracy of the rich. Both of them are features of the European societies that More and his friends evaluate in the first book

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Utopians as a quasi-monastic society. See M. M. Lacombe, "La sagesse d'Epicure dans L'*Utopie* de More" in *Moreana*, November 1971, 169-182. For Greenblatt, the importance of the belief of punishments and rewards of the afterlife are social mechanisms to ensure that the Epicurean hedonism of the Utopians would not interfere with the harmony of society. See *The Swerve*, 231.

[34] Logan also states this and relates it to *De officiis* III, v. See *The Meaning of More's «Utopia»*, 155

[35] Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 48.

of *Utopia*. These topics were also targets of the attacks of Erasmus, who frequently showed his concerns for the corruption of habits of individuals and societies. The characterization of false pleasures presents several parallelisms between these two texts.[36] For instance, both Erasmus and More reflect on the madness produced by the fascination with jewels, which are appreciated equally by men and women who cannot assess if they are real or false. "Moria" states that he met someone with "her own name" (*Noui ego quendam mei nominis*) who gave fake gems to his wife, but these did not make the present any less worthy, since she was unable to tell the difference. This of course proves that *stultitia* makes even pleasures based on false goods contribute to the joys of life.[37] It seems likely that Moria is referring here to Thomas More, to whom the book was dedicated. Possibly acknowledging this reference, More writes in *Utopia* about the madness of people who purchase jewelry:

> [These people] will not purchase it unless taken out of its gold setting and exposed to view, and note even then unless the seller takes an oath and gives security that it is a true gem and a true Stone, so anxious are they lest a spurious Stone in place of a genuine one deceive their eyes. But why should a counterfeited one give less pleasure to your sight when your eye cannot distinguish it from the true article?[38]

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[36] André Prevost considered that *Utopia* is a "Praise of wisdom" written by More as an answer to his friend's *Moriae encomium*. See André Prevost, *Thomas More et la crise de la pensée européenne*, Lille, Maison Mame, 1969. For Sissa (*op.cit.*, 149) the connection is even stronger and *Utopia* should be read as a "friendly parody" of Erasmus' work.

[37] *Noui ego quendam mei nominis, qui nouae nuptae gemmas aliquot adulterineas dono dedit, persuadens (vt erat facundus nugator) eas non modo veras ac natiuas esse verum etiam singulari atque inaestimabili precio. Quaeso, quid intererat puellae, cum vitro non minus iucunde pasceret et oculos et animum, nugas perinde vt eximium aliquem thesaurum conditas apud sese seruaret?* (*Moriae Encomium*, 132).

[38] *Imo ne sic quidem, nisi adiurato uenditore, & prastanti cautionem, ueram gemmam ac lapidem uerum esse, tam solliciti sunt: ne oculis eorum, ueri loco adulterinus imponat. At spectaturo tibi, cur minus praebeat oblectamenti factitious, quem tuus oculus non discernit a uero?* (*CW* 4, 168/19-23).

A few lines above this paragraph More mentions the "strange and sweet madness" of those that follow counterfeit pleasures.[39] The use of the word *suauiter* in this context points again to Erasmus' text. The most explicit reference, however, occurs when Hythloday reflects on the kindness that Utopians show for those people afflicted with *stultitia*.[40]

Nevertheless, the differences between the characterization of pleasure and madness are greater than the similarities. While Moria seeks to show the benefits of *stultitia* for the happiness of men and women, the Utopian moral philosophy establishes that a life of false pleasures is extremely harmful, both for individuals and for the society as a whole. Even though it is clear that the *Moriae* and *Utopia* use the satiric mode and the rhetoric genre of the *declamation* consistently, the tone in which the pleasures of illusions are presented is different. We might consider that Moria's "praise" on the madness of the different social types (and particularly on the most powerful ones, such as kings and popes) should be simply inverted to show the authors' intention; but from our perspective, the same cannot be said about how the Erasmian character speaks about the joys and pleasures produced by the lack of rationality. The satire of *Moriae* is more ambiguous in this regard than *Utopia*, since it would seem that all the *adulterinae voluptates* in the latter are nothing more than a list of things that its author condemns in the European way of life.[41]

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[39] *In hac fucatae uoluptatis imagine, mirum quam suauiter insaniunt ij qui nobilitatis opinione sibi blandiuntur ac plaudunt* (*CW* 4, 168/5-6)

[40] *Moriones in delitijs habentur, quos ut affecisse contumelia magno in probro est, ita uoluptatem ab stultitia capere non uetant. Siquidem id morionibus ipsisi maximo esse bono censent, cuius qui tam seueres ac tristis est ut nullum neque factum neque dictum rideat ei tutandum non credunt, ueriti ne non satis indulgenter curetur ab eo, cui non modo nulli usui, sed ne oblectamento quidem (qua sola dote ualet) futurus esset.* (*CW* 4, 192/7-14).

[41] From our point of view the conceptual framework provided by Dustin Griffin is very helpful to understand the ambiguities of Erasmus and More's use of the 'satiric mode.' For Griffin, satire is not a clean opposition between virtues and vices, but an open inquiry of the moral issues it deals with. He also considers *Utopia* to be a "staged opposition of ideas" in which the reader must decide who

The main reason for this is that More's *Utopia* emphasizes the relation between madness and the "conspiracy of the rich" that endangers the possibility of a functional and egalitarian society. In one of the most famous passages of book II, Hythloday states:

> Consequently, when I consider and turn over in my mind the state of all commonwealths flourishing anywhere today, so help me God, I can see nothing else thank a kind of conspiracy of the rich, who are aiming at their own interest under the name and title of the commonwealth.[42]

This echoes what he said earlier regarding false pleasures, which were presented as the consequence of a *vanissima conspiratio* that makes that which is by nature bitter appear as sweet and vice-versa.[43] Skinner accurately noted that one of the main targets of More's satire is the idea that *nobilitas* is associated with wealth and with luxurious habits.[44] Most of the false pleasures listed are related to these habits, such as hunting, the use of rich clothes, or the need to be regarded as superior by the populace. Even though these ideas were already present in many texts by Erasmus, More's political ideas were more heavily grounded in the reality of his time, and his criticism is, therefore, more precise.

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lost and who won. See Dustin Griffin, *Satire: A Critical Reintroduction*, Kentucky, UP of Kentucky, 1994, 87.

[42] *Itaque omnes has quae hodie usquam florent Respublicas animo intuenti ac uersanti mihi, nihil sic me amet deus, occurrit aliud quam quaedam conspiratio diuitum, de suis commodis Reipublicae nomine, tituloque tractantium* (*CW* 4, 240/18-22).

[43] *Nam ut quicquid natura iucundum est, ad quod neque per iniuriam tenditur, nec iucundius aliud amittitur, nec labor succedit, non sensus modo, sed recta quoque ratio persequitur, ita quae praeter naturam dulcia sibi mortales uanissima conspiratione confingunt (tamquam in ipsis esset perinde res ac uocabula commutare) ea omnia statuunt adeo nihil ad felicitatem facere, ut plurimum officiant etiam, uel eo quod quibus semel insederunt, ne ueris ac genuinis oblectamentis usquam uacet locus, totum prorsus animum falsa uoluptatis opinione praeoccupant* (*CW* 4, 166/10-19).

[44] 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 UP, 1987, 123-58.

Although it might not be possible to establish a direct link between this accusation of More-Hythloday and the Epicurean corpus, the description of Lucretius of the evolution of man and society in the fifth book of *De rerum natura* has points in common with the Utopian organization.[45] For the Roman poet, mankind never knew a "Golden Age," and his beginnings were dominated by the fight for survival in a dangerous environment. After men learned to use fire and the first societies were created under the rule of kings, the progress of civilization finally led to the increase of luxuries and false pleasures:

> Then therefore pelts now gold and purple, trouble men's life with cares and weary it with war; in which, as I think, the greater fault rests upon us. For without the pelts, cold tormented the naked sons of earth; but we take no harm to be without a vestment of purple worked with gold and great figures, so long as there is the poor man's cloak to protect us. Therefore mankind labors always in vain and to no purpose, consuming its days in empty cares, plainly because it does not know the limit of possession, and hot it is ever possible for real pleasure [*vera voluptas*] to grow.[46]

The Utopian theory of *vera voluptas*, much like the Epicurean theory that Lucretius endorses, is the main tool by which they expect to prevent that any man or woman might desire to distinguish

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[45] According to the mentioned study by Allison Brown, the Lucretian theory of evolution was one of the most attractive sections of the *De rerum natura* for the Florentine humanist of the 15th century. Surtz & Hexter point out that there is a "primitive strain" present in *Utopia*, where "there is a restless desire to break the bonds of an outmoded and complicated civilization and to return to an existence far more simple, far less artificial and oppresive." See "Introduction", in *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, vol. 4, New Haven, Yale UP, 1965, clxiii.

[46] *« tunc igitur pelles, nunc aurum et purpura curis / exercent hominum vitam belloque fatigant;/quo magis in nobis, ut opinor, culpa resedit. / frigus enim nudos sine pellibus excruciabat / terrigenas; at nos nil laedit veste carere / purpurea atque auro signisque ingentibus apta, / dum plebeia tamen sit, quae defendere possit. / Ergo hominum genus in cassum frustraque laborat. / semper et in curis consumit inanibus aevom,/ nimirum quia non cognovit quae sit habendi / finis et omnino quoad crescat vera voluptas. » De rerum natura*, V, vv. 1423-1433. The English translation belongs to W. H. D. Rouse (Loeb Classical Library 181).

themselves from their fellow citizens by the accumulation of unnecessary goods.[47]

Logan argued that the assimilation of *utilitas*, *officia* and *vera voluptas* is one cornerstone of the Utopian edifice, since it establishes a clear link between the happiness of the individual and the survival of the commonwealth.[48] The hedonic calculus, clearly inspired in Epicurus, works at a social level. This is why the true pleasures are not thought individually, but as a limited list of species. It is impossible to create "new" pleasures, since the nature of pleasure is firmly delimited. Every attempt to widen the possibilities of nature by inventing, for instance, artificial games (such as dicing) is absurd in the eyes of the Utopians. The idea that the *inconcussas voluptates* ('forbidden pleasures') could be the most attractive, as Ovid writes in his *Amores* (*Am* 4, 31), is not even a possibility that the utopians consider when they discuss the types of pleasure. *Varietas* is not a component of true pleasure, because *varietas* implies a constant search and an insatiable desire.

The relation between the endless movement of desire and the titillations of pleasure is still a subject of debate for modern philosophers. It was one of the big differences between the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, who privileged the dynamism of the "desiring machines" and Michel Foucault, who considered that the conceptualization of desire as the feeling of a lack was regressive.[49] In

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[47] Plato discusses the simple pleasures of the primitive men in the *Republic*. In book VIII, Socrates condemns the hedonism of the "democratic man" (*δημοκρατικός*) who is lead astray by appetites that go far beyond his needs (VIII, 558d-561d).

[48] *The Meaning of More's "Utopia,"* 180; "The Argument of Utopia," in John C. Olin (ed.) *Interpreting Thomas More's Utopia*, New York, Fordham UP, 1989, 23.

[49] In an interview called "Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity" Foucault stated that "Pleasure also must be a part of our culture. It is very interesting to note, for instance, that for centuries people generally, as well as doctors, psychiatrists, and even liberation movements, have always spoken about desire, and never about pleasure. 'We have to liberate our desire,' they say. No! We have to create new pleasure. And then maybe desire will follow." See Michel Foucault, B. Gallagher, & A. Wilson, "Sex, Power, and the Politics of Identity," in Paul

Utopia, the higher forms of pleasure are not related to any kind of movement and could be considered mainly as "negative." This relates them with the Epicurean pleasures, which were the consequence of the absence of any form of distress in the mind and in the body. As we saw, rational contemplation occupies the second place for the moral philosophers of More's island. The first place, related to the virtuous actions and their recollection, would seem at first sight to be a form of movement, but if we consider the nature of the Utopian society, we can deduce that these virtuous acts are nothing but the common way of living. A virtuous act might imply an action in the European World, since there the virtues and the individual and social habits are often in opposition. More's life gives us an example of this. Did his refusal to acknowledge the supremacy of his King over the Pope produce a pleasure of the first kind? The question, which might have been very relevant for More himself, is out of place for a citizen of Utopia.

Rabinow (ed.), *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*, New York, The New Press, 1997, 166. Deleuze theory can be found in Gilles Deleuze, "Desire & Pleasure", in *Foucault and His Interlocutors*, U of Chicago P, 1997, 183-92.

Conclusion: Utopian ideals and hedonic adaptation

After the study by Brickman and Campbell, the concept of "hedonic treadmill" or "hedonic adaptation" has become an important subject of debate for those who theorize about human happiness, particularly inside the theoretical framework of utilitarianism.[50] According to this theory, it is not possible to increase the level of happiness in a substantial way, because each individual tends to adapt himself to his new circumstances and to acquire a new standard by which the satisfaction and distress will be measured. This leads us to the question: if the European societies were to adopt for themselves the moral philosophy of the Utopians, would the people become happier than they were under the effect of the "conspiracy of the rich?" Did the Utopians find a form of life that truly increased their happiness level without generating new ways of frustration and dissatisfaction?

Trying to answer these questions would require filling too many blanks in the description we have of More's fictional island. If we follow the text, Hythloday affirms unambiguously that "there is nowhere in the world a more excellent people nor a happier commonwealth."[51] As we said, this is accomplished in no small part by proposing a reinterpretation of the Epicurean theory of "negative" (or static) pleasure, albeit modifying some of the criteria for their classification. The highest forms of pleasure for the mind and for the body are to act morally and to be healthy in the most moral and healthiest society that can be imagined. In other words, sustaining the

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[50] See Phill Brickman & Donald Campbell, "Hedonic relativism and planning the good society," in *Adaptation-level theory*, 1971, 287-305. According to Logan ("The Argument of Utopia," 181), More's *Utopia* anticipates the utilitarian ethic systems of the 18th century.

[51] « *Nusquam neque praestantiorem populum, neque feliciorem ese rempublicam.* » (*CW* 4, 178/16-17).

established moral order and nourishing the body with food are two parallel acts. On this point, we can speak of the organization of *voluptas* as the key element of Utopian biopolitics.

The questions posited above regarding the hedonic adaptation theory and its possible effects on a European-Utopian cultural encounter can help us relate the Utopian theory of pleasure with one of the most debated issues of More's book: how could the Utopians adapt to Christianity? According to Skinner, it would be impossible to adapt the hedonistic moral philosophy of the inhabitants of the island to the soteriological scheme outlined in the Bible.[52] Surtz had argued against any tension between Christianity and the Utopian way of life.[53] There seems to be evidence of this in the pages where Hythloday describes their first contact with the teachings of Christ, and says that their reaction was positive. However, in these same pages, he also tells us the story of a Utopian who was baptized and, after starting to proselytize violently his new faith, was exiled from the island.[54]

The order of the *buthrescae* seems to be the most explicit argument both in favor and against the compatibility of the Utopian *verae voluptates* and the European religion. As stated above, the members of this sect reject earthly pleasures and seek to find true happiness in the afterlife alone. This connects them to the ascetic ideals of Christianity and its rejection of *voluptas*.[55] But at the same

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[52] "Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* and the Language of Renaissance Humanism," 150.

[53] According to R. Galibois, the compatibility of the Utopian-epicurean pleasure theory with the official philosophers of Christianity (such as a Augustine or Thomas Aquinas) is given by the fact that More takes from Aristotle (*Eth. Nich.* X, V) the idea that one of the criteria for recognizing the moral validity of a form of pleasure is to evaluate the way that honorable men react to it. The moral probity of the Utopians therefore shows that their *voluptates* are worthy. See Roland Galibois, "*L'Utopie*: éloge du plaisir ?" in *Moreana*, December 1988, 184.

[54] The story appears on *CW 4*, 218.

[55] This was the conclusion of Valla in his *De voluptate/De vero bono*, where the Christian orator (Niccolò Niccoli in the first version, Antonio da Rho in the last ones) states that *voluptas* is *duplex*: one of this earth, and another heavenly. The first one should be spurned to obtain the second.

time, this attitude goes against the "official" moral philosophy of Utopia and its negative epicurean pleasures, because the *buthrescae* desire something larger than anything that can be found in this existence. Their presence in the island shows that the imaginary construction of *Utopia* includes heterogeneous elements that do not necessary form a unified totality. We might, therefore, ask ourselves if the Europeans should adopt the quasi-epicurean theory of pleasure of the moral philosophers of Utopia (which does not reject religion in any way), or if the Utopians would be happier in the long term if they all became *buthrescae*.

Once again, it is not possible to answer this univocally, and the most likely conclusion lies somewhere in the middle. More's book has the capacity to create new questions and ways of inquiry into the social and individual tensions that we continue to experience. Our goal here has been to show how the Utopian organization of pleasure (which shows the mark of different philosophical traditions) rejects the common notion that *varietas* and *voluptas* are two inseparable concepts and favors the epicurean negative notion of pleasure. These pleasures have in common with those favored by Epicurus and Lucretius the fact that for keeping peace and welfare in Utopia, the individual must only adapt to the laws of nature, which according to the Utopians, tells us to love ourselves and our neighbors. However, they are also different, since they specifically pursue the happiness of the society as a whole and cannot admit the possibility of a person enjoying his peace of body and mind ignoring the social struggles that surround him.[56] Once the laws of nature and the laws of society are inextricably intertwined, there is no place for any form of desire that goes beyond them. The homeostasis of the individual and of the commonwealth is perfectly achieved.

This also affects the use of the hedonic calculus in More's fictional island. Epicurus' pragmatic tool to decide on the eligibility of

[56] Logan, referring in particular to Aristotle's and Plato's theorization of *hedoné*, points out this as an important difference between the Greek theorization of pleasure and More's. See *The Meaning of More's "Utopia"*, 176.

each pleasure and pain is now used on a social scale to establish once and for all the hierarchical scale of *voluptates*. It is not a calculation that needs to be reconsidered each time by the individual: it is a social axiom. As we saw, only one thing seems to be capable of altering this structure: the advent of Christianity to the island. If the risk of losing the heavenly pleasures overthrows any possibility of enjoying the earthly ones, it is safe to imagine that the Utopians will abandon their moral system in favor of the ascetic lifestyle of the *buthrescae*. From our point of view, however, this cannot be safely deduced from the text. It would be more accurate to say that the Utopian moral system could enter into a fertile dialog with Christianity, which would imply that an entirely new conception of *voluptas* could emerge.

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