

Thursday Sep. 13, 1:30-3:00 pm – “Thomas More's Utopia”

Chair: Prof. Elliott Simon (U. Haifa)

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Utopian History: Prospects for Social Change

The Island of Utopia has often been regarded as a place where nothing new ever happens, for the sheer regimentation of life in all the Utopian cities prevents any change from taking place, so much so that Hythloday announces that description of one Utopian city will suffice to introduce his interlocutors to life in all Utopian cities; in this vision, Utopia becomes a place impermeable to historical change. However, Hythloday himself bears witness to the Utopians' openness to outside influences, such as Greek language and literature, as well as the arts of print and paper making; of these, the art of print was already bringing about great changes in More's lifetime. This paper will explore how, despite the common, and very understandable, evaluation of Utopia as a place of sheer stasis, the Utopian vision necessarily includes enough social and cultural openness to allow historical change.

