Peter Plotas 10/6/15

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Mulling Over More’s Manuscript

Thanks to Erasmus clarifying More’s views on education in his short piece, the reader gains an advanced insight into More’s critiques on his own society and political system through an evaluation on the benefits of education. More spurns the society of these religiously-governed men, who enact all laws in the name of God, and yet possess more societal issues than “a non-Christian community, organized in accordance with human values” and guided by reason (Bradshaw 8). More attributes these shortcomings in his own society to a lack of liberal education, which both he and Erasmus claim contributes to the good of society by fostering a “love of literature” (Erasmus 224:14). More places this form of education within his fictitious land of Utopia, and, not by accident, the inhabitants gain extremely similar benefits of happiness and “services [they] can now render to [their] country” (Erasmus 223:28-29). Moreover, the Utopians’ love for “intellectual activities” translates into a developed ability to “recognize good and just reasons for what they are,” further separating themselves from the detestable, corrupt, immoral sixteenth century society of Thomas More (Erasmus 224:30-31; More 61).

More resumes his dispatch on the value of reading and learning in Erasmus’ letter by explaining that he continues to pass down this valued education to his children, which Erasmus asserts will “eliminate idleness and improper amusements” (Erasmus 224:13). He says that a passion for reading and literature yields a defense against such vices, and beyond that it “is the way to absorb the highest principles, which can both instruct and inspire the mind in the pursuit of virtue,” essentially reasoning that this literary passion is both the path from vice and the path towards virtue (Erasmus 224:20-22). Without this liberal education, the religious-based intentions of the political figures within More’s society are fruitless; they lack a compass to the true moral and stable community life enjoyed by the Utopians. The men and women of sixteenth century society possess no defenses to combat idleness, which is what fosters the malignant intentions and ignorance within so many leaders of the time, and, as Erasmus says, “nothing is more intractable than ignorance” (Erasmus 224:28-29).

Ultimately, More’s society is downtrodden by the severe deficiency of liberal education within the system. Without this noble privilege, this path to virtue, the men at the helm of sixteenth century politics are overshadowed by spectrums of greed, unchristian punishments and laws, and immoral behavior. These evils and more spawn from the brew of idleness and ignorance that men rot within during this time, despite all of their claims in the name of God. Ironically, a society based off human reason and value rather than religion holds more moral standards and customs than that of a supposedly Christian society. The Utopians accomplish this feat through an honest love of education, literature, and reading as a whole. They have their priorities correctly aligned because they “devote their time to the freedom and cultivation of the mind, [because] that, they think, constitutes a happy life” (More 66).

I pledge that I have neither received nor given unauthorized assistance during the completion of this work. Peter George Plotas

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