

Enclosures, Women, Colonialism and Capitalism

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Part A

1. “The sheep [commonly so meek and eating so little]; now, as I hear, they have become so greedy and fierce that they devour human beings themselves.” -Thomas More, *Utopia*
2. “Philosophers who, in laying the foundation for their political theories, have asked ‘What are men like?’ ‘What is man’s potential?’ have frequently in turning to the female sex, asked ‘What are women *for*?’” -Susan Moller Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought*

Part B

4. Both Plato and More leave doubt as to whether or not their perfect society can be realized. Choosing *either* Plato *or* More, address this problem. Do you think their ideal society is intended as a “blueprint” or not? Why? Defend your position by interpreting the text. If it is a blueprint, what are the key features of Plato's or More's contemporary societies that needed to be changed and how does their perfect society achieve this? If you think they are not blueprints, what is the purpose of their critique of their existing societies and what is the purpose of describing an ideal society in detail?

1

This quote discusses how sheep grazing pastures are taking over the areas that peasants used to live, impoverishing them and causing them to starve. Sheep are not consuming people, but they are eating people's livelihoods, and thus their ability to survive. The sheep are grazing in the fields that peasants would have previously used to feed their families and survive. This text is written in England during the period of enclosures. This is when the land went from being owned by the lord, but a resource that all peasants could use to grow their own food, to land that was private property. More speaks of how these enclosures are increasing poverty, and increasing the number of peasants starving because they are no longer able to grow their own food. This is because some individuals see greater personal benefit in enclosing the land, and allowing the more profitable sheep to graze on it. This quote is found when Raphael is talking to the Cardinal and the court about the increase in poverty and theft (19). The rest of the court believes that theft and poverty should be harshly punished whereas Raphael believes that poverty is increasing due to enclosures (20). Initially, the court disagrees with Raphael's ideas, but when the Cardinal agrees with the ideas, the rest of the court begins to agree (28). This is significant because it speaks to the idea discussed throughout Book I that people are afraid of new ideas, like Raphael's. Until someone else agreed with the change, the courtiers were unwilling to think about these ideas. This quote is significant because it demonstrates the severity of England's state of poverty. Sheep, which were once docile and inoffensive, are causing peasants to starve as they no longer have land to farm. Despite the rapidly changing economic situation in England, the courtiers are afraid to act as they are afraid of change. This situation demonstrates how people fear change even as the survival of other humans requires it.

2

This quote discusses how philosophers ask “what is a man’s potential” and ask “what are women for” (10). In many political philosophies, the authors attempt to get to the base of human nature for men and look to see what men are capable of. When the same authors look at women, however, they look at what women currently do, and assign this to be their nature. For example, if women are currently taking care of children and elders, the philosophers may say that it is a woman’s nature to be caring, when women are in fact are just currently doing care work. This is often associated with the nature/nurture debate. Philosophers look to see the nature of men as if they were not placed in the current society and say that that is how men are. Philosophers then look at the nurture of women and how they have been socialized and use that as an explanation as to how women are. The significance of this quote is its criticism of how women are included in political philosophy. There are three main ways in which traditional political philosophy approaches women’s nature. The first is to not include women at all. Philosophers like Rousseau indicate that they do not intend to talk about women at all (5). The second way that women are discussed is when they are included under phases such as ‘humanity’ (5). In this way, women are not specifically included, and thus their specific needs, differences, and potential nature is disregarded for a male-centric view. The third way that women are referred to is through the nurture method, where theorists ask what women do (9). Okin is arguing that students, academics, and researchers should be aware of the gender biases that exist in much of traditional philosophy, where women are excluded, ignored, or oversimplified (7). Through this quote, Okin shows that the mere inclusion of a mention of women does not mean that useful, valuable, or good research has been done on the study of their nature.

The meaning of the word 'Utopia' is disputed. It is often taken to mean a perfect place and society, but others believe that it is a place that is unobtainable and can never be found. In Thomas More's *Utopia*, the reader must ask themselves the same question. More's *Utopia* can be read as either a blueprint for the future or as a criticism of Tudor England, the time in which he was writing. This essay will argue that it is not intended as a blueprint, as replicating it would be impossible, but it is intended to allow the reader to critique Tudor England as More ties his version of Utopia to the major critiques of England that can be seen in Book 1.

A blueprint would imply that Utopia is something that current or past societies should, or should have modelled themselves upon. However, creating More's version of Utopia would be very impractical, and likely impossible. This is for two reasons; it would be impractical to build the physical space of Utopia, and More never outlines how to build a Utopia, and specifies that nobody can get there, implying that it is not meant to be an actual society.

The first reason why Utopia should not be considered to be a blueprint is because it would be difficult to create the physical space that Utopia would require. More writes very specific physical characteristics for Utopia, including its shape, size, and space from other states. Utopia is two hundred miles across, is crescent-shaped with a bay in the middle, there is a channel to get in the bay with shallows on one side, rocks on the other, and a reef in the middle that rises above the water (43). On the other side of the island, the coast is rugged and separated by the continent by fifteen miles of water (44). The physical features of Utopia would be near impossible to recreate, as it would require building up a very large island. The geography of Utopia is very important; it is central to their defence policy, as the coast makes it hard to attack, and the difficult-to-navigate bay makes attacks difficult (43). This means that society can worry

less about attacks, and allows them to have a purely voluntary army. The geography of Utopia is also critical to the layout of their cities and farming. The geography allows for 54 nearly identical cities to be built (44). The spacing between the cities is never further than a day's walk which would contribute to the centralized political system of Utopia (44). Overall, the geography of Utopia is important and would be nearly impossible to replicate. If the geography was different the societal structure would also be different, perhaps significantly so. Thus, since the geographical nature of Utopia could not be built then Utopia could not be built. More would have known this, as geography cannot easily be man-made, and thus he never intended it as a blueprint or a system to be replicated.

The second reason why *Utopia* should not be considered to be a blueprint is that More never outlines how to build Utopia. When Raphael is telling the story of Utopia he discusses that Utopus built Utopia, but he never outlines how it was built (48). Instead, he discusses what Utopia looked like after it had been fully developed. If More intended to have Utopia be a blueprint for the future, he likely would have outlined how society should get there. To build Utopia the creator must instill a value system and system of production into a society that already exists (100). This would be very difficult, as people are often afraid of change, or are unwilling to make a change if it would affect them negatively, even if it would improve the lives of everyone. If More intended for society to go on this long and difficult process of reforming their values, he likely would have included instructions or steps on how to get there. As More did not include these things, it can be interpreted as that he did not see Utopia as a system to be used as a blueprint for future societies.

Instead of looking at More's *Utopia* as a blueprint for society and as something to replicate, it should be seen as a critique of English society. In Book 1 More discusses the main

problems with English society and government. The main points and issues that More raises in Book 1 are the main pillars of Utopian society in Book 2. These four issues are gender inequality, class inequality, needlessly bloody wars, and the monarchy.

The first critique of society that is offered by More is a critique of gender inequality in England. More says that hardly any women in England work (pg 53). More sees this as a failure of English society as it means that a great deal of productivity is lost. If women worked, and their husbands worked, more could be produced in a shorter period of time. In Utopia, women do work, and they work the same amount as their husbands, although sometimes in different jobs (51). Women train in the army and are involved in farming like men (51). Women also work different types of craftwork, but the same amount as men (pg 50). More sees women's participation in what he sees as valid work, as good, and effective contributions to society.

The second critique of society that is offered by More is a critique of class inequality in England. The period that More is writing in is the period of enclosures. This is when the land went from being owned by lords and collectively farmed by the peasants, to being enclosed and under the sole use of the lords and rich. This caused many people to lose their livelihoods, and food sources, all while the lords became richer. England had a large class structure, where there was a small, rich, ruling class, and a large peasantry. This inequality and class structure allows the lords to build excessive wealth, while the poor starve. More critiques this extreme inequality between rich and poor by presenting the idea of communal ownership in Utopia. In Utopia, nobody owns the land, and nobody can acquire an excess of wealth (54). Instead, everyone contributes to society through their various jobs, and it is a money-less society where everyone is also able to take what they need.

The third critique of society that is offered by More is a critique of needless bloody wars. In England at the time of writing, there were many bloody wars that resulted in many being killed. Men would be dragged into the war by their lords or others in their community, where they would then be killed. In Utopia for comparison, they avoid going to war directly, and when they must they send mercenaries or volunteer forces (95). In this way, the Utopians can trick or buy their ways out of death by war. This critique allows the reader to see the pointlessness, and the extreme, unnecessary violence of Tudor England, and how that there could be a better system.

The fourth critique of Tudor England that More offers is a critique of the monarchy. In England at the time of writing the political system was run by monarchs and couriers. More discussed in Book 1 how people are afraid of change and new ideas, and instead of listening, they will stay with what is known and traditional (28). This prevents Raphael, a friend of More's and the narrator of Utopia from his ideas being heard, and prevents new and creative solutions from being implemented (28). In More's Book 2 where Utopia is discussed, this is not an issue. In Utopia, there is a democracy where the citizens elect their representatives to rule and make decisions. These representatives are subject to only being allowed to debate in public and being beholden to the citizens that elected them (50). This means that the citizens all have a voice in governance, and they can voice their ideas on how to reform or take action in the country. Public debate and accessibility of being able to communicate with the government is significantly better and more open in Utopia. In this way, More critiques how ineffective the system is in Tudor England, and demonstrates that there could be a better system where everyone's voice and ideas are heard.