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Thomas More's "rule" of pleasure before, after, and in *Utopia*

Abstract: After establishing a context of More's lifelong engagement with the "calculus" of pleasure, this essay shows how the section devoted to the Utopians' pleasure philosophy is structured around five formulations of a "rule" to calculate "true and honest [*honestas*]" pleasure in ways that playfully imitate and echo the "rule" Cicero formulates several times in *De officiis* to discern one's duty when there seems to be a conflict between *honestas et utilitas*. When followed, the Utopian pleasure calculus shows the necessary role of *societas, officii, iustitia, caritas*, and the other aspects of human nature, most importantly friendship, that Cicero stresses in his rule and that he argued Epicurus ignored. Much of the irony and humor of this section depends on seeing the predominance of Ciceronian vocabulary in Raphael's unusual defense [*patrocinium*] of pleasure, rather than a Ciceronian defense of duty rooted in *honestas*. Throughout, however, this essay also shows how More goes beyond Cicero by including Augustinian and biblical allusions to suggest ways that our final end is not as Epicurus or the Stoics or Cicero claim; the language and allusions of this section point to a level of good cheer and care for neighbors and for God in ways quite different from any classical thinker.

Keywords: Utopia, pleasure, Epicurus, Plato, Aristotle, Lucian, Cicero, Augustine, Chrysostom

Résumé: Après avoir abordé le contexte de l'engagement dont More a fait preuve toute sa vie vis-à-vis du «calcul» du plaisir, cette étude démontre comment la section consacrée au plaisir philosophique des Utopiens se structure autour de cinq expressions d'une «règle» visant à calculer le plaisir «vrai et honnête [*honestas*]» sous des formes qui imitent et rappellent vraisemblablement la «règle» formulée plusieurs fois par Cicéron dans le *De officiis*, celle qui aide à discerner son devoir lorsque qu'il semble y avoir conflit entre *honestas et utilitas*. Si on le suit, le calcul du plaisir utopien révèle le rôle nécessaire de *societas, officii, iustitia, caritas*, et d'autres aspects de la nature humaine, en premier lieu l'amitié, sur laquelle Cicéron insiste et que, comme il le montre, Epicure ignorait. Une grande part de l'ironie et de l'humour de cette section dépend de la perception du vocabulaire cicéronien prédominant dans la défense [*patrocinium*] inhabituelle prise par Raphaël du plaisir plutôt que de la défense cicéronienne du devoir, basée sur l'*honestas*. Tout au long de cette étude, en outre, il sera démontré comment More va plus loin que Cicéron en

ayant recours à des allusions bibliques et augustinienes qui suggèrent que notre fin dernière n'est pas ce qu'Epicure ni les Stoïques ni Cicéron affirment ; la langue et les allusions de cette section révèlent un niveau de gaîté, un souci de son prochain et de Dieu, qui s'expriment de façon bien différente chez les penseurs classiques.

Mots clés: Utopie, plaisir, Epicure, Platon, Aristote, Lucien, Cicéron, Augustin, Chrysostome

Forceful engagement with the realities of pleasure and pain is one of the distinctive characteristics of Thomas More's writings, from his earliest to his last. Whether it be the pleasure calculus introducing his "Rules of Spiritual Battle" in his first published English work, or in his final book commenting on the extreme pain that "attacks" Christ in Gethesemane, or in his final letters confessing his own fears of giving in under the pains of torture, More was clear-sighted about the power of pleasure and pain in directing human action. From this perspective, the pleasure ethic in *Utopia* is less surprising, but still perplexing. Does More give there, "[a]ccording to Stephen Greenblatt, . . . the best defense of Epicureanism produced by a Renaissance scholar"?¹ Or once the intricate Utopian pleasure "calculus"² is calculated, is it as Dominic Baker-Smith concludes: that pleasure is austere and restricted in Utopia, and not really Epicurean?³ This article presents an answer after a brief overview of More's treatments of pleasure before and after writing *Utopia*, and then after an analysis of the Lucian irony at play in Utopia's pleasure calculus.

BEFORE AND AFTER *UTOPIA*

In his early Letter to Colet of 1504, More dramatically draws attention to his efforts "to climb the steep stony-path of virtue" when faced with the many pleasures and allurements of the city.⁴ Here he alludes to the proverbial choice between the easy path of pleasure and the steep and stony path of virtue presented by such authors as Xenophon, Cicero, and Basil the Great.⁵ This inherent conflict between virtue and pleasure was

¹ Mariano Vilar, "Pleasure and Variety in Thomas More's *Utopia*," *Moreana* 203–4 (2016): 149 referring to Greenblatt's analysis of More and Epicureanism in *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern* (New York: Norton & Co, 2012), 227–33 especially.

² George Logan uses this descriptive term in *The Meaning of More's "Utopia"* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), 175.

³ *More's Utopia* (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 173.

⁴ *St. Thomas More: Selected Letters*, ed. Elizabeth F. Rogers (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 4.

⁵ Xenophon's *Memorabilia* 2.1.21, Cicero's *De officiis* 1.118; Basil the Great's *On Reading Greek Literature* 5.