

THOMAS MORE AS A POLITICAL THINKER AND ACTOR FOR REFORM

By TOMIHARU TSUKADA*

In the sixteenth century many intellectuals, who might exclusively have devoted themselves to religion or the *vita contemplativa* in a previous age, became drawn into the vortex of politics. Among them was Erasmus, who lent his advice to kings and served them, albeit perhaps not wholeheartedly. Also there was Luther, who called vehemently for the suppression of peasant rebellions and in consequence was instrumental in the establishment of the territorial state. The political conditions of the day, whether inclined to anarchy or to order, had a profound impact on intellectuals. In these conditions some of them became more mature and critical observers and thinkers about politics. This essay will attempt to illustrate through tracing the locus of growth of More's political thinking in an age of social mobility, how one of the intellectuals in the sixteenth century perceived the reality of politics, what ideas of political society he worked over and the part he played on the political stage of his day.

More treated the problems of commonwealth¹ in a rather stable political world. The achievement of national unity under the Tudors brought about the stability of political life and the possibilities for various kinds of political reforms without any drastic change in the English constitution. There was a certain continuity between More's days and the past. Such a political situation was quite different from that in Machiavelli's Italy where the political world lay exposed as orderless and near-anarchic and the problem of the political thinker was to found a new constitution by whatever means. The creativity of More's political thinking was displayed in his quest for building a more just and prosperous commonwealth on the established order.

As to the content of More's political thought we can hardly find any new elements in it. He was typically eclectic in that he adopted any sort of ideas whatever available or appropriate to the condition of the day out of the classical and Christian tradition, not stubbornly attached to one principle. Also, More did not create a pure political theory by a significant redistribution of emphasis in political theory as Machiavelli did. Further, needless to say, More was neither a so-called simple-minded Utopian nor an idealist who knew but little of the world. More was a political thinker who was not only eager about the reform of the commonwealth on the model of the classical and Christian ideas, but also sensitive to the hard realities that came in the way of reform. It is the great and tenacious effort to bridge the gap between ideal and reality that remarkably characterised More's political thinking. In this paper we shall treat of More's political thought in connection with the politics of the day, especially centering upon his efforts for reform.

* Associate Professor (*Jokyōju*) of History of Political Thought.

¹ The body politic; a state, esp. viewed as a body in which the whole people have a voice or an interest. *The Oxford English Dictionary*.

1

More's early political thinking was thoroughly conditioned by the framework of the classical and medieaval political tradition. He viewed political events with very ordinary political judgement and expressed his thoughts in traditional terminology. In Latin epigram, More considered political society an organic body, and tried to answer the question of what position the monarch should occupy in the body politic. He concentrated his attention on the relation between monarch and people, and on regulation of the powers of the monarch. More stated that

a kingdom in all its parts is like a man; it is held together by natural affection. The king is the head; the people form the other parts. Every citizen the king has he considers a part of his own body. His subjects exert themselves in the king's behalf, and they all look upon him as the head for which they provide the body.²

He also compared the king, who performs his duty properly, to the father, and argued that a true king is abundantly blessed in having as many children as he has subjects.³

Thus for More, the relation between king and the people is not based on power or wealth, but on the voluntary submission or love due to a king for the conduct of good government. He also stressed the moment of consent in government and the regulation of the monarchy by the parliament.

More's political thought above mentioned suggests that More, living in rather a stable political world, could see the old unifying principles effective enough not to call for the new principles to make political phenomena appear intelligible and political action possible. However, More did not only view the Tudor kings through the classical and mediaeval notions, but also understood them from the point of view relevant to a current political situation. Though establishing unity and peace the Tudor constitution was neither a static organism nor a *corps immobile*. The new monarchy had not yet accomplished the task of creating the commonwealth which both realists and idealists of the day expected to be built in their respective interests. There remained old problems and new ones emerged. More's concern in these problems enlarged his political knowledge.

In 1509 the coronation of Henry VIII seemed to mark the beginning of a new political age. While his predecessor had been preoccupied with suppressing revolts led by pretenders and preventing intrigues, the new monarch ascended the throne amid a generally stable political atmosphere. Political power had been centralized under the control of the king, and he had become a symbol of national unity and a focus of reverence for the people. Henry VIII's coronation was celebrated by the populace at large and heralded as the beginning of an age of prosperity for the commonwealth.

More welcomed the new monarch as a liberator and a reformer, and he expressed his expectations of Henry in a eulogy:

² *The Latin Epigrams of Thomas More*, ed. and trans. L. Bradner & C.A. Lynch (Chicago, 1953), Latin p. 13, English p. 172.

³ *Ibid.*, L. p. 49, E. p. 172.

This day is the limit of our slavery, the beginning of our freedom, the end of sadness, the source of joy, for this day consecrates a young man who is the everlasting glory of our time and makes him your king—the only king who is worthy to rule not merely a single people but the whole world—such a king as will wipe the tears from every eye and put joy in the place of our long distress.⁴

But More did more than merely praise and admire the new monarch; he expected the king to cope with the problems of the day. In his praise of the king's achievements were implicit suggestions of policies that should be adopted.

Our prince opened the sea for trade. If any overharsh duties were required of the merchants, he lightened their load. And the long-scorned nobility recovered on our prince's first day the ancient rights of nobles. He now gives to good men the honors and public offices which used to be sold to evil men. By a happy reversal of circumstances, learned men now have the prerogatives which ignoramus carried off in the past. Our prince without delay has restored to the laws their ancient force and dignity. And although formerly each rank in the state was changing character completely, now at once every rank is restored.⁵

Though these were simple expressions of expectations existing in More's mind rather than a set of prescribed remedies based on the accurate grasp of new problems, we may find that More had come to turn his eyes directly on the world of realities and believe in the possibility of politics in expectation of the new king. In later pages More's orientation towards reform will be more closely examined and I shall try to show that *Utopia* is a book of reform by the hand of the maturest political thinker and actor. What ought to be noted here, however, is that the development of More's political thinking was promoted by his commitment to public life.

While the expectations of the new king made More believe in the creativity of political activity, the subsequent disillusion deepened his insight into another aspect of politics. A few years following his coronation Henry VIII began to show signs of despotism, illustrated by his senseless involvement in the war with France and by the execution of the Earl of Suffolk. More grew increasingly disenchanted with the new king and became conscious of his barbarous and savage destructiveness. In the earlier days of Henry's reign More's attention to the affairs of state had been primarily directed towards the concerns of establishing or reforming the commonwealth. Committed as he was to politics, More consciously or unconsciously turned his attention to matters antithetical to his idea for reform, and came to have an astute grasp of the evils inherent in the new monarchy. The darker side of politics came to occupy his attention.

Sensing that the internal politics was inclining to despotism, More began to write *The History of King Richard III*, in which More vividly described the politically ambitious Richard usurping the throne through violence and Machiavellian craft, and eventually coming to a tragic end. This history is characterized by his view of politics as a drama of political men driven by a boundless ambition and an insatiable pride. For example, he

⁴ *Ibid.*, L. p. 16, E. p. 138.

⁵ *Ibid.*, L. pp. 18-19. E. p. 141.

portrayed the character and motives of Richard thus—

He was close and secret, a deep dissimuler, lowly of countenance, arrogant of heart, outwardly coumpinable where he inwardly hated, not letting to kiss whom he thought to kill; dispiteous and cruel, not for evil will alway, but offer for ambition, and either for the surety or increase of his estate. Friend and foe was much what indifferent: where his advantage grew, he spared no man's death whose life withstood his purpose.⁶

This is not only a picture of Richard himself, but may be a picture of the political ambitious of the day whom More observed at first hand. Many of the techniques used by Richard III in acquiring power were reminiscent of Machiavellism (as fully developed in *The Prince*): victory through the bold exercise of violence and trickery, the destruction of rivals for power, the manipulation of the masses who can be counted on to make judgement on surface evidence.

The demonic aspect of politics had been explored in traditional political writing in terms of the theory of tyranny, but this was mainly explicated as the counterpart of the *speculum principis* and remained basically abstract criticism divorced from practical reality. By contrast, More's arguments were not limited to sterile truisms or commonplace judgements, but grew out of his interest in recent historical and contemporary events. More faced the political world where older arrangements of control had weakened and traditional moral dictates were losing their hold allowing power and trickery to be almost freely exercised. We find that in *The History of King Richard III* More showed a greater insight into the nature of the politics of the day.

The picture we get of More in this history is that of an exceptionally acute observer of the political scene, similar to Machiavelli who saw the essentially demonic nature of power. The following words symbolically expressed More's grasp of the politics of the day. "These matters be king's games, as it were, stage plays, and for the more part played upon scaffolds."⁷ But while Machiavelli accepted power-politics and presupposed it as unchangeable in his construction of political theory, More refused to accept it. More eloquently described the brutalizing and corrupting effects of power on those who sought after and exercised it, and pointed out the cumulative effect on society of the consistent application of power and trickery. More made Edward IV say in his sickbed:

Such a pestilent serpent is ambition and desire of vainglory and sovereignty, which among states where he once entereth creepeth forth so far, till with division and variance he turneth all to mischief—first longing to be next the best, afterward equal with the best, and at last chief and above the best. Of which immoderate appetite of worship, and thereby of debate and dissension, what loss, what sor-

⁶ *The History of King Richard III*, ed. R.S. Sylvester (The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St. Thomas More, Volume 2, New Haven, 1963) pp. 7-8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81. The next epigram shows the same view on politics. "You often boast to me that you often make frivolous comments for the king's ear without restraint and in accordance with your own inclination. This is like playing with tamed lions—often it is harmless, but everytime there is the danger of harm. Often in anger he roars for no known reason, and suddenly what was just now a game brings death. Your pleasure in this matter is not safe enough. *Epigrams* L. pp. 69-70, E. p. 190.

row, what trouble hath within these few years grown in this realm.⁸ More, likewise, described the politically ambitious in the anguish of loneliness and uncertainty, and his tragic end caused by Divine providence.

Which things on every part well pondered, God never gave this world a more notable example neither in what unsurety standeth this worldly weal, or what mischief worketh the proud enterprise of a high heart, or finally, what wretched end ensueth such dispiteous cruelty. . . . And the mischief that he took, within less than three years of the mischief that he did; and yet all the meantime spent in much pain and trouble outward; much fear, anguish, and sorrow within.⁹

More warned the ruling class that the indiscriminate exercise of power driven by ambition and pride could only provoke the greatest of all dangers for both the commonwealth and the power-hungry. But only a warning. The problem as to how to remedy the political condition of the day into a rightly ordered environment, making brutality and cruelty unnecessary was left unsolved.

2

If the maturity of political thinking consists in grasping politics in its entirety, that is, its ambivalence of light and shadow, More had reached maturity as a political thinker and actor when he was writing *Utopia*. More, already conscious of the creativity and the destructiveness of contemporary politics, elaborated a design for reforming the commonwealth. *Utopia* may be said to be a perfected handbook of reform for an actor on the political stage based on both the shrewd grasp of political and social problems caused by the vices of men and the belief in the latent but exciting possibility of human nature.

In *Utopia* More tackled wider and deeper problems; the decay of mediaeval institutions, the growth of strong centers of political power, and the spread of capitalistic practices in the economy. One of the fundamental tendencies of the Renaissance is that older arrangements of control had broken down and the resulting release of energies threatened to make the establishment of order impossible or difficult. Energies were released not only in the world of politics, but also in almost all the fields of human activity: morality, economy, religion, arts etc. How to control and order these energies, whether in a positive or negative way, was the most urgent and difficult problem of the day.

In England under the Tudors the released energies made the monarchy strong enough to achieve unity and stability in the political world, and made England increasingly richer than before. These conditions enabled the government to deal with the needs of the people which had been neglected in the internal disturbances, and to give serious attention to the protection and welfare of the people, including the lowest class. In this respect More seemed to fundamentally accept the release of these energies as the potential for creating a better order as his eulogy to the new monarch shows. But he knew well that if unrestrained, the released energies would easily render political order despotic and economic

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87.

society exposed as orderless and near-anarchic. More's political thinking was inspired by these problems which England under the Tudors faced.

What means did More use in coping with these problems? He wrote out a beneficial and entertaining handbook which contained various guiding principles and tactics for reforming the commonwealth. When More started to write this handbook *Utopia*, he had gained his experience in public life. More was called early to a busy and exhausting career as a lawyer and public official. He also was a member of an embassy to the Netherlands in the summer of 1515, representing the City of London's interests. During these days More came to acquire a very keen judgement in politics and the sagacity with which he noted the sources from which all evils actually arise in the commonwealth or from which all blessings possibly could arise.

The intellectual influence of overwhelming importance on More was civic and Christian humanism. Originating in Italy, civic humanism began to spread in sixteenth century England among the educated class. This philosophy set high value on civic life and encouraged commitment to politics. Humanists identified knowledge with social activity and the self with the citizen. Men educated in the new humanist mode entered the political world and many became prominent officials of government. Most were motivated by the desire for higher status or by lust for power, but a few had a strong desire to remedy vices which prevailed in the commonwealth. They believed they could save their society by reviving the best in both classical and Christian antiquity, going back to Plato and the Gospels. They were Christian intellectuals with an infectious belief in the power of good scholarship and proper education. More, exposed to humanistic ideas in Oxford and at Lincoln's Inn and under the strong influence of Colet and Erasmus, deepened the learning about Greco-Roman classics and Christian classics. Fascinated by a new store of classical and Christian ideas, More must have come to believe in the possibility of cultivation of man's mind through them. His letter to Oxford University testifies to his belief. In it More advocated that humanistic education trained the soul in virtue and students could study the laws of human nature and conduct from the classical works of the poets, orators, and historians.¹⁰ Regarding More's role as a political actor the important thing is that he mastered rhetoric to become a man of great eloquence.

These two elements, that is, complete knowledge of the world and consummate learning combined to produce *Utopia*, in which More designed the ideal of a commonwealth, the pattern and perfect model of morality.

In reading *Utopia* the problem we inevitably encounter is who speaks for More himself, Hythlodæus or the fictional More in *Utopia*. Different answers lead to different interpretations of *Utopia*. On the one hand, those who identified Hythlodæus' views with those of More took the radical interpretation viewing Utopian communism as a model for the ideal society; on the other hand those who viewed the fictional More as the true More interpreted *Utopia* as a moderate and realistic program of reform. I cannot go into this problem in more detail here, so I shall only briefly express my view. Hythlodæus and the fictional More each speaks for More himself, but only partially. The views of the two combine to make up More's view in its entirety. It is proper to interpret that the dialogue between Hythlodæus and the fictional More reflects the dialogue in More's mind. The

¹⁰ *The Correspondence of Sir Thomas More*, ed. E.F. Rogers (Princeton, 1973) pp. 115-116.

gap between the radical and moderate position suggested the oscillation of More's thinking during his writing of *Utopia*. But it also reflected his recognition that the problems of the day were too difficult and complicated to be solved by only one measure.

The first book of *Utopia* is characterised by More's insight into the political and social problems of the day. In England the energies of the ruling class, which had once gone into the struggle for power in the civil war, were now turned to strengthening the monarchy and expanding to the continent. More painted a striking portrait of the monarch absorbed in collecting money and obsessed with chivalric glory. In the political condition which did not so frequently demand extreme and violent actions as before, the main concern of the prince was to secure and increase his resources of money. Here appeared various attempts to fill royal coffers, often contrary to the welfare of the people. More's attention concentrated on financial exactions; enforcement of long-forgotten laws to raise money, and the apparent practice of getting a grant from parliament for a war, then calling off the war and keeping the money.¹¹ Another policy which dismayed More was that of adventurous foreign policy. Almost all monarchs prefer, More criticized, to occupy themselves in the pursuits of war rather than in the honourable activities of peace, and they care much more how, by hook or by crook, they may win fresh kingdoms than how they may administer well what they have got.¹²

Not only in the political world, but also in the economy the ambition and greed of the ruling class asserted itself unrestrainedly to cause misery and suffering among the poor. More's own words on this situation are so impressive that they deserve to be quoted at length:

In all those parts of the realm where the finest and therefore costliest wool is produced, there are noblemen, gentlemen, and even some abbots, though otherwise holy men, who are not satisfied with the annual revenues and profits which their predecessors used to derive from their estates. They are not content, by leading an idle and sumptuous life, to do no good to their country; they must also do it positive harm. They leave no ground to be tilled; they enclose every bit of land for pasture; they pull down houses and destroy towns, leaving only the church to pen the sheep in. And, as if enough English land were not wasted on ranges and preserves of game, those good fellows turn all human habitations and all cultivated land into a wilderness.¹³

We find a strong protest to the ruling class with moral passion implicit in these words. More not only directly expressed his passion and accused them of their wicked actions. Rather More chose to bring bare facts vividly before their eyes and imaginations. This is one of More's tactics based on the rule of rhetoric that narratives carry more conviction with the hearers. More described the great harm which the invasive war caused in the country.

In the meantime they were being plundered, their money was being taken out of the country, they were shedding their blood for

¹¹ *Utopia*, ed. Edward Surtz, S.J., and J.H. Hexter (CW, vol. 4, 1965) pp. 90-93.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

the little glory of someone else, peace was no more secure than before, their morals at home were being corrupted by war, the lust for robbery was becoming second nature, criminal recklessness was emboldened by killings in war, and the laws were held in contempt.¹⁴

More impressive is the narration about the whole mischief of the new economic system. Consequently, in order that one insatiable glutton and accursed plague of his native land may join field to field and surround many thousand acres with one fence, tenants are evicted. Some of them, either circumvented by fraud or overwhelmed by violence, are stripped even of their own property, or else, wearied by unjust acts, are driven to sell. By hook or by crook the poor wretches are compelled to leave their homes Away they must go, I say, from the only homes familiar and known to them, and they find no shelter to go to.¹⁵

There are many other expressions testifying to his belief in the validity of this method besides *Utopia*. In *Richard III* or polemics with the Reformers More vividly described the disastrous state caused by the tyrant or the factions of Luther to call readers attention to the serious problems of the day. The first step to reform was to arouse the ruling class to watch closely the mischief spreading in the commonwealth.

In this condition More relied on two devices to cure these ills of Tudor society. The first, consisting of legal arrangement, was symptomatic of More's viewpoint as a moderate reformer. The second device, coping with the ultimate causes of these ills, that is moral vices, is to create virtues to counter them.

After describing the existence of widespread social and economic inequality and of a parasitic gentry which refused its social duties, destroying and disrupting the peace, More proposed a set of prescribed remedies by law aimed at the steady and gradual elimination of evils from the commonwealth. At every scene of debate on the social problems in Book I More repeatedly advised making laws to remedy the evils. For example, More, facing the ruinous plagues, persuaded:

Make laws that the destroyers of farmsteads and country villages should either restore them or hand them over to people who will restore them and who are ready to build. Restrict this right of rich individuals to buy up everything and this license to exercise a kind of monopoly for themselves.¹⁶

Also, in opposition to the strict and hardly just criminal laws More advocated the human and advantageous law aimed at destroying the vices but saving the persons and so treating them that they necessarily become good and, for the rest of their lives, they repair all the damage done before.¹⁷ What should be noted in this respect is that toward the end of Book I More suggested the possibility of reforming the commonwealth by law for the general welfare.

A statute might be made that no person should hold more than

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 90–91.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 66–67.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 68–71.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 78–79.

a certain amount of land and that no person should have a monetary income beyond that permitted by law. Special legislation might be passed to prevent the monarch from being overmighty and the people overweeping; likewise, that public offices should not be solicited with gifts, nor be put up for sale, nor require lavish personal expenditures.¹⁸

Yet More's reliance upon the law was not unconditional. More, constantly engaged in legal business, was clearly aware of the limited efficacy of law and the danger of entrusting the legislation and administration of law to the morally corrupted ruling class. The law could lighten the burden of poverty and misfortune to some extent, but not remove it entirely. Further the law was twisted to cover up and justify the conspiracy of the rich. Immediately after proposing the law for reform, More pointed out the demerits of the law, saying that while you are intent upon the cure of one part, you make worse the malady of the other parts.¹⁹ The ultimate causes that incurred such a perverted situation were, More diagnosed, the three key sins of English society—sloth, greed, and especially pride. "Pride like the serpent from hell entwines itself around the hearts of men and acts like the suckfish in preventing and hindering them from entering on a better way of life."²⁰ The impediment to the reform were the moral vices of people, especially the ruling class. As long as the people remained morally corrupt, legal means alone would be inadequate.

Then More proposed the abolition of private property and communism as the permanent and radical solution. The second book of *Utopia* was dominated by this proposal, while the idea of the reform by law was developed in less than half of the first book. In evaluating the difference between a moderate and radical position, we may interpret that in a badly corrupted condition More proposed communism as a desperate remedy, giving up the legal means. While there is much to be said for this interpretation, I take another approach. It is improbable that the moderate reform by law was proposed only to be refuted. We should rather interpret that the two complemented each other to make up a more perfect and stratified design for reform.

Though aware of the limit and demerit of law, More must have reasoned that the realistic and secure reform was one attained by legal means,²¹ intended to eliminate dangerous inequalities in the commonwealth, to meet the material needs of the people and to protect their possessions, and considered deliberately how to keep the law undefiled by pride, ambition, and greed of the ruling class.

Here appeared More's second device centering around the attempt to create moral virtues through education. Hence the issue came to involve the moral education of the ruling class which, by its very moral quality, would benefit the commonwealth. In this respect More faced up to the problem of his day within the framework of the traditional political thinking which contained a stubbornly moral element. But the important thing is that More neither sought escape to the clear world of moral ideals nor uncritically clung to the classical-mediaeval notion of morality, but he deliberately selected the moral principles appropriate to a new situation out of a body of classical-mediaeval ideas, and designed to correct and culti-

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 104–105.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 106–107.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 242–245.

²¹ In later pages we shall deal with this point in detail.

vate the soul or personality of the monarch and officials through these moral principles.²²

The second book of *Utopia* was constructed with such a design. It consists of the attractive description of Utopian traditions, customs, laws, and ceremonies and religions which were all superior to those of contemporary Europe. Utopia is the best state of commonwealth composed of these ideal institutions. As many critics remarked, the institutions of Utopia, though extremely wise and holy, were not the models after which the institutions of England should be entirely reconstructed. Book II of *Utopia* is not a blueprint for the ideal society. Also, we should not see the work as a delightful trifle that should be valued primarily for its witty satire on Western Europe. It is not institutions themselves, but principles which should be materialised to the institutions and supporting them that matters to More. More preferred to express these principles by making free use of rhetoric to persuade readers more effectively rather than show them directly. Ideal institutions of Utopia attract readers and then make their attention turn to the moral principles contained in them.²³ "The *Utopia* contains principles of such a sort as it is not possible to find in Plato, in Aristotle . . . Its lessons are less philosophical, perhaps, than theirs but more Christian."²⁴ More designed to inspire these principles into the mind of people through fiction smeared with honey.

We find this method operative sharply and distinctly in the description of the economic system in Utopia. The principal foundation of Utopia is communal life and subsistence—without any exchange of money. In Utopia there exists no private property, and the products of each family are conveyed to designated market buildings. Each kind of goods is arranged separately in storehouses. From the latter any head of a household seeks what he and his require and, without money or any kind of compensation, carries off what he seeks.²⁵ Other features of the Utopian economic system may be enumerated as follows; generous public provision for the infirm, meals taken publicly in common refectories, six hours of manual labor a day for all but a handful of magistrates and scholars, and careful measures to prevent anyone from shirking. These ways of economic life build up a more prosperous and just society in Utopia. We can easily find the idea of abolition of private property and communism under the strong influence of Plato in *The Republic* and the early Christian social teaching.

This economic system should be viewed neither as a blueprint for the communist com-

²² We can ascertain More's design by the comments of readers of *Utopia* who understood both More himself and his intention. To More, Jerome Busleyden the councilor to King Charles wrote as follows. "You pitied the pitiable fate of these commonwealths, and you wished to save those which today hold the hegemony from a like vicissitude of fortune by using this perfect commonwealth of yours as a means. The latter has devoted its energies not so much to framing laws as to training the most qualified officials. It has not done so without reason, for otherwise, if we are to believe Plato, even the best laws would all be counted dead. After the likeness of such officials, the pattern of their virtue, the example of their conduct, and the picture of their justice, the whole setup and proper course of a perfect commonwealth should be modeled." *Ibid.*, pp. 34–35.

²³ Budé read *Utopia* as follows: On the one hand, Hythlodæus is the one who has built their city for the Utopians and established customs and laws for them; that is to say, he has borrowed from them and brought home to us the pattern of the good life. On the other hand, beyond question it is More who has adorned the island and its holy institutions by his style and eloquence, who has embellished the very city of the Hagnopolitans according to precept and rule, and who has added all those touches that bring grace and beauty and impressiveness to the magnificent work. *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 252–253.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 136–137.

monwealth, nor as a daydream created by the free flight of imagination. We should notice that More's diagnosis of the current economic conditions of England lay behind the Utopian economic system. In the sixteenth century England was in the process of the economic revolution—the conversion of arable land to pasture because of the profit to be made from sheep-farming. From a wider point of view the agrarian changes of the sixteenth century may be regarded as a long step in the commercialising of English life. The growth of the textile industries was closely connected with the development of pasture farming, and made England more prosperous. But this process caused misery and suffering among the poor, while the rich squandered the profits of their exploitation and monopoly on clothes, servants and luxuries.

More's charge against this state of affairs was that the unscrupulous greed of a few was ruining the very thing by virtue of which England had been once counted fortunate in the extreme.²⁶ Then More's problem becomes how to keep the commonwealth prosperous as well as to remove the whole mischief of this system. As has been already shown, the regulation by law was not enough to cure the ills of the economy, since the law was ineffective against moral vices of the ruling class. It matters to More whether these moral vices—sloth, greed and, especially pride—would be cured or not. If we read carefully we can find Utopian economic principles consisted of the discharge of one's duty by honest work, the love of one's neighbour, and the consideration of the welfare of the whole community. Ultimately these principles were based upon the moral virtues such as industry, fraternity, and justice. More seemed to think that the only and radical solution was to create the virtues able to counter and overcome vices, and he attempted to make these virtues appeal to the people by picturing an ideal and attractive economic system based on them.

More faced the new situation resulting from the release of energies in various human activities. I think More did not deny all the expressions of these energies, which might have had great possibilities for improving the commonwealth. These energies, More must have believed, could be turned to the benefit of the commonwealth, if oriented to established avenues by moral discipline. This found appropriate expression in the hedonistic moral principle which More advocated in *Utopia*.

Though we cannot give an accurate description of how far the people followed released desires and pursued pleasure in this world, repeated sumptuary laws in this century suggested that the individuals' chief concern was to increase his standard of living within his class, whether noble, bourgeois, churchman, or peasant-proprietor. The restoration of order and the revival of economics combined to produce an opportunity for the people to pursue a life more comfortable and more happy. More saw the pursuit of happiness degenerated into ill-timed luxury in England. "Not only the servants of noblemen but the craftsmen and almost the clodhoppers themselves, in fact all classes alike, are given to much ostentatious sumptuousness of dress and to excessive indulgence at table."²⁷ Thus More criticized the misdirected pursuit of happiness, but he seemed to fundamentally accept the inclination to a more pleasant and happy life. Utopian ethic testifies to this supposition. Utopians define either the whole or the chief part of human happiness by pleasure. They are somewhat too inclined to this attitude of mind: that no kind of pleasure is forbidden, provided no harm comes of it. Thus Utopian ethic centers upon the Epicurian definition

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 68–69.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 68–69.

of happiness,²⁸ but More modified it by certain principles taken from religion and the Stoics. Utopian ethic admonishes people to love and venerate the divine majesty, to help all other men as well as to lead a life as free from care and as full of joy as possible.²⁹

What should be noted here is that More did not propose the ascetic ethic of the mediaeval church to solve the problem of morality of the day, but he selected the Epicurian and Stoic principle out of a body of just revived Greco-Roman ideas and adjusted them to the religious principle. More's intention was to recast the notion of morality in accordance with the new situation. Utopian ethic should be regarded as the moral principle on which to reconstruct the mind of the European people in response to the changed situation. More expected these moral principles to inspire the people to remedy their vices.

In the political world of the day there existed a remarkable ambivalence of light and shadow: creative activity was shaded by immoral motives. More, committed to politics, had come to see that while the energies of the monarch could be creative, they could also be both politically and morally destructive. For example the monarch driven by ambition and pride could achieve peace and order, but at the cost of people's prosperity and happiness. More was also sensitive to the moral dilemma of politics: the morally corrupting effects of exercising power³⁰ or the seizure of power by the morally corrupted. The important and undeniable thing to More is that from the monarch, as from a never-failing spring, flows a stream of all that is good or evil over the whole nation, or the prosperity or ruin of the commonwealth depends on the character of officials.

For More like classical and mediaeval writers, the problem was to educate the ruling class to a moral perfection, which would benefit the commonwealth.

Inspired by Greco-Roman political thought, More faced up to the ambivalence of political creativity and destruction especially with the idea of the philosopher-king. The governor in Utopia is chosen from among scholars and educated circumspetively. The education of those who govern is, More thought, decisive for the achievement of the ideal commonwealth. The scholar-governor rules not through power or fear but through education, and hence wins the willing respect of his subjects. Utopia envisions a complete system of education where most people, men and women alike, devote hours, not spent in manual labor, to study throughout their lives. Through education which values morals and virtues as important as the advancement of learning, good citizens are nurtured and a firm foundation for the peace and security of the commonwealth is established. These ideal insitutions are designed to emphasize that moral virtue and philosophical wisdom are a prerequisite for those engaged in politics. More devoted his energies to educating the monarch or officials by holding up before them the ideal commonwealth governed by the philosopher-king.³¹ Confronting urgent and difficult problems the classical theory of politics revived distinctly—as a source of guiding principles and tactics for reform.

More's ambivalent thinking on the politics of the day culminated and gained an ultimate conclusion in the debate immediately concerned with the councilorship in the first book of *Utopia*, which was written later in London. The dialogue between Hythlodæus and

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 160–161, pp. 144–145.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 162–163.

³⁰ More warns in *Epigrams* as follows: Unlimited power has a tendency to weaken good minds, and that even in the case of very gifted men. *Epigrams*, L. p. 18, E. p. 140.

³¹ *Utopia*, pp. 33–35.

the fictional More on the councilorship reflects the oscillation of More's mind. The fictional More, with a profound belief in the creativity of politics, urges that the virtuous philosopher's most effective means for fulfilling his obligation of promoting the common good is to give counsel to the king as source of his country's weal or woe.³² On the other hand Hythlodæus denies the possibility of reform by the philosopher-councilor, showing how his salutary advice would be resisted, ignored, or stigmatized by courtiers.³³ Further he emphasizes the morally corrupting effects of politics, saying that by their evil companionship, either you will be seduced yourself or, keeping your own integrity and innocence, you will be made a screen for the wickedness and folly of others.³⁴

In spite of the many difficulties and dangers the philosopher-councilor faced in the political world, More repeatedly advocated the responsibility of the philosopher to bring about a more just and prosperous commonwealth and its feasibility. More knew well enough that the reform ideals of the philosopher would not be readily realized given the political realities of the day. The last resort that More relied upon is the philosopher's ability to act based on eloquence and his deep knowledge of the world. More explained the tactics of the philosopher-councilor by likening his role to that of an actor.

But there is another philosophy, more practical for stateman, which knows its stage, adapts itself to the play in hand, and performs its role neatly and appropriately. This is the philosophy which you must employ Whatever play is being performed, perform it as best you can, and do not upset it all simply because you think of another which has more interest. So it is in the commonwealth. So it is in the deliberations of monarchs.³⁵

More believed that the office of councilor required a philosopher to grasp both the character of his ruler and the realities of the political situation and to advise his king tactfully what he should do. More urged intellectuals of the day to be prudent political actors who could persuasively play on the stage of politics. Thus the idea of the philosopher-king turned to the more practical idea of participation of intellectuals in politics. More urged not only others, but himself as well. Just after publishing *Utopia*, More entered the king's service as a councilor. Then he held several offices, served as Speaker in the Commons and, finally, became Lord Chancellor. These successes of More in the political world show that he acted tactfully applying practical philosophy. Even though his ultimate design was frustrated, More was one of the most prudent actors on the political stage of the day.

More assumed the plasticity of human mind and the efficacy of the human will despite his dark view on human nature. It was possible, More believed, to cultivate the souls and personalities of the monarch and officials, but only through the creative activity of intellectuals who had both the complete knowledge of the world and the consummate learning. More wrote *Utopia* inspired by the classical belief that politics had to do with man's internal state, especially the promotion of man's interior life and man could develop his moral

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

³³ "If I proposed beneficial measures to some king and tried to uproot from his soul the seeds of evil and corruption, do you not suppose that I should be forthwith banished or treated with ridicule?" *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 102-103.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

potentialities through a life devoted to politics.

As far as shown up to this point, More seemed to trust almost wholeheartedly the idea of reform by means of moral education. But we should not be unduly influenced by the portrait of More as the creator of ideal institutions of Utopia. What characterizes More's political thinking is, to repeat, that the moderate-realistic idea and the radical-ideal idea complemented each other to create a more perfect design for the reform of the commonwealth. To keep the balance between two positions More's view on the law should be considered again.

As his later works shows, More apprehended that if not supported by the law or any other institutions, reform by education alone would be unfruitful or sometimes even dangerous. Nine years after the publication of *Utopia*, More began to have a vehement controversy with Luther. In it More, on the realistic position, criticized Luther's political thinking centering upon the idea of the best magistrate and the law of the gospel. Against Luther's assertion that the law of the gospel alone would ultimately be sufficient and human laws useless if magistrates were good and the faith truly preached,³⁶ More contended that as long as the ownership of property could yet remain, and many wicked men would remain, the law of the gospel would be ineffective.³⁷ Further More urged that without the human law even the rule of the best magistrates would degenerate into tyranny.

If you take away the laws and leave everything free to the magistrates, . . . they will rule by the leading of their own nature and imperiously prosecute anything they please, and then the people will in no way be freer, but, by reason of a condition of servitude, worse, when they will have to obey, not fixed and definite laws, but indefinite whims changing from day to day.³⁸

More, conscious of the demonic aspect of politics, regarded the law as essential to the reform. He expected the law to keep the society stable and prevent the power from being arbitrary and so smooth the ground for reform.

The idea of reform by education and by law were the expression of two different kinds of commitments on More's part. In a morally corrupted age there were two methods of reform which were interdependent; one by the law, which was the way of More as a realist lawyer, the other by education, which was More's way as a pure intellectual. The mind of More, like an oval, has two centers, which made his thinking and activity more flexible and stratified, and more perfect.

³⁶ *Responsio ad Lutherum*, ed. J.M. Headly (CW, vol. 5, 1969) pp. 274-275.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 276-277.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 276-277.