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Brendan Bradshaw: “More on *Utopia*”

Serving as a discourse through multiple interpretations of More’s Utopia and its myriad of symbolism, Bradshaw’s article goes forth as yet another diver into the ocean of Utopia that has already so many ventures. However, this particular diver separates itself from the pack by drawing off of the successes of other interpretations and rejecting those that hold less weight, particularly Professor Hexter’s dialogues. Claiming that his arguments are founded on “an unsustainable hypothesis,” Bradshaw targets Hexter’s follies in two main misconceptions: the misconception of Christian religious interpretation and the misconception of social justice (Bradshaw 2). By identifying Hexter’s falsehoods, the true intent and purpose behind the More’s evidence is drawn out and made starkly indisputable.

Beginning with the misconception of the Christian religious interpretation, we see that Hexter reasons “the Utopians, despite their lack of rituals, are true Christians,” essentially meaning that the basis for a Christian commonwealth is simply moral and virtue and requires nothing more (Bradshaw 4). Hexter continues to play off of an incorrect deduction that More’s intent was to place virtue at the soul of Christianity, when in reality such an intent does not align with More’s beliefs, because in More’s era, scripture and sacraments were definitive aspects of Christianity (Bradshaw 7). Without the “true knowledge of Christianity” that could only stem from scripture and the like, it is apparent that “Utopia, therefore, must be … a non-Christian community, organized in accordance with human values”; furthermore, why would More communicate a “process of conversion” and “evangelization” if the Utopians were already Christian (Bradshaw 8, 13)? With all of this overwhelmingly contrary evidence to Hexter’s implication, the answer as to whether or not the Utopians are intended to be a pure Christian community of virtue is a resounding “no.”

A secondary shortcoming of Hexter’s analysis is his misrepresentation concerning social justice along with his suggestion that “the private possession of property was both a punishment for sin and a remedy for it” (Bradshaw 15). Hexter neglects to fully analyze the communism of Utopia and ultimately fails to put the debate on common ownership at the time into proper context (Bradshaw 15). In terms of social justice, Hythloday shows through questioning and description that “a social system based on private wealth is not conducive to social justice … [whereas,] a system of communal ownership is so” which is apparent in the inherent methods of operation in each society (Bradshaw 17). Additionally, a theoretical justification for private property by St. Thomas “[removes] its origins from the realm of sin,” demonstrating that communism was not specifically used by More to strike out the evils of private property but rather to destroy the root feelings of greed and pride by creating this shared society (Bradshaw 16).

Through these newfound revelations, we can begin to comprehend a more general, and certainly accurate, assessment of More’s Utopia’s symbolism and preceding intentions. Although Hexter’s account is flawed, he has still indirectly supplied readers with the clarity that Bradshaw ultimately brings to the table. For this we should be grateful; we now recognize the truth that the Utopians are not a Christian community because More would never have designed such a thing without the presence of scripture and sacraments. Furthermore, they are not a Communist society for the purpose of eliminating private property but rather for the elimination of the corrosive feelings that accompany private wealth. Ultimately, thanks to Bradshaw, readers have now stepped closer towards grasping the exact intentions of More when he wrote this historically significant piece.

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

Works Cited

Bradshaw, Brendan. "More on *Utopia*." *The Historical Journal* 24, no. 01 (March 1981): 1-27. Accessed September 30, 2015. doi:10.1017/s0018246x00008001.