THE BOUNDS OF HUMAN EMPIRE:
Early Modern English Utopias and the Early Capitalist Imagination

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ABSTRACT

Utopia has often been defined as an imaginary, secular, rational ideal that marks a break with older, mythic, pre-political forms of social ideality such as paradise, Cokaygne, arcadia, or the Golden Age. The utopian order—whether understood as an expression or critique of emergent capitalist ideology—is conceived as the seed-form of a future commonwealth in which natural scarcity and social conflict are transcended through the rationalization of the production process or the extension of human control over nature. This dissertation examines the social and historical context for the emergence of early modern utopian literature as a genre; it also challenges the dominant narrative of rationalization and disenchantment by showing how paradise and utopia are not discrete stages in the development of an idea but form a structural opposition through which we in the present define our own modernity. This dissertation is divided into three chapters, each exploring a different mode or subtype of utopia—social, scientific, and paradisial. Through a close reading of two influential works of early modern utopian literature—Thomas More’s Utopia and Francis Bacon’s New Atlantis—alongside John Milton’s Paradise Lost, I argue that early modern utopian literature provides an image of the
future constructed out of disparate pre-modern cultural forms and modes of production that are brought into contact and projected into a fictional space opened up or made imaginable by the discovery of the New World. Europe’s mythic prehistory is made coincident with its early capitalist present; an original, humanized nature or an original form of communal property is juxtaposed with and partially integrated into a rationalized system of labour discipline and knowledge production, animated by an early capitalist ethic of improvement.
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Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light. To gain such perspectives without velleity or violence, entirely from felt contact with objects—this alone is the task of thought. It is the simplest of all things, because the situation calls imperatively for such knowledge, indeed because consummate negativity, once squarely faced, delineates the mirror-image of its opposite. But it is also the utterly impossible thing, because it presupposes a standpoint removed, even though by a hair’s breadth, from the scope of existence, whereas we well know that any possible knowledge must not only be first wrested from what is, if it shall hold good, but is also marked, for this very reason, by the same distortion and indigence which it seeks to escape.

—T.W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, visions of “other worlds” or alternative modes of social and economic life have largely been confined to the domain of literary fiction, detached from questions of political organization or historical necessity. The idea of communism as a future mode of production and an organizing principle inspiring practical political activity seems, to many, to be either an anachronism or a utopian dream far removed from the exigencies of everyday life. Many writers and theorists have nevertheless returned to utopia as a means of understanding this historical impasse and the gap between the “really existing socialism” of the twentieth century and its unrealized communist horizon. With traditional parties and social movements in disarray, and in the absence of new forms of political organization, utopian speculation has flourished alongside dystopian and apocalyptic

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fantasies of civilizational collapse. Fredric Jameson, parodying Margaret Thatcher, even argues that, for the left, there is now “no alternative to Utopia.”

This utopian turn at the beginning of the twenty-first century may, of course, be dismissed as a symptom of political defeat and marginalization—a turn inwards following the failure of socialism as a practical political project. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, alternatives to liberal capitalism appear illusory or impossible, even to many socialists, and are treated as objects of aesthetic reflection or philosophical speculation. From this perspective, Francis Fukuyama’s end-of-history thesis could be understood as the abstraction of the utopian impulse from its confused and dangerous realization in political praxis. Alternatively though, the utopian turn may be understood as an immanent critique of this historical closure, providing an image of a radically different social order at a time when there is as yet no practical means of realizing it, when, as Jameson argues, “historic alternatives to capitalism have been proven unviable and impossible, and … no other socio-economic system is conceivable, let alone practically available.” From this perspective, the utopian turn represents an impasse or a failure, but one that might help us grasp the limits of our own political imagination. Utopia as a genre is born out of such an impasse; it appears when new social property relations have formed, but a


3 Jameson xii.
new theoretical framework and revolutionary subject conscious of itself as such has yet to appear. The periodic reemergence of utopianism might be understood, then, as the aesthetic or political expression of a class “without a project or nation.”¹⁴ Thomas More’s *Utopia* was written at such a moment, and our own time might well be a similar conjuncture.

The early modern utopias that are the subject of this study are important, not so much for their prescience or utility, but for what they tell us about early capitalist ideology in its infancy, when agrarian capitalism was just emerging and mature capitalist class relations had not yet fully developed. Early modern utopian literature provides a *negative image* of new social relations that had come into existence but had yet to be conceptualized. When Thomas More imagines a social order that rationalizes and universalizes the principle of the commons, when Francis Bacon imagines an ideal college that coordinates economic activity and supplants the organs of the state, when John Milton imagines an Edenic condition in which physical labour is both meaningful and necessary, they formulate alternatives to an emerging social and economic order that can only appear to them as political disorder or moral decay. Utopian literature represents the imagined transcendence of capitalism before the idea could be conceptualized, and so bears traces not only of *emergent*, but also *dominant* and *residual* cultural formations.⁵ In fact, the early modern utopias that are the subject of this dissertation do not exactly provide an image of a coherent, imagined future social totality so much as a dizzying, kaleidoscopic pattern of cultural

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¹⁴ Jameson 29. The definition of utopian thought as the ideological expression of a class without a project or nation is an idea Jameson borrows from Christopher Kendrick’s work on Thomas More: “More’s *Utopia* and Uneven Development,” *Boundary Two* 13.2/3 (Winter-Spring 1985) 245-6.

⁵ I use the terms “dominant,” “residual,” and “emergent” cultural forms as formulated by Raymond Williams in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford UP, 1977) 121-7.
elements from disparate modes of production, past and present. Utopia is born as an expressive form of the early capitalist imagination, reaching beyond itself while still unconscious of itself as such.

The title of this dissertation—“The Bounds of Human Empire”—is taken from Francis Bacon’s unfinished work of utopian fiction, the New Atlantis. Describing the purpose of the scientific institution at the heart of the New Atlantis, Bacon’s narrator tells us: “the End of our Foundation is the knowledge of the Causes, and secret motions of things; and the enlarging of the bounds of Human Empire, to the effecting of all things possible.” For Bacon, utopia expands the realm of the possible. The idea of “human empire” is presented here in epistemically terms, as a scientific project that seeks to extend human dominion over nature through the advancement of learning and the technical mastery of the causes and “secret motions” of things. In Bacon’s utopia, social antagonisms between human beings are to be transcended through the foundation of a collaborative scientific institution that seeks to re-establish humanity’s original dominion over the natural world. While the concept refers specifically to the utopian end of Bacon’s natural philosophy, the idea of utopia as the realization of the grant of dominion in Genesis—human mastery transcending and neutralizing all social antagonisms—reflects a contradiction at the heart of other early modern utopias. Utopia is the neutralization or imaginative suspension of natural scarcity and social conflict through the elaboration of a more perfect institution for the extension of knowledge and power. As an anticipatory image of a future human empire, utopian literature provides a vision of universal harmony and perpetual peace, but it also achieves this

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6 The metaphor of the “kaleidoscope” as a figure for the overlapping modes of production in More’s Utopia is used by both Jameson and Kendrick. See Kendrick, “More’s Utopia and Uneven Development,” op. cit. 245, and Jameson, “Morus: the Generic Window,” in Archaeologies, op. cit. 27-28.

harmony through the displacement of the object of domination. The slaves in *Utopia*, the Americans in the *New Atlantis*, the fallen angels in *Paradise Lost* are the displaced non-human objects of utopian domination that cannot be fully assimilated or expelled.

The early modern utopian mode can be understood, I argue, as a symbolic resolution of a real contradiction—the attempt to solve on a formal or aesthetic level an acute form of social displacement. The pun in More’s title—good place / no place—is often understood to be a satirical disavowal of the possibility of utopia, but while More’s *Utopia* is a fictional, satirical, and imaginary *mundus inversus*, it is also presented as an inversion of a world already turned upside down. As Darko Suvin argues, utopia “takes up and refunctions the ancient *topos* of *mundus inversus*: utopia is a formal inversion of significant and salient aspects of the author’s world which has as its purpose or *telos* the recognition that the author (and reader) truly live in an axiologically inverted world.”

In More’s *Utopia*, the ideal is not presented in opposition to reality; rather, existing social conditions appear so distorted and disorienting that they verge on the unreal. More’s England is a land turned upside down, a place where sheep devour men and a new wilderness spreads over fields and towns. *Utopia* in this context serves as an imaginary resolution of a process of social displacement that has already created “blank” social-geographical spaces, both on the margins of the known world and at the centres of European empire. It may be hypothesized that the emergence of utopia as a genre of fiction in the early modern period was made possible by the discovery of the Americas, which appeared to

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9 “Utopia” can be read as a pun on *eu-topia*, “good place,” and *ou-topia*, “no place.”

Europeans as a *terra nullius* and a world set apart from the larger world of Europe, Asia, and Africa, belonging to a distant, even antediluvian past. The revelation of another world within this one—a world suspended at the moment of the fall—inspires the formulation of other possible worlds that are truly alien but not utterly noumenal. The inclusion of the imaginary voyage as a frame story in most early modern utopias is consistent with this hypothesis. Classical ideal commonwealths—such as Plato’s *Republic* or Plutarch’s Sparta—did not generally make use of this framing device. Early modern utopias are imagined to be both of the world and outside it, embodying both an inner-worldly and other-worldly ideal.

The concept of utopia, then, is a formal or symbolic resolution of a process of social displacement, and following James Holstun, I argue this displacement is a consequence of two world-historical events: first there is the external displacement of people precipitated by the European encounter with the New World, the discovery of a new horizon of the unknown, and the conquest, colonization, and enslavement of nations outside European civilization and Christian community; second, there is the internal displacement of people brought about by the enclosure of the commons, the erosion of custom, the commodification of land and labour, and the emergence of agrarian capitalism.¹¹ Early modern English utopian discourse is at once an

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imitation, idealization, critique, and imaginary escape from these two forms of social displacement. Often these utopias provide an explicit critique of enclosure, colonialism, or empire, but since they are formed before the emergence of a coherent concept of political economy—much less capitalism—their authors are unable to see the ways in which their remedies for the process of dislocation and social decay brought about by the emergence of capitalist social relations are themselves bound up within the logic of this very dislocating power.¹² Early modern utopian literature provides us with an image of an ideal society formed through a more rational organization of labour, systematic improvements to the forces of production, the control of waste, excess and scarcity, and the extension and elaboration of the disciplinary functions of the state. These utopias are, in part, unconscious expressions of early capitalist ideology. Even when their explicit aim is to provide a critique of this process of dislocation, the utopian remedies are often premised upon the dislocation itself and seek to use it as a means of creating a better world. Utopia, as a concept combining and sublating various ancient, modern, and medieval models of social ideality, is brought about by the desire to harness and fully realize this dislocating power.

This dissertation builds on the recent work of a number of scholars of early modern English utopian literature: Amy Boesky’s work on utopian literature and the emergence of new disciplinary institutions and practices; Marina Leslie’s analysis of renaissance utopias and the formation of a new historical subject or new historiographical forms; James Holstun’s study of

¹² Early modern economists developed theories and models for understanding the function of money, trade, prices, and markets, but the concept of “capitalism” as a system or a mode of production had yet to emerge. Jean Bodin developed the quantity theory of money, Thomas Mun formulated the mercantilist doctrine of a positive balance of trade, and Josiah Child outlined some of the principles of free trade, but none of them developed the theoretical basis for capitalist production and exchange as a function of rational self-interest, or saw the market as an ideally autonomous, self-regulating mechanism. See Jean Bodin, Response to the Paradoxes of Malestroït (1568), H. Tudor & R.W. Dyson, eds. (Bristol: Thoemmes, 1997), Thomas Mun, England’s Treasure by Forraign Trade (1628) (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), Josiah Child, “Brief Observations Concerning Trade and Interest of Money” (1668), in Selected Works 1668-97 (Farnborough: Gregg, 1968).
puritan utopias and the rationalization of the millennium; Christopher Kendrick’s recent work on utopian literature and the carnivalesque; Richard Halpern’s analysis of the relationship between utopian discourse and primitive accumulation; Jeffrey Knapp’s study of utopian thought and early English colonialism; and J.C. Davis’ work on the relationship between utopian literature and other forms of early modern ideal society writing. All of these writers are interested in the social context of early modern utopian literature, but they frame the relationship between text and context using a wide variety of theoretical approaches—Foucauldian discourse analysis, Weberian sociology, the New Historicism, Marxism, and feminism, to name the main currents.

This dissertation examines the relationship between social and formal displacement in early modern utopian discourse through a Marxist lens. I am interested in the moments in which the exoteric utopian idea reveals, through formal contradiction, narrative rupture or incompletion, the fragments of another, disavowed social ideality. I want to understand how the utopist creates the blank space on which to write the laws of an imaginary society. “Human empire” is the term I use to describe what I see as the end or telos of this process of displacement—the imagined future transformation of the fictional utopian enclave into a universal empire that neutralizes particular social antagonisms. But the utopian idea always leaves traces of the antagonism, incorporated and transfigured by the new utopian order. The utopian core of these texts is this fragment of the old social antagonism, not the catalogue of laws and customs that is supposed to make it impossible.

To understand utopia as a process of dis-placement rather than a coherent, self-consciously fictional “no-place” requires a critical reappraisal of the terms by which we define the object of study. Studies of utopian literature have generally attempted to define the genre by contrasting the idea of utopia with earlier myths, fantasies, and wish-images that are part of its pre-history. Writers as diverse as Glenn Negley, J. Max Patrick, Joyce Hertzler, A.L. Morton, Robert C. Elliot, Harry Levin, and Frank and Fritzie Manuel have all defined utopia in opposition to paradise, arcadia, or Cokaygne, which are seen as its unconscious or mythic prefigurations. “Paradise” becomes the opposed term against which utopia is defined. While paradise is understood to be a natural or supernatural ideal—the perfect garden—utopia is conceived as a human or social ideal: the perfect polis. Paradise belongs to the mythic past, shaped by a divine creator, and remembered as a real point of origin. Utopia, by contrast, looks forward to a possible future, shaped by a human author, who presents it as a work of fiction. The idea of utopia as the seed-form of a new “human empire,” however, allows for a different perspective on the relationship between utopia and paradise, allowing us to see them as contemporary and mutually constitutive ideas. The utopian end of Bacon’s natural philosophy, after all, is nothing less than the restoration of Adam’s original knowledge of and dominion over nature—the restoration of a humanized, paradisial nature through the reformation of natural science. While some men “endeavour to establish and extend the power of their country and its dominion among men,” Bacon writes, the highest and noblest ambition is for “a man to endeavour to establish and extend the power and dominion of the human race itself over the

universe.” For medieval exegetes, Adam’s original knowledge of the natural world was lost with the fall, but for Bacon, this lost knowledge is something that can be restored, or at least repaired:

For creation was not by the curse made altogether and for ever rebel, but in virtue of that charter ‘In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,’ it is now by various labours … at length and in some measure subdued to the supplying of man with bread; that is to the uses of human life.

The story of the fall, the loss of paradise, and the memory of an original, humanized nature is at the heart of Bacon’s utopian thought, but many other early modern writers use the idea of an original earthly paradise to imagine possibilities that lie dormant in the present. Thomas More uses the metaphor of sheep devouring men to depict greedy, rapacious landlords in his *Utopia*—an ironic inversion of Isaiah’s prophesy in which the sheep lies down with the wolf and nature returns to a peaceful, Edenic, humanized condition. More’s description of his ideal commonwealth also relies heavily on allusions to the classical Golden Age of communal ownership and natural abundance in which scarcity and exploitation are unknown. Some combination of the paradisial and utopian modes can be found too in the writings of William Shakespeare, Henry Neville, Gerrard Winstanley, and John Milton, to name just a few.

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16 Ibid. 1.365; 4.248.


How, then, do we define these terms and how do we understand the relationship between them? Following J.C. Davis, I take a structural, synchronic approach to the definition of utopia and argue that the disparate manifestations of what Davis calls “ideal society writing” in the early modern period share a common preoccupation with the problem of scarcity.\(^\text{19}\) Utopia, paradise, Cokaygne, and the millennium each provide different ways of imaginatively resolving the gap between collective human desires and the means of satisfying them. Davis claims that utopia is one subtype of the ideal society, distinguished from other forms of social ideality because it provides a more rational solution to the problem of scarcity. “The utopian is more ‘realistic’ or tough-minded,” Davis writes, “in that he accepts the basic problem as it is: limited satisfactions exposed to unlimited wants. He seeks a solution not by wishing the problem away nor by tampering with the equation. He does not assume drastic changes in nature or man.”\(^\text{20}\) Utopia, in other words, provides a collective solution to the gap between desires and satisfactions without idealizing either nature or humanity—without positing either supernatural abundance or superhuman discipline. Davis defines utopia in this way in order to clearly distinguish it from arcadia and other forms of ideal society writing, but I argue that in the early modern period, images of social ideality which would normally appear to violate the law of scarcity—paradise, Cokaygne, arcadia, the Golden Age—also begin to appear “utopian” in Davis’ sense, not just because they too serve as wish-images for possibilities latent in the present, but because the very superabundance of Eden and humanity’s freedom from toil in the original state becomes an ethical problem that requires a solution in the form of a more rational vision of the organization.

\(^{19}\) J.C. Davis, *Utopia and the Ideal Society*, op. cit. 18-20.

\(^{20}\) Davis 37.
of labour and knowledge in the unfallen state. This is most evident in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, where Adam and Eve must find ways of rationally coordinating satisfactions and desires because the luxurious growth and abundance of Edenic nature threatens the stability of that state. One might argue that utopian literature “solves” the equation of desires and satisfactions either through a radical transformation of social relations of production (More’s *Utopia*), or through a radical transformation of knowledge and the technical forces of production (Bacon’s *New Atlantis*). But in *Paradise Lost* what we find is not exactly an arcadia in which the tension between need and desire is magically resolved. Rather, we see something like a new human empire emerging from an ideal state of nature in which work and play, production and creation, are not yet entirely distinct. Many works of utopian literature look back to this moment of humanized nature in order to imagine a new social order. Not content with creating an alternative, fictional mode of production, they also imagine the resolution of the problem of scarcity as a process that transfigures the act of production itself, through the sublation of work and play. Paradise and utopia, then, are not exactly stages in the development of an idea; they form an opposition through which we in the present define our own modernity.

This dissertation is divided into three chapters. Each closely examines a particular text that stands in for a different mode of early modern utopian discourse—what I am calling “social utopias,” “scientific utopias,” and “paradisial utopias.” The first chapter examines Thomas More’s *Utopia*—the text from which we receive the word or concept through which various strands of utopian discourse are threaded into a recognizable, if unstable, genre. In this chapter, I begin by considering the relationship between the real and the fantastic in More’s text. In *Utopia*, I argue, it is England that appears to be the strange place, the fantastic place, the product of literary artifice—a place where sheep devour men and the state itself appears to be nothing more
than a mad work of theatrical artifice. It is the enclosure of the commons that creates this dislocating effect, dissolving the old social and economic order and creating, in Hythloday’s eyes, a world turned upside down. The description of the commonwealth of Utopia in Book 2 is shaped by More’s anxiety concerning the emergence of a volatile mass of people newly dislocated by the enclosure of the commons. The utopian “no-place,” situated somewhere beyond the New World, provides an image and an imaginary resolution of this dislocation. Utopia institutionalizes communal property, extending and universalizing the principle of the commons, but it also harnesses the capitalist ethic of improvement, utterly transforming and rationalizing labour and the customs and rights within which the commons is embedded. Utopia, then, is neither nostalgia for medieval corporatism nor anticipation of bourgeois liberty, but a formal and highly ironic resolution of contradictions specific to the very early phases of agrarian capitalism. Utopia reforms the dislocated masses, transforming them from a masterless and unassimilated mob into the foundation of the commonwealth. The very thing that was most threatening—the mass of people released from customary bonds of mutual obligation—makes the utopian reinscription of law possible. The utopian solution to this process of dislocation is not the simple negation of early capitalist social relations, however, but rather their integration and sublation within a new mode of production. In the process of resolving or overcoming the dislocating effects of capitalism, Utopia actually preserves or reproduces its key elements. The Utopians’ anxious hoarding and debasement of gold and the highly idealized Utopian ethic of utility are, in effect, unconscious forms of early capitalist ideology.

Chapter 2 begins with an examination of the relationship between political dominion and “Adamic dominion” in Francis Bacon’s scientific and political works. The figure of the New World appears in the *Novum Organum* and a number of Bacon’s essays, dialogues, letters and
political tracts as a metonym for nature in general. Just as new inventions such as artillery and the compass had opened previously unknown regions of the material globe to exploration and conquest, so too the invention of a new method, a new organon for the study of the hidden motions of nature, could, according to Bacon, open up new realms of the \textit{globus intellectualis} to exploration and conquest and greatly expand the bounds of “human empire.” While a number of critics have argued that Bacon’s concept of human empire is radically distinct from political empire, I argue that human and political empire are intimately bound up with one another in Bacon’s scientific and political work. While these critics point to the autarky of the \textit{New Atlantis} and its lack of colonies as evidence that Bacon’s scientific ideal is anti-imperialist in character, I examine the founding myth of Bacon’s utopia, its war with the ancient Atlantis, in order to show how the destruction of the Amerindian empires in the early modern period figures as the ground or precondition for Bacon’s empire of man. Through an analysis of the implicit class structure of Salomon’s House—the core institution of Bacon’s utopia—I reveal the contradictions that emerge from Bacon’s appropriation of the so-called “maker’s knowledge tradition.” While Bacon’s epistemology implies the unity of maker and knower, a close reading of his scientific and utopian works suggest that the maker and knower are embodied as distinct subjects. In the end, the \textit{New Atlantis} must contain or repress the political as a determinant of the utopian form because the transformation of productive forces described in the text implies a threat to traditional feudal notions of sovereign power.

Chapter 3 turns to an analysis of what I call “paradisial utopia” and John Milton’s \textit{Paradise Lost}. The first part of Chapter 3 sets out to frame the relationship between the concept of paradise and the concept of utopia in order to make a case for reading \textit{Paradise Lost} alongside works of utopian literature. I explain why \textit{Paradise Lost} is excluded from
most discussions of the genre and examine the rationale various writers have used to define utopia and paradise in opposition to one another or as generic subspecies that arise from a developmental process through which a modern, rational utopia emerges from a prehistoric, mythological paradise. Just as early modern utopian literature draws on the imagery and topoi of classical and biblical origin myths, though, paradise becomes rationalized and future-oriented in the early modern period. In *Paradise Lost*, for example, pre-fallen labour is given a rational basis. Labour is not just an arbitrary imposition placed upon Adam and Eve to ensure they are not idle; Adam and Eve’s labour is made necessary in Milton’s poem. The very superabundance that magically removes the threat of scarcity also becomes, in *Paradise Lost*, an imperative to labour, and this paradox is key to understanding the utopian impulse in the text. Through an analysis of the structure of unfallen nature and unfallen labour, I make the argument that the separation scene in Book 9 of *Paradise Lost* dramatizes a conflict between the “Protestant ethic” and its own capitalist “spirit.” Labour mediates the relationship between the structure of nature and social hierarchy in Milton’s epic. The vitalist materialism of *Paradise Lost* gives Edenic nature a capacity for self-movement and a tendency towards both spontaneous generation and chaotic disaggregation, and the very excess of nature introduces the problem which it was supposed to suspend or magically resolve—the problem of how to balance desire and the satisfaction of desire. If paradise and utopia represent opposed conceptions of nature and desire or opposed solutions to the problem of scarcity, in Milton’s poem the opposition is contained within paradise itself.

We might say that the formal or imaginary resolution represented by utopian literature is achieved through the discovery or revelation of a place swept clean of history. Utopia is
cosmopoiesis, the creation of imaginary worlds *ex nihilo* on the outer limits of civil society—at its origin, its *telos*, and on what are imagined to be the margins of the world.22 In the early modern period, this discourse, I believe, contributed to the development of both the concept of a “state of nature” in its Hobbesian and Lockian manifestations, as well as later progressivist and social evolutionist theories of historical development. But early modern utopias were not in themselves “progressivist,” or at any rate, the secular, this-worldly, rationalizing, and future-oriented ideal was still embedded in millenarian, other-worldly, carnivalizing, and “backwards” forms of thought, and indeed we cannot understand the emergence of the progressivist doctrine without viewing it as part of an unresolved dialectic with these forces.

21 Marina Leslie, however, provides a useful counter argument to the claim that renaissance utopias are therefore intrinsically ahistorical or lack an implicit concept of history. See Leslie, *Renaissance Utopias and the Problem of History*, op. cit.

22 The concept of *cosmopoiesis* is formulated by Giuseppe Mazzotta in *Cosmopoiesis: The Renaissance Experiment* (U of Toronto Press, 2001). For Mazzotta, *cosmopoiesis*, or “world-making,” includes but is not limited to utopian thought.
CHAPTER I

Gold Slave Chains: Thomas More And Social Utopia

1. The World Turned Upside Down

In the spring of 1503, Amerigo Vespucci set sail from Lisbon travelling with a fleet of six ships bound for the New World. Three months into the journey, the flagship struck a rock off the coast of a lonely, uninhabited island a thousand miles west of Sierra Leone, and “through the arrogance and folly of our admiral,” Vespucci writes, the other ships were separated from each other and lost their way on the vast expanse of the South Atlantic Ocean. Vespucci and his remaining companions reached the southern coast of Brazil in the fall of the year, and after they “pacified all the land’s people,” they left twenty-four men behind with weapons and provisions for a few months and set sail for home.¹ There is no record of what happened to these twenty-four men, but in his *Utopia*, Thomas More claims to have met one of them. Raphael Hythloday—sailor, scholar, and philosopher—was, More tells us, one of the men Vespucci left behind. In his conversation with More, Hythloday continues the story where Vespucci left off, travelling west from South America through the South Pacific, eventually circumnavigating the globe before returning home to Portugal. *Utopia* is, among other things, a travelogue. Hythloday’s journey provides the frame story for More’s description of his imaginary ideal commonwealth, and it is the idea of the “New World” that allows More to imagine a place that is both of the world and outside it. Part of what makes *Utopia* new and fascinating is More’s ability to situate his “no place” *within* the world through elaborate framing devices that mediate the relationship between the imaginary and the real. *Utopia* is framed by an imaginary voyage that is an extension of real voyage. But the

first story Hythloday tells us is not a story about Utopia or the peculiar customs of the peoples inhabiting the New World. He tells a story instead about a journey he once made to England and the strange customs and practices of the English gentry.

Hythloday’s description of England is of a land turned upside-down, a land in which a growing wilderness swallows town and countryside, where churches are converted to sheep pens and sheep devour men. “Your sheep,” he says, “that commonly are so meek and eat so little, now, as I hear, have become so greedy and fierce that they devour human beings themselves.” These sheep “devastate and depopulate fields, houses and towns,” and their owners—noblemen, gentlemen and even some abbots—leave no land free for the plough: they enclose every acre for pasture; they destroy houses and abolish towns, keeping the churches—but only for sheep-barns. And as if enough of your land were not already wasted on game-preserves and forests for hunting wild animals, these worthy men turn all human habitations and cultivated fields back to wilderness (63).^2

This mundus inversus, this fantastic and satirical image of social disorder and decay, is described as something “special to you Englishmen,” something peculiar and unique to More’s own country. But at the beginning of Book 1, More dismisses stories of “wonders” and “monstrosities” (monstra) as commonplace or ordinary. When More and his friend Peter Giles press Hythloday for details about the many foreign lands he visited in his travels, More says, “we made no inquiries … about monsters, for nothing is less new or strange than they are. There is no place where you will not find Scyllas, ravenous Celaenos, man-eating Laestrygonians and that sort of monstrosity” (49). The man-eating sheep of England seem to be one of these commonplace monsters. More says you can find these monsters everywhere,

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or rather, there is *nowhere you cannot find them*—*nusquam fere non invenias*. This kind of ironic double-negation, or litotes, is a frequently recurring rhetorical device in *Utopia* and reflects on the syntactical level an important structural feature of the text—its tendency to represent its subject by means of negation.³ Monsters are not found *everywhere*, rather there is no place they cannot be found. The negation of “no place”—*nusquam*—is the domain of monsters. It is not *Utopia* that harbours monsters, but reality itself. More’s irony distances and transforms the familiar, the everyday, the ordinary into the monstrous, the strange and uncanny so that the inner truth of familiar customs and institutions might become visible. It has often been noted that Utopia appears to mirror England in a number of ways. The geography of the island, the layout of its capital city and the customs and institutions of its people simultaneously reflect English geography, English customs and institutions, and invert them. But it should be stressed that before More begins to describe Utopia in any way, England itself is presented as a *mundus inversus*, a place of monsters, a fantastic inversion of the natural order of things. If Utopia mirrors England, it is an England that has already passed through the looking glass.

In order to understand the relationship between the real and the imaginary in More’s *Utopia* it is necessary to examine the relationship between the two books that make up the text. *Utopia* is a frame tale or a story within a story. More’s ideal commonwealth is not simply described; it is enclosed within an *argument*. It is presented as the solution to an otherwise irresolvable problem in the real world. So what question or problem is Utopia

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³ Elizabeth McCutcheon was the first to draw attention to the significance of More’s use of litotes, although she does not focus on this particular instance. McCutcheon is interested in More’s use of this rhetorical technique because of the way it reveals the irony and ambiguity of the text. “We’re never quite sure where we stand in the *Utopia*,” she writes: “On the smallest syntactical level ambiguity does exist of a sort which can never be altogether resolved, and probably was not meant to be.” See McCutcheon, “Denying the Contrary: More’s Use of Litotes in *Utopia*,” in *Essential Articles for the Study of Thomas More*, ed. R. Sylvester & G. Marc’hadour (Hamden: Archon, 1977) 272.
supposed to answer? The dialogue between Thomas More, Peter Giles and Raphael Hythloday in Book 1 takes numerous turns and detours, but there are, I argue, three major debates that structure the dialogue: the “debate on counsel;” the “debate on theft;” and the “debate on property.” These debates are nested inside each other and frame other stories or dialogues—the debate on theft is nested within the debate on counsel, and the description of Utopia (which constitutes an entire book in itself) is placed within the frame of the debate on property. The debates themselves are framed by More’s account of his (real) journey to Bruges and Antwerp and his encounter with (the fictitious) Hythloday. Letters between More and his circle of friends on the subject of Utopia—always written with the pretence of its actual existence—along with a map of the country and a description of the Utopian alphabet form the paratextual frame that gives Utopia its playful air of realism. We may visualize the structure of the work and its various frames in the following schema:

Letters, map, alphabet
   More’s journey (Book 1)
      Hythloday’s journey
      Debate on counsel
         Debate on theft
            Description of England
      Debate on property
         Description of Utopia (Book 2)⁴
      Hythloday’s peroration
   More’s response
   Letters and poems

From this brief outline we can see the delays and circumlocutions, the movement in and out of frame stories and dialogues which prepare the ground for what is usually considered the core of Utopia—Hythloday’s description of the island republic and its inhabitants, customs

⁴ See page 71 for a more detailed outline of Book 2.
and institutions. These frame stories are quite elaborate, accounting for (if we include the letters and other prefatory matter) roughly 2/5 of the entire text. Most of this framing apparatus seems to have been written after Book 2. J.H. Hexter, in his insightful and groundbreaking study, uncovers what he calls the central “seam” in the text—a rough patch marking two distinct moments of composition. Hexter traces this seam in certain inconsistencies in the early part of Book 1 as Hythloday first describes his journey under the equator, past desolate, wild regions, where the distinction between the human and the animal breaks down, to the antipodes where Utopia and other civilized nations are imagined to be. More remarks that it would take too long to repeat all the things that Hythloday had observed in these places, nor, he says, would it serve his purpose:

Perhaps on another occasion we shall tell more about these things, especially those that it would be useful not to be ignorant of—above all, the wise provisions that he observed among the civilized nations. ... While he told us of many ill-considered usages in these new-found nations, he also described quite a few other customs from which our own cities, nations, races and kingdoms might take lessons in order to correct their errors. These I shall discuss in another place, as I said. Now I intend to relate only what he told us about the customs and institutions of the Utopians, but first recounting the conversation that drew him into speaking of that commonwealth. (49-51)

Contrary to More’s claim, however, the customs of these other imaginary nations are described in great detail in the dialogues that follow. Everything from the Polylerites’ provisions for the punishment of thieves to the Achorian’s policies governing subject nations and the Macarians’ financial laws and regulations are used at some point or other to buttress Hythloday’s arguments. The “now” in the last sentence is deferred considerably by the ensuing conversation. The large gap between More’s introduction of the story and the actual

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5 J.H. Hexter, *More’s Utopia: The Biography of an Idea* (Princeton UP, 1952) 21. Book 2, the description of the republic of Utopia, seems to have been written over a relatively short period of time while More was visiting Giles in the Netherlands following his diplomatic mission; most of Book 1 appears to have been written slowly, in between tasks, as More returned to his duties in England.
description of Utopia suggests, to Hexter, the possibility of a break in the text, with the second clause of the last sentence quoted above forming a seam separating two distinct drafts or moments of composition.6

The seam that divides the two books is revealing because it suggests two separate sets of intentions. Book 2 is wide-ranging and somewhat rambling in its description of various Utopian customs and institutions—everything from the Utopians’ clothing and dining to their natural and moral philosophies and religions is described. In the first draft of his Utopia, Hexter argues, More simply presents his ideal commonwealth within the frame of a brief travel narrative without explaining in detail how his Utopia resolves problems or contradictions in the real world. But in his later draft he reframes his description of Utopia as a solution to a particular problem or complex of interrelated problems that otherwise find no resolution in existing institutions. The focus in Book 1 is on crime and punishment, just counsel and the corruption of court politics, private property and the enclosure of the commons. Each of these debates tells us something about More’s later intentions and the questions that Utopia is supposed to answer.7 But the frame story connecting the imaginary ideal society of Utopia to the problems and limitations encountered in the real world of Tudor England does not just reveal the central contradictions that Utopia is supposed to resolve; the framing dialogue also complicates the relationship between the real and the imaginary, even as it bridges the gap between them.


The last debate in Book 1, the debate that connects the two books and frames Hythloday’s description of Utopia, is the debate on property. This debate marks the transition from Book 1 to Book 2, the movement from reality to fantasy, from Europe to Utopia. The debate on property subordinates or folds into itself the previous debates. The impasses reached in the previous debates on theft and counsel are the result, Hythloday says, of our inability to see beyond the surface of things, our inability to see the root of all these problems in the institution of private property. Private property, he says, is the underlying cause of criminality and the original form of theft; private property dissolves the commonwealth into competing private interests, leading to the spread of a kind of madness or sickness through the shattered body politic. If we ask ourselves again, what is the question to which Utopia is the answer, it would most obviously be the legitimacy or illegitimacy of private property and the possibility or impossibility of communal property. Numerous political historians and literary theorists have focused on the question of the legitimacy of private property as the central idea of Utopia, this, irrespective of whether Utopia itself is understood as a proposal, a critique of existing social conditions, an ideal type, a theoretical model, or an ironic, playful joke. It is certainly true that More’s (or Hythloday’s) communism is one of the most

8 Hythloday frequently uses the metaphor of root causes, uprooting, deracination, going to the root of the matter, etc. “Subferre, evellere, radicibus extirpare, subferre again, rescindere, radicatus evellere—the vernacular equivalents of such terms,” J.H. Hexter notes, “are the standard coins of intellectual commerce with the modern radical.” See Hexter, “Utopia and its Historical Milieu,” in Works, vol. 4, op. cit., cxxi.

9 That is, even if Utopian communism and Utopian institutions are thought to be placed in a satirical or critical light, even if the meaning of social-property relations is subordinated to the moral economy of Utopian institutions, the problem of how to interpret the radical critique of property presented in Utopia remains a central concern. Although their methodologies, conclusions and ideological presuppositions differ widely, a tradition of taking Hythloday’s critique of private property and his defence of utopian communism seriously can be traced through Karl Kautsky’s, Thomas More and His Utopia, trans. H.J. Stenning (New York: Russell & Russell, 1959), Russell Ames’, Citizen More and His Utopia (Princeton UP, 1949), and J.H. Hexter’s, More’s Utopia: The Biography of an Idea (Princeton UP, 1952). The tradition of reading Utopia through the lens of its satiric or ironic elements can be traced through C.S. Lewis, English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama (Oxford: Clarendon, 1954), R.W. Chambers, Thomas More (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1935)
interesting things about the text. As Hexter notes, the universality of More’s communism is unique for its time and diverges from earlier, pre-modern forms of communism, which are almost always presented as a communism of the elect. While many Utopian customs and practices are easily forgotten by the casual reader, Utopian communism is not. The centrality of the question of property is not merely an anachronistic distortion introduced by the modern reader’s present concerns or political commitments; it is reinforced by the structure of the text itself. The description of Utopia is framed by the debate on property, ending with Hythloday inveighing against the “conspiracy of the rich” and More the narrator speaking sotto voce, as it were, to his readers, sharing his reservations about the absurd basis of the whole Utopian system, that is, “their communal living and their moneyless economy” (247). The corrupting influence of money and private property is the real world problem to which Utopia—in however fantastic a form—provides the answer. Utopia is presented as an imaginative solution to this problem, but Book 2 does not therefore mark a transition from reality to fantasy; in Book 1, private property already seems to have dissolved the distinction between the real and unreal, creating a mundus inversus at the centre of European civilization. Utopia appears in the text, not as a world turned upside-down, but as an inversion of an inversion of the real.


See Hexter, “Utopia and its Historical Milieu,” Works, vol. 4, op. cit. cx-cxiii. Peasant communism tends to have a messianic or millenarian dimension, while in monastic sects and secular ideal commonwealths, communal ownership is restricted to an ascetic elite.

More goes on to write: “This one thing alone utterly subverts all the nobility, magnificence, splendor and majesty which (in the popular view) are the true ornaments and glory of any commonwealth” (247). More’s defense of the “popular view” of nobility—nobility as splendor, majesty and ornament—is, of course, deeply ironic.
2. The Theatre of the State

The relationship between the “real” and “fantastic” in *Utopia* is complex, but we begin to see the nature of the relationship in the debate between More and Hythloday on public service and the limits of political reform. At the end of the debate on counsel, Hythloday and More rehearse a variation on the old conflict between the philosopher and the sophist. More responds to Hythloday’s criticisms of court politics with a critique of what he calls Hythloday’s “academic philosophy” (*philosophia scholastica*) which, he argues, is a form of discourse that belongs to the domain of private life and is wholly ineffective when made to serve public ends: “In the private conversation of close friends,” More says, “this academic philosophy is pleasant enough, but in the councils of kings, where great matters are debated with great authority, there is no room for it” (95). There is no room, More argues, because such “new and strange ideas,” which attempt to pluck up evil by the root and “suppose every topic suitable for every occasion” will, as Hythloday himself admits, only fall on deaf ears (95-7). They will not persuade any prince, courtier, or public official who, for whatever reason, is committed to a contrary course of action. But unlike Hythloday, More does not retreat from the realities of public life. He proposes instead an “indirect approach,” which may not make everything good, but may at least make as little bad as possible. Here More takes on the role of the rhetorician and the politically engaged humanist scholar, and although he makes a case for adaptation and compromise, he does so in an interestingly paradoxical fashion. More writes:

There is another philosophy, better suited for the role of a citizen, that takes its cue, adapts itself to the drama in hand and acts its part neatly and appropriately.\(^\text{12}\) This is

\(^{12}\) More refers to this other philosophy as *philosophia civilis*. 
the philosophy for you to use. Otherwise, when a comedy of Plautus is being played, and the household slaves are cracking trivial jokes together, you come onstage in the garb of a philosopher and repeat Seneca’s speech to Nero from the *Octavia*. Wouldn’t it be better to take a silent role than to say something inappropriate and thus turn the play into a tragicomedy? You pervert a play and ruin it when you add irrelevant speeches, even if they are better than the play itself. So go through with the drama in hand as best you can, and don’t spoil it all just because you happen to think of a play by someone else that might be more elegant. (97)

It is this moment in the text—the moment when More assumes the role of the practical statesman and More the character defends the life and actions of More the author—that reality becomes confused with theatrical performance. More, of course, was very familiar with all kinds of playacting. William Roper, in his *Life of Thomas More*, tells us that the young More was a very capable stage actor: “Though he was young of years,” Roper writes, “yet would he at Christmas-tide suddenly sometimes step in among the players, and never studying for the matter, make a part of his own there presently among them, which made the lookers-on more sport than all the players beside.”13 In the theatre of the court, however, making a part for yourself and stepping in among the players is dangerous, and the older More was more circumspect. The reality of court politics means “knowing the stage” and performing one’s role in the “play at hand.” This is the scene of *philosophia civilis*, of active public life, of political commitment and *Realpolitik*—the neat and appropriate performance of one’s role, indirect persuasion through well-adapted performance. This is what More counsels his own literary creation: know the stage and perform the actual play. To speak truth directly is not philosophy; it is simply “to wear philosopher’s garb,” to perform an

inappropriate role. To speak off script, outside the lines written by the author, will pervert or ruin the play, but it will not necessarily shatter the theatrical illusion itself.\textsuperscript{14}

There are a number of layers of irony in this speech by More. The most obvious, of course, is the conflation of reality and theatricality. The inner truth of power, More says, is an elaborate play, a performance upon which the fate of real lives and nations nevertheless depend. Civic duty therefore entails an “indirect approach” to the transformation of the political narrative and subtle adaptation to the unfolding story. The philosopher in this context appears as just another “set of attire,” another rhetorical gesture, another role, and a poorly adapted role at that. But curiously, in More’s analogy the play of statecraft is also implicitly compared to a Plautian comedy, and this association tends to undermine his argument. After all, the reference to household slaves cracking trivial jokes inadvertently calls to mind the earlier debate on council in which Hythloday describes public service as a kind of servitude,\textsuperscript{15} or else it recalls the debate at Cardinal Morton’s table, which begins as a serious philosophical dialogue and ends as a farce. If this theatrical metaphor is meant to counter Hythloday’s criticisms, it seems to miss the mark entirely; for Hythloday never sought to transform the play of statecraft from a comedy into a tragedy, or even to break up the performance. For him the court is already a tragicomedy and the entrance of the philosopher changes nothing. \textit{Philosophia civilis}, the play at hand, is the tragicomedy according to Hythloday, full of parasites and “wise fools” (\textit{morosophi}), and it is best simply

\textsuperscript{14} Even if the play is disordered, the theatrical illusion, which Hythloday later calls a kind of collective madness, remains intact. It should be remembered that \textit{Utopia} is a hodge-podge of several different genres—imaginary voyage and ideal commonwealth, satire and philosophical dialogue, political tract and “diverting entertainment,” \textit{speculum principis} and paradoxical encomium.

\textsuperscript{15} The argument circles around the distinction between \textit{servias} and \textit{inservias}. When Hythloday says he will not enslave himself to any king, Giles responds saying, “I do not mean that you should be in servitude to any king, only in his service”—“mihi visum est non ut \textit{servias} regibus, sed ut \textit{inservias}” (emphasis added 50-1). Hythloday remains sceptical: “The difference is only a matter of one syllable,” he says.
not to act. By refusing public service, Hythloday is already playing the part without words that More recommends to him.

So who is the philosopher-fool in this analogy? More alludes to Seneca’s dispute with Nero in the *Octavia*, and this dialogue certainly reflects many of the themes that recur in Hythloday’s speeches. In the *Octavia*, Seneca regrets his rising political fortunes, the futility of public service and the loss of his private studies. The memory of his old cosmological studies leads to melancholy rumination on the end of things. He imagines a future Golden Age following a catastrophic end to this world, “a renascent / Better world” that will “breed a new generation, / As the young world did when Saturn ruled”—a new people for whom all war, property, theft and scarcity would be unknown. He also recalls the decline and fall from that original state, but here the simile is abandoned and the syntax remains in the past tense, returning by stages to the corruption and decline of the present moment, when, on cue, Nero appears on stage. Seneca’s attempt to counsel Nero is of course utterly hopeless. Seneca speaks, somewhat pompously, of justice, trust and consent; Nero responds with the facile rhetoric of the tyrant, certain of his own strength and the consent won by the sword. There is no room for More’s “indirect approach.” The play is at all times moving towards tragedy.

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17 *Octavia* 440-592. The dialogue is mostly a rapid series of duelling aphorisms. From 455-461:

Nero: Mobs trample the weak.
Seneca: And crush the loathed.
N: Steel guards the emperor.
S: Loyalty better.
N: Caesar should be feared.
S: Even more so, loved.
N: They have to fear me—
S: Necessity irks.
N: And obey my commands.
S: Make them just ones.
N: I’ll decide.
S: What consensus ratifies.
N: The slighted sword will ratify.
Hythloday does resemble Seneca from the *Octavia*, at least in certain respects, but More, of course, imagines this windy Seneca making his stern and melancholy speech not in the *Octavia* but in a Plautian comedy, full of clever slaves, prostitutes, and lusty old men. More does not exactly say the court is a comedy of Plautus; he says that practicing academic philosophy within the court creates an effect like the mixing of theatrical genres. But if realism demands continuous adaptation to whatever play is being performed, it is implied that the skillful statesmen must be adept at sensing not only the mood of the current play but also the shifting moods or shifting fortunes that indicate a new play and a new narrative unfolding; that is, he must be prepared to *mix genres* or play through a mixed genre, and this condition may in fact be the rule rather than the exception. After all, do either the comedies of Plautus or the tragedies of Seneca capture the spirit of the renaissance court? Does not the court itself oscillate so rapidly between these moods that “the play at hand” always resembles a kind of mixed genre? How does one adapt to the play at hand if it is already and at all times a chaotic mixture of tragedy and comedy? These are questions that More leaves unanswered, and it is a grim irony that the court of Henry VIII would soon share striking resemblances to a farcical *Octavia*, with More himself in the role of Seneca the author, accused of treason and facing a death sentence for his imprudent counsel.\(^1\)

The analogy works against More in another way as well. We might say that if anyone is playing the part of Seneca from the *Octavia* here it is More himself. For the *Octavia* is unique among the plays attributed to Seneca in that its supposed author appears on stage, and this, of course, is one of the very curious and unusual things about *Utopia* too. The irony in

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\(^1\) Seneca the character is not executed in the *Octavia*, but Seneca the author was put to death by Nero following a failed plot to assassinate the emperor. Nero ordered Seneca to commit suicide, along with dozens of other aristocrats and senators.
More’s work is to a great extent structured by the ambiguous relationship between More the author and “Morus” the character. More distances himself from *Utopia* by presenting it as a kind of second-hand description of a real place. The author attributes the source material of the text to his own literary creation—Hythloday—who is simultaneously spectator, character and storyteller.\(^\text{19}\) This distance is highlighted by the skepticism of the author’s fictional projection—Morus—who questions Hythloday’s judgment and reasoning. But just as it would be a mistake to conflate Hythloday’s politics with More’s, it would also be wrong to present Morus as the source of direct authorial speech.\(^\text{20}\) Neither Hythloday nor Morus is More-the-author, whose own public persona was, as Greenblatt notes, very carefully crafted, and with a great deal of ambivalence. When Morus compares Hythloday to Seneca playing the role of the philosopher in a comedy by Plautus, his own fiction, the complex fiction of his public self, is glimpsed.

But in addition to revealing the complexity of the author’s public persona as it was fashioned in this time and place, More’s speech on political theatre reveals something too about the structure of the text and the central role of private property in *Utopia*. More’s *theatrum mundi* blurs the line between the two books, the line dividing political reality and literary fantasy. For Morus, it is the academic philosopher bent on plucking up bad ideas by

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\(^{19}\) Hythloday’s name—“nonsense peddler”—might reflect his role as both the author’s fictional source and his literary creation. While Hythloday’s name and the Greek pun implied in the word “Utopia” have sometimes been used to argue that the whole of *Utopia* is a joke, it should be remembered that “Morus,” More’s conservative, anti-communist narrator and mouthpiece, also bears a name that has some pretty ironic overtones. Greenblatt and number of other critics use the Latin “Morus” to distinguish More the character from More the author. See Greenblatt, op. cit. 34.

their roots who disorders the play of statecraft. The play itself is simply the way things are, the given order of things that must be accepted as a precondition for acting. Hythloday, however, responds with a counter-figure; he describes this general condition, the condition in which the distinction between reality and theatricality has broken down, as a kind of sickness or madness in the body politic. By attempting Morus’ approach, the “indirect approach” which is adapted to the unfolding play, Hythloday claims that he will simply end up sharing the madness of others: “The only result of this,” he says, “will be that while I try to cure the madness of others, I’ll be raving along with them myself” (97). The disorder, then, goes deeper than a confusion of genres; for Hythloday, the entire play—or rather the insidious theatrical metaphor itself, the metaphor which is presented as a model of pragmatism and political realism—is a form of madness. It is a form of madness, moreover, that is contagious and infects the whole, not just a few particularly mendacious councillors, but everyone, including would-be reformers who adapt themselves to the performance with the intent of changing it. And while in Morus’ speech, the madness of the play is implied but reluctantly accepted as the given order of things, for Hythloday, the sickness and madness of the body politic has a specific underlying cause and its etiology can be traced. At the root of this sickness and the madness of the state, he says, is private property. It is private property that unhinges reality and dissolves the existing political order in theatrical illusion. Legislation can be enacted to control the spread of this disorder, to limit ownership of land or the buying and selling of offices, but if private property itself persists, Hythloday says, the sickness will also:

Laws of this sort, I agree, may have as much effect as poultices continually applied to sick bodies that are past cure. The social evils I mentioned may be alleviated and their effects mitigated for a while, but so long as private property remains, there is no hope at all of effecting a cure and restoring society to good health. While you try to cure
one part, you aggravate the wound in other parts. Suppressing the disease in one place causes it to break out in another, since you cannot give something to one person without taking it away from someone else. (103-5)

While Morus sees the court as a play, Hythloday sees the play as a form of madness and the court as a sick body past cure, its “doctors” spreading the disease in a vain attempt to stamp it out. The commonwealth persists, in this metaphor, in a state of chronic illness or slow decay. Princes and their lawyers and courtiers grasp only symptoms in their attempt to isolate a particular disorder: the growing plague of theft and vagrancy, for instance, or the threat of rebellion. Their error is the assumption that the disorder comes from outside, from criminals, agitators, or stubborn philosophers, when the disorder and decay, according to Hythloday, resides within the very organs of the state and is spread through the ministrations of its wise doctors.

This exchange between Hythloday and Morus introduces the debate on property and provides a means of understanding the relationship between the real/actual and the imaginary/ideal in \textit{Utopia}. Book 1 of \textit{Utopia} is, I argue, structured by the two competing tropes articulated by Morus and Hythloday: 1. real politics is a play; 2. this “play” is a form of sickness or madness. On one hand we have a variation on the \textit{theatrum mundi} metaphor, and on the other hand the metaphor of the sickly body politic. The first collapses or dissolves the distinction between the practical affairs of state and the drama of the stage, the “real world” and theatrical artifice; the second redefines the first as symptomatic of a collective madness, a disorder of the humours of the body politic which results in collective delusion or a break with reality.\footnote{21} In Hythloday’s metaphor, the root cause of the disorder is finally

\footnote{21} Although Hythloday does not refer directly to a balance of humours or a humoral system, it is strongly implied in the description of the movement of the disease through the collective body: a fundamental disorder of the whole causes a reciprocal breeding of the disease in its parts. Sickness as structural imbalance is
revealed to be the institution of private property itself. What is interesting about these two metaphors—the *theatrum mundi* and the body politic—is that together they locate the imaginary or the unreal not in Utopia, but in *this* world, in existing political and economic institutions. Utopia is an image and an imaginary resolution of a crisis within the existing order of things. Put another way, the dialectic of reality and fantasy in *Utopia* is internal to the real. The utopian “no place” is not an empty fantasy, but a displacement of contradictions within the real.

3. Sheep Devouring Men

The first debate in Book 1 of More’s *Utopia* concerns the limits of political reform. Hythloday is sceptical about the prospects of reform within the context of the court, but he does not simply locate the source of the impasse within the court itself. The problems facing the commonwealth—thievery, criminality, poverty—cannot be solved by the court, he argues, because the court and the commonwealth itself are founded on a greater act of theft, a “conspiracy of the rich,” which long ago wrested control of the commonwealth and bent it to private ends. Tracing the root causes of poverty that lead to crime, Hythloday draws subtle parallels between the figures of the thief and the lord, dissolving the distinction between them.22 This occurs in a number of places in the text. We first see it when Hythloday inveighs against the “great many noblemen who live idly like drones off the labour of others at the heart of the humoral medical paradigm, which was of course the conventional model for medical practice in the 16th century.

22 Christopher Kendrick also notes the parallel drawn between the thief and the king in *Utopia*, a parallel which, he argues, reflects the dislocation of the feudal subject: “The truly profound and striking parallel that emerges from Hythlodaeus’ argument,” Kendrick writes, “is that between thief and king, who together might be said to delimit the paradigmatic space of the late feudal subject. … The king and the beggar are a late feudal version of master and slave, hopelessly outside the reciprocal feudal system for this reason and yet representative of it, irreconcilably antithetical yet bound together as a unit, identified.” See Kendrick, “More’s *Utopia* and Uneven Development,” *Boundary Two*, 13.2/3 (Winter/Spring 1985) 248.
… [and] drag around with them a great train of idle servants [*stipatores*], who have never learned any trade by which they could make a living” (59). Many of these servants and retainers were soldiers, the last remnants of the private armies of England’s feudal lords. In the sixteenth century they were becoming a costly extravagance in the increasingly centralized Tudor state and many were being released from service with no prospects for employment. The idleness of the English nobles is exploitative, Hythloday argues, but this idleness also infects the servants of the rich, and it is these retainers, released from service, who become the growing mob of dispossessed and masterless men, turning to crime and brigandage in order to survive. The criminal idleness of the poor is shown to stem from exploitative idleness of the rich. The parallel is developed later in the dialogue where Hythloday describes the customs of the fictional Polyclerites and their laws governing the punishment of thieves. In their land, Hythloday reports, “whoever is found guilty of theft must make restitution to the owner, not (as elsewhere) to the prince; they think the prince has precisely as much right to the stolen goods as the thief himself” (71-3). And again, in the imaginary council chamber of the French royal court, Hythloday advises the king to live within his means: “let him never take money as a fine for some crime when a judge would regard an ordinary subject as wicked and deceitful for claiming it,” he says (93). In these passages, the lord is shown to be a just legislator who curbs his own appetites and those of his subjects, but we can infer from his sly reference to what is practiced “elsewhere” that in Europe and in the real council chambers of kings and princes, there is no real difference between thieves and lords.

This destabilization of the distinction between thief and lord becomes more explicit near the end of Book 1. In nations where money is the “measure of all things,” Hythloday
concludes, “whatever a man can get he calls his own private property” (101). Implicit here is a suggestion that private ownership is founded on an act of appropriation that is guaranteed, in the last instance, by force: whatever a man can get—whatever he is capable of acquiring—is called his own private property. That is, the things that are called my private property are mine not because of any superior ethical or legal claim to them, but simply because I am able to make them mine. The struggle to divide things among competing private interests, Hythloday observes, leads to a proliferation of ineffectual laws, for “all the mass of laws enacted day after day don’t enable [men] to secure [their] own or defend it, or even to distinguish it from someone else’s property” (101). It is money and exchange themselves that dissolve the distinction between theft and ownership, which dissolve the commonwealth into a collection of competing private interests, which dissolve the law while throwing up an elaborate façade of ineffectual, ever-multiplying statutes. This inversion, where the lord is shown to be the true thief and the commonwealth is shown to be a mere collection of private desires, is articulated most directly and forcefully at the end of Book 2 following the description of Utopia: “When I consider and turn over in my mind the various commonwealths flourishing today,” Hythloday famously remarks, “so help me God, I can see in them nothing but a conspiracy of the rich, who are advancing their own interests under the name and title of the commonwealth” (243-5). In the marginal gloss, More’s friend Erasmus adds: haec adnota, lector—“reader, note well.”

The dialogue on theft is meant to illustrate the futility of rational debate within the court, but for Hythloday the problem goes deeper than court politics. Crime and poverty

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23 Giles claims credit for part of the marginal gloss in his letter to Busleyden, but the gloss as a whole is also attributed to Erasmus on the title page of the 1517 edition. It is not entirely clear who wrote this note. See Utopia: Latin Text and English Translation, op. cit. 27.
cannot be seriously addressed without going to the root of the problem in the structure of private property itself. Theft, according to Hythloday, is not a problem that can be solved by the court. Crime cannot be contained by enacting this or that statute to mitigate poverty or control the avarice of lords or commoners. The technique or gesture repeated at key moments throughout Book 1 is to demonstrate how some discord or disordered state that appears external to the interlocutors—the disordered passions and unruly desires of the thief, for instance, who must be punished or killed to restore order—is actually internal to the governing body which is supposed to purge the discord and enact punishment. It is the courtiers and lawyers, not the vagrants and thieves, who are closest to the rot of the commonwealth.

When Hythloday dismisses the commonwealth as a mere “name” or “title” concealing a collection of private interests, he does not simply condemn the greed or corruption of a few lords or counsellors as the cause of England’s social problems. If the root of the problem were corruption then just counsel might be enough to reform the state and restore order. But for Hythloday, the root of the problem is not exactly the moral failings of self-interested individuals; it is a very specific form of social property. Throughout Book 1 Hythloday inveighs against private property in general, but it is important to note that he singles out a particular practice or a social property relation peculiar to the English as the special object of his scorn. Hythloday, as we have seen, focuses on enclosure—the fencing in of common grazing land, the conversion of tillage to pasture, and the displacement of tenant farmers. But these were only some of the most visible symptoms of a more fundamental transformation of agriculture from small-scale, labour-intensive, relatively autarkic peasant holdings to large-scale, increasingly efficient and market-oriented leaseholding that occurs in
England, in fits and starts, over the early modern period. It was a transformation that would not be complete until well into the 18\textsuperscript{th} century but would have profound consequences for the structure of agrarian social-property relations in More’s own lifetime. There were enormous changes in the freedom, mobility and economic security of peasants and tenant farmers in the early modern period. Robert Brenner, in his classic work on agrarian class structure in pre-industrial Europe, argues that in England in the mid-15\textsuperscript{th} century, and across Western Europe, peasants were relatively successful at securing a degree of freedom from labour services and arbitrary tallages, and in their push for fixed rents.\textsuperscript{24} In part this was due to the long cycle of population decline and demographic collapse which began with the Black Death in the mid-14\textsuperscript{th} century and continued through the 15\textsuperscript{th} century. Landlords, however, had two advantages during the period following the plague: they were able to appropriate vacated holdings and thereby enlarge their demesnes, which removed a large portion of land from the customary sector and greatly increased the leasehold sector; second, they were able to maintain the right to impose fines whenever peasant land was conveyed through sale or inheritance, which gave the lords a great deal of leverage to enclose lands and dispossess small peasant proprietors.\textsuperscript{25} There was resistance and open revolt, but by the late 17\textsuperscript{th} century wealthy landlords in England owned anywhere from 70 to 75\% of cultivatable land, and the classic landlord / capitalist tenant / wage labourer structure described by Karl Marx in the first volume of \textit{Capital} was beginning to emerge.\textsuperscript{26} This is in stark contrast to the increasing


\textsuperscript{25} Brenner 47.
parcelization of peasant holdings elsewhere, as in France. It was the failure of the English peasants to establish freehold control of the land and not simply demographic changes alone that allowed the landlords to enclose the commons and engross their demesnes. The unique leasehold structure that took hold in England was created through the unusual situation in which successful peasant resistance had brought an end to serfdom and restrictions on peasant mobility, but landlords were at the same time able to appropriate peasant land, dispossessing the now formally free peasant population. Under these conditions, a mass market in both land and labour emerged, and a new dynamic was set in motion in which tenant farmers had to compete with one another to improve labour productivity. Under the older feudal mode of production, labour was tied to the land and the majority of leases were fixed, customary leases. There was no competitive pressure, no motivation to systematically improve labour productivity. The lords increased their incomes by “squeezing” the peasants, extracting higher rents or tallages through extra-economic (juridical-political) means, and the peasants were prevented from improving the land because of these unproductive exactions.

The dispossession of a free peasantry and the creation of a market in labour and land created a situation in which it was in the interest of both the landlord and the tenant farmer to increase profit through improvements to labour productivity. Tenant farmers were competing for leases, free wage labourers were competing for work, and landlords, having lost many of their extra-economic powers of surplus extraction, had to cooperate with tenants to improve the land in order to increase their share of rent. These three factors—the end of serfdom (and the loss of juridico-political powers on the part of the lord), the dispossession of the peasants (and the creation of a labour market), and the transfer of large sections of land into the

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leasehold sector (the creation of a market in land)—set in motion a new competitive dynamic that led to the emergence of agrarian capitalism. The greater efficiency of this system freed up—and dispossessed—a non-agricultural labour force, which in turn provided a growing home market for manufactured goods, creating the groundwork for a self-perpetuating dynamic of agricultural and industrial productivity.27

Of course, physical enclosure, the fencing in of land and the conversion of tillage to pasture, are not the sole or even the principal causes of this transformation, but enclosure understood more broadly, as a social and legal process whereby customary rights to common land are removed or eroded, is indeed a significant factor leading to the dissolution of feudal social relations. Enclosure was the most visible sign of the radical commodification of land and labour which was increasing pressure on the part of tenant farmers to maximize profitability and labour efficiency. Marx describes this process as the “so-called primitive accumulation” that precedes the development of more mature forms of industrial capitalism. Brenner and Ellen Meiksins Wood describe this process as the beginnings of “agrarian capitalism,” a new dynamic that begins in agriculture, in the production of the most fundamental means of subsistence—food and clothing—and eventually extends outward to transform pre-capitalist markets, enclosing ever-more aspects of human life and the natural world and subjecting them to market imperatives. It was not just sheep farming and physical enclosure, then, but the changing class and property arrangements that brought about the dislocation of tenant farmers and began to create that pool of wage-labourers, alienated from

the means of their subsistence, who would provide the effective demand and labour necessary for industrialization.

More could never have anticipated all this, of course. Hythloday’s criticisms were directed at a concrete social problem, not an abstract economic system, which was in any case still so new and inchoate that there was yet no conceptual framework with which to understand it. Nor were Hythloday’s specific arguments against enclosure particularly unique. Enclosure was very unpopular. It was contentious even among the propertied classes because the social dislocation that it produced threatened the position of those people who most benefited from it. Anti-enclosure rhetoric appeared in the works of Sir Thomas Smith, Henry Brinklow, and Thomas Starkey. Of course *Utopia* taken as a whole is more than an anti-enclosure tract—it is at once less instrumental and more radical, exposing the very roots of poverty in the institution of private property and imagining a new secular commonwealth founded on universal communal ownership, but also renouncing at key moments the possibility of reform. Its radicalism, which withdraws from the world, is very different from anything expressed in the anti-enclosure tracts of reformers. It is different too from the millenarianism of Fra Dolcino, Thomas Münster, and Gerard Winstanley, who, in various ways, sought to restore the kingdom of God. More’s *Utopia*—a this-worldly ideal that

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28 More’s own complicity with the practices he criticizes should also be noted. In 1527 More was accused of illegally enclosing 30 acres of land in Oxfordshire. The case was dismissed when More demonstrated that he had already returned the land to tillage and rebuilt a farmhouse that had previously been destroyed. Whatever his political beliefs, then, More seems to have been personally invested in the process of enclosure. See J.J. Scarisbrick, “Cardinal Wolsey and the Common Weal,” in *Wealth and Power in Tudor England* (London: Athlone, 1978) 61, and John Guy, *Tudor England* (Oxford UP, 1988) 92-3.


30 If *Utopia* is not reformist, though, it certainly inspired and influenced anti-enclosure reformers. See Neal Wood’s chapter on More in *Foundations of Political Economy*, op. cit. 90-123.
withdraws from the world—presents us with something that transcends both the reformist and the millenarian impulse; *Utopia* is a satirical inversion of messianic prophesy.

The image of sheep devouring men in Book 1 satirizes what we might call the messianic utopianism of the Old Testament prophets. England appears as an inversion of the messianic kingdom in which “the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb,” and harsh, predatory, unyielding nature will return to an Edenic state of pacification, humanization and abundance.\(^{31}\) This has not, to my knowledge, been noted in the scholarship on More, even though the figure of sheep devouring men has been a favourite of later reformers and radicals who emphasize the importance of More’s critique of enclosure for our understanding of *Utopia*. This may be because Hythloday’s sheep seem, on the surface at least, to be very secular creatures. The sheep seem to stand in for their owners—rapacious and greedy landlords and enclosers—or else they appear to be literal sheep, driving the figurative flock out from their homes and churches and into the wilderness. The sheep are merely brutish animals, displacing and destroying the spiritual flock, or they are bestial men, an “accursed plague” of insatiable gluttons, greedy gentleman and grasping abbots. But this conflation of the human and the animal implies something more. The description of churches converted into sheep pens calls to mind the nexus of scriptural motifs associated with sheep—the sacrificial offering, the figure of Christ, the flock of the faithful—and places them in an ironic light. The sheep take on a predatory or carnivorous aspect, as though the sheep and the wolf had become a single creature, a chimera of predator and prey. It is not much of a leap, then, to argue that Hythloday’s image of predatory sheep is a satirical inversion of the messianic age and the end of predation—the sheep lying down with the lamb, as in the quote

\(^{31}\) Isaiah 11.6. All references to the Christian Bible are from the King James Bible.
from Isaiah above, or the sheep and lamb “feeding together” as in Isaiah 65.25: “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,” says the prophet, “and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent’s meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord.” It is an image that recurs throughout the prophetic books of the Christian Old Testament, and is frequently associated with judgment of the rich and powerful, a levelling of social distinction, restoring to the poor the fruits of their labour. Immediately before the image of the wolf and the lamb feeding together, for instance, we have this image of a transfigured social order to match the image of a transfigured nature:

They shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the Lord, and their offspring with them.

Hythloday’s description of enclosure is almost a mirror image of this passage from Isaiah. The tenant farmers of England, he tells us, labour in vain and have their land and their homes taken from them. “Stripped of their belongings by trickery or brute force,” their fields are enclosed and their homes destroyed by gentlemen and lords (63). Their crops go to waste or are appropriated by their creditors. They are compelled to sell all that they own and whole families are driven homeless into the growing wasteland. The sheep and the wolf feed together, but now only because the sheep has become as greedy and wild and bloodthirsty as the wolf. The social order in the guise of nature becomes even more hostile, more predatory and wild.

32 See, for example, Hos 2.18, Job 5.23 and Am 9.13, which share some of the same eschatological themes—redemption of nature, an end to scarcity, judgment of the powerful; but also, cf. Mathew 7.15-17 and Luke 10.2-3.

33 Isaiah 65.21-23.
This parodic inversion of Isaiah is important because the (negative) eschatological topoi in *Utopia* have largely been overlooked in the scholarship on More. *Utopia* is most clearly modeled on the secular, ideal commonwealth of Plato’s *Republic* or Plutarch’s Sparta; it appears to be a this-worldly ideal. Even the fantastical elements of *Utopia* are more in the humorous mood of Lucian’s writings than Isaiah’s prophesies. But I do not argue that the messianism in *Utopia* is expressed in any positive way. The topoi from Isaiah are inverted and satirized and applied to England, not Utopia. *Utopia* appears in More’s work through a kind of biblical litotes—an inversion of an inversion of the messianic kingdom; utopian communism is not the restoration of an Edenic or messianic order, but is rather the negation and sublation of its opposite. It is precisely this sublation, not the simple negation of a paradisial beginning, that gives *Utopia* its modern character.

The combination of anti-enclosure rhetoric with imaginary, this-worldly, universal communism is something unique and certainly important given what we know of the broad social and economic consequences of enclosure. But while *Utopia* goes beyond the practical demands of the early modern reformers like Henry Brinklow and Thomas Starkey and diverges sharply from the millenarianism of early and pre-modern peasant communism, it would be a mistake to call his critique of enclosure a prophetic critique of capitalism. 34 For one thing, neither he nor any of his contemporaries had even a notion of economy as a sphere of human activity distinct from politics and morality. 35 More could never have imagined his


35 Early modern economists, such as Jean Bodin, developed theories on the function of money, trade, and prices, but the concept of an autonomous, self-regulating market system had yet to emerge. See Jean Bodin, *Response to the Paradoxes of Malestroit* (1568), H. Tudor & R.W. Dyson, eds. (Bristol: Thoemmes, 1997), Thomas Mun, *England’s Treasure by Forraign Trade* (1628) (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), Josiah Child,
work as a critique of an economic system with its own laws of motion. And how could he have such a concept? The economic as such only became fully disembedded from other social relations as a consequence of mature, industrial capitalism, and this disembedding of the economic could not have been seen as anything other than political disorder from the perspective of people still inhabiting a largely feudal society. Nascent agrarian capitalism appeared to More and his contemporaries, not as a new economic order, but as political disorder, social dislocation, greed, and moral decay. This is why in More’s *Utopia* the spectre of the unreal emerges from within the existing order of things. The existing world had already been turned upside-down for More; displacement through enclosure had already created a “no place,” a new kind of fantastic wilderness in which sheep seem to devour men. The republic of Utopia appears in More’s text as an inversion of the unreal, a *mundus inversus* for a world already turned upside down.

*Utopia*, then, contains a critique of institutions, practices and social-property relations which we now recognize as capitalist, but before capitalism or even “political economy” could be conceptualized. Capitalism appears in the text as a disorder or inversion of the proper order of things—sheep devouring men, lords behaving as thieves, philosophers acting like fools or madmen, the commonwealth transformed into a collection of private interests.

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36 The idea that capitalism involves the “disembedding” of markets from other social relations is a notion that Karl Polanyi develops in *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001). Polanyi argues that while all societies have economies in the sense that they must organize the material conditions of their existence, 18th and 19th century industrial Europe was “uniquely economic” in that the economy began to be conceived as a separate domain with its own laws, distinct from social or political organization, in which the motive of gain was raised to the level of a principle and a justification for action and behaviour in everyday life (31). The economy in pre-market societies is always submerged or “embedded” in social relationships, according to Polanyi. People act to protect social interests and assets—material goods are valued as a means to social ends. In such societies, the economic system is a mere function of social organization, and market interactions are regulated by custom, law, ritual or religion rather than autonomous and apparently self-regulating market prices.
What we recognize as “capitalism” appears in *Utopia* as a monstrous inversion and dislocation of reality, a dislocation or displacement that can only really be perceived through *cosmopoiesis*, through the creation of an imaginary new world, or an imaginary enclave within this world, existing on its periphery. Utopian literature or the utopian impulse or spirit, it has been argued, emerges or becomes most pronounced during periods of great social and technological change, when everything seems to be coming apart, but when the forces of transformation are not yet understood or even conceptualized, and active, consciously directed action or revolutionary praxis cannot yet be clearly imagined. In other words, the utopian impulse is ascendent in periods when everything and nothing seems possible. *Utopia* itself was written in such a moment, a period of primitive accumulation, when agrarian capitalism and new forms of colonialism were just emerging, still bound up within a feudal political and ideological framework. It is important to recognize, of course, that More could never have understood or foreseen the consequences of enclosure or Euro-colonialism. His work is not prescient in that sense. But it does provide us with an image of early agrarian capitalism at the moment of its emergence, before it could be formally conceptualized. If we are so wary of teleological readings of *Utopia* that we refuse even to acknowledge the concrete social and economic context in which it is written simply because that context had not yet been conceptualized, we will fail to understand the historical import

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37 The concept of *cosmopoiesis* is formulated by Giuseppe Mazzotta in *Cosmopoiesis: The Renaissance Experiment* (U of Toronto Press, 2001). For Mazzotta, *cosmopoiesis*, or “world-making,” includes but is not limited to utopian thought.

38 Fredric Jameson describes utopian literature as the construction of imaginary “enclaves” within real social space. See “The Utopian Enclave,” in *Archaeologies of the Future* (London: Verso, 2005) 10-21. “We may … posit the money form as leading a kind of enclave existence within More’s historical moment,” Jameson writes: “this enclave status of money is precisely what allows More to fantasize its removal from social life in his new Utopian vision” (16-17). But as we shall see, it is not clear if money or exchange value is entirely removed from Utopia.
of the text. Just because certain phenomena did not have names at the time they emerged does not mean they did not exert influence over people’s imaginations. The thing that exists but has no name is, in fact, the object of critical theory.

Utopia is not an empty fantasy, a “no-place” or a cloud-cuckoo land; it is an image and imaginary resolution of a very real form of displacement. The shock of the dislocation caused by the enclosure of the commons is really what Utopian institutions are designed to contain. But while communal property is institutionalized in in Book 2 of More’s *Utopia*, labour is also rationalized in his fictional republic, and Utopian citizens are subject to new disciplinary practices that transform and indeed dissolve the feudal customs and institutions within which the commons is embedded. *Utopia*, then, does not exactly turn backwards, idealizing feudal social values, but neither does it clearly anticipate mature industrial capitalism; it is a formal and highly ironic resolution of contradictions specific to the very early phases of agrarian capitalism. *Utopia reforms the dislocated masses*, transforming them from a masterless and unassimilated mob into the foundation of the commonwealth. The very thing which was most threatening, the mass of people released from customary bonds of mutual obligation, makes the utopian reinscription of law possible. Thus we find that in Hythloday’s account of Utopian prehistory, the founding story is one of subjection to and colonization by a foreign king who dissolves all former social bonds and cultural memory and writes a new perfected law on the blank slate of a colonized people. In *Utopia* the dislocated mass—the thing which Utopia is designed to contain—is also the foundation stone of the new republic.
4. Gold Slave Chains

Earlier in this chapter I argued that the “no place” of Utopia—the fantastic, unreal place, the flight of fancy, the work of literary artifice—is not opposed to reality, but is a force of dislocation that emerges from within the real, from within existing institutions and customs and actual forms of power and exchange. It is the pragmatic, practical-political activity of the renaissance courtier that gives rise to the mad and self-enclosed theatre of court politics; it is the enclosure of the commons and the insatiable greed of landlords that turns England into an satirical inversion of Isaiah’s messianic kingdom where sheep devour men and a new wilderness spreads over cultivated fields and towns. Utopian institutions and practices seem to be designed to preempt or contain the frightening spectre of disorder, dislocation and displacement caused by the emergence of new capitalist relations of production, but these Utopian institutions also reproduce capitalist forms of displacement on another level. Utopia formally solves the problem of enclosure by creating new communal social-property relations, but these new relations are also maintained and legitimated by unconscious capitalist ideology. This contradiction—primitive communist relations of production coupled with early capitalist ideology—is given striking symbolic form, I argue, in the image of gold slave chains.

Near the beginning of the section oddly titled “Utopian Travel” we get Hythloday’s description of the Utopians’ curious uses for gold. The Utopians, we are told, do not value gold “beyond what the metals themselves deserve” (149). In other words, since they have no money, gold appears to them only as a material for use, and in that capacity it is close to worthless. The uselessness of gold is something that More’s narrator, Hythloday, claims is clearly self-evident. “Anyone can see … that iron in itself is far superior to either [gold or
silver],” he says: “men could not live without iron, by heaven, any more than without fire or water. But Nature granted to gold and silver no function [*usus*] with which we cannot easily dispense. Human folly has made them precious because they are rare” (149). This emphasis on the function, the bare nature of the thing, its instrumental use-value, begins to give the reader a sense of how different the Utopian order of value might be. In the absence of money, ornament, and external markers of social distinction, gold apparently has no function within Utopia (or no function with which the Utopians cannot easily dispense). Nevertheless, the valueless thing, the dangerous, frivolous, and useless thing is not excluded from Utopia; in fact, the Utopians accumulate vast reserves of gold, such a great supply, Hythloday says, that his audience would scarcely believe it to be possible.

So why do the Utopians acquire Gold in such vast quantities? Utopia’s abundant natural resources and highly productive agriculture and cottage industries make it nearly self-sufficient. The island’s lack of iron is the only thing that prevents Utopia from achieving the ideal autarky of the Platonic republic. This lack of iron is what keeps Utopia tied to the world. This one scarce resource keeps open the semi-permeable boundary of the otherwise self-enclosed enclave. The scarcity of iron is what necessitates trade with the outside world but it does not in itself necessitate the acquisition of gold, and Hythloday makes it very clear that *both* iron and gold are acquired by the Utopians in great quantities. The practical uses for iron are clear, but we might ask ourselves why the Utopians feel the need to acquire something that should be useless within their own borders. Hythloday tells us that they

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39 Of course, the aesthetic value of gold and silver is repressed or passed over as trivial or foolish. This is in part due to the Utopians’ suspicion of ornament and all markers of social distinction, but this does not begin to explain why the Utopians could not find aesthetic value in gold which does *not* lead to fetishization and irrational displays of distinction. It as though More could not perceive a form of fashion or ornament (or indeed, even aesthetics) distinct from either conspicuous display or commodity fetishism.
acquire gold precisely because it is valuable to others and because they need to be able to manipulate the desires and the value-systems of others. They acquire gold, in other words, not because it has any value internal to Utopian society, but because of the continual threat implied by the very existence of an outside to the Utopian order of value. The Utopians keep gold “as a protection against extreme peril or sudden emergency,” Hythloday says, and by this he means primarily the threat of war (147). Gold is hoarded in order to pay foreign mercenaries or to bribe different factions within enemy nations. Gold is acquired to protect Utopia from foreign incursions, to maintain the boundary between Utopia and the external world.

The need to acquire iron and gold is a sign of Utopia’s inner-worldly character. Utopia is not exactly a renascent Golden Age; in fact, Utopia engages in foreign trade primarily to acquire the two metals most closely associated with the end of the classical Golden Age. Gold, which is a metonym for money and private property in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, is also associated with the emergence of avarice and inequality, while iron is associated with war, violence and tyranny. In the Age of Iron, Ovid writes:

> The land which had been as common to all as the air or the sunlight was now marked out with the boundary lines of the wary surveyor. The affluent earth was not only pressed for the crops and the food that it owed; men also found their way to its very bowels, and the wealth which the god had hidden away in the home of the ghosts by the Styx was mined and dug out, as a further incitement to wickedness. Now dangerous iron, and gold—more dangerous even than iron—had emerged. Grim War appeared, who uses both in his battles, and brandished his clashing weapons in hands bespattered with slaughter.40

The mining of gold and iron signify, for Ovid, the end of communal ownership and universal peace. The fact that these two metals are foreign to Utopia suggests an affinity with the

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Golden Age, but the need to reintegrate these two dangerous metals into the Utopian economy suggests a very different social order, one that is not a return to first nature. Utopia needs these metals, but just how they integrate them into their own economy while maintaining the Utopian enclave is a question that occupies a great deal of Book 2.

Hythloday tells us that they do not keep their gold locked up in a tower or vault because that might raise suspicions or encourage “clever fools” among the common people to accuse their leaders of attempting to defraud or cheat the people. The hidden stockpile or guarded storehouse would affirm, contrary to the Utopians’ disavowal, the value of gold and introduce the possibility of social disorder and class antagonism.\(^{41}\) Hythloday suggests that even the suspicion of a hidden power rooted in this reified mass of wealth would undermine Utopian society. What should be done with this strange thing, then, this thing which should have little or no value within Utopia itself, but is still needed because it assumes value in relation to the external world? To conceal or protect it would give it, at the very least, the aura of a value which would need to be repressed. The valueless thing, the thing which is only useful as a means of manipulating the value-systems of others, would become a Trojan horse, secreting exchange-value and commodity fetishism into Utopia and disrupting the Utopian system of communal ownership and gift-exchange. The Utopians, then, must subject gold to their own system of value or risk introducing a subversive thing into the republic—the most subversive thing for Utopia, really, since Utopia is founded on an argument against private property, and gold, in More’s text, is a metonym for private property in general.

\(^{41}\) More never claims that Utopia is a classless society; nor does he claim that social distinction or nobility do not exist. Rather, nobility is given what might be called a “rational” basis, rooted not in property or family but in humanistic virtue—right conduct, public service, intellectual mastery, etc. In this limited sense, Utopia anticipates the rationalization of social distinction characteristic of liberal meritocracy.
The Utopians’ solution is to hide gold in plain sight, to subject gold to their own ethic of utility and keep gold within the republic in the form of useful things. Since they do not use money, Hythloday tells us, the Utopians “keep gold and silver (of which money is made) in such a way that no one will value them beyond what the metals themselves deserve” (149). Because value is supposed to reside in the thing’s nature—its material attributes or the potential function that a material may serve—gold is put to use. Gold is not very useful, though, especially for people indifferent or even hostile to ornament and external markers of social distinction. The range of possible uses for gold in Utopia is further restricted because the primary function of the material remains its use as an economic weapon against external enemies, and so must, at a moment’s notice, be given up to be melted down and used as currency to acquire mercenaries or bribe officials. If gold is to have a secondary use, it must be as something that could acquire no sentimental value. People must not become attached to objects that might at any time be requisitioned by the state for use in war. More importantly, since gold still contains a subversive potential value attached to its primary function, a form of value that could dissolve the boundary between the Utopian enclave and the external world, the uses to which gold can be put must assume a symbolic or ritual function that degrades the material. It is not enough that gold be subjected to use; it must also be debased or used as a marker of shame.

Hythloday describes this custom along with his own astonishment, for he acknowledges it must seem incredible or unbelievable to those who have no experience of it. “While they eat and drink from earthenware and glassware of fine workmanship but of little value,” he says:

from gold and silver they make chamber pots and all the humblest vessels for use everywhere, not only in the common halls but in private homes also. Moreover, they
employ the same metals to make the chains and solid fetters which they put on their slaves. Finally, as for those who bear the stigma of disgrace on account of some crime, they have gold ornaments hanging from their ears, gold rings encircling their fingers, gold chains thrown around their necks, and, as a last touch, a gold crown binding their temples. Thus by every means in their power they make gold and silver a mark of ill fame. (153)

Within Utopia, gold is made useful only when its use is associated with filth or shame. Gold, for the Utopians, is a mark of ignominy and a metonym for waste, slavery, and criminality. Ornamentation is made to serve as a means of abjection and public humiliation. To wear gold or silver ornaments in Utopia is to be symbolically covered in excrement.

It is a strikingly evocative image. Edward Surtz, in his book *The Praise of Pleasure*, suggests that More may have got the idea for golden chamber pots from a number of contemporary and classical sources.\(^4^2\) Amerigo Vespucci’s *Four Voyages* may have been one such source. Vespucci writes that the native inhabitants of Brazil and the New World were indifferent to, even contemptuous of, gold: “The wealth that we enjoy in this our Europe and elsewhere, such as gold, jewels, pearls, and other riches, they hold as nothing: and although they have them in their own lands, they do not labour to obtain them, nor do they value them.”\(^4^3\) Pietro Martire d’Anghiera also relates a story about a tribe of people that “used kitchen and other common utensils made of gold;” for gold, he is told, “has no more value among them than iron among you.”\(^4^4\) In the first century, the Roman historian Tacitus reports that gold and silver did not much impress the Germans: “among them one can see silver vases, given as presents to their envoys and leaders, held in as low esteem as those shaped

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\(^4^2\) Most of the following sources are from Surtz, *Praise of Pleasure*, op. cit. 54-5 or *Works*, vol. 4, 429.

\(^4^3\) Amerigo Vespucci, *Four Voyages*, op. cit. 11.

from clay." Scorn for gold and silver is also found in Plutarch’s description of the legendary Spartan king Lycurgus, who eliminated the crimes of theft and bribery by confiscating all gold and silver ornaments and coins and substituting them with iron. But the striking image of gold chamber pots, according to Surtz, appears to come from an epigram written by the Roman poet Martial, which is also quoted by More’s friend Erasmus in his *Adages*. Martial’s epigram mocks a certain Bassus because he apparently defecated in a gold vessel but drank from a glass one.

This configuration of classical and contemporary sources for the striking image of gold chamber pots and slave chains gives us a sense of the range of associations that More invokes in his *Utopia*, from the primitive nobility of the German barbarian or Brazilian “savage,” to the asceticism of the classical ideal commonwealth, and the playful, grotesque, and satirical mood of Martial’s *Epigrams*. But these associations and allusions do not in themselves explain the image or the function of the ritualized debasement of gold within the Utopian social order itself. Although Surtz notes the Utopian ideology of use, he does not try to explain or make sense of their debasement of gold in terms of a struggle between competing expressions of value. Richard Halpern in his chapter on More in *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation*, argues that the debasement of gold is the quintessential Utopian act, reflecting the Utopian ideology of use, the customs and institutions designed to contain the

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irrational effects of exchange value. But the debasement of gold also illustrates a central contradiction within More’s fictional republic. Utopia, he says, “prohibits desires that, strictly speaking, can only arise elsewhere.” The avaricious desire for gold should not even arise given the Utopian moral and material economy of use. Utopian sanctions and prohibitions conjure up those desires that they are meant to control, desires which should have no meaning within the Utopian polity itself, but are nevertheless implied by the very practice of shaming and debasement. Halpern notes that it is the conservative critic, C.S. Lewis, who first touches on the contradiction: if gold were plentiful enough to use in this way, Lewis argues, it would not be precious, and so would not need to be actively debased. Halpern suggests that this Utopian practice actually invests gold with a desirability that it should not have given the superfluity and super-abundance of gold within Utopia. For Halpern, this prohibition on the fetishization of gold makes no sense within the structure of Utopian political economy; it only gains meaning in relation to the outside of Utopia. “English social relations,” Halpern argues “are the ‘unconscious’ of Utopia, emerging as inexplicable and imperishable desires.”

But is the ritualized debasement of gold really “inexplicable” within the structure of Utopian moral and political economy? Can it only be understood if we posit Europe as the unconscious of Utopia? On the one hand, yes, of course Europe is the “political unconscious”


50 Lewis writes: “If gold in Utopia were plentiful enough to be so used [to dishonour slaves], gold in Utopia would not be a precious metal.” *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, op. cit., 170.

51 Halpern 146.

52 Halpern 146.
of the text; More’s *Utopia* is a formal resolution of very real contradictions specific to its particular historical context. But this does not mean that the customs, prohibitions or sanctions of the fictional republic are inexplicable on their own terms. They would only be inexplicable if Utopia were imagined to be truly autarkic or separate from the world. Yet More very deliberately conceived Utopia as being bound up with the world, as having its own natural scarcities that draw it into a web of trade and inter-imperial rivalry. As Christopher Kendrick points out, Utopia’s system of ritualized debasement and repression is explicable within the logic of Utopian institutions if we realize that Europe is not so much Utopia’s “unconscious,” as its very *environment*. The compulsion to repress or control the value of gold makes sense if we recognize that the Utopians must both understand and disavow the value of gold in order to preserve the Utopian polity. Halpern and Lewis argue that super-abundance should, logically, make gold valueless without any additional sanctions or prohibitions, but this would hold true only if Utopia were a hermetically sealed enclave and gold were imagined to be a naturally abundant material native to Utopia. In that case, yes, the prohibition and ritualized debasement of gold would be inexplicable; however, gold is commonplace in Utopia not because of any natural abundance, but as a result of Utopia’s enormous surplus production, its mercantilist trade policies and its war preparations—policies which introduce a new threat even as they ward off others. The super-abundance of gold is a condition of Utopia’s symbiosis with (and protective reaction against) the external world. Within Utopia, gold has a paradoxical value that is bound up with its disavowed

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53 Christopher Kendrick, *Utopia, Carnival, and Commonwealth in Renaissance England* (Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 2004) 67. Kendrick goes on to suggest that “[p]erhaps the critical obliviousness to this point is to be accounted for by the stress on Utopia’s constitution as such as an island, in a moment of rupture with the mainland, and by the undoubted presence of an ideal of self sufficiency in Utopian self-understanding. But these do not necessarily signify actual independence, of course, and More takes pains to make isolation impossible. The Utopians lack a vital resource, iron, and so must trade for it with money economies” (68).
commodity-character. Gold, after all, is the one thing Utopians acquire, not primarily for use, but for its value in exchange—a value which can only be openly acknowledged elsewhere, outside the boundaries of Utopia. Gold is the thing, useless in itself, which is nevertheless useful in exchange as an instrument of war and a means of manipulating the economies and political systems of foreign nations. Gold is the thing which comes from outside and has value only as a means of securing the boundary between the outside world and the Utopian enclave, but for this very reason it also represents a threat. Gold must be accumulated in order to protect the republic from external threats, but the alien value attached to gold—its central function as the embodiment of abstract exchange-value—also makes it an implicit threat to Utopia. Gold is both the thing which keeps the outside out, and, in its capacity as the bearer of abstract value, it is the very thing which the boundary is designed to exclude.

So how exactly is the subversive, external value of gold contained or repressed within the Utopian polity? If we return to Hythloday’s description of the Utopians’ ritualized debasement of gold we find that not only is it subjected to the utopian ideology of use, but the very “uses” to which gold is subjected seem to highlight its fundamental uselessness, its purely symbolic function. Iron or ceramics are clearly more effective if the bare function of the material is to restrict movement or contain waste. The narrator does not attempt to resolve the tension between gold’s utility and its symbolic value. It is as though the slave chain, a physical constraint on bodily movement, had been transformed into a pure symbol of shame and abjection. It no longer really functions to constrain the slave but merely to humiliate them, and the humiliation associated with the metal is, in fact, a function of its very uselessness.
5. The Anemolian Ambassadors

Following the description of the Utopians’ ritualized debasement of gold, Hythloday observes how “these customs so different from those of other people also produce a quite different cast of mind”—*diversas ... animorum affections*—a different state of mind or disposition of the soul (150-1). It is this particular custom, their treatment of gold and precious things, that allows us to begin to see the strikingly different interiority or subjectivity of the Utopians. Up until this point, the narrator’s description of Utopia, its institutions and practices, more or less takes the dry, objective tone of a record or catalogue of geographical, political and social structures. Although many of the customs described imply a completely different world-view, no attempt is made to explain how they are understood from the perspective of the Utopians themselves or how foreign customs or practices might appear to them. It is only when the narrator attempts to explain the Utopians’ ritualized contempt for gold that we see something of the Utopian *ani**mi affectio*. It is this strange practice that compels the narrator to shift from the objective report of the European observer to the hypothetical perspective of the Utopian subject in order to grasp the inner life of Utopian custom.

This shift in perspective occurs by means of an anecdote told by the narrator in which reflexive Utopian perceptions and prejudices begin to become evident to the outside observer. The peculiar Utopian “cast of mind,” Hythloday says, “never became clearer to me than it did in the case of the Anemolian ambassadors” (151). The story he tells is of a group of envoys from a distant land, unfamiliar with Utopian customs, who confuse the simplicity and uniformity of Utopian dress with backwardness and poverty. The Anemolian ambassadors attempt to impress and intimidate the natives with a dazzling display of elegant
clothing and finery, precious jewels and gold. They make a grand entrance with a hundred
servants, all of them in rich, colourful clothing, the ambassadors themselves wearing silks
embroidered with gold, heavy gold chains and strings of pearls around their necks, gold rings
in their ears and around their fingers, and magnificent caps atop their heads set with sparkling
gems:

In fact, they were decked out in all the articles which in Utopia are used to punish
slaves, shame wrongdoers or entertain infants. It was a sight to see how they strutted
when they compared their finery with the dress of the Utopians, who had poured out
into the streets. But it was just as funny to see how wide they fell of the mark, and
how far they were from getting the consideration they thought they would get. Except
for a very few Utopians who for some good reason had visited foreign countries, all
the onlookers considered this splendid pomp a mark of disgrace. They therefore
bowed to all the humblest of the party as lords, and took the ambassadors, because of
their golden chains, to be slaves, passing them by without any reverence at all. You
might have seen children, who had themselves thrown away their pearls and gems,
nudge their mothers when they saw the ambassadors’ jeweled caps and say, “Look at
that big lout, mother, who’s still wearing pearls and jewels as if he were a little boy!”
But the mother, in all seriousness, would say, “Quiet, son, I think he is one of the
ambassadors’ fools.” (153)

The first thing to notice about this remarkable story is the point of view. Up until this point
the narrator has been describing Utopian customs and practices from the perspective of an
outside observer, but here we see a subtle shift. The encounter between the Anemolians and
Utopians is described from a perspective which is neither Anemolian nor Utopian—from a
position which is neither outside nor fully inside Utopian custom. But while we do not
exactly observe the encounter from the point of view of the Utopians themselves, the
narrator’s language nevertheless invites us to identify with the Utopian gaze—the perspective
of the “onlookers,” or *Utopiensium oculis omnium*—and laugh at the foolishness of
Anemolian pomp and spectacle *as though* it were a strange, foreign practice. *Pretium erat
videre, non minus erat volupatis considerare*—“it was a sight to see,” “it was not a little
funny to see,” says Hythloday, as he describes the Anemolians, and then directs us to the
perspective of a child who exclaims, *en!*—“look!” “behold!”—the *magnus nebulo*, literally the “great worthless one.”\(^{54}\) This is the most overt expression of contempt—too overt in fact, so the mother must chasten her child so as not to cause embarrassment. “Silence,” she says, “say nothing;” the man is not a *nebulo* but a *morionibus legatorum*, a clown or fool of the ambassadors.

The point is that almost all the verbs or phrases denoting observation or the direction of gaze—*videre*, *considerare*, *oculis omnium*, *en*—are directed at the Anemolians rather than the Utopians. In order to grasp the Utopian “cast of mind,” Hythloday presents us with a mirror in which we see ourselves from the other’s point of view, dressed in a foreign costume, the costume of the fool. We can laugh at the windy Anemolians because they are not us, but we are also meant to recognize ourselves (or our ruling class) in these *magni nebulones* and their conspicuous displays of wealth and power.\(^{55}\) The representation of Utopian subjectivity or consciousness, then, serves on one level as a critique of European forms of social distinction and false *nobilitas*.\(^{56}\)  But what “cast of mind” is disclosed to us here? Do we see the interiority of the Utopians through the Anemolian mirror?

It is important to note the perspective of the child in this scene, for what is being disclosed here is not just superficial cultural differences—different fashions or manners of dress—but a radically different world-view shaped in the very early stages of childhood.

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\(^{54}\) *Nebulo* is also a term of abuse signifying a worthless person or sometime a person of “low birth;” slaves were also sometimes referred to as *nebulones*. See “Nebulo, Nebulonis,” *A Latin Dictionary*, eds. C. Lewis & C. Short (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966).

\(^{55}\) The name *Anemolian* comes from the Greek *anemolios*, or “windy.”

\(^{56}\) Quentin Skinner argues in *Foundations* that *Utopia* takes to its logical conclusion the humanist commonplace that only virtue—and not inherited status or wealth—constitutes true nobility. See Skinner’s chapter, “The Humanist Critique of Humanism,” in *Foundations*, op. cit., 244-62, esp. 257-9.
Immediately before this scene, Hythloday tells us that the Utopians seem to indulge their youngest children with pearls, gems, and other precious stones, giving them freely as toys and ornaments. Gems and pearls are objects of delight and pride for the very young, he says, but for that reason they are also things which are set aside by older children who see them as signs of infancy, dependency and childishness. “When they have grown a bit older and notice that only small children like this kind of toy, they lay them aside,” Hythloday observes: “Their parents don’t have to say anything; they simply put these trifles away out of shame, just as our children, when they grow up, put away their marbles, baubles and dolls” (151). So, in addition to associating gold with waste, ignominy, uselessness and abjection, each Utopian also internalizes an association between “precious things” and trivial, childish things. Each of them experiences in childhood their own feelings of delight and shame associated with these objects. The “precious thing” resides in their memory as the thing which had to be rejected in order to become an adult. The feeling of shame associated with the thing, moreover, comes from within rather than from some explicit order or judgment of the parent. The precious thing is associated with infancy, and its rejection marks the moment when the child begins to internalize and identify with the authority of the adult world and reject external markers of childhood. So the precious thing must be rejected and forgotten in the same way that the child forgets their “marbles, baubles and dolls;” it must be sacrificed as though it were no sacrifice. But here we have a peculiar contradiction in the moral economy of Utopia, for gems and pearls may seem to be treated as trivial, childish things, but clearly they are not. They may be treated like toys, but they are certainly unlike any other toy. Marbles, baubles and dolls, after all, do not have a repressed, subversive value external to the child’s community. The shame felt by the child awakening to the true value of
“precious things” must have a peculiarly powerful, if unrecognized, meaning. Adulthood, for the Utopians, seems to be marked by a transition from sensual delight in the precious thing to a kind of repressed awareness of the dangerous power of the commodity fetish.

Before exploring the role of the commodity fetish in shaping Utopian ideology, however, it is useful to outline an opposed interpretation of Utopian subjectivity, one that sees Utopia as a negation of individual subjectivity as such. Stephen Greenblatt argues that the story of the Anemolian ambassadors and the description of the Utopians’ uses for gold, silver, and gems illustrate or make manifest the role of public shaming or the “intense communal pressure of honor and blame” in Utopia: “As the experience of the Anemolian ambassadors suggests, slavery functions not only as a penal and economic institution but as an extreme form of shaming. … Malefactors are not executed or shut away from public view,” he writes, “but are forced to do nasty or demeaning work under the gaze of all.”57 The internal social function of gold, as we have seen, is to visibly mark the criminal or slave with disgrace. The aesthetic property of the metal, its capacity to catch the eye, is utilized as means of drawing our gaze towards a figure of shame or ignominy, to mark an individual for public humiliation. The Utopian cast of mind which this story is meant to disclose, then, is not a private subjectivity or inwardness, but a communal consciousness shaped by the ever-present public gaze. “The public quality of Utopian space renders this gaze inescapable, for ordinary citizens as well as slaves,” Greenblatt writes: “Being seen is central to the experience of shame (and, for that matter, of praise), and thus Utopia is constructed so that one is always under observation.”58 While the Anemolian ambassadors were intent on a

57 Greenblatt, op. cit. 48-9.
58 Greenblatt 49.
display of self-aggrandizement, personal honour and distinction, what they are subjected to instead is the Utopians’ own forms of ritualized shaming and debasement. But this scene is not simply a comical inversion of expected reactions to traditional forms of social distinction and status display; this kind of public gaze, according to Greenblatt, is actually designed to contain, foreclose or diminish all forms of self-differentiation, private inwardness or “individuation.” In other words, the Utopian “cast of mind” revealed here is not a different kind of inwardness but a cancelation or partial annulment of private subjectivity.

For Greenblatt, the story of the Anemolian ambassadors and the description of the Utopians’ uses for gold reveal the extent to which Utopian society is a social order structured by public shaming rather than private guilt. Public shame and public honour, according to Greenblatt, partially cancels or effaces the force of guilt. The “pangs of conscience, the inner conviction of sinfulness, the anxious awareness of having violated a law or distanced oneself from God,” that private experience of guilt so characteristic of later Protestant confessional writing, is contained or partially annulled by Utopian customs:

Such feelings are by no means entirely eliminated in Utopia, but the coercive power of public opinion—the collective judgment of the community, perceived as an objective, external fact—diminishes the logical necessity for a mechanism of social control operating within the inner recesses of an individual consciousness such as More’s own.”

Greenblatt notes that there are many signs that More himself was deeply affected by an inner sense of guilt and sinfulness—in his letters to his daughter and, most strikingly, in his private and secretive “penitential practices” which he observed with almost monastic discipline. Greenblatt argues that the Utopian cast of mind can be seen as a reflection and cancellation of More own “self-fashioning.” The desire to contain or delimit private inwardness in Utopia reflects the tension between More’s public persona and his private self, his self-aware, ironic

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59 Greenblatt 51.
and politically committed self-fashioning, and his equally powerful desire for an expiation of guilt through “self-cancellation.” Utopian customs and institutions, particularly those related to public shaming, are, in effect, the negation—in imagination—of this tension between the public and private selves. The Utopian practice of shaming collapses the distinction between public and private, and so diminishes the anxious tension that is concomitant of this distinction. “We may observe that in emphasizing shame rather than guilt as a social force,” Greenblatt says, “Utopia would diminish the possibility of that psychological experience by reducing the inner life and strengthening communal consciousness.” It is this “communal consciousness” that the story of the Anemolian ambassadors is supposed to disclose. For Greenblatt, the Anemolian mirror allows us to see not only ourselves or our “invidious distinctions” from a distanced perspective, but also to adopt the gaze that shapes the Utopians’ own communal consciousness.

Greenblatt’s argument is compelling because of the way in which it addresses the troubling question of “what More meant” by giving us a more complex understanding of what we mean by “More.” This is not simply a more subtle biographical explanation of the meaning of the text; it is an analysis of how the self is written or fashioned in a particular time and place, and how the structure and function of the individual personality or political subject has a great deal of historical specificity. Greenblatt’s work is as much about reading the self through the text as it is about reading the text through the self. It is this emphasis on the changing social and political context of subjectivity and self-fashioning, the changing

60 Greenblatt 54-7.
61 Greenblatt 53.
means or modes of disciplining the self, that allows Greenblatt to uncover the hidden tension between public shaming and private guilt that structures much of *Utopia*.62

This focus on the Utopian subject as the locus of public shaming may, however, overlook a key detail in the function and logic of these customs, for it is not primarily *people* who are being ritually debased, but rather *things*—gold, silver, gems—or rather, the *abstract value* embodied by “precious things.” This is important to note because it reveals something of what we may call the paradoxical “modernity” of More’s *Utopia*. The tension described by Greenblatt—between public shaming and private guilt, communal versus private subjectivity—tends towards a narrative in which *Utopia* appears as a block to or reaction against modernity or an emerging modern subject. Variations on this theme are repeated throughout Greenblatt’s essay. Utopia, we are told, attempts to control or delimit “individuation,” “self-differentiation,” “private inwardness,” “guilt,” “the pangs of conscience,” the “inner conviction of sinfulness,” the “inner recesses of individual consciousness,” “self-ownership,” “possessive individualism,” etc.63 In other words, utopian customs and institutions appear to be designed to contain the virus of a proto-protestant, proto-bourgeois subjectivity:

Utopian shame opposes the undesirable development of inwardness through guilt, as its communism opposes the development of a sense of self-ownership; both are viewed as traps or nightmares. Marx too, it might be observed, saw guilt and private ownership as forces imprisoning men, but not before they had liberated men from other, prior forces; they in turn would have to be destroyed, but they were necessary, indeed inevitable elements in the process of human emancipation. More does not see history in this way; he wishes, as it were, to stop modern history before it starts, even as he wishes to cancel his own identity.64

62 This approach might be understood as a kind of Foucaultian critique or reworking of both Burkhardt’s thesis on the development of the “renaissance individual” and Weber’s analysis of the protestant work ethic and the emergence of bourgeois subjectivity.

63 Greenblatt 40; 45; 51-4; 51; 51; 54; 38.

64 Greenblatt 54.
This argument, that More wishes to block “modern history”—a modernity that is identical to a protestant moral economy of guilt—is in some sense a variation on the arch-conservative Catholic reading of Utopia as a work of nostalgia for a lost, mythic state of organic, feudal corporatism. The social function of public shaming in Utopia is imagined as a block to the development of private inwardness and self-possession, and therefore a block to the modern self—individuated and alienated—and the moral economy of guilt that is supposed to characterize, in Max Weber’s words, the protestant “spirit of capitalism.”

This emphasis on the disciplinary function of Utopian communism, the moral economy of Utopian institutions, is certainly legitimate given the fact that, as noted earlier, More had no real concept of “economy” as such, no concept, that is, of the economic as an autonomous domain or abstract system. Nevertheless, one of the most interesting things about Utopia is the way in which something like the concept of abstract value appears in the text, not, of course, as part of a coherent theory, but as the spectre or possibility of something that must be contained. The meaning or import of this revelation of abstract value is occluded if we view the communal ethos of shame and honour in Utopia strictly in terms of an emerging subjectivity. By framing the text as an expression of and reaction to an emerging early modern subjectivity, Utopian institutions and customs appear to be, more or less, a negation of modernity, an idealization of a pre-modern or pre-capitalist mode of social organization. But if we recognize that the Utopian practice of ritualized debasement is not

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directed primarily at people, but rather at things, the logic and function of Utopian discipline takes on an entirely different meaning.

If we return to the strange anecdotes about gold slave chains and chamber pots, or the story of the Anemolian ambassadors, the story through which we are supposed to find the Utopians’ true “cast of mind,” what we have, curiously, is a story about how people are shamed (sometimes inadvertently and comically) as a consequence of a deliberate policy of ritually debasing things. The shaming of people follows from the necessity to devalue or debase things. Greenblatt provides an extremely insightful analysis of the social function of gold and silver as a means of public shaming, but doing so he ignores the primary function of gold and its potentially subversive value, and so he ignores the way in which these social uses are as much about the debasement of gold, the repression of its primary function, as they are about the public shaming of criminals and slaves. It is the material itself that must be publicly debased or devalued. Slaves and criminals are, of course, disgraced or humiliated through the use of gold chains, but for Hythloday it is really more important, in this context, that gold is debased through its association with slavery and criminality. This, after all, is the point of the anecdote—to explain the Utopians’ treatment of “precious things” not so much their treatment of slaves and criminals. If we follow the logic of the various associations—between gold and slavery, gold and excrement, etc.—we see that these customs are really all about the debasement of things rather than people, or, more accurately, it is the commodity-character so clearly evident in precious things, so clearly evident as the reason for their existence within Utopia, that must be repressed through debasement and devaluation, exposing the “natural” uselessness of the material. The exchange-value of gold, as we have

66 The section on slavery—De Servis—follows shortly after. The significance of the ordering of the various sections or subchapters will be developed below.
seen, makes it both necessary and dangerous to a society committed to communal ownership but still dependent on external markets and vulnerable to the depredations of external enemies.

Just as it would be absurd to say that the Utopians’ use of gold chamber pots is meant to degrade the people who use them, just as it would be absurd to say their use of gems as children’s toys is meant to humiliate infants, it is absurd to say that gold is used *primarily* to disgrace slaves and criminals. The purpose of the association is not, in the first instance, to shame individuals or humiliate or disgrace Utopian subjects but to debase “precious things”—to associate them with filth, criminality, slavery, and childishness. Gold is a *marker* of ignominy, true, but only because it is first debased through association with *uselessness*. And we should note that this is not any arbitrary association, a form of classical conditioning, say, in which one stimulus reproduces the reflexive responses of an entirely unrelated stimulus through repeated association; no, there is an *underlying affinity* that is supposed to become manifest through these repeated associations—a relationship between gold, shame, social disgrace, and *uselessness*. The common denominator is uselessness: the debasement of supposedly purposeless things, baubles, childish toys, shit, waste material, useless people, or people who can only be *made* useful through force. That is, the Utopians’ practice of public shaming is not simply an attempt to control or delimit the bounds and structure of an emerging modern subject, it is also an attempt to control and delimit the bounds and structure of *value*, not through a return to pre-modern forms of social control, but through the elevation or valorization of work, labour, and productivity, and through an association between the *ethical* and the *useful*. Whatever this may amount to, it is not an abstract negation of modernity.
Take, for instance, the encounter between the Utopians and the Anemolian ambassadors. On the surface it may seem that the Anemolians, with their conspicuous display of wealth and distinction, are representative of decadent, modern Europeans and their “invidious distinctions,” representatives, that is, of an early modern, early capitalist subject as opposed to the primitive communism and monastic egalitarianism of the Utopians. To an extent this is true, of course. The Anemolians are clearly a mirror for the reader, a mirror through which they begin to see English customs, particularly social hierarchy and private wealth, from an estranged perspective. But this is also a curious moment in the text in which the contrast between European customs and those of the Utopians brings to light the distinctly modern ethos of the Utopian animi affectio. That is, one can see Anemolian pomp as actually quite pre-modern in character. Far from being an expression of early modern or early capitalist “self-differentiation” or “self-fashioning,” Anemolian pageantry and spectacle is entirely consistent with feudal modes of social distinction. Among the Anemolians, wealth, money and value are clearly indistinguishable from social display. All the Anemolian gold that we see takes the form of ornament and spectacle. Money or wealth is clearly valued by the Anemolians as a means to social ends; the economic is a function of the social. That is, the Anemolians appear to behave as the ruling classes of pre-capitalist societies have always behaved. Their pomp and spectacle, their exuberant status displays, make sense within a society in which the economic is still embedded, in Karl Polanyi’s terms, within the social or political.67 By contrast, it is the Utopian practice of debasing things, or rather, the commodity-character of particular things (things produced or acquired in order to be exchanged with other things) that suggests a suppressed awareness of abstract value

characteristic of a capitalist cast of mind. The Utopians’ anxiety concerning the disavowed value of gold reveals an implicit understanding of abstract value itself, as does their use of gold purely as a means of exchange rather than adornment. In fact, one could say that the rejection or suppression of aesthetic or ornamental value is not an effect of a monastic suspicion of worldly pleasure—the Utopians, after all, have no problem with the pursuit of pleasure—rather, it is an effect of a utilitarian and productivist suspicion of uselessness.

We must be careful, of course, to distinguish between the Utopian ideology of use and “utilitarianism.” The use of the term in this context is a bit of an anachronism. While Fredric Seebohm and George M. Logan have argued that Utopian moral philosophy and economic arrangements anticipate certain aspects of classical utilitarianism, no one suggests that *Utopia* provides us with a clear concept of social utility in the form of a systematic ethical framework that anticipates all the key features of Jeremy Bentham’s or John Stuart Mill’s theories. Utility does not find expression here as a coherent ethical system, but as a kind of confused mixture of moralism and instrumentality. This is not to say the Utopians do not have their own moral philosophy. Hythloday, applying the terms of classical Greek and Roman philosophy in order to make sense of Utopian custom, implies that they are Epicurean in their general attitude towards work and play. But that term does not quite fit either; Utopian Epicureanism is influenced by a kind of productivist ethos and instrumental rationality that goes beyond the personal or moralistic Epicurean calculus of pleasure and pain. Utopian Epicureanism, like classical 18th or 19th century utilitarianism, is governed by an idea of the collective good that is not just about morality but also something like “economics,” or the management of production and exchange and the collective organization

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and discipline of labour. This emphasis on the organization of material production and collective labour—coupled with an implicit (if disavowed) understanding of abstract value—makes Utopian Epicureanism something quite different from its classical antecedents. The image of gold slave chains represents the underlying tension between Utopian moral philosophy and labour discipline. Or in other words, the image of slaves bound with chains of gold crystallizes the tension between Utopia’s Epicurean ideology and the “real” relations of production in Utopia.

6. Narrative Structure and Social Structure

In order to understand the relationship between Utopian ideology and Utopian economy it is necessary to first understand the moral philosophy of the Utopians. It is important to note that Hythloday’s account of Utopian moral philosophy follows from his description of their curious uses for precious things and the “cast of mind” that is implied by this use. The anecdote about the Anemolian ambassadors leads directly into a discussion of the Utopian world-view that stands behind these strange customs and behaviours. Hythloday remarks that the Utopians’ “attitudes” regarding the money-form developed “partly from their upbringing [partim ex educatione], since the institutions of their commonwealth are completely opposed to such folly, partly from instruction [partim ex doctrina] and good books” (155). In other words, these “attitudes” have their basis in an institutional or

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69 George M. Logan describes Utopian economics as the application of Epicurean moral principles on a collective, political level, applying those principles to the allocation of communal resources. It is in this sense that Utopia “anticipates utilitarianism” according to Logan. See The Meaning of More’s Utopia, op. cit., 187. See also Edward Surtz’s discussion of Epicurus in Praise of Pleasure, op. cit. 23-35.

70 The Utopians, “attitude” towards the money-form is described as a mixture of amazement, wonder and disgust. “Mirantur ac detestantur,” we are told; they are fascinated and revolted by the madness (insania) inspired by money. This amazement or wonder mirrors back to the reader her own initial response—the
doctrinal code that Hythloday goes on to formulate in terms of a “moral philosophy” and a “religious principle.” Utopian moral philosophy, then, is presented as an expression of Utopian institutions and should really be understood as the ideological framework for Utopian social order, a framework that only begins to be formulated in response to the problem of understanding and rationalizing the Utopians’ uses for gold. The problem introduced by the Utopians’ disavowed understanding of abstract value and their own ritualized debasement of precious things—their inverted commodity fetishism—is at the root of Utopian ideology.

If we understand the section on moral philosophy as the “ideological framework” for the fictional Utopian republic, then we can work backwards and analyze this lengthy subsection as a counterpart to the earlier sections in Book 2 on production and exchange. The sections titled “Occupations” and “Social Relations” describe relations and techniques of production, the discipline of labour, forms of exchange, while the sections on natural and moral philosophy, Epicureanism, the hierarchy of pleasures, war and religion describe the ideological structures, the worldview or system of belief in Utopia. We can visualize the structure of the subsections of Book 2 as follows:

![Diagram of Book 2 subsections]

response Hythloday cautiously anticipates—to the excremental, infantile and servile associations that the Utopians have discovered as the “natural” properties gold.
The first sections are described from the distanced, neutral stance of an objective, near-invisible observer; beginning with the section oddly titled “Travels of the Utopians,” the text passes through the looking glass of Utopian custom and reveals the gap between the narrator’s perspective and the perspective of the subject whom he observes. In other words, we start with “objective” material relations, and only really arrive at the level of ideology by separating the narrator out as a distinct character, which allows us to observe the process of observation. Of course, this schema is an abstraction; the first few sections also deal with what might be called “Utopian ideology”—the description of Utopian political structures in the section on “Their Officials,” for instance, or the description of the purpose of labour in Utopia at the very end of “Their Occupations.” There is some brief description here of Utopian beliefs or values, what they consider to be the purpose of work and government, but these observations are not in any way as systematic and detailed as they are in the later sections of Book 2. In these earlier sections we get no sense of these beliefs as a coherent, organized system of thought. The scattered observations regarding Utopian ideology in these earlier sections really anticipate or require the more systematic account of the structure of Utopian thought that we get in the later sections. The transition from Hythloday’s straightforward depiction of the workings of Utopian institutions and relations of production in the first half of Book 2 to the systematic account of Utopian ideology found in the later sections occurs alongside a change in the structure of narration. The movement from description to reflection, from an account of the organization of work to philosophical reflection on the process of discipline, is bound up with a change in narrative perspective. It is this transformation of the text’s narrative form, in fact, that creates the character of Hythloday, separating him from the author’s voice.
Let’s trace this movement from one level of narration to another, from one level of the Utopian social order to another to see where and how this dislocation of the observer takes place and what meaning it might have. The first half of Book 2 describes the island’s physical and social geography (“Their Cities”), its political structures (“Their Officials”), the general division of labour and the occupations of its citizens (“Their Occupations”), and their quasi-familial social relations and systems of exchange (“Social Relations”). The narrator proceeds fairly logically through a description of Utopian geography, to a description of Utopian politics and Utopian social and economic relations. At the beginning of Book 2 the personality of the narrator recedes into the background and is scarcely perceivable; it emerges slowly through the course of the description of the various institutions and customs of Utopia, and only comes fully into view in the section on the “Travels of the Utopians,” through his description of gold slave chains and the story of the Anemolian ambassadors. Only a single interjection by the narrator distinguishes him from the author in the first half of Book 2, and this interjection is itself designed to present the narrative as transparent and unembellished. The narrator claims that he will “describe” or “depict” (depingam) the principle city of Utopia—Amaurot—saying only, “I know it best because I lived there for five full years” (117). So while the narrator briefly draws attention to himself and his status as a foreigner, he also emphasizes his intimate familiarity with the subject of his description and offers no opinions or judgments regarding the customs and institutions which he depicts. There is no suggestion that he is unreliable or that his point of view colours or distorts his observations at this point. In fact, it is easy to forget there is a narrator at all. There are no

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71 The sections on Utopian occupations and social relations describe both “household management” and the social organization of production and exchange, and so they concern the “economic” in both the classical and modern sense.
other references to the narrator in the first sections of Book 2, and the tone remains distant and objective, as if it were impersonal narration.

Beginning with the section oddly titled “Travels of the Utopians,” a different, seemingly more fragmented, less logical series of observations emerges, moving from a description of the laws governing travel and Utopian attitudes towards gold, to their natural and moral philosophies, their Epicureanism, their “hierarchy of pleasures,” their punishments for criminals, their foreign policies, and their practice of religious toleration. Does this series of descriptions have a peculiar logic of its own? Well, we might say that this new section really begins the moment we start to see Utopian customs from the inside, from within their “cast of mind,” their system of value, their forms of discipline, their view of the Anaemolian ambassadors. These are the sections in which a more wide-ranging if somewhat disjointed analysis of Utopian ideology emerges. The narrator, too, emerges as a distinct personality at the transition point, and becomes more distinct as he tries to elaborate on the Utopians’ paradoxical “uses” for the money-form.

Alistair Fox has noted the intrusion of the narrator’s voice at the very end of the section on “Social Relations,” just before the section on Utopian travel. When More describes the music, spices and perfumes which accompany the Utopians’ communal banquets, Fox argues, “he insinuates a critical judgment on their proclivity towards harmless pleasure that alerts the reader to the presence of a narrator whose view is distinct from both the Utopians’ viewpoint and, possibly, the author’s own.” More writes that the Utopians are “somewhat inclined to think that no kind of pleasure [*voluptatis genus*] is forbidden, provided harm does not come of it” (143). The tone is perhaps ambivalent, but whether this

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particular passage implies judgment or not, it is certainly true that by the time we get into the next section, “Travels of the Utopians,” the narrator’s viewpoint has become distinct from that of the Utopians, to the point where it admits a certain limit or block to understanding. When Hythloday begins to tell us about the Utopians’ hoard of gold, he suddenly addresses More and the reader directly, saying “I’m really quite ashamed to tell you how they keep it, because you probably won’t believe me,” and goes on to say, “I would not have believed it myself if someone else had simply told me about it, but I was there and saw it with my own eyes” (147-49). Hythloday invokes the authority of his own eyes, but as a consequence he also draws attention to his particular point of view, his embarrassment, the doubt that grows in the space between observation and narration. 73 And as we have seen, when Hythloday tells the story of the Anemolian ambassadors, he recounts how it became clear to him that “these customs so different from those of other people also produce a quite different cast of mind” (151), a viewpoint that he cannot fully grasp from the inside, but merely reflects back to the reader in the Anemolian mirror. When he describes the debate within Utopia on the nature of human happiness and the struggle between what might be called the “Stoic” and “Epicurean” factions of Utopian philosophy, he asserts that “they seem rather too much inclined to the view which favours pleasure, in which they conclude that all or the most important part of human happiness consists” (159). If earlier his opinions regarding Utopian Epicureanism were merely insinuated, here they are more clearly expressed as the gap widens between the narrator and the object of his gaze. Fox argues that by the time we get to the section on Utopian warfare, the teasing and ironic tone becomes

73 For the reader, of course, the narration is presented as though it were also second hand, at another remove from us, told to us through More, not by More.
increasingly harsh and satirical. The satire initially directed at Europe, he argues, begins to infect Hythloday’s description of Utopia itself, and so the contrast between Europe and Utopia begins to dissolve. Describing the ruthless pragmatism of Utopian warfare, Fox writes that

the rationality of the Utopians has led them to duplicate all the most disgusting of European war practices, and even to invent worse ones of their own: they foster bribery, assassination, sedition, rival claimants to the enemy throne, hire mercenaries, and disregard both kinship and friendship in the ferocity with which they fight. All humour and facetiousness vanishes in this section, and the tone becomes as black as night.

Fox traces these shifts in tone in order to uncover what he believes to be the author’s state of mind as he composed *Utopia*. The text, he argues, begins full of optimism and descends into doubt and satirical dystopianism as More unfolds the implications of “Utopian rationality” and begins to become wary of his own creation. Fox infers this changing attitude from the shift in narrative perspective from the “relative tonal stability” and impersonal narrative structure in the first sections, to the facetiousness and paradoxical irony of the narrator in the middle sections and finally the harsh, satirical irony in final sections, where the dark implications of Utopian rationality are felt.

But Fox seems to overlook the fact that the “dark tone” and “satirical irony” of this section really emerges from Hythloday’s description of Utopia’s neighbours, which clearly stand in for various European nation states. The “disregard [for] both friendship and kinship” which Fox ascribes to the Utopians, for instance, more accurately describes the practices of

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74 Fox 102.

75 Fox 100-1.

76 Fox argues that More “was [finally] able to salvage himself from the black irony of the section on Utopian warfare, by asserting the existence of a dimension of religious experience in which men cease to have to take responsibility for the inadequacy of their own rational vision and the limitations imposed upon them by the paradoxes of the human situation” (102).
the Zapoletes, those “busy sellers” of war—mercenaries very like the Swiss who sell themselves to the highest bidder. “Hardly a war is fought in which a good number of them are not engaged on both sides,” Hythloday observes:

Thus it happens every day that men who are united by ties of blood and have served together in friendship, but who are soon after separated into opposing armies, meet together in battle. Forgetful of kinship and comradeship alike, they furiously run each other through, driven to mutual destruction for no other reason than that they were hired for a paltry sum by opposing princes. (209)

This scornful account of the shifting loyalties of mercenaries and mercenary nations is not exactly about Utopia. As with much of the satire in the text, it is directed primarily at European customs and practices. While it is true that the Utopians use these mercenaries and are therefore indirectly responsible for this slaughter, their “use” of the Zapoletes also has the secondary purpose of exterminating them, and this, strange as it sounds, is not presented as though it were a bad thing. “As for how many Zapoletes get killed,” Hythloday says, “the Utopians never worry about that, for they think they would deserve very well of mankind if they could sweep from the face of the earth all the dregs of that vicious and disgusting race” (211). This is a disturbing passage, no doubt, but that does not make it ironic, nor does the tone of this passage imply that the author has turned against his own creation or has deliberately collapsed the distinction between Europe and Utopia. In fact there is nothing in this passage to suggest that it is consciously intended to present a distanced, satirical reflection on Utopian rationality. The narrator, if anything, appears to agree with the genocidal use of the Zapoletes, a people who, given their barbarism, their degenerate profit-seeking and fratricide, are presented as a nation worthy of destruction. Erasmus’ denunciation of mercenaries in his Adages, or More’s own condemnation of the atrocities committed by mercenary armies, in the Dialogue Concerning Heresies, suggest that More
and his close associates felt a great deal of contempt for mercenaries. While this passage may reflect certain inconsistencies or contradictions inherent to Utopian rationality, it does not follow that More intended it to be read satirically. What we see here are the consequences of Utopian pragmatism and rationality carried outside the boundary of the Utopian state, but we do not clearly see the author’s intentions or his state of mind at the moment of composition.

Likewise, when Hythloday tells us that the Utopians do not make formal treaties, this is not really presented as a criticism of the Utopians; the custom is used instead to reflect on the hypocrisy and emptiness of legal contracts and treaties in the real world. “In Europe, of course, and especially in these regions where the Christian faith and religion prevail,” Hythloday remarks, “the dignity of treaties is everywhere kept sacred and inviolable. This is partly because the princes are all so just and virtuous, partly also from the awe and reverence that everyone feels for the popes” (199). Given Hythloday’s fierce denunciation of actually existing secular and religious authorities in the debate on counsel, the satirical tone here is so blatantly obvious that one can almost hear the curl in the lip of the narrator. But once again, the satire is not directed at the Utopians’ shocking or unusual customs, but at the hypocrisy of pious Europeans. Even when they engage in bribery, assassination, and sedition, or use devious tactics to avoid direct warfare, Hythloday always presents these “low” methods as having a noble end in the hands of the Utopians. While “other nations” may condemn the Utopians’ custom of buying or bidding for the life of the enemy “as the cruel villainy of a degenerate mind,” the Utopians, Hythloday says, consider such actions praiseworthy,

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merciful and humane because they avoid unnecessary slaughter. In fact, he says, “they pity the mass of the enemy’s soldiers almost as much as their own citizens, for they know common people do not go to war of their own accord, but are driven to it by the madness of princes” (207). So far from duplicating “all the most disgusting of European war practices,” as Fox asserts, the Utopians transform those practices by using them for different ends—to spare life, mitigate conflict, or focus their violence on the ruling class of foreign enemy nations. Nor are they presented as ignoble or cowardly for all this cleverness, for when they do engage the enemy directly in warfare, “they don’t hold life so cheap that they throw it away recklessly, nor so dear that they grasp it greedily at the price of shame when duty bids them give it up” (213). It is hard to read into these passages a tone that is “as black as night,” and so it is difficult to ascribe any particular change in the state of mind of the author, much less determine the significance of this change for our understanding of the text.

Nevertheless, Fox’s observation regarding the emergence and separation of the narrator’s voice from the author’s is useful, even if his speculations about the author’s state of mind at the moment of composition do not adequately explain this subtle shift in perspective. Instead of focusing on authorial intent, I am interested here in the relationship between the changing structure of the narrative and the shift from simple description of Utopian custom to reflection on Utopian animi affectio. That is, I am more interested in the relationship between narrative form and the Utopian “state of mind” than I am in the relationship between narrative form and the state of mind of the author. The change in perspective emerges, I argue, as the narrator tries to grasp the inner life of Utopian custom, how the Utopians think or how their value-system works. At each of the points at which the narrator’s voice becomes audible or becomes estranged from the object of observation, the
problem of representing the Utopian system of value, their order of things, is the problem at hand. The first clear rupture in the text, if we follow the order of its composition rather than its final construction, creates the voice of Hythloday. The narrator’s voice emerges as he describes the Utopians’ attempt to use the money-form to protect the integrity of the republic while repressing its subversive, alien value, which always threatens to undermine Utopian order from within. The shift in narrative perspective happens the moment the narrator begins to describe the spectacle of gold slave chains—an image which is so strange that it opens up for the narrator the possibility of misunderstanding, the possibility of an entirely different cast of mind, a different subjectivity, but also a different order of value, a different worldview. This image separates the narrator’s voice from the author’s; it draws attention to the eye of the narrator and the gap between observation and description. But crucially this image and the accompanying shift in narrative structure draws attention to a contradiction within Utopia itself—the tension between the social relations of production within Utopia and the ideological framework through which the Utopians understand themselves and the world. The image of gold slave chains is at the heart of this contradiction and at once promises to make sense of the inner life of Utopian custom and obscures its functioning.

7. Communism and the Utopian Mode of Production

The image of gold slave chains cannot really be understood unless we have a better grasp of the relationship between the strange, kaleidoscopic relations of production in Utopia and the ideological formations to which they give rise; for this image and the narrative dislocation it effects really reflects the central contradiction of Utopian social order. So let’s return to the first sections of Book 2 in order to understand how they work structurally and
what kind of logic animates them. It is in these sections spoken by the near-transparent narrator that we get a sense of how Utopian society works on the most basic level—the natural environment and resources of the place, how things are produced, how labour is organized, and how goods are exchanged in a society without private property. At the most fundamental level, Utopian communism involves the extension and universalization of the principle of the commons. The means of subsistence—land, plus the tools and techniques devised for working it—are collectivized and a system of compulsory, communal agricultural labour is instituted in which everyone participates through rotating labour stints and education in the countryside. There is no private ownership of land or housing. Periodic work and housing rotations ensure that no one develops a sense of propriety or ownership over the land. The structure of agricultural work defines in broad strokes the fundamental social property relations in Utopian society—semi-nomadic primitive communism, the rehabilitation of feudal common lands, a kind of systematized version of small, autarkic peasant communalism.

This is not the only kind of labour that is performed in Utopia, of course. While agricultural work is universal and mandatory, there is a division of labour through the practical trades. In addition to the rural labour conscription, all citizens living in the cities are required to specialize in some productive trade (ars), which they practice when they are not engaged in the primary work of farming. Particular stress is laid on the usefulness of this specialized craftwork, which is usually something like cloth-making, masonry, metal-work, or carpentry. The organization of this work follows a kind of guild or petty-craft production model. The work is organized along the lines of a patriarchal master-apprentice relationship between older and younger workers; the craftsmen control or have direct access to the means
of production and local distribution networks. There is no intermediary class of merchants or
workshop owners. There is, however, a class of elected officials—syphogrants and
tranibors—who, while they do not control the means of production or organize the
production process, nevertheless observe the work to ensure no one is engaged in any activity
that has no real utility. Stress is continually laid on the productivity, utility, and universality
of work as the guarantor of material abundance. The one exception to this rule of utility is the
“scholarly class”—the literatorum ordo—who are exempted from practical physical labour
so that they may pursue intellectual work. Craftsmen (mechanici) may rise to this class
through hard work and natural ability, so it is a quasi-meritocratic order, but women and
slaves are excluded. The scholarly class also functions as the political class, which
effectively restricts the democratic features of Utopia’s political institutions. The elected
syphogrants and tranibors, along with the priests and governors, are all drawn from the
scholarly class. This class proves to be the exception to the rule of compulsory, universal,
practical labour, although the members of this class achieve this status only through
extraordinary diligence, and, apparently, often choose to ignore their own exceptional status
and work alongside those whom they monitor.

There is also a second “exceptional class,” a second class that is set apart from the
ordinary citizenry. These are the slaves who perform menial dirty work, such as slaughtering
animals, or the heavy cleaning and maintenance work in the collective dining halls. There are
few details regarding the work of slaves. Some of their work seems to be the same as that of
ordinary citizens, only it appears to be more physically taxing or unclean. Some of these
slaves are Utopian citizens who are being punished for an infraction; some of them are war
captives or convicts purchased overseas, or voluntary “penniless drudges” from foreign
countries. This class is alluded to in the first sections on Utopian political and economic order, but their role is explained only in the later sections on Utopian ideology. For now we may simply note that their virtual exclusion from the sections on Utopian “Occupations” and “Social Relations” suggests that their work is supposed to seem inessential to the economy of Utopia.78

From this brief outline of the relations of production in Utopia we can see four major categories of work—agricultural labour, craftwork, intellectual labour and slave labour. Two of these categories are normative (general agricultural labour and specialized craftwork are performed by everyone); two are exceptional (the elevated scholarly class and the debased slave class). There are three major classes—the citizen, the scholar, and the slave—which are internally divided by a gendered division of labour. Property ownership and exchange works on the principle that “all things are common,” and “those who give get nothing in return from those who receive” (104, 146). The first of these formulations—the principle that all things should be held in common—is really More’s incredulous characterization of Raphael’s ideal, moneyless economy in Book 1; the second is Hythloday’s description of Utopia’s actual system of domestic exchange in Book 2. Hythloday goes on to say that the gift which binds the various cities in Utopia makes “the whole island … like a single family” (147). The distinction between household and commonwealth, oikos and polis, then, is dissolved in Utopia. Communal ownership makes all distribution networks into an elaborate system of tribal gift-exchange. But the position of the slave in this familial household economy of gift-

78 The virtual absence of the slave from sections on Utopian economy is significant. The slave class is supposed to seem inessential; slavery is supposed to serve an ethical—as opposed to strictly “economic”—function, enforcing the discipline of the Utopian hierarchy of pleasures. The truth is a little more complicated as we shall see.
exchange is the key to understanding the nature of the relationship between Utopian ideology and Utopian economy.

As Christopher Kendrick and Fredric Jameson have pointed out, the mode of production of Utopian communism appears to be a kind of kaleidoscope of overlapping modes from widely disparate historical epochs. The principle form of labour—communal agricultural labour conscription—recalls something like semi-nomadic primitive communism combined with the mass-organization and large-scale agricultural engineering of the so-called “Asiatic mode.” The gift economy of Utopia is also consistent with these two modes. The feudal mode is implied here too, of course, in the rehabilitation of the commons as a small peasant-holding wish-image, in the quasi-monastic caste of the literatorum ordo, and in the free guild structure of Utopian craftwork. Something of the classical mode can be seen in the patriarchal republicanism of Utopian political institutions and, of course, in the practice of slavery. Capitalism, or an early, transitional form of capitalism, also appears in the structure of Utopia—at the boundary of the enclave-world, on its skin, as it were, in its protective/mimetic reaction to the outside world, but it may also be seen to reside at the very heart of the republic, as the disavowed core of Utopian moral economy and productive relations. We might say that capitalism appears within Utopia as a fantastic, dislocating foreign power which the whole is designed to exclude, but it also appears at the heart of this


80 The Utopians practice both penal and war slavery. These forms tend to be conflated, both in the text and in the secondary literature, but they nevertheless serve very different purposes in Utopian society. In Utopia, penal slavery is used to discipline and control individual Utopian citizens who are unable to govern their passions, whereas war slavery is practiced to subdue recalcitrant nations. For an analysis of the ways in which classical and early modern theories of slavery often conflate different forms of servitude—including household slavery and agricultural slavery, penal slavery and war slavery, chattel slavery and political slavery—see Mary Nyquist, Arbitrary Rule: Slavery, Tyranny, and the Power of Life and Death (U Chicago Press, 2013) esp. 20-6.
constellation of broken historical modes, in Utopia’s disciplinary practices and in its repression and manipulation of the commodity-form.

From the first sections of Book 2, particularly the sections on Utopian “Occupations” and “Social Relations,” we begin to see that Utopian communism—as an imaginary mode of production—is really a reconfiguration of several different historical modes, or fragments of old modes of production brought together in a new pattern. What is this pattern? What organizing principle runs through this pattern? To begin with, we might note the honour accorded to ordinary, practical labour in Utopia, its consistent stress on utility and universal, common ownership. In this regard More’s text diverges sharply from the elitist communism of Plato’s Republic, where there is a sharp line delineating the ruling class (which practices communism) and the working class (which does not).81 The other tradition of common ownership alluded to in Utopia—the “communism” of the primitive, apostolic church (or, to a limited extent, some Christian monastic orders)—is also a communism of the elect.82 Utopia, by contrast, universalizes the principle of common ownership, which is something unique. It also elevates and rationalizes labour. Unlike monastic or apostolic communism, Utopian communism is a system which values labour for its utility—for its capacity to increase pleasure or reduce suffering, to create material abundance and free time. The ruling class in Utopia is still a class of the “useless,” but their devotion to the telos of labour—the higher pleasures of the mind—does not in practice separate them from the process of material


82 For a discussion of pre-modern monastic or elite communism, see Hexter, “Utopia and Its Historical Milieu,” in Works, vol. 4, op. cit. cx-cxiii.
production. They still feel compelled to labour *voluntarily*, which suggests that physical labour is not, in itself, a marker of class in Utopia.

The universal compulsion to labour, the levelling of social distinction through physical labour, is part of Utopia’s founding myth. In the story of Utopia’s origin—the conquest of Abraxa by king Utopus—the very geography of the country is transformed through a colossal feat of social and technical engineering which mobilizes the entire population to cut a channel fifteen miles wide, separating the new land of Utopia from a distant, unnamed continent. King Utopus, we are told, “put not only the natives to work at this task, but all his own soldiers too, so that the vanquished would not think the labour a disgrace” (111). The soldiers of King Utopus, then, did not just enforce the first mass labour conscription, they also did the work themselves in order to remove the insult or indignity attached to labour. This, in fact, would seem to be the real purpose of the man-made channel.

The channel not only physically separates Utopia from the rest of the world; the act of creating it redefines the meaning and value of labour in Utopia. In the everyday work of the mature republic, the maintenance of labour discipline is a job that the ruling class performs themselves, not through an intermediary caste of foremen, soldiers or police; so while discipline is imposed within what is still essentially a hierarchical, class-bound society, the exemptions and privileges of the ruling class do not allow them to wholly detach themselves from material production, to view physical labour from a distance as an insult to their own dignity and status. In fact, the very uselessness of the *literatorum ordo* is not presented as privileged “idleness,” but as another kind of work, a kind of impractical, intellectual or scholarly work that is the end or purpose of all practical, physical work.
So underlying the patchwork system that is the Utopian mode of production there is a tension between hierarchy and egalitarianism, physical and intellectual work, utility and uselessness. Common ownership is universalized and everyday, practical labour is elevated, but there is also a ruling intellectual caste that performs work which is impractical, voluntary, or simply managerial. This tension is not resolved in the first sections of Book 2. In fact, this tension cannot really be resolved at all, except on the level of ideology where the tension between the useful and the wasteful—utilis and iners—is rearticulated in terms of an Epicurean moral philosophy and a “hierarchy of pleasures.” In the section on “Occupations,” we just begin to see the outlines of this philosophy. All work, we are told, is supposed to meet human needs, but the Utopian economy is not simply autarkic; it is oriented towards the production of a surplus—a material surplus and a surplus of free time. This surplus is created by re-channelling all the energy wasted on the “superfluous trades” and putting to work the “various kinds of idlers” in the commonwealth (129). Under normal circumstances, Hythloday observes, the production of a surplus would simply undercut prices to such an extent that the people who create the necessities of life would no longer be able to make a living. Given the mediation of the money-form in production and exchange, waste becomes a necessity (129-31). But if one were to remove the intermediary of exchange-value, Hythloday argues, if money and private property were abolished, then the idlers and the wasteful could be put to useful work without undermining the whole system of production:

Suppose again [under Utopian communism] that all the workers in useless trades [inertes artes] were put to useful ones [utilia], and that the whole crowd of languid idlers (each of whom consumes as much as any two of the workmen who provide what he consumes) were assigned to productive tasks—well, you can easily see how little time would be enough and more than enough to produce all the goods that

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83 Among these “idlers” are priests, the rich, gentlemen and lords, plus their retainers of course, “that cesspool of worthless swashbucklers,” but also “lusty beggars” and women, whose work was apparently invisible to More (129).
human needs and conveniences call for—yes, and human pleasure too, as long as it is true and natural pleasure. (131)

Utopian communism, then, is predicated upon the transformation of wasteful activity into productive activity. The Utopian mode is imagined to be not only ethical but also enormously productive and rational. The Utopian economy puts an end to scarcity. Pleasure—*voluptas*—not bare subsistence is the aim or purpose of work in Utopia (although this is always qualified as “true and natural pleasure”). And since scarcity and luxury have nothing to do with the maintenance of social distinctions in Utopia, this pleasure is derived less from consumption than from the expansion of *free time*.

The production of free time is, for Hythloday, what makes Utopian society superior to his own. The Utopians, we are told, work only six hours a day and spend the rest of their time at rest, play or in leisure. The hours of the day when they are not working are left “to each person’s individual discretion,” but in practice there are strict limits placed on acceptable leisure activities, and this “leisure” (*otium*—something inherently suspect) is closely monitored and disciplined (127). In their free time, Utopian subjects may play music or amuse themselves with conversation, but “they know nothing about gambling with dice or other such foolish and ruinous games” (129). There are no ale-houses and no brothels, either—“no chances for corruption; no hiding places; no spots for secret meetings. Because they live in the full view of all, they are bound to be either working at their usual trades or enjoying their leisure in a respectable way” (145). Even the games they play have a moral or pedagogical function. Their games are designed to teach logical reasoning or the interplay and conflict between the virtues and vices. Indeed, the discipline of the mind and will

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84 Hythloday does not elaborate here, but only later, in his description of Utopian moral philosophy.
appears to be the main purpose of Utopian leisure. While this time seems to be freely given over to the Utopian subject, we are also told that “generally these intervals are devoted to intellectual activity”—public lectures before dawn, for instance, which are designed specifically for the scholarly class, but are well attended by the broader citizenry. People attend the lectures of their choice, depending on their interests, “but if anyone would rather devote his spare time to his trade, as many do who are not suited to the intellectual life, this is not prohibited; in fact, such persons are commended as specially useful to the commonwealth” (127). If we read these passages carefully, then, we see how Utopian “free time” is really another form of work. We find that “generally” or “for the most part,” free time is devoted to scholarly pursuits—the discipline of the mind or the development of intellectual faculties. If an individual is not so inclined, they are not exactly permitted to play or engage in some empty pursuit; they are given the option instead to devote their spare time to their trade. They are “not prohibited” from volunteering their free time to work—a phrase which sounds permissive, but given the range of options that are described as “not prohibited,” there is a severe, if implicit, limitation on the acceptable use of “spare time.” In keeping with the Utopians’ valorization of practical labour, the people who choose to work are commended, but it is also implied that they are expected to work if their natural abilities or inclinations do not lend themselves to scholastic pursuits. The hierarchy of pleasures, the distinction between bodily pleasure and intellectual pleasure elaborated later in Book 2 is foreshadowed here as a general class division within the republic—a distinction between those who can and cannot pursue the ends of labour.

This can be seen most clearly at the very end of the section titled “Their Occupations,” when Hythloday describes the purpose of work. When needs and basic
pleasures are met, he says, when large-scale infrastructure and public works projects have
been improved and maintained, when no practical use can be found for the accumulating
material surplus,

then they very often proclaim a shorter work day, since the magistrates never force
their citizens to perform useless labour [*supervacaneo labore*]. The chief aim of their
constitution is that, as far as public needs permit, all citizens should be free to
withdraw as much time as possible from the service of the body and devote
themselves to the freedom and culture of the mind. For in that, they think, lies the
happiness of life. (135)

Here we see the basic lineaments of Utopian ideology beginning to be expressed. Happiness
lies in the freedom and culture of the mind—*animi libertas cultusque*—freeing the subject, as
much as possible, from the service of the body—*ab servitio corporis*. In this context,
*servitium corporis* can mean servicing the body’s needs or exerting the body in physical
labour.\(^{85}\) Both senses are implied here. The citizen, Hythloday says, should be freed,
whenever possible, from all unnecessary physical toil—work that exceeds the needs and the
natural pleasures of the body. “Useless labour”—*supervacaneo labore*—implies an
imbalance in the body politic, an imbalance of production and consumption that is expressed
on the collective level as an imbalance of want and excess. The disequilibrium produced by
useless labour is supposedly avoided by channelling excess capacity into free time, that is,
the pursuit of the higher pleasures of the mind—*animi libertas cultusque*—which is supposed
to be the end or purpose of all bodily labour. But as we have seen, much of this free time is
channelled back into productive work, as large sectors of the citizen class and a whole class
of slaves beneath them are effectively or actually condemned to the “service of the body,”

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\(^{85}\) This kind of word play was common. Nyquist notes that for many early modern political theorists,
the idea of “serving” and “saving” are both implied in the term *servus*: Grotius and Hobbes, among others, she
writes, claim “that the very term *seruus* or *serui* (slave or slaves), which is the substantive of *seruire*, to serve,
derives from the verb *seruare*, to preserve, spare, or save” (8). Nyquist provides an extensive analysis of the
ideological implications of this etymological claim in *Arbitrary Rule*, op. cit. 218-26.
either because they cannot enjoy the higher pleasures of the mind or because they cannot govern their lower bodily impulses and must be subject to penal slavery and forced labour as a means of discipline. So on the one hand this sounds like a rather beautiful idea: all people working together to free one another from unnecessary toil; all people working together to allow for the free development of the creative capacities of the whole; all people working together to create the free time that is necessary in order to enjoy the ends of labour—the curiosity and free play of the mind, the pleasure of philosophical contemplation or aesthetic reflection, the happiness which lies in the purposeless discipline of the mind. On the other hand, when Hythloday refers to “all citizens” we must remember that he really does not mean “all people.” As we shall see, even among the citizen class, those who cannot enjoy the higher pleasures are expected to work, and those who cannot govern their own bodies, those who are governed by their own bodily appetites, must be enslaved, instrumentalized, reduced to mere utility though either force or shame. The end or purpose of labour, the free time enjoyed by all citizens, becomes confused with the means necessary to achieve it, and what initially appears to be the free play of the mind increasingly resembles the tedious discipline of the schoolroom, distinguishable from the discipline of the fields or the workshop only because it is less obviously useful, or useful only as a means of discipline.

So what is “free time” in Utopia? It certainly is not a holiday or a festival; there is no room for the carnivalesque, for the potentially subversive or destructive free-reign of repressed impulses. Free time is not festive time, but really another form of work-time—sometimes it is literally work, the free gift of additional labour, other times it is given over to the improvement of the mind or will. In either case, free time is spent productively. The pursuit of pleasure is really limited to the pursuit of the higher pleasures that do not create...
waste or pain as a consequence of their expression. So on the one hand Utopian society seems to be structured by a collective desire to increase the quantity and scope of free time and pleasure—to such an extent that even Hythloday seems wary of their inclination to “favour pleasure” over the pursuit of virtue as a good in itself—on the other hand, what constitutes acceptable forms of play are governed by a strict hierarchy of pleasures, which disciplines, rehabilitates, and tempers the potentially subversive Epicurean tendencies of Utopian moral philosophy. This hierarchy of pleasure is the framework for Utopian ideology and while it is presented as a product of philosophical discourse or rational argument, we find that it is intimately bound up with, and is in fact guaranteed by, the institution of slavery.

8. Slavery and Utopian Ideology

Utopian Epicureanism legitimates the general division of physical and intellectual labour in Utopia. This division of labour is meant to free as many people as possible from the “service of the body” so they might dedicate themselves to the “freedom and culture of the mind.” But those who are unable to enjoy these higher pleasures are nevertheless bound to the service of the body, and those who succumb to lower bodily pleasures can even be punished with slavery. Hythloday tells us that only “the gravest crimes are punished with slavery” (193), but when he goes into specifics he emphasizes the use of slavery for seemingly minor offences like adultery and work avoidance. In fact, it is “violators of the marriage bond [that] are punished with the strictest form of slavery” (191). We might say these two categories of criminals—idlers and adulterers, the slothful and the lustful—represent opposed imbalances of lower bodily pleasures. They violate the social harmony that is guaranteed by collective adherence to the hierarchy of pleasures, either from a too-
strong desire to avoid pain or a too-strong desire to seek pleasure. The institution of slavery in Utopia serves a disciplinary function which is meant to regulate the lower pleasures.

Slavery provides the coercive pressure that ensures the coherence of the Utopians’ ethical code. While slave labour is presented as inessential to the economy, slavery nevertheless provides the discipline that ensures Utopian Epicureanism does not slide into hedonism. It is in this sense that slavery serves an ideological rather than strictly economic function.

Hythloday observes early on that Utopian society is organized around the pursuit of pleasure, and “pleasure” is initially defined quite broadly: “by pleasure they understand every state or movement of the body or mind in which we find delight according to the behests of nature,” Hythloday says. That which is pleasant by nature, however, has a more precise definition as “a delight that does not injure others, does not preclude a greater pleasure, and is not followed by pain” (167). The highest pleasures for the Utopians are, of course, the pleasures of the mind—knowledge and the contemplation of truth. The lower pleasures are pleasures of the body and are themselves divided into higher and lower forms. The higher form arises from a stable state of equilibrium—the calm, harmonious state of the body in health, when it is undisturbed by any disorder (173). The lower form of bodily pleasure arises from an imbalance of some kind: the pleasures that fill the senses with immediate delight, either through restoring a deficiency—eating or drinking—or discharging an excess: “as when we move our bowels, generate children, or relieve an itch somewhere by rubbing or scratching it” (173). These last forms of pleasure, the lower pleasures of the body, are potentially dangerous according to Hythloday because to pursue them as ends necessitates a permanent state of disequilibrium or an imbalance of want and excess. Unlike the higher bodily and intellectual pleasures, the satisfaction of lower bodily desires actually
extinguishes pleasure, and can lead to a compulsive fixation on the moment of loss, a constant round of pleasure and pain.

This disequilibrium, this imbalance of excess and lack, is in fact what Utopian institutions are designed to contain. If the lower pleasures of the body are not disciplined, excess and deficiency reemerge on the social level in the dissipating luxury of the rich and the grinding poverty of the poor. In Utopia, the lower pleasures—pleasures that arise from organic imbalances—represent not just dangers to the health of the individual body or to the moral character of individual subjects, but to the body politic itself. For Hythloday, greed and want are manifestations of a collective moral disequilibrium. Among the pursuers of “false pleasure,” Hythloday says, are people “pleased by empty ceremonial honours,” who “flatter themselves on their nobility,” or those “who are captivated by jewels and gemstones,” and “hide away gold they will never use,” or gamble and throw away their wealth with reckless abandon (167-71). Hythloday’s discussion of the hierarchy of pleasures follows from this catalogue of false pleasures: hoarding and gambling, obsession with gold, jewels, and ornament, aristocratic display and empty ceremony. Like the lower bodily pleasures, the pleasures of wealth, power, and distinction are bound up with their opposites—poverty, misery, and envy. The lower pleasures of the body represent, on the social level, an imbalance of wasteful accumulation and wasteful expenditure.

Idlers and adulterers are enslaved and bound with chains of gold in Utopia to ensure the healthy equilibrium of the body politic, to ensure the lower impulses do not take over and create an imbalance of want and excess, poverty and decadence. But does the institution of slavery really produce a state of equilibrium or does it not in fact contribute to a crisis of overproduction? Does it not create the excess that it is supposed to contain? Hythloday tells
us that the Utopians prefer slavery to capital punishment because “convict labour is more beneficial to the commonwealth,” and “slaves, moreover, contribute more by their labour than by their death” (193). This seems to be in keeping with the Utopians’ ideology of use. The question is: how useful is this labour? As we saw earlier, useless labour is abhorred by the Utopians precisely because it creates an imbalance of surplus value and wasteful expenditure; the purpose of labour should be pleasure—the higher pleasures of the mind—and Utopian subjects should be freed, wherever possible, from the service of the body. Surpluses are supposed to be wasted on free time, preventing an imbalance of overproduction. But in practice the number of people who can pursue these ends is strictly limited. Not just slaves, but even members of the citizen class are compelled to volunteer their free time to their trade. But this work technically should not be necessary. Hythloday insists that what makes the six-hour workday possible is that no one is exempt from useful work. He does not say that the six-hour day is really an illusion or that slavery is a necessary economic institution that allows the citizen class to work less. He insists that the six-hour workday is “ample to provide not only enough but more than enough of the necessities and even the conveniences of life” (129). The extra work voluntarily performed by citizens during their free time and the extra work imposed on slaves as a form of punishment is therefore surplus labour. It is work that exceeds what is necessary to satisfy collective needs and natural pleasures, and as a result it must presumably produce an ever-accumulating material surplus—an excess that cannot be consumed. In fact, it is this surplus labour time that might help to explain the Utopians’ vast reserves of gold.

But the institution of slavery in Utopia does not create a dynamic of over-production and accumulation through its penal-ideological function alone; it is also used as a direct
means of expropriation. When Hythloday discusses the purpose or function of Utopian slavery, he presents it as a penal institution, but he also remarks—almost in passing—that most of the slaves in Utopia are convicts purchased overseas, or foreign “penniless drudges” who willingly sell themselves into indentured servitude (187). These people are all acquired from outside Utopia; they are people who have not violated the moral/legal code of the republic but are nevertheless subjected to slavery. When Hythloday tells us that the Utopians purchase foreigners “who had been condemned to death in their own cities” (185), we can easily confuse this form of slavery with penal servitude. After all, the foreigners are criminals, and their slavery in Utopia serves as a kind of punishment. But we might ask ourselves, what are these criminals being punished for? Hythloday does not tell us, but we can infer from his comments in Book 1 that many (if not most) of them are in fact thieves. We might recall that the occasion for the debate at Cardinal Morton’s table in Book 1 is an argument over the “rigid execution of justice then being practiced on thieves,” who were by far the largest group of criminals subject to execution. Thieves, Hythloday tells us, “were being executed everywhere [in England,] with as many as twenty at a time being hanged on a single gallows” (55-7). Holinshed reports that somewhere around 72,000 thieves were executed in England during the reign of Henry VIII. 86 Hythloday’s condemnation of this rigid execution of justice leads him to condemn the practice of enclosure which creates the poverty that forces people to become thieves, but the first solution he offers is a form of penal slavery practiced by another fictional commonwealth—the Polyerlites. The Polyerlites, he tells us, do not execute or imprison their thieves but instead enslave them and sentence them to “work on public projects” (73). In fact, Hythloday devotes a considerable amount of

time describing the Polylerites’ institution of penal slavery in Book 1 and the means and
techniques they use to discipline and control their slaves. Since so much of Book 1 concerns
the problem of how to control theft, and since Hythloday on several different occasions
explicitly argues for the use of slavery rather than execution as a means of punishing and
disciplining thieves, we can infer that many of the criminals the Utopians purchase overseas
are in fact thieves, condemned to death in their own countries for a crime that has no
meaning within Utopia. 87

This is a fascinating contradiction, and may explain why Hythloday does not really
specify what sort of criminals the Utopians purchase. Utopia, after all, was supposed to make
theft impossible: Utopia was supposed to solve the problem of theft by abolishing private
property. “The social evils” Hythloday mentions in Book 1—the plague of theft primarily,
but also the vagrancy, poverty, and corruption that are its causes—“may be alleviated and
their effects mitigated for a while,” he says, “but so long as private property remains, there is
no hope at all of effecting a cure and restoring society to good health” (103). Utopia is
presented as evidence that a society without private property—and so without theft—is
possible. But at the end of Book 2 we see that Utopia, lacking thieves of its own, nevertheless
imports and punishes the thieves of foreign nations. Why would the Utopians punish thieves
when theft is meaningless to them as a crime? The active acquisition of foreign slaves—
thieves and paupers—suggests the Utopians have an almost missionary zeal for criminal

87 Fredric Jameson touches on this contradiction in his discussion of the Polylerites’ punishments for
thieves: “The real problem is that by Hythloday’s own account of the matter there ought not to have been any
thieves in this happy land [of the Polylerites] to begin with, so that the very possibility of a just (that is to say,
Utopian) punishment is necessarily at one with the disappearance of the crime it was designed for.” While this
is true of Utopia, I argue, it is not entirely clear why there ought not to have been any thieves in the land of the
Polylerites, who have not actually abolished private property. See Jameson, “Of Islands and Trenches:
Neutralization and the Production of Utopian Discourse,” in The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971-1986, vol. 2
reform, but it also argues for the necessity of slavery to their economy, something that does not seem to be suggested in the earlier sections on Utopian work and social relations. These slaves are not really subject to penal slavery, after all, even if they are criminals, because the crime for which they were condemned outside Utopia does not have any meaning within Utopia. They are effectively enslaved for the sake of productivity. Their labour goes into the production of a surplus, which means the acquisition of more gold, the financing of more wars, and the production of more slave chains. In Book 1, Hythloday shows us the social causes of theft, exposing the complicity of the English system of justice in producing the thieves it then punishes. Describing the poverty and destitution created by the enclosure of the commons, Hythloday asks: “what else is this … but first making thieves and then punishing them for it?” (67). If Utopia no longer makes thieves, however, it still makes use of them. In Book 2, we see these thieves bound and shamed with gold, the material form of the surplus their forced labour helps to produce.

It is useful to recall, here, where this surplus ultimately goes. Hythloday tells us that the Utopians hoard gold “only for a contingency that may or may not actually arise” (149), but later, in the section on Utopian military organization, the narrator makes it very clear that this “contingency” arises with alarming frequency and is often actively sought out by the Utopians themselves. The Utopians do not simply use their surplus for self-defence; they make pre-emptive military interventions to protect the commercial interests of their allies.88 And when they win these wars, Hythloday says: “They take as indemnity not only money,

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88 Hythloday of course says “they go to war only for good reasons: to protect their own land, to drive invading armies from the territories of their friends, or to liberate an oppressed people, in the name of compassion and humanity, from tyranny and servitude” (201-3). But he goes on to say that they will even wage war “when their friends’ merchants have been subjected to extortion anywhere in the world under the semblance of justice,” which effectively makes pre-emptive war permissible (203).
which they set aside to finance future wars, but also landed estates, from which they may enjoy forever a substantial annual income.” Hythloday goes on to tell us that “they now have revenues of this sort in many different countries, acquired little by little in various ways, which have mounted to over seven hundred thousand ducats a year” (217). Utopia’s gold goes into financing wars, and their wars create a dynamic of ever-expanding conquest and accumulation. While their colonization efforts are presented as a separate venture, distinct from this system of martial tribute and leaseholding, their colonies on the mainland also tend to feed into the same dynamic of growth, over-production, and accumulation. Hythloday presents this colonization project as a mutually beneficial arrangement, “for by their policies the Utopians make the land yield an abundance for all, though previously it had seemed too poor and barren even to support the natives” (137). But they also do not hesitate to wage wars of extermination against recalcitrant populations who are unwilling or unable to submit to their rule:

Those who refuse to live under their laws they drive out of the land they claim for themselves; and against those who resist them, they wage war. They think it is perfectly justifiable to make war on people who leave their land idle and waste yet forbid the use and possession of it to others who, by the law of nature ought to be supported from it. (137)

The Utopian ethic of utility, then, is not that far removed from the capitalist ethic of improvement; both are framed according to the terms of natural law and provide a rationale for colonial expansion on the grounds that greater productivity or the generation of a material surplus justifies the expropriation of anything that is deemed to be idle wasteland.89 The

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89 See Ellen Meiksins Wood’s discussion of the “ethic of improvement” in The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View, op. cit., 105-8 and 156-61. Wood writes that “the word ‘improve’ itself, in its original meaning, did not mean just ‘make better’ in a general sense but literally meant to do something for monetary profit, especially to cultivate land for profit (based on the old French for into, en, and profit, pros—or its oblique case, preu).” This meaning was commonplace in the sixteenth century. Wood writes, and “by the seventeenth century, the word ‘improver’ was firmly fixed in the language to refer to someone who rendered land productive and profitable, especially by enclosing it or reclaiming waste” (106).
Utopian ethic of use essentially justifies a process of primitive accumulation through slavery, war, tribute, expropriation and colonization.

The Utopian ethic of utility and the pseudo-Epicurean hierarchy of pleasures are, we might say, unconscious capitalist ideology. The central contradiction within Utopia—primitive communist relations of production coupled with unconscious early modern capitalist ideology—is given symbolic form in the image of gold slave chains. The hierarchy of pleasures, reinforced by the institution of slavery, ensures the production of a surplus: a surplus of time, but also inevitably a surplus of gold, a surplus of waste, and a surplus of slave chains. There is a dialectic of improvement and waste, free-time and work-time, that makes Utopia possible. Utopia needs the thieves of foreign nations because it is bound up within the world and must produce a surplus in order to survive. Utopia reforms the dislocated masses, but it does not just contain the social dislocation caused by the emergence of capitalism; Utopia makes this dislocation itself into a disciplinary power.
CHAPTER II

Merchants of Light: Francis Bacon and Scientific Utopia

1. Human Empire and Political Empire

In Francis Bacon’s *Novum Organum* and in his introduction to the *Instauratio Magna*, the European discovery of the “New World” is used as a metaphor for the yet-to-be-discovered potentialities that lie dormant in nature. Just as new inventions such as artillery and the compass had opened previously unknown regions of the material globe to exploration and conquest, so too the invention of a new method, a new organon for the study of the hidden motions of nature, could, according to Bacon, open up new realms of the *globus intellectualis* to exploration and greatly expand the “bounds of Human Empire.”¹ Navigation, exploration, colonization and conquest serve as topoi in Bacon’s writing for humanity’s extended control over the forces of nature. The New World stands in for nature in general in Bacon’s major works, and the discovery and conquest of the New World serves as a metaphor for scientific discovery and practical invention.

But this association between the discovery of the material globe and the discovery and control of the hidden forces of nature is complicated by the appearance of different forms of “dominion” in Bacon’s writing. The development of the practical sciences and the mechanical arts is described in the *Novum Organum* as the restoration of a lost knowledge, ¹

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¹ The *globus intellectualis*, or the “intellectual globe,” is a metaphor describing the provinces or branches of learning taken as a whole, including areas which remain underdeveloped. The *globus intellectualis* is imagined both as a map and a figurative territory; in the *Novum Organum*, Bacon compares the underdeveloped branches of natural science to undiscovered or newly discovered regions of the “material globe.” See *The Works of Francis Bacon*, 14 vols., eds. James Spedding, et al. (London: Longman, 1857-74): 1.191; 4.82. The concept of “Human Empire,” or human control over nature, is from *The New Atlantis*, op. cit. 3.156, and is discussed at length below. All subsequent references to Bacon’s texts will be cited parenthetically by volume and page number.
the restoration of Adam’s original knowledge of—and dominion over—created things. For
Bacon, the loss of this knowledge is not a necessary condition of humanity’s fallen state, but
“can even in this life be repaired,” and not just through moral behaviour and spiritual
reflection, but also “by arts and sciences:”

For creation was not by the curse made altogether and for ever rebel, but in virtue of
that charter ‘In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,’ it is now by various labours
… at length and in some measure subdued to the supplying of man with bread; that is
to the uses of human life [ad usus vitae humanae subigitur]. (1.365; 4.248)

For Bacon, then, the loss of an original, humanized nature is not an eternal curse but an
impetus to labour—to restore and develop practical reason and control the hidden motions of
things. This labour is not simply a punishment according to Bacon; it is the very means by
which we might restore an Edenic, humanized nature—a natural order fully under the will
and dominion of man. Bacon rejects the idea that the fall condemns humanity to perpetual
drudgery and blind toil within an unyielding, hostile nature. Instead he re-imagines labour as
the advancement of the mechanical arts and practical sciences—the improvement of the
means for taming and controlling the forces of nature. The curse itself provides the means for
redemption; through labour, through the development of the forces of production, the
mechanical arts and practical sciences will not only supply humanity with bread—with bare
subsistence—but will eventually subdue harsh, alienated nature and bend it again “to the uses
of human life.” This is the utopian end of Bacon’s natural science: to redeem, in part, the fall
and the attendant loss of humanity’s original dominion over created things. While some men
“endeavour to establish and extend the power of their country and its dominion among men,”
Bacon writes, the highest and noblest ambition is for “a man to endeavour to establish and
extend the power and dominion of the human race itself over the universe [humani generis
ipsius potentiam et imperium in rerum universitatem instaurare et amplificare]” (1.222;
To shift the object of domination from other people to created nature in general is the purpose of Baconian science; an antagonism between human beings themselves would thus be transformed and overcome by a collective, universal, and bloodless conquest of nature.

This complex relationship between political dominion and dominion over nature has led some scholars to examine the meaning and purpose of the figure of the “New World” in Bacon’s writing. Why is scientific discovery imagined in terms of an imperialist project of exploration, conquest, and colonization? If “Human Empire” is made in the image of political empire, is it not coloured by that image? Or does the struggle for mastery over nature negate or supersede particular forms of political dominion? What, in other words, is the relationship between the (political) vehicle and (epistemological) tenor in Bacon’s key metaphor? A number of literary critics and historians of science have sought to distance Bacon’s epistemology from his politics and his writings on empire, arguing that the figure of the “New World” in the Novum Organum is meant to provide a striking contrast between the limits of political dominion and humanity’s dominion over nature. Markku Peltonen, for instance, argues that in Bacon’s works “there was a rhetorical similarity between the propagation of the augmentation of learning and civic greatness, but they stood in diametrical opposition as far as the qualities which they necessitated were concerned,” ultimately, Bacon’s scientific writings, he says, “do not provide us with the context in which we should place his texts on the greatness of states.”

Peltonen acknowledges that there are parallels between science and navigation or natural philosophy and “civic greatness” in the Novum

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1 Peltonen, “Politics and Science: Francis Bacon and the True Greatness of States,” The Historical Journal, 35.2 (1992): 281. Peltonen, drawing on Bacon’s own terminology in the essay “Of the Greatness of States” frequently uses the term “civic greatness” to refer to phenomena normally associated with “empire” or “imperialism.” Peltonen uses Bacon’s own terminology because he wishes to avoid anachronistic assumptions, but at times he appears to beg the question regarding the relationship between Bacon’s own rhetoric and the social and political conditions to which he refers.
Organum: “the aim of both,” he says, “consisted in an extension of power. True greatness dealt with ‘the extension of empire,’ while the end of natural science was to ‘extend the bounds of human empire.’” But Peltonen nevertheless emphasizes the “irreconcilable gap” between the scientific and imperialist enterprises in Bacon’s writings: “the chief aim of both enterprises was the enlargement of power, and the former could be expressed in the military terms of the latter. But these analogies fail to bridge the gap between the acquisition of an empire through warfare and the advancement of science through permanent peace.”³ Science and empire (or “civic greatness”) are not “parts of a coherent system” according to Peltonen, and the parallels that we do find between Bacon’s epistemology and his politics in works such as the Novum Organum or the Advancement of Learning are merely analogical. The analogy serves a rhetorical function which is to magnify the greatness of human empire—the peaceful extension of humanity’s dominion over nature.

Brian Vickers also emphasizes the gap between the vehicle and the tenor in Bacon’s metaphor. For Bacon, he writes, “Columbus’s discovery of America was the fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy, inaugurating a new age of learning—a typically confident Renaissance assessment of its own newness.”⁴ If this “new age of learning” requires or is coeval with “the opening of the world by navigation and commerce,” this “opening” is not to be understood in imperialist terms; narrow utilitarian ends and particular national interests are, Vickers argues, always subordinate to the pursuit of knowledge and the uses of human life in Bacon’s writing. Vickers writes that “the goal of learning [for Bacon] was not simply practical utility

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³ Peltonen 291, emphasis added.

but a higher, part-secular, part-Christian ideal of benefit to mankind in every facet of life.”⁵

This goal—the advancement of mechanical knowledge and natural philosophy so that they might yield practical benefits to all people in “every facet of life”—is, according to Vickers, the real meaning of “empire” in Bacon’s scientific works. The scientists in the New Atlantis, he says, “have as their goal ‘the enlarging of the bounds of Human Empire, to the effecting of all things possible,’ and we can now see that far from being a crass anticipation of technological triumph that goal is one of Christian charity, humanity, philanthropy.”⁶ The conquest, enslavement, and exploitation of other people and other nations apparently ceases with the inauguration of this new human empire.

Charles Webster also describes this metaphor as one in which the tenor appears to exceed the vehicle. For Bacon and his contemporaries, the “domination of nature” was an enormous collective undertaking that required royal patronage and so had to be framed as an instrument of secular empire, but “even more than the conquest and colonization of new territories,” Webster writes, “the empire of man over nature was regarded [by Bacon] as a noble ideal.”⁷ Sarah Irving extends Webster’s analysis of the puritan concept of “Adamic dominion” in Bacon’s work and suggests that it represents an image of empire distinct from what she calls the “neo-Roman intellectual tradition” in which empire denotes political sovereignty: “Bacon expressed the idea of power over nature as a concept of empire. But this was not empire in the political, neo-Roman sense. This was the restoration of Adam’s empire of knowledge.” The recovery of this original empire of knowledge is a project that cannot be

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⁶ Vickers, ibid. 286.

easily conflated with the imperialism of nation states, according to Irving: “this was an epistemic, rather than a political conception of empire.”

Bacon, she argues, had “moral misgivings” and concerns about colonization, and the idea of empire found in his scientific and literary texts must be understood as an epistemological rather than political ideal; in fact, she says, it is “an ideal of non-colonial interaction with the New World.”

This distinction between political and epistemic dominion is important to stress; in order to understand the relationship between Bacon’s politics and his epistemology it is necessary to analyze the tensions created by the coincidence of these two very different conceptions of empire. Nevertheless, all of the arguments which seek to rescue Bacon’s science from his imperialist rhetoric rest on the assumption that these two forms of empire bear some sort of analogical relationship to one another. This is not surprising since most of Bacon’s references to the New World in the Novum Organum take the form of a simile or metaphor comparing images from distinct conceptual fields—from the “material” and “intellectual” domains, for instance, or the undiscovered regions of the globe and the hidden forces of nature. It may be useful, however, to examine some of these passages closely in order to clarify how these parallels are developed and to determine whether they are strictly analogical in character. For what appears on the surface to be a metaphor is, I argue, also

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9 Irving 254. Irving returns to many of these arguments in her book, Natural Science and the Origins of the British Empire (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008) 23-46. In this longer work, Irving explores the way in which colonization became central to “the natural philosophical project of recovering man’s empire over nature” (xii). But while she argues that idea of “Adamic dominion” is eventually used to legitimate the dispossession of indigenous peoples, she nevertheless maintains that Bacon’s concept of “Human Empire” was still imagined as an enterprise separate from England’s colonialist projects, and claims “there is no connection in Bacon’s work between colonies and the restoration of man’s empire, the latter of which is an epistemological rather than territorial pursuit” (23).
metonymical in structure, and the metonymical character of the “New World” sheds light on the nature of the relationship between political and epistemic empire in Bacon’s work.

2. The New World as Metonym

In the Novum Organum, Bacon describes his scientific project as a voyage of discovery similar to those undertaken by Columbus or Vespucci. While explorers of the material globe were opening up new lands for discovery and conquest, Bacon sees himself embarking on a parallel journey in the domain of the intellect: “Surely it would be disgraceful if, while the regions of the material globe [globi materialis tractus],—that is, of the earth, of the sea, and of the stars,—have been in our times laid widely open and revealed, the intellectual globe [globus intellectualis] should remain shut up within the narrow limits of old discoveries” (1.191; 4.82). The Novum Organum is presented as the first step beyond these narrow limits, a method or technique for charting the unexplored terrain of the globus intellectualis: “In former ages,” he writes,

when men sailed only by observation of the stars, they could indeed coast along the shores of the old continent or cross a few small and mediterranean [i.e. inland] seas; but before the ocean could be traversed and the New World discovered, the use of the mariner’s needle, as a more faithful and certain guide, had to be found out; in like manner the discoveries which have been hitherto made in the arts and sciences are such as might be made by practice, meditation, observation, argumentation,—for they lay near to the senses, and immediately beneath common notions; but before we can reach the remoter and more hidden parts of nature [ad remotiora et occultiora naturae], it is necessary that a more perfect use and application of the human mind and intellect be introduced. (1.129; 4.18)

The New World is likened here to occultiora naturae—“the hidden parts of nature,” which exist beyond the horizon of “common notions,” beyond the narrow limits of that inland sea

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10 Bacon explicitly compares his project to voyages of discovery in a number of different passages in the Novum Organum. See for instance aphorisms LXXXIV, XCII and XCIII (4.82, 91, 92) among others discussed below.
which was still navigable by the naked senses. The compass in this figure represents a practice or method of investigation, a new organon, for discovering those hidden domains.

This simile is repeated throughout the *Novum Organum*. The “hidden parts of nature” are described variously as a wilderness, a wasteland, or a dense wood and a knotted and tangled path—a place lacking human habitation where we could easily lose our way: “there are [to be] found in the intellectual as in the terrestrial globe,” Bacon writes, “*waste regions* as well as cultivated ones” (1.134; 4.23). The purpose of the new organon would be to find a way through this wasteland, to settle this wilderness, to cultivate these regions now tangled and overgrown by a dense and impenetrable “wood of particulars,” to reshape nature in such a way that it might meet human needs and human ends. We cannot make our way through the hidden parts of nature without such a method, Bacon writes: “[for] the universe to the eye of the human understanding is framed like a labyrinth, presenting as it does on every side so many ambiguities of way, such deceitful resemblances of objects and signs, natures so irregular in their lines, and so knotted and entangled.” And even with the application of some method, “the way is still to be made by the uncertain light of the senses, sometimes shining out, sometimes clouded over, through the woods of experience and particulars [per experientiae et rerum particularium sylvas]. (1.129; 4.18) Nature is presented as a labyrinth, which implies a *way*—a goal, destination or purpose—that is nevertheless blocked at every point, turned aside by ambiguities, deceitful resemblances between objects and signs, irregularities, knots and tangles (*spirae et nodi*) in the line of the path. It is a way, moreover, that can only be guided by the “uncertain light of the senses,” which sometimes shines, sometimes is clouded over, through a dense surrounding forest, a “wood of experience and particulars.” In the *Instauratio Magna*, this simile introduces an argument for an inductive
method in the natural sciences, a form of reasoning that Bacon contrasts with the sterile, syllogistic method of Aristotelian scholastics and the “fantastical learning” of the practitioners of alchemy and natural magic, “who have committed themselves to the waves of experience,” and pursue “a kind of wandering inquiry, without any regular system of operations” (1.128; 4.17). Bacon conceives a way out of this sterile rumination and blind wandering by means of a methodology that moves from the careful observation of particulars under controlled conditions—“nature under constraint and vexed” (1.141; 4.29)—through a process of induction by elimination to the formulation of general laws governing particular phenomena. The way through the labyrinth of nature, “the wood of experience and particulars,” is conceived by way of induction and controlled experiment—that is, through the definition and control of the necessary conditions for the reproduction of nature’s effects.

It is easy to see how Bacon’s use of the New World as a simile for nature and his description of natural science as a process of discovery and exploration might be abstracted from the process of colonization and conquest. In the passages quoted above, the New World appears to stand in for the unknown—a terra incognita of the intellect—and if Bacon’s

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11 See also the Novum Organum, where Bacon writes: “the secrets of nature reveal themselves more readily under the vexations of art than when they go their own way” (4.95)

12 Positivists like Karl Popper and Joseph Agassi dismiss Bacon’s methodology as a simplistic “induction by enumeration”—piling up observations of particulars and deriving generalizations without positing falsifiable hypotheses. But this crude image of Bacon’s epistemology has been largely refuted. Bacon’s method is really more like a process of induction by elimination that moves from the observation of nature under controlled conditions, focusing particularly on what Bacon calls “prerogative instances” or experimentally reproducible situations, to the formulation of general axioms governing particular phenomena. For Bacon, the procedure which successfully imitates or reproduces a particular effect of nature is itself knowledge of that phenomenon, and this emphasis on works or the effective procedure as the guarantor of truth has led many nineteenth century critics to characterize Bacon’s epistemology as utilitarian or proto-utilitarian in character. Bacon’s supposed “utilitarianism” has since become the subject of intense debate. See Brian Vickers, “Bacon’s So-Called ‘Utilitarianism’: Sources and Influence,” and Paolo Rossi, “Ants, Spiders, Epistemologists,” in Francis Bacon: Terminologia e Fortuna nel XVII Secolo, ed. M. Fattori (Rome: Edizioni dell’Ateneo, 1984): 281-313; 245-60. See also Lisa Jardine, Francis Bacon: Discovery and the Art of Discourse (Cambridge UP, 1974), and Antonio Pérez-Ramos, Francis Bacon’s Idea of Science and the Maker’s Knowledge Tradition (Oxford UP, 1988).
representation of the New World as an uninhabited wasteland has some troubling implications, we may still be inclined to accept what appear to be the terms of the analogy and treat it as comparison between different forms of discovery rather than different forms of conquest. But there are two difficulties with this reading: first, Bacon does not consistently describe the New World as uninhabited and frequently uses the language of conquest and colonization alongside the more innocuous rhetoric of “exploration” and “discovery;” second, it is not at all clear that the process of scientific discovery is merely analogous to exploration and conquest. The advancement of learning, Bacon tells us, makes the discovery and conquest of the New World possible, and the compass is not just a figure for the new organon, but an example of that which new method might itself create.

Let us begin with the first difficulty: when Bacon refers to the “waste regions” of the intellect he does not exactly say these deserts of the mind are merely discovered. The deserts of the intellect may seem empty, but the language of war and conquest in the passages that follow suggest a struggle of some kind is necessary in order to settle them. Bacon tells us that these waste regions of the globus intellectualis lie open for conquest, which implies a struggle and an adversary of some kind, even if this adversary remains obscure. Bacon writes: “I do not propose merely to survey these regions in my mind like an augur taking auspices, but to enter them like a general who means to take possession [sed intrare, ut duces, promerendi studio, suscepimus]” (1.135; 4.23). The “augur” in this simile seems to represent the practitioners of “fantastical learning”—the alchemists, astronomers, or magicians—who merely observe nature, make empty divinations, and are unable to make these waste regions fruitful. Bacon, by contrast, would enter these regions of nature “like a general,” or dux, “to take possession” (suscipere). The adversary to be subdued in this simile appears to be nature
itself, as is implied in a number of other passages in the *Novum Organum*. But if the augur is a figure that stands in for ancient superstitions or fantastical learning in general, then we could infer that the augur in some sense inhabited these wastelands before the coming of the natural scientist and must be displaced or displanted before the scientist-general can truly take possession.

The exact relationship between the augur and the general in Bacon’s simile remains uncertain, however, and since augury was an ancient Roman custom not known to be practiced by Amerindians, there is no clear parallel being drawn here between the conquering scientist and the English colonist. It is nature itself that is the object of domination in Bacon’s simile. But while the New World often appears in Bacon’s rhetorical figures as an uninhabited place, or a screen for the projection of nature in the abstract, Bacon also occasionally refers to the “innumerable nations” of the Americas and uses the discovery of these nations to demonstrate the great advances that had been achieved in his own time. In these passages the New World appears not as an *image* of nature but as an *example* of the kind of discoveries that Bacon’s new inductive method might make possible. The discovery of the New World is used to counter the old argument from authority and tradition that everything under the sun has already been thought or that the wisdom of the ancients is complete and unparalleled, and nothing is left for moderns to do except refine and reinterpret Aristotelian dialectic in light of Christian doctrine. While Bacon shows a great deal of admiration for ancient Greek philosophy—especially the natural philosophy of the pre-Socratics—he also stresses the *limits* of their knowledge and the vast expanse of the yet-unknown. In ancient Greece, he writes, “there was but a narrow and meagre knowledge of either time or place; which is the worst thing that can be, especially for those who rest all on
experience” (1.182; 4.73). The Greeks, he says, had no real history that extended beyond a thousand years, “but only fables and rumours of antiquity”—a fragmented and incomplete knowledge of their own past. Their familiarity with the traditions of other nations and the scope of the material world were also extremely limited. Their knowledge of the globe, Bacon writes, did not extend beyond North Africa or the Ganges,

much less were they acquainted with the provinces of the New World, even by hearsay or any well founded rumour; nay a multitude of climates and zones, wherein innumerable nations [populi infiniti] breathe and live, were pronounced by them to be uninhabitable. ... In our times on the other hand both many parts of the New World and the limits on every side of the Old World are known, and our stock of experience has increased to an infinite amount [et in infinitum experimentorum cumulus excrevit]. (1.182; 4.73)

For Bacon, the discovery of the “innumerable nations” of Asia, Africa, and the Americas, all those places and people beyond the horizon of the old Greek world, adds an incalculable amount to that “stock of experience” from which all knowledge is derived. The discovery of the New World represents a decisive break with centuries-old traditions of thought that are fundamentally shaped by experience and the limits of experience. Bacon uses the language of trade and accumulation here rather than conquest and colonization, but it is important to note that this enterprise no longer appears as a metaphor but as an instance or example of the kind of empirical knowledge that has the capacity to transform the world. The discovery of the New World serves not only to illustrate or magnify the scope of Bacon’s project; it is also presented as an integral part of the advancement of learning.

The simile of the mariner’s needle touched on earlier helps to illustrate this tension between analogy and example. In that simile, the New World is likened to “the hidden parts of nature”—inaccessible by means of other, less systematic practices that rely on simple observation, contemplation, logic, and dialectic. Bacon’s *Novum Organum* is to provide a
“more perfect use and application of the human mind and intellect,” and, like the mariner’s needle, it offers a means of navigating the more remote, undiscovered regions of nature (1.129; 4.18). This simile seems fairly clear, but it is complicated by the fact that the figure of the compass frequently appears in the *Novum Organum* as an example of the *fruits* of the new science—fantastic instruments or useful things hitherto discovered only by chance, things which no one could have anticipated or created through abstract philosophical speculation but *could now* be discovered if intellectual and material resources were harnessed by Bacon’s inductive method. The compass appears in these instances as a *consequence* of the method rather than as a vehicle for the method. Bacon writes:

Again, it is well to observe the force and virtue and consequences of discoveries; and these are to be seen nowhere more conspicuously than in those three which were unknown to the ancients and of which the origin, though recent, is obscure and inglorious; namely, printing, gunpowder, and the magnet. For these three have changed the whole face and state of things throughout the world; the first in literature, the second in warfare, the third in navigation; whence have followed innumerable changes; insomuch that no empire, no sect, no star seems to have exerted greater power and influence in human affairs than these mechanical discoveries. (1.222; 4.114)

In this famous passage, the compass is held up as a discovery that has the force to transform “the whole face and state of things” and exerts greater influence on human affairs than either politics or blind fate. Mechanical discoveries are the true determinants of human affairs, Bacon writes, and such discoveries are promised as the fruit of Bacon’s methodology. The compass is not itself an image of the *method* here but is rather an example of the kind of thing that the method might produce. Things like the compass, along with artillery and the printing press, which Bacon characterizes as the unlikely products of chance observations, could, he says, become more commonplace and abundant through the application of a more systematic and collaborative method for the observation, imitation, and reproduction of
natural phenomena. Prior to their discovery, inventions such as gunpowder or the compass,
Bacon says, must have seemed inconceivable: “the notion of a fiery blast suddenly and
violently expanding and exploding would hardly have entered into any man’s imagination or
fancy; being a thing to which nothing immediately analogous had been seen, except perhaps
in an earthquake or in lightning, which as magnalia or marvels of nature, and by man not
imitable, would have been immediately rejected” (1.207; 4.99). Likewise, the idea “that
anything could be discovered agreeing so well in its movements with the heavenly bodies,
and yet not a heavenly body itself, but simply a substance of metal or stone, would have been
judged altogether incredible” (1.208; 4.100). Bacon points out that these practical inventions
were not brought about by philosophy or “the rational arts,” but rather “by accident and
occasion,” and so things which now seem to be natural wonders beyond imitation or control
must also contain possibilities for human use. “There is therefore much ground for hoping
that there is still laid up in the womb of nature many secrets of excellent use,” Bacon says,
which might be revealed through the application of a better method of discovery: “Only by
the method of which we are now treating can they be speedily and suddenly and
simultaneously presented and anticipated” (1.208; 4.100).13

The compass appears in Bacon’s text, then, as both means and end—it is an image of
the methodology used and an example of the kind of useful things that might be produced by
it; it is both the method itself and an image of the discoveries still laid up in the “womb of
nature,” waiting for the method to bring them into the world. So when Bacon uses the image

13 It is interesting to note that these inventions whose origins Bacon describes as “obscure and
inglorious”—printing, gunpowder, and the magnet—were not European inventions and were “discovered” by
Europeans only through the expanding trade networks of the late middle ages. While each of these inventions
helped make early modern European empires possible, they are themselves not so much the products of local
“accident and occasion,” as Bacon claims, but the fruit of expanded networks of commerce that reached,
indirectly, from Western Europe to China.
of the compass to represent the new organon, it does not function exactly like a simile; he is, rather, substituting cause for effect. What does this tell us about the structure of Bacon’s figurative language as it used in his scientific texts? We might say that many of Bacon’s tropes which appear to be metaphors or similes are not really comparisons, identifications or statements of similitude at all; they are, in fact, closer to metonymy in their underlying structure. There is an emphasis on contiguity over comparison, association over similitude, the indexical over the iconic, structural relationships over transpositive leaps. The vehicle in Bacon’s tropes often bears some sort of indexical relationship to the tenor. Even in the passage which sets up the central opposition between the globus materialis and globus intellectualis, Bacon presents the discovery of the New World not simply as a metaphor or simile, but as a scientific discovery in its own right: “it [must not] go for nothing,” he writes, “that by the distant voyages and travels which have become frequent in our times, many things in nature have been laid open and discovered which may let in a new light upon philosophy” (1.191; 4.82). The New World, then, is not just like nature, it is one of the hidden regions of nature and its discovery is both a part of the advancement of learning and is made possible by such advances. The compass is not just similar to the new organon; it is an example of that which the organon could produce. The relationship between compass and organon, New World and nature, globus materialis and globus intellectualis, is, I argue, metonymic rather than strictly metaphoric.

The frontispiece of the first edition of the Instauratio Magna provides the reader with a visual representation of this metonym; the “Great Renewal” is depicted as a ship passing

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14 This substitution of cause for effect is sometimes referred to as “metonymy of the effect” or “metonymy of the efficient.”
between two enormous columns—the Pillars of Hercules—which signify the boundary separating the limits of the Old World and the vast expanse of the New. A passage from the Book of Daniel appears beneath the ship: “Multi pertransibunt & augebitur scientia,” it reads—“many shall go to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased” (Dan. 12.4). It is a motto that Bacon frequently uses as a sign uniting the exploration and colonization of the material world with the reestablishment of Adam’s more perfect knowledge and dominion over nature. In Book 1 of the Novum Organum, for instance, Bacon refers to this passage from the Book of Daniel as a “prophecy … touching the last ages of the world.” For Bacon, Daniel’s prophecy “clearly [intimates] that the thorough passage of the world (which now by so many distant voyages seems to be accomplished, or in course of accomplishment), and the advancement of the sciences, are destined by fate, that is, by Divine Providence, to meet in the same age” (1.200; 4.92). The voyages of discovery are both a precondition for and a sign of the coming advancement of the sciences, and both are united in a biblical prophecy that anticipates the end of history and the redemption of humankind. The discovery of new lands and the expansion of the new European empires, then, appear to be not so much an analogy as necessary condition for the advancement of the sciences and the extension of human dominion over nature.

If we recognize that the key figures in Bacon’s writing—the compass, the New World, the material globe—are metonymical rather than strictly metaphorical in their underlying structure, then we can recognize that the concept of “Human Empire,” which is

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15 Bacon repeats this argument in a number of different places—in Valerius Terminus, for example, and in the Advancement of Learning. In the Advancement Bacon writes: “this proficiency in navigation and discoveries may plant also an expectation of the further proficiency and augmentation of all sciences; because it may seem they are ordained by God to be coevals, that is, to meet in one age. For so the prophet Daniel speaking of the latter times foretelleteth, Plurimi pertransibunt, et multiplex erit scientia: [many shall pass to and fro, and knowledge shall be multiplied:] as if the openness and through passage of the world and the increase of knowledge were appointed to be in the same ages; as we see it is already performed in great part” (6.198-9).
Frontispiece to Francis Bacon’s *Instauratio Magna* (1620)
bound up with these tropes, is also a kind of metonym and not is not strictly metaphorical or analogical. If the New World is considered to be a part of nature, if the discovery of new regions of the material world is a sign of and condition for the revelation of the *mundus intellectualis*, if gunpowder and the compass are examples of what Bacon’s new organon could effect, then the discovery, conquest and colonization of the New World is not simply an analogical image of Bacon’s Empire of Man; it is a part of this expanded notion of empire.

3. **Planting in a Pure Soil**

   In order to understand this expanded notion of empire and its relationship to actual practices and institutions, it is useful to examine some of Bacon’s political tracts, literary works, letters, and essays on empire and colonialism. It is also important to emphasize Bacon’s personal and ideological commitment to the project of English colonialism and empire-building, since Bacon has too often been characterized as a kind of proto-liberal whose qualified support for empire, punctuated by expressions of doubt or moral indignation, amount to a critique of colonial expansion. But this image of Bacon as a reluctant or conflicted imperialist tells us more about the anxieties and contradictions produced by liberal appropriations of Bacon’s epistemological project than it does about Bacon’s project itself. The point of this excursus is not simply to clarify Bacon’s views on empire and colonialism (although that is certainly an important task), but also to examine in detail how colonial expansion is imagined, justified or explained in terms of “Adamic dominion” and the control of nature, and how political and epistemological concepts in Bacon’s writing are bound up with each other in a number of different texts.
An Advertisement Touching An Holy War is a good place to start as it is one of Bacon’s longer reflections on the conditions which legitimate not only “holy wars,” but also the conditions under which pre-emptive war and wars of “extirpation” and “displantation” might justifiably be waged against savage people or “people in name” only. While it is difficult to determine precisely which, if any, of the characters in the dialogue represent Bacon’s own opinion, it is important to note that the very possibility of an anti-imperialist position is excluded from the outset. Only Pollio claims “there is no possibility of an Holy War,” and argues that such wars are “but the rendez-vous of cracked brains;” but Pollio also claims that the “wild and savage people” of the New World “are like beasts and birds which are ferae naturae, the property of which passeth with the possession, and goeth to the occupant” (7.21). While he is opposed to the extremity of “holy wars” in principle, this is hardly a critique of colonialism, and while the character Martius seems to disagree with him, pointing to the “magnificent temples,” “regular justice” and monarchical rule of the Incas and Aztecs as evidence of the Amerindians’ personhood, he nevertheless praises the European conquest of the New World as a necessary precondition for the propagation of the faith (7.21-22). The Spaniards, he says, “opened the new world and subdued and planted Mexico, Peru, Chile, and other parts of the West Indies. We see what floods of treasure have flowed into Europe by that action … infinite is the access of territory and empire by the same enterprise.” And while this conquest was driven by the pursuit of empire and treasure, which, he says, was “not a solid body of glory,” nevertheless, “We may see that in these actions … both the spiritual and temporal honour and good have been in one pursuit and purchase conjoined” (7.21). So for Martius the inhabitants of the New World are people, but their conquest and dispossession is legitimated by the spiritual end that this conquest achieves, and for Pollio,
waging war in order to propagate the faith is never justified, but the conquest, dispossession and displacement of the inhabitants of the New World is not really a war at all since the people inhabiting that land are not, to his mind, strictly people.

Of course, neither of these arguments necessarily reflects Bacon’s own position, but they do set up the parameters of the debate and these parameters exclude an anti-imperialist or anti-colonial position. Moreover, Zebedaeus, the central character in the dialogue, the character who has by far the longest speech and the most nuanced argument, whose argument negates both positions and pushes past this initial impasse, actually makes the strongest case for imperialist war and asserts the unity of Adamic and political dominion which is so crucial to our understanding of Bacon’s larger scientific and epistemological project. Zebedaeus resolves the conflict between the two positions outlined by Pollio and Martius by grounding the justification for war on Aristotle’s concept of the natural slave, arguing that slavery, extirpation, and holy war are justified under certain exceptional cases where a people are not really a people, but merely a “heap,” a “rout,” a “swarm,” a “multitude” or “shoal” of people—that is, where people are not organized in a nation or a state, but exist more like a herd of animals. As in Aristotle’s formulation, Zebedaeus says, “if there can be found such an inequality between man and man as there is between man and beast or between the soul and the body, it investeth a right of government” (7.29). It is not that “wiser or stouter or the juster” nations have a right to govern lesser nations, according to Zebedaeus, rather nations in general have a natural right to govern people who have no real political order. “Where there is an heap of people,” he says, “(though we term it a kingdom or state) that is altogether unable or indign to govern, there it is a just cause of war for another nation, that is civil or pollicced, to subdue them” (7.29). The extension of empire and political dominion becomes a
holy war when it is waged to reestablish civil rule and natural law, where the conquered
people are like animals or a mindless body, “unable or indign to govern.”

Where people are devoid of civil institutions and are like a “swarm” or “multitude”
according to Zebedaeus, the extension of political dominion is legitimated by the original
grant of dominion given to Adam. This grant of dominion over nature is, accordingly, the
foundation of all government:

There cannot be a better ground laid to declare this, than to look into the original
donation of government. Observe it well, especially the inducement or preface. Saith
God: Let us make man after our own image, and let him have dominion over the
fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the air and the beasts of the land, &c. Hereupon De
Victoria, and with him some others, infer excellently, and extract a most true and
divine aphorism, Non fundatur dominium nisi in imagine Dei. Here we have the
charter of foundation: it is now the more easy to judge of the forfeiture or reseizure.
Deface the image and you devest the right. (7.30)

In this key passage Zebedaeus grounds political dominion on the original grant of dominion
over created nature and establishes a right of “reseizure” in cases where people have
“defaced the image” of God or have degenerated from that image which distinguishes man
from animal. “But what is this image,” Zebedaeus asks, “and how is it defaced?” Curiously,
he does not attempt to provide a positive answer to this question. He does, however, stress
the negative. Zebedaeus argues that a nation ruled by “evil governors or tyrants” is not so
defaced that it forfeits government. It is only by “some perverseness and defection in the very
nation itself” that the image is defaced and a people lose the title of dominion (7.31). As
Mary Nyquist notes, Bacon avoids justifying warfare between civil nations, but focuses
instead on the necessity of waging wars against what he calls nations “in the privative”—

16 “There is no dominion unless it is founded on the image of God.” Francisco de Vitoria, from “De
nations lacking civil rule altogether. The inhabitants of the New World are used here as an example of such a defaced image. They are presented as a people whose nakedness is seen as a sign of their perverse, unregenerate and perpetually fallen state. “Surely their nakedness,” Zebedaeus says, “(being with them, in most parts of that country, without all veil or covering,) was a great defacement: for in the acknowledgement of nakedness was the first sense of sin; and the heresy of the Adamites was ever accounted an affront of nature” (7.34). But it is not simply their nakedness that makes them a bestial multitude and a “nation in name” only, but more importantly—for Zebedaeus—their practice of human sacrifice and cannibalism: “their sacrificing, and more especially their eating of men,” he says, “is such an abomination, as (methinks) a man’s face should be a little confused, to deny that this custom, joined with the rest, did not make it lawful for the Spaniards to invade their territory, forfeited by the law of nature and either to reduce them or displant them” (7.34). If nakedness, human sacrifice, and (symbolic) cannibalism are potent images of redemption in Christian doctrine, they are felt to be horrifyingly perverse when encountered as real practices or rituals performed outside of the symbolic order of Christianity. Such acts become a sign of defacement and degeneration, which, according to both divine law and the law of

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17 Nyquist explores this passage in her extended analysis of the concept of the “privative” in early modern political writing. “The universality promised by creation in God’s image is here conveniently both affirmed and denied,” she writes: “Defacement of the divine image … accounts for depravity that has become second nature, issuing in violations of both natural law and the law of nations.” See Nyquist, Arbitrary Rule: Slavery, Tyranny, and the Power of Life and Death (U Chicago Press, 2013) 241.

18 There are many other examples of the “defaced image” in An Advertisement. Among these swarms and multitudes Zebedaeus cites a motley assortment of specimens: pirates and “rovers by land,” Assassins and Mamelukes, Anabaptists, Canaanites and West Indians. Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker provide a detailed analysis of these various figures which, taken together, they argue, constituted the demos of the emerging English empire and a potentially subversive force in opposition to early modern capitalism—a class enemy that was often represented in the literature of the time as a monstrous “many-headed hydra” which must be subdued by an imperial Hercules in order to establish and maintain civil rule. See Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic (Boston: 2000): 36-40.
nature, legitimate not only conquest but also “displantation.” This, ultimately, is what the extension of Adamic dominion means. It is not simply the extension of human control over nature, but also the reduction and displantation of those people who have regressed to a state of nature. The grant of dominion over nature authorizes not only an epistemological project of scientific inquiry; it also serves as the basis for a “tacit league or confederation” of nations “against such routs and shoals of people, as have utterly degenerate from the laws of nature as have in their very body and frame of estate a monstrosity and may be truly accounted … common enemies and grievances of mankind; or disgraces and reproaches to human nature” (7.35-6).

This should give us some perspective when reading other texts in which Bacon appears to have a more qualified or even critical position when it comes to empire and colonial expansion. In his essay “Of Plantations,” for instance, Bacon famously writes: “I like a plantation in a pure soil, that is, where people are not displanted to the end to plant in others. For else it is rather an extirpation than a plantation” (6.457). This has sometimes been taken to mean that Bacon was opposed to or at least concerned or anxious about the consequences of colonial expansion in the New World, but in light of An Advertisement and other texts on plantation and colonization, such concern or anxiety can be seen to be entirely compatible with imperialist ideology. Where, after all, is such a “pure soil” to be found? Virginia was certainly not founded in a “pure soil,” and yet there is ample evidence of Bacon’s own participation in the Virginia Trading Company. Clearly Bacon’s

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19 Bacon was involved in the founding of the Newfoundland Company in 1607 and the Virginia Company in 1609. In the Second Charter of the Virginia Company, William Strachey addresses Bacon as the “most noble fautor [favorer] of the Virginian Plantation, being from the beginning (with other lords and earles) of the principall counsell applied to propagate and guide yt.” As Linebaugh and Rediker note, this charter empowered the governor “to declare martial law in order to bring the colony to discipline thereby to make money for the new stockholders” (op. cit. 33). See also William Strachey, For the Colony in Virginea Britania: Lawes Divine, Morall and Martiall, etc., ed. D. Flaherty (Charlottesville: U of Virginia Press, 1969).
understanding of what constitutes the purity of soil has little to do with the mere existence of
an indigenous population. In An Advertisement, Zebedaeus clearly articulates the necessity of
“displantation” in the New World; it was “lawful,” he says, “for the Spaniards to invade
[Amerindian] territory, forfeited by the law of nature and either to reduce them or displant
them” (7.34). In “Of Plantations,” Bacon seems to suggest that this displantation is morally
wrong, but read carefully, the essay does not really contradict the position articulated in An
Advertisement. If the New World is not really populated by “nations in right,” but only routs
and shoals, multitudes and monstrosities, then one cannot really call the displacement of
those people “displantation.” This may surprise some scholars who read these passages from
the Essays in isolation and sense in them a certain respect or concern for the indigenous
populations of the Americas. After all, Bacon does go on to write in “Of Plantations” that
colonizers should treat native peoples “justly and graciously:”

If you plant where savages are, do not only entertain them with trifles and gingles, but
use them justly and graciously, with sufficient guard nevertheless: and do not win
their favour by helping them to invade their enemies, but for their defence it is not
amiss. And send oft of them over to the country that plants, that they may see a better
condition than their own, and commend it when they return. (6.459)

This appears to confirm the image of Bacon as a reluctant and critical supporter of
colonization, but again context is important if we are to understand the nature of the
criticism. In this essay Bacon argues that a plantation which displaces an indigenous
population is “rather an extirpation than a plantation,” but here he seems to suggest that one
can colonize land occupied by “savages” without really displanting them. It is important to
note that the “pure soil” Bacon refers to earlier in the essay is not exactly uninhabited or even
uncultivated land, but is rather land acquired without bloodshed or “extirpation,” without, in
other words, violent displacement. But for Bacon to imagine one can “plant where savages
are” and not displant them suggests that he does not really see them as occupying the land in which they live. Implied here is the notion that “savages” cannot be displanted because they do not really “plant” or make the land productive. In a way this is even more extreme than the arguments put forward by Martius and Zebedaeus in *An Advertisement*, who at least acknowledge that the native inhabitants of the New World had to be conquered and displaced in order that their land might be “reseized” by civil nations and put to the use of empire.

Bacon’s position here is more in line with Pollio, who argues, “wild and savage people are like beasts and birds which are *ferae naturae*, the property of which passeth with the possession, and goeth to the occupant” (7.21). “Savage people” are, in other words, indistinguishable from the wilderness they inhabit; they do not possess or occupy land, so they cannot really be displanted. In “Of Plantations,” Bacon says they should be “used justly” and not entertained with “trifles and gingles,” but there is no indication that he believes they should be treated like *nations in right*. They should instead, he says, be brought back to the imperial metropole wherever possible so that they might be shown “a better condition than their own.” This is the real purpose of their “just treatment.” The cultural assimilation of savages and barbarians is crucial for the extension of empire and is at the heart of Bacon’s notion of the “greatness of states.”

In his essay, “Of the True Greatness of Kingdoms and Estates,” Bacon writes that “all states that are liberal of naturalization towards strangers are fit for empire,” and by “naturalization” Bacon does not mean simply the extension of economic privileges to “singular persons alone,” but also to “whole families, yea, to cities, and sometimes to nations” (6.448). Bacon cites Rome as an example of an empire that thrived through a policy of cultural and political assimilation alongside aggressive colonization, for “their custom of
plantation of colonies, whereby the Roman plant was removed into the soil of other nations,” was a crucial part of this imperial project: “Putting both constitutions together [plantation and naturalization], you will say that it was not the Romans that spread upon the world, but it was the world that spread upon the Romans: and that was the sure way of greatness” (6.448). By imagining the process of colonization and cultural assimilation as an act of immense charity and hospitality—a gesture embracing barbarous nations, so they may know “a better condition than their own”—Bacon is able to create an image of English empire founded everywhere in a “pure soil,” an empire that expands without actually displacing or destroying other nations.

The concept of a “pure soil” is a key ideologeme in Bacon’s work. Even in his writings on the colonization of Ireland Bacon speaks of a “pure soil” or area pura that might be enclosed and planted by the English without actually displanting the native inhabitants. It should be noted that in “Certain Considerations Touching the Plantation in Ireland” Bacon at one point describes the colonization of Virginia as “an enterprise in my opinion differing as much from this [the plantation of Ireland], as Amadis de Gaul differs from Caesar’s Commentaries” (11.123); the two plantations differ so greatly in his mind that one might as well be comparing romance and history or fantasy and reality, and yet the same presuppositions underlie both narratives.\(^{20}\) In the case of Ireland, though he counsels religious toleration and the use of restraint when exercising military force, Bacon still makes an argument for what he considers an effective, pragmatic approach to the reduction, colonization, and assimilation of the subject nation. In “Considerations touching the Queen’s Service in Ireland,” it is true that Bacon calls for less bloodshed and violence, but only

because a rebellion had already been successfully put down and continued violent repression seemed counter-productive to the immediate task at hand. Addressing Elizabeth I, Bacon writes that “the Queen seeketh not an extirpation of that people [the Irish], but a reduction; and that now she hath chastised them by her royal power and arms, according to the necessity of the occasion, her Majesty taketh no pleasure in effusion of blood, or displanting of antient generations” (10.47). Bacon at once counsels a kind of restraint—reduction or subjection rather than total extirpation—while at the same time acknowledging the legitimacy of the crown’s acts of violence “according to the necessity of the occasion.” He calls too for “a toleration of religion” in some principal towns but again for purely pragmatic reasons, as the suppression of Catholicism had been, he says, “one of the principal pretences whereby the heads of the rebellion have prevailed both with the people and with the foreigner” (10.49). Again he leaves no doubt that his goal is still the erasure of local laws, customs, land rights, and religious practices, and “the well expressing or impressing of the design of this state upon that miserable and desolate kingdom,” in order “to reduce wild and barbarous people to civility and justice” (10.47).

Likewise, in his address to James I on the Irish question, Bacon commends the king’s efforts at colonizing Ireland and even argues that it is an exceptional act that differs from former examples of colonization because it is—or could be—bloodless: “for most part of unions and plantations of kingdoms have been founded in the effusion of blood: but your Majesty shall build in solo puro et in area pura, that shall need no sacrifices expiatory for blood; and therefore no doubt under a higher and more assured blessing.” Bacon again

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21 “Certain Considerations Touching the Plantation in Ireland,” in Works 11.117. The concept of area pura or a “pure soil” seems to refer to Ireland as a whole. Near the beginning of his discourse, for instance, Bacon contrasts the plantation of Ireland with the union of England, Scotland and Wales; unlike the latter, he
seems concerned about a possible “effusion of blood,” but this concern is not at all a challenge to imperialist ideology; in fact it works to legitimate the enterprise as a humane and exceptional act undertaken to extend civility and justice to a barbarous people. The very concepts of *area pura* and “bloodless sacrifice” are clearly *expressions* of early modern imperialist ideology. If Bacon raises concerns about unnecessary or excessive violence, these concerns do not seem to introduce any doubts about the legitimacy of the enterprise or the possibility of planting in *area pura* without displanting the Irish.

4. **The Harp of Orpheus**

It is not hard to find examples of imperialist rhetoric in Bacon’s political writings, but the point I would like to stress is not simply that Bacon was an active supporter of colonial projects in both the old and the new worlds; rather, it is important to understand that the rhetoric Bacon uses to justify colonization and the extension of empire also *grounds* political empire in “human empire” or the extension of human dominion over nature. As we have seen, in *An Advertisement Touching An Holy War* Bacon argues that the colonization of the New World is legitimated by the “original donation of government”—that is, Adam’s dominion over animals; in “Certain Considerations Touching the Plantation of Ireland,” Bacon makes a similar argument by means of an allegorical interpretation of the myth of Orpheus, which rehearses or anticipates his more famous reading of the story in *De Sapientia Veterum*, or *The Wisdom of the Ancients*. The parallels between these two texts allow us to

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says, the former plantation is an act which founds a state out of nothing, “resembling the creation of the world, which was *de nihilo ad quid*” (11.116).
better understand the relationship between political empire and human empire in Bacon’s
scientific and political writings.

In his treatise on the plantation of Ireland, Bacon tells us that “the harp of Ireland puts
me in mind of that glorious emblem or allegory wherein the wisdom of antiquity did figure
and shadow out works of this nature” (11.117). The ancient story of Orpheus “shadows” the
works of modern empires, and England’s imperial sway in Ireland is likened to the song of
Orpheus, which tames wild and savage animals and brings order to inanimate nature:

For the poets feigned that Orpheus, by the virtue and sweetness of his harp, did call
and assemble the beasts and birds, of their nature wild and savage, to stand about him,
as in a theatre; forgetting their affections of fierceness, of lust, and of prey; and
listening to the tunes and harmonies of the harp; and soon after called likewise the
stones and the woods to remove, and stand in order about him: which fable was
anciently interpreted of the reducing and plantation of kingdoms; when people of
barbarous manners are brought to give over and discontinue their customs of revenge
and blood and of dissolute life and of theft and rapine, and to give ear to the wisdom
of laws and governments; whereupon immediately followeth the calling of stones for
building and habitation, and of trees for the seats of houses, orchards, inclosures, and
the like. This work therefore, of all other most memorable and honourable, your
Majesty hath now in hand; specially if your Majesty join the harp of David, in casting
out the evil spirit of superstition, with the harp of Orpheus, in casting out desolation
and barbarism. (11.117-18)

In this strange and fascinating passage Bacon compares the wild and savage beasts entranced
by Orpheus’ song to the Irish (and other “people of barbarous manners”) who are reduced
and colonized and finally “give ear to the wisdom of laws and government.” The moment
these people begin to obey the new law, stones and trees are removed from their scattered
places and become buildings, orchards, and enclosures; wild, inanimate nature under the
influence of this new law is transformed, as though nature itself desires to become once more
subject to human purposes and human ends. There is an echo here of Bacon’s concept of
“human empire” and Adamic dominion—a redeemed and humanized nature or nature
returning to its Edenic state. Beasts and birds “forget their affections of fierceness” and
stones and trees “stand in order” about the figure of Orpheus, who resembles an unfallen Adam. The two forms of empire—human and political—are fused in Bacon’s allegorical interpretation of the story. Orpheus’ song, which enchants and subdues nature, is also read as the “shadow” of political empire and represents the conquest and colonization of barbarous peoples.

This reading of the myth of Orpheus appears also in *De Sapientia Veterum*, where Bacon compares two stories about Orpheus to two distinct domains of philosophy—natural and political. *De Sapientia Veterum* was first published in 1609, so the essay “Orpheus, or Philosophy” was likely written around the same time as Bacon’s treatise on the plantation of Ireland, which was presented to the king sometime between 1608 and 1609.\(^\text{22}\) It is difficult to say which text was written first, but they clearly evolved out of the same idea. In *De Sapientia Veterum*, Bacon writes: “The story of Orpheus, which though so well known has not yet been in all points perfectly well interpreted, [and] seems meant for a representation [imaginem] of universal Philosophy.” Orpheus himself is described by Bacon as “an easy metaphor for philosophy personified” (6.646; 6.720). Bacon then rehearses two key stories about Orpheus: his journey into the underworld where he tries to rescue Eurydice from death, and his enchantment of the beasts, trees and stones, which ends with his own death at the hands of the Thracian bacchanals. “The meaning of the fable appears to be this,” Bacon writes: “The singing of Orpheus is of two kinds; one to propitiate the infernal powers [ad placandos Manes], the other to draw the wild beasts and the woods. The former may be best understood as referring to natural philosophy, the latter to philosophy moral and civil [ad philosophiam ... moralem et civilem]” (6.647; 6.721). Bacon reads these stories as allegories.

\(^{22}\) The date on the manuscript is 1606, but this date is certainly inaccurate since a number of events described in the text actually occurred in 1607. See the editors’ notes on the manuscript in *Works* 11.115-16.
describing the function or purpose of philosophy. The first song represents natural
philosophy and the power of man over nature; the second song represents the power of moral
or political philosophy—*philosophia civilis*—over other men. The first song subdues and
enchants “the infernal powers” and is sung to restore life, while the second song subdues and
enchants “the wild beasts” and is sung to unite the barbarous multitude under “the yoke of
laws.”

The power of the first song, Bacon writes, is the same power that lies dormant in
natural philosophy:

> For natural philosophy proposes to itself, as its noblest work of all, nothing less than
> the restitution and renovation of things corruptible, and (what is indeed the same
> thing in a lower degree) the conservation of bodies in the state in which they are, and
> the retardation of dissolution and putrefaction. Now certainly if this can be effected at
> all, it cannot be otherwise than by due and exquisite attempering and adjustment of
> parts in nature, as by the harmony and perfect modulation of a lyre. (1.47–8; 6.721)

Natural philosophy, then, is imagined as a work of restoration and renewal, the regeneration
of “things corruptible” (*resitutio et instauratio rerum corruptibilium*). Its end or “noblest
work” is to contain the effects of entropy, to slow or reverse the process of dissolution,
putrefaction, and decay in living things. This is a strikingly utopian image of science—
natural philosophy as the instrument of redemption, whose goal is the salvation and
restoration of the living body, the regeneration of fallen nature, the reversal of death itself.
This is consistent with the idea of natural science as the instrument of human empire and the
restoration of Adamic dominion found in the *Novum Organum* and the *New Atlantis*. To
“establish and extend the power and dominion of the human race itself over the universe,”
which is how Bacon describes his project in the *Novum Organum*, is ultimately to restore an
unfallen, regenerative, and humanized nature (1.222; 4.114).
But for Bacon, this first song of Orpheus—the song which enchants the infernal powers—has so far failed. It fails, Bacon writes, because the discipline it requires is too great, and “premature meddling and impatience” caused the old natural philosophers, alchemists, astrologers, and magicians, to look back and lose the very object of desire, which, like Eurydice, vanishes as soon as we reach out to grasp it. “Then Philosophy finding that her great work is too much for her, in sorrowful mood, as well becomes her, turns to human affairs,” Bacon writes:

and applying her powers of virtue and equity and peace, teaches the people to assemble and unite [populorum coetus in unum coire facit] and take upon them the yoke of laws and submit to authority [et imperiiis se submittere], and forget their ungoverned appetites, in listening and conforming to precepts and discipline. Whereupon soon follows the building of houses, the founding of cities, the planting of fields and gardens with trees; insomuch that the stones and the woods are not unfitly said to leave their places and come about her. And this application of Philosophy to civil affairs is properly represented, and according to the true order of things, as subsequent to the diligent trial and final frustration of the experiment of restoring the dead body to life. (6.648; 6.722)

For Bacon, civil or political philosophy emerges out of natural philosophy and is made necessary by the fall of humanity and the failure of natural philosophy, at least in its primitive state, to restore the dead body to life. In an unregenerate, fallen state, civil philosophy teaches the bestial multitude to unite as an “assembly of people” (populorum coetus). Philosophia civilis instils discipline, controls the lower appetites, establishes law, authority and imperium; it brings about the building of houses, the founding of cities, the planting fields and gardens, so that “the stones and woods are not unfitly said to leave their places and come about her.” But this second song of Orpheus—which also appears in his treatise on the plantation of Ireland—is an echo of the first song. When the first song fails, the second one seems to reprise the old theme. The wild beasts, “putting off their several natures … no longer caring to satisfy their hunger or to hunt their prey,” stand about Orpheus
“gently and sociably, as in a theatre,” rapt and listening, and in this tableau nature appears humanized, or seems to return, briefly, to an Edenic state and submit to human will. Here we have a vivid image of what Zebedaeus, in *An Advertisement*, calls “the original donation of government”—the origin of political power imagined in allegorical terms as the power to subdue and tame nature itself.

The second song seems to be a continuation of the first—a repeated theme rather than a distinct melody, and it too is a delicate harmony and a tenuous spell which soon loses its power. Orpheus’ second song is finally drowned out by the “bacchanals”—seditious rebels and savages whose cacophonous roar disorders the song, breaks the trance, and tears Orpheus apart: “for so it is that after kingdoms and commonwealths have flourished for a time, there arise perturbations and seditions and wars; amid the uproars of which, first the laws are put to silence, and then men return to the depraved conditions of their nature, and desolation is seen in the fields and cities” (6.648; 6.722). Then, Bacon writes, philosophy is torn to pieces and barbarism sets in; the waters of the river Helicon sink underground, carrying with them the fragments of the body of Orpheus, “until, according to the appointed vicissitude of things, they break out and issue forth again, perhaps among other nations, and not in the places where they were before” (6.648; 6.722). For Bacon, the story of Orpheus is about a series of attempts at ordering or restoring fallen nature. Philosophy attempts to subdue the infernal powers of death and decay, and when this fails, philosophy turns inward and attempts to control human appetites and the bestial multitude. People are subdued by law and are governed by states, but perturbations and seditions among them lead finally to an “uproar” which destroys the social order, and philosophy itself is torn to pieces and sinks into
oblivion. After the course of many centuries, its fragments reappear in the stream of history in another place at another time to begin the cycle again.

In these two texts—“Certain Considerations Touching the Plantation in Ireland” and The Wisdom of the Ancients—a deeply pessimistic view of history and the fate of nations is mixed with a vision of *translatio imperii* and the future restoration of human empire. Implied here is the belief or hope that the river Helicon, which carries the pieces of Orpheus through the subterranean currents of history, will break to the surface in England, whose new plantations in Ireland and America bring new people under the yoke of law and whose “new organon” promises to open up new regions of the *globus intellectualis* to conquest and colonization. The two forms of empire are intimately intertwined in Bacon’s interpretation of the story. In his treatise on the plantation of Ireland, for instance, Bacon writes that the king must “join the harp of David, in casting out the evil spirit of superstition, with the harp of Orpheus, in casting out desolation and barbarism” (11.118). If the infernal powers are to be subdued and the hidden forces of nature are to be harnessed, then the wild beasts and bacchanals—both within and outside us—must also be subdued. While the idea of Adamic dominion serves as a founding myth or a “charter of foundation” for all forms of political rule in An Advertisement, it can also serve as the image and *telos* of natural philosophy. While human empire provides the ideological foundation for political empire, the new natural sciences are themselves a collective work and a *royal* work, requiring the organization, resources, and legitimation of the state. Political empire is not just a metaphorical image of humanity’s eventual dominion over nature, it is *part* of the historical-eschatological process through which human empire is to be realized.
In each of these texts on colonialism and empire—*An Advertisement*, “Of Plantations,” “Of the True Greatness of Kingdoms and Estates,” “Certain Considerations Touching the Plantation in Ireland”—Bacon’s approach is fairly pragmatic; he deals with specific reforms to improve the productivity, political stability and cultural integration of the colonies. But the use of the concept of Adamic dominion in Bacon’s political writings introduces a utopian dimension to his work. The extension of human empire, after all, has as its goal the *humanization of nature*: the end, not only of all political antagonism, but also the more fundamental antagonism between human beings and nature, the end of decay and death, the regeneration of “things corruptible,” the restoration of the living body. “Human empire” is the idea through which Bacon juxtaposes the archaic wish-image of an Edenic, unfallen nature with a future vision of perfect technical mastery through labour, experiment, and inductive reasoning. But there is, we might say, both a utopian and an ideological dimension to Bacon’s empire of man: it is utopian in that it represents an imagined end to political conflict and material scarcity through the extension of humanity’s collective, practical knowledge of the natural world; it is ideological in that its universality requires an exception that provides cover for the extension of political dominion. Far from *humanizing* nature, it effectively *naturalizes* much of humanity, reducing other human societies to a condition *ferae naturae* in order to legitimize their reduction and displantation.

5. Merchants of Light

In *An Advertisement Touching An Holy War*, Adam’s dominion over nature provides the “charter of foundation” for colonial rule, and in *Novum Organum* and *The Wisdom of the Ancients*, restoration of Adamic dominion is presented as the “noblest work” of natural
philosophy, the *telos* of a reformed natural science. But if human empire and secular empire are bound up with one another in a number of Bacon’s scientific and political tracts, in his work of utopian fiction, the advancement of learning seems to be at odds with the demands of empire. Near the beginning of the *New Atlantis*, Bacon sets up an opposition between the aggressive, militaristic Atlantis of the ancient Americas and the peaceful, autarkic island nation of Bensalem—the “New Atlantis”—which Bacon situates somewhere “beyond both the old world and the new” (3.134). The old Atlantis is a powerful confederation of nations whose greed, ambition, and imperial overreach leads to defeat and divine punishment in the form of a great flood that destroys the Americas and reduces its inhabitants to a savage condition of bare nature. The destruction of the old Atlantis, like the destruction of Babel, scatters the nations of the world and breaks apart the cultural and economic unity of the archaic world. Bensalem alone retains knowledge of the archaic past while remaining free from foreign corruption and the entanglements of inter-imperial rivalry. Unlike Atlantis, Bensalem does not expand aggressively or colonize other countries; unlike Atlantis, Bensalem does not trade in material commodities except as a means of acquiring knowledge. Bensalem’s apparent isolation and autarky allow it to focus on the peaceful development of science and the extension of human control over nature. This is one of the reasons why so many critics argue that Bacon’s imperialist rhetoric can be separated from or subordinated to his higher ideal of human empire. Bensalem, Bacon’s ideal state, seems wholly uninterested in imperialism, and while its “Merchants of Light” engage in commercial espionage in the underdeveloped periphery of the New World, most critics argue that these trade sorties are non-colonial in character since they do not seek to extend cultural or political influence.
Some even argue that this “trade in light” is not really commercial trade at all since its end is not material gain or profit but the expansion of knowledge.23

But if we are to grasp the relationship between secular and “human” empire in Bacon’s utopia, it is important to understand the foundational event in the text—the event which separates his utopia from the world and creates the enclave of Bensalem. This foundational event involves the destruction of the New World in the archaic, mythological past, and is used as an explanation for its present savagery. The story of how Bacon’s utopia came to be involves a kind of temporal displacement of the ongoing destruction of the Americas. For Bacon, the regression of the New World is what produces the separation that makes the utopian enclave of the New Atlantis possible. This foundational event is crucial to our understanding of Bacon’s utopia because the very concept of “utopia” is premised upon the partial separation or relative isolation of the utopian polity from the world. For this reason, the story of how a given utopia came to be isolated touches on the nature of the utopia as such. How it is isolated reflects the structure of its design—the conditions or limitations of its ideality or reality. Therefore, when exploring the relationship between imperialism and natural science in Bacon’s New Atlantis, we should not accept at face value Bensalem’s avowed ideology, its rejection of empire or its disinterested pursuit of knowledge; we should focus instead on the conditions that make this rejection possible.

We might begin by thinking about the ways in which Bensalem maintains the utopian enclave in the present, the means by which it hides itself within the world without being utterly removed from it. Bensalem’s trade policies and the role of the “Merchants of Light” are crucial to the maintenance of the semi-permeable boundary between Bensalem and other nations. Near the beginning of the *New Atlantis*, the governor of Bensalem’s “House of Strangers” tells us that the Merchants of Light are the only Bensalemites who are permitted contact with the outside world, and their trade expeditions are the only means by which goods and knowledge pass into or out of the utopian enclave. The Merchants of Light are tasked with maintaining the secrecy of Bensalem as they conduct their trade. Their main purpose is to monitor the “affairs of state” of foreign nations and to observe “the sciences, arts, manufactures, and inventions of all the world; and withal to bring [to Bensalem] books, instruments, and patterns of every kind” (3.146). The Merchants of Light have two mandates: they serve as spies for the king, giving him intelligence concerning Bensalem’s neighbours, and they serve as merchants for Salomon’s House, acquiring books, instruments, and information concerning the advancement of the sciences, arts, and manufactures in foreign lands. These two roles are united, as the acquisition of practical inventions and “patterns of every kind” implicitly involves the acquisition of instruments of war, or else the means by which such instruments and improvements might be developed.\(^\text{24}\) Moreover, the Merchants of Light, by virtue of their secrecy, acquire their intelligence at a discount. Hiding their true

\(^{24}\) Salomon’s House uses the knowledge acquired by the Merchants of Light to extend and develop their knowledge of the material world and to create “things of use,” including better engines of war. As the Father of Salomon’s House tells us: “we imitate and practice to make swifter motions than any you have, either out of your muskets or any engine that you have; and to make them and multiply them more easily, and with small force, by wheels and other means: and to make them stronger, and more violent than yours are; exceeding your greatest cannons and basilisks. We represent also ordnance and instruments of war, and engines of all kinds: and likewise new mixtures and compositions of gun-powder, wildfires burning in water, and unquenchable” (3.163).
interests from their trading partners, they hide the true value of the commodities they acquire. In every transaction they are, then, both spies and merchants, and the roles are complementary. The governor of the House of Strangers, however, claims that their true designs are not mercenary, but serve a higher purpose. For though they set sail with “a good quantity of treasure ... for the buying of such things and rewarding of such persons as they should think fit,” their aim is not to profit directly or materially from their transactions, but to acquire knowledge or “light” as opposed to mere “commodities of matter.” Bacon writes: “Thus you see we maintain a trade, not for gold, silver, or jewels; nor for silks; nor for spices; not any other commodity of matter; but only for God’s first creature, which was Light: to have light (I say) of the growth of all parts of the world” (3.146). To emphasize the significance of this statement, the governor breaks off his speech here and Bacon describes the response of his narrator: “And when he said this, he was silent; and so were we all. For indeed we were all astonished to hear such strange things so probably told” (3.146-7).

Several critics have cited this passage on the Merchants of Light as evidence for the anti-colonial or anti-mercantilist character of Bacon’s utopia or to separate his pragmatic, political conception of empire from his ideal, epistemic empire. Bensalem is able to confine its trade to the acquisition of “light” because, as the governor tells us, King Solamona made Bensalem “sufficient and substantive … to maintain itself without any aid at all of the foreigner” (3.144). King Solamona’s two great laws—the “interdicts and prohibitions … touching entrance of strangers” and the foundation of Salomon’s House—meet in this goal (3.144). While Bensalem is “of rare fertility of soil” on its own, Salomon’s House harnesses and transforms this natural fertility to wonderfully productive effect, which makes

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25 For an excellent analysis of the “invisible exploitation” underlying the trade of the Merchants of Light, see Charles Whitney, “Merchants of Light: Science as Colonization in the New Atlantis,” op. cit., 258.
Bensalem’s isolation, secrecy and autarky possible. The Merchants of Light, then, appear to some critics to be agents of a radically transformed mode of exchange—an ideal, non-colonial relationship to the rest of the world. Claire Jowitt, for example, observes that “in this utopian world colonial endeavour is redundant. The scientocracy described in the New Atlantis is able to care for all the population’s needs without territorial expansion or foreign trade.”

For her, the trade of the Merchants of Light does not really constitute “foreign trade” at all. Markku Peltonen also emphasizes the “self-sufficiency” of Bensalem and argues that “the values and qualities emphasized in the New Atlantis stand in complete contrast to those lying at the heart of true [political] greatness,” or empire. Peltonen argues that Bacon’s utopia is not strictly about politics but is rather an allegory for his epistemology. Bensalem’s “solitary situation,” the emphasis on the fruitfulness of its soil, its refusal to admit strangers, and, significantly, its self-sufficiency, its lack of trade and its lack of interest in war or colonization, all suggest that Bensalem is not an imperial power and Bacon’s utopia is not about “the greatness of states” at all, but is rather a model for Bacon’s scientific project.

Sarah Irving and Jacqueline Cowan both draw on Peltonen and use the passage on the Merchants of Light to argue that Bensalem’s self-sufficiency and its trade in knowledge make it an anti-colonial text. Irving claims that “what is utopian about Bensalem is that it is a society which fulfils the promise of Bacon’s natural philosophical project and avoids the dangers of the distortion of knowledge on the colonial periphery.”

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26 Claire Jowitt, “‘Books will speak plain’? Colonialism, Jewishness and politics in Bacon’s New Atlantis,” in Francis Bacon’s The New Atlantis: New Interdisciplinary Essays (Manchester UP, 2002) 130.


distorted in Bacon’s utopia because “Bensalem’s self-sufficiency enabled Bacon to put forward an alternative idea of the collection of knowledge,” an alternative which does not involve domination or exploitation of the New World.  

“The ideal of state-building which Bacon presents in the *New Atlantis* is not based upon gaining possession of colonies but rather upon gaining possession of knowledge,” Irving argues, and so “Bensalem is not a territorial empire but an epistemic one.”  

Cowan makes a similar argument in her analysis of Bacon’s *New Atlantis* and questions whether Bacon’s idea of “Human Empire” has anything to do with colonialism or imperialism. The “Merchants of Light” in the *New Atlantis*, she says, undertake what appear to be commercial voyages, but Cowan questions whether these expeditions are really a form of colonialism since they do not accrue knowledge or commodities by force, displace native peoples or establish any kind of religious, political, or cultural presence. “Since travel to new worlds in the *New Atlantis* is motivated neither by material wealth nor to establish plantations, the Merchants of Light are not agents of colonialism,” she writes:

Instead, Salomon’s House casts the expansion of empire as an economy of knowledge. For Salomon’s House, to enlarge “the bounds of Human Empire” is to enlarge the reach of their knowledge. In the *New Atlantis*, Bacon calls early modern exploration and the expansion of empire into the service of his scientific method. And as his e/utopia suggests, this economy of knowledge is geared toward the welfare of humankind.  

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29 Irving 255.  
30 Irving 256.  
The ideal of “Human Empire” as it appears in Bacon’s utopian fiction is thus imagined to be the very negation of particular political or economic interests—an “economy of knowledge” that serves the interests of humanity as a whole.

Jeffrey Knapp also cites the passage on the Merchants of Light to argue that “the Bensalemites are … interested in possessing only the knowledge of other countries,” but he is also aware that this “trade in light” is an ideological construction. Knapp observes that “elsewhere Bacon portrays himself as the explorer of a specifically ‘intellectual’ New World; in New Atlantis he depicts ancient Mexico and Peru as the first imperialists, annihilated for their acquisitiveness by ‘Divine Revenge’, apparently so that he can discredit a potentially materialist or New World construction of otherworldliness and associate anti-materialism with an overtly fictional ‘new’ Atlantis instead.”32 Bensalem’s merchants, who seek only to possess knowledge and gladly part with mere “commodities of matter,” are set in opposition to the acquisitive, militaristic empire of the old Atlantis, but this opposition is Bacon’s own fictional construction and needs to be critically analyzed. Indeed, the sharp distinction drawn by some critics between epistemic empire and political empire is difficult to maintain, I argue, since the very act of exchange which the Merchants of Light perform—the exchange of material commodities for light—implies a disavowed equivalence. Moreover, it is important to note that while Salomon’s House makes Bensalem’s autarky possible, Salomon’s House acquires much of the raw mechanical knowledge for its laboratories—“books, instruments and patterns of every kind”—from the Merchants of Light. To argue that this is not really foreign trade or that it is a trade in pure knowledge as opposed to commodities of matter ignores the dialectic of “commodity” and “light” that is implicit in the

very concept of a “trade in light.” How, after all, can Bensalem be self-sufficient if its autarky is premised upon scientific and mechanical knowledge acquired through a secretive trade with foreign nations?

Amy Boesky touches on this problem in her book, *Founding Fictions*, noting that the information procured by the Merchants of Light, “like More’s treasure kept not as treasure, troubles the bounded status of the colony. To maintain their technocratic superiority, the Bensalemites must import information from overseas, consuming foreign knowledge in order to reproduce or transform it in the scientific factory which is at once the colony’s eye and brain.” Like More’s gold slave chains and chamber pots, the “light” that the Merchants of Light acquire is both necessary and potentially subversive because it is both the means by which Bensalem separates itself from the world and at the same time the acquisition of it draws them into the world of commerce and inter-imperial rivalry. This trade in light is a form of exchange that appears to be purified of all external relations of power—a fair exchange of goods for knowledge, absent of any political or military coercion—and yet the price of knowledge is by necessity distorted by the secrecy and superior intelligence of the agents of Salomon’s House.

As Charles Whitney points out, this trade in light is not negligible or peripheral to the operation of Salomon’s House. Fully one third of the brethren of the Foundation are employed as Merchants of Light, making them the largest single faction within the college.  

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34 Whitney writes: “By the proportions given, the light of information gathered must account for about one-third of the gross national product of Bensalem’s laboratories. Bensalem is clearly a technologically developed nation that depends upon imports of ‘raw material’ from less developed ones.” (258). While there is no way to determine the exact value of the information obtained by the Merchants of Light simply based on the number of their agents, we can still infer that they account for a sizable proportion of the basic input of “raw” intellectual material.
It is difficult, therefore, to maintain that Bensalem’s trade in light is not really foreign trade or not a significant source of “raw material”—in the form of facts, instruments, and techne—for the improvement of the forces of production within Bensalem. The secrecy of the Merchants of Light, moreover, creates a substantial imbalance in Bensalem’s trade with other nations. Whitney writes: “secrecy, one infers, must insure ridiculously low prices for ‘light,’ since the sellers do not know the use value of their products,” and the buyers are protected from the vulnerability incurred by their dependence on the “labour and ingenuity of less developed nations.” While several of the critics cited above take issue with Whitney’s portrayal of colonial relations in the New Atlantis, none of them adequately address his central argument regarding the implied unequal exchange in the New Atlantis and simply resort to pointing out the lack of territorial colonies in the New Atlantis as proof that Bacon’s idealized scientific enterprise remains unsullied by his imperialist politics and his personal investments in English colonialism. But Whitney’s argument goes further than this:

It is not just that Salomon’s House does not fulfill its goal [autarky and human empire]; even its limited success actually depends upon the continuing relative backwardness of the world beyond Bensalem and on a necessary technological distance measured between the raw material of fact and the ‘manufactured’ generalization. Foreign backwardness produces not only lower prices but would preclude the advanced technological development by rivals that could threaten Bensalem’s security. In short, Bacon has made scientific success dependent upon a kind of invisible exploitation.

Whitney’s critics simply cite the absence of visible exploitation—territorial colonies, military conquest, cultural assimilation, etc.—as evidence against his thesis, ignoring the central point of his argument, namely, that the invisibility of this exploitation is an expression of imperialist ideology. It is not surprising that Bacon’s ideal empire is free from visible

35 Whitney 258.

36 Whitney 258.
exploitation; after all, even when he describes real imperialist projects, such as the colonization of the New World or Ireland, he speaks of them as though they were enterprises that could be conducted “in solo puro et in area pura, that shall need no sacrifices expiatory for blood” (11.117). What Bacon is describing in the New Atlantis is not an anti-colonial or anti-imperialist ideal or even an allegory for scientific progress and “human empire” purified of the political implications of the figure of empire. He is describing one side of an ideal political-epistemic empire.

There is, however, a more sophisticated critique of Whitney’s thesis that struggles with the problem of how to make sense of this “invisible exploitation.” David Colclough in his essay “Ethics and Politics in the New Atlantis,” repeats some of the predictable responses to Whitney’s arguments, but he does at least address the key point made by Whitney and notes that it is “the very secrecy and supposed inequality of these transactions that has exercised critics,” and not overt forms of colonialism, which are clearly absent from the text. According to Colclough, these critics argue that, in effect, “beads are exchanged for gold, in an encounter typical of imperialist enterprise through the ages.”\(^37\) Colclough takes issue with this interpretation, however, because it is, to his mind, rather simplistic: “Certainly, these knowledge-gathering voyages of the merchants resemble small military or mercantile sorties, but given their striking difference from most colonial endeavours, their most interesting aspect is surely their commodification of knowledge.” In this exchange, Colclough writes, “Knowledge is like, and yet unlike, other mercantile commodities.”\(^38\) By engaging in a trade for light—exchanging gold, silver, silks, and spices for instruments, patterns, mechanical


\(^{38}\) Colclough 65.
knowledge, and *techne*—Bacon implies that knowledge is *fungible*. While “light” is opposed to “commodities of matter,” they are nevertheless made equivalent through the exchange. This formulation—*both like and unlike*—suggests that knowledge is a special commodity, one that can be exchanged but ultimately stands above the logic of exchange. As “God’s first creature” it is something that is not produced in order to be exchanged, but it can play that role and enter into exchange nonetheless. This is an important insight, but Colclough does not expand on it except to argue that the commodification of knowledge has nothing to do with colonialism per se. “This is not a colonial relationship to the knowledge the Merchants find on their travels,” Colclough writes, “even if it is possibly an exploitative one.”

Colclough attempts to resolve this apparent contradiction—mercantilism without colonialism; economic exploitation without social or political control—by arguing that the absence of overt, colonial domination in the text suggests that the story of the Merchants of Light is really a fable about knowledge and reading. The *New Atlantis*, he writes, is “an extended reflection on the ethics and the politics of the philosopher’s relations with past authorities and present and future readers,” rather than a discourse on an ideal “feigned commonwealth” and its relationship to the outside world. For Colclough, the passage on the Merchants of Light is an allegory for the natural philosopher’s relationship to past authorities. “We have noted,” he writes,

that in his description of the mercantile acquisition of knowledge from other societies, Bacon implies that those societies are less ‘developed’ or sophisticated in natural philosophy than Bensalem. Nonetheless, their ‘light’ is still valuable. This relationship is strikingly similar to Bacon’s frequently articulated attitude towards—

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39 Colclough 65.

40 Colclough 75, 66.
and use of—the texts of the ancients and other philosophers, which he regards as flawed.  

Bensalem’s acquisition of raw facts, patterns and mechanical knowledge from less developed nations—knowledge which, as Colclough says, is “under-used” or whose value is “not even recognized”—is seen as an allegory for the natural philosopher’s relationship to their own past. Those ancient philosophers, like the inhabitants of America, are a “young people” in Bacon’s eyes, and their observations and natural histories remain useful even if their true value has yet to be recognized. In Colclough’s reading of the *New Atlantis*, material exploitation of other nations becomes a figure for the intellectual exploitation—the “re-use” or “re-appropriation”—of past authorities. In the process, this exploitation ends up looking quite harmless; indeed, it becomes a way of honouring one’s predecessors by making their work fruitful in the present. This “fruitful ‘trading’ relationship with the textual past” is seen as an ideal form of exchange, where value is created without loss to either party. Indeed, this allegorical trade is finally presented as *the very opposite* of domination and conquest. “The task of the seventeenth-century natural philosopher,” according to Colclough’s reading, “is to enter into trade with, rather than to seek conquest over, the books and knowledge-systems of the past, just as the Bensalemites do with their Merchants of Light.”

The political import of the *New Atlantis* thus shrinks to an ethics of reading or making use of the past. But this is a rather strained interpretation. There are, after all, several instances in which Bensalem’s relationship to the cultural and philosophical heritage of the

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41 Colclough 66.

42 See for example aphorism LXXXIV in Bacon’s *Novum Organum*, in *Works* 4.82; Colclough 66.

43 “Re-use” and “re-appropriation” are terms that Colclough uses to describe this process which involves acquisition without loss or harm. The knowledge of the Americans in the *New Atlantis* is, he says, “under-used” or “not even recognized” and so can be taken without causing harm (Colclough 66-7).

44 Colclough 67.
ancient European world is described in explicitly non-allegorical terms, terms which also involve drawing a marked *distinction* between the New World and the ancient European world. Bacon tells us, for instance, that Bensalem retains knowledge of the ancient past while the New World has lost all memory of its origins. From the moment of first contact we learn that the Bensalemites know ancient Hebrew, ancient Greek, and “good Latin of the School” (3.130). They even seem to have greater knowledge of classical and Christian European traditions than the Europeans themselves. They are familiar with Plato—“a great man with you”—and the governor of the House of Strangers claims that they have “large knowledge” of Plato’s *Timaeus* and *Critias*, while Europeans have but “sparing memory, or none” (3.141). The governor also hints that Bensalem has knowledge of texts written by the biblical King Solomon which were lost to Europe: “namely, that Natural History which he wrote, of all plants, from the *cedar of Libanus* to the *moss that growth out of the wall*, and of all *things that have life and motion*” (3.145). Most striking of all, Bensalem receives the entire Christian canon before the canon is actually formulated by the church fathers of the Old World.

Bensalem, then, serves as a model for a society which has fully remembered and reappropriated the “textual past,” but it is hard to see how this is related to Bensalem’s trade with the New World. In the *New Atlantis*, the inhabitants of the Americas appear to reside outside *history*, having lost all memory of the past and their own Atlantean ancestors. They are a “young people,” like the ancients themselves, but they are also young because they have lost the knowledge of the ancients. While Bensalem is the home of an ancient, wise and technologically advanced civilization, the New World in the *New Atlantis* is the home of a childish people, a “poor remnant of human seed,” a “rude” and “ignorant,” “simple and
savage people,” who are responsible for both their own isolation and the separation of Bensalem from the rest of the world. This makes the inhabitants of the Americas quite different from the ancient Greeks, for while Bacon is often critical of Aristotelian natural philosophy or the mechanical arts of the ancient world, he never describes the ancients as “savage” people lacking “letters, arts, and civility” (3.143).

Colclough reads Bensalem’s trading relationship with its less developed neighbours as a relationship between the European scientist and his own “textual past,” and while there is indeed a kind of temporal distortion at play in Bacon’s representation of the Americas, this does not mean the inhabitants of the New World in the New Atlantis can be read as allegorical figures standing in for the natural philosopher’s own past. If we are to grasp the nature of the relationship between Bensalem and the New World we need to go back to the foundational event of the text—the event which destroys the Americas, reducing its inhabitants to a state of savagery while separating Bensalem from the rest of the world. It is this event which creates the utopian enclave that the Merchants of Light must work to maintain.

6. The Old Atlantis and the Second Flood

When the narrator asks the governor of Bensalem’s House of Strangers how the island nation came to be isolated from the rest of the world—how, in other words, the utopian enclave was created in the first place—he tells us that their isolation began as a result of a war with the nations of America. The present state of the New World savagery is the result, he says, of an ancient catastrophe, similar to the flood in Genesis, which marked the end of the original Atlantean empire and the destruction of the archaic precursors to Peru and
Mexico. The first flood—the biblical flood in Genesis—destroyed most of humanity, Bacon writes, but “the example of the ark, that saved the remnant of men from the universal deluge, gave men confidence to adventure upon the waters,” and so the first flood did not divide nations into separate “worlds” (3.140). The second flood is described as a “particular inundation” which destroys only the Americas, but it also brings an end to the ancient trade and commerce that united Noah’s early descendants. Before the war—some three thousand years ago according to the governor—the whole world was united by commercial and cultural ties. Navigation was much further advanced, not only in Bensalem, but also in Europe, Asia, and Africa. The governor tells us that even “the great Atlantis (that you call America), which have now but junks and canoes, abounded then in tall ships” (3.141). All the world was bound up within a great circulation of trade, people, and ideas, and while Bensalem was eventually isolated and began to institute a policy of national secrecy, at that time it was visited by people from all corners of the globe. As for their own ships, the governor tells us, “they went sundry voyages, as well to your Straits, which you call the Pillars of Hercules, as to other parts in the Atlantic and Mediterrane Seas; as to Paguin (which is the same with Cambaline) and Quinzy, upon the Oriental Seas, as far as the borders of the East Tartary” (3.141). Bensalem was not just known to other nations, then; it was itself a great commercial and maritime power. Its merchants and explorers reached out past the “Pillars of Hercules”—a symbolic act which both recalls and inverts the famous image from the frontispiece of Bacon’s *Instauratio Magna*. But while Bensalem had ships which could

45 Bensalem, we are told, still retains “some stirps and little tribes” of foreigners who immigrated long ago. The fact that distinct “tribes” of foreigners still exist after three thousand years of isolation is a strange detail that suggests both cultural tolerance and cultural chauvinism. Foreigners apparently are not forced to assimilate, but they also somehow remain “foreign” after three millennia. Given the enormous length of time one must posit the existence of customs and institutions that actively maintain the archaic difference between outsiders and native Bensalemites within the isolated nation state (3.141).
travel to Europe and Asia, the great Atlantis had such a powerful armada that it was able to cross the Strait of Gibraltar and land on the shores of Bensalem with two military expeditions intent on conquering and subduing the greater part of the world. The prehistory of Bensalem, then, is presented as a time when the old Atlantis was at the pinnacle of its power and sought to organize an already unified world market under a single political authority.

In telling this story about Bensalem’s separation from the rest of the world, Bacon clearly draws on themes from Plato’s account of Atlantis in the dialogues Timaeus and Critias. But when the governor of Bensalem’s House of Strangers tells the story of the war with Atlantis, he also casts doubt on this “narration and description which is made by a great man with you” (3.141). It is interesting to consider what Bacon rejects in Plato’s account of Atlantis: “the magnificent temple, palace, city, and hill; and the manifold streams of goodly navigable rivers, (which, as so many chains environed the same site and temple); and the several degrees of ascent whereby men did climb up to the same, as if it had been a scala coeli,” he writes, “be all poetical and fabulous” (3.141-2). The utopian dimension of Plato’s Atlantis—the geometrical perfection of its architectural design, its function as a model for the Platonic Forms—is mere “poetry,” a beautiful embellishment or fanciful distortion. The kernel of truth in the story, for Bacon’s governor, is to be found in Plato’s account of the commercial and military power of Atlantis, and the imperial overreach and eventual fall of the ancient state. “Yet so much is true,” he writes,

that the said country of Atlantis, as well that of Peru, then called Coya, as that of Mexico, then named Tyrambel, were mighty and proud kingdoms in arms, shipping and riches: so mighty, as at one time (or at least within the space of ten years) they

46 “Ladder of heaven.”
both made two great expeditions; they of Tyrambel through the Atlantic to the
Mediterrane Sea; and they of Coya through the South Sea upon this our island.
(3.142)

The truth in Plato’s story, then, is to be found in the description of Atlantean empire—its
arms, shipping, and riches, its ambitious military expeditions and domination of overseas
trade—not the technological achievements or the political organization of the ancient state,
which Critias presents as a counter-model to Socrates’ ideal society. Bacon’s account is more
in line with the Timaeus, which simply describes the war and the destruction of Atlantis as
background for a description of ancient Athenian society. It is the war and the flood that
matter in Bacon’s account, not the customs and practices of the Atlanteans. Bacon
consciously rejects the utopianism of his source material and alludes to it only as an accident
of history that creates the conditions for his own utopia. The destruction of Atlantis separates
Bacon’s utopia from the rest of the world and establishes the boundaries of a new Atlantis; it
breaks apart the social and economic matrix of the ancient world, the commercial and
cultural ties which are imagined to bind Europe, Asia, and the Americas in the distant past.

This foundational event—the destruction of Atlantis—produces a strange effect that
has gone unnoticed in the critical literature around Bacon’s utopia. When referring to the
kingdoms within the Atlantean confederation that are destroyed by the flood, Bacon uses the
names of recently destroyed Amerindian empires, calling them “Peru” and “Mexico,” which,
he says, were then named “Coya” and “Tyrambel.” The association implies historical
continuity—Coya and Tyrambel are presented as the ancient names of Peru and Mexico, as

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47 The two versions of the original story can be found in Plato’s Timaeus 24e-25d, and Critias 108e-121c. See Timaeus and Critias, trans. R. Waterfield (Oxford UP, 2008). The brief description of the war with Atlantis in the Timaeus immediately precedes a longer dialogue on natural philosophy and the origins of the cosmos.

48 “Coya” is another name for Peru. “Tyrambel” appears to be a product of Bacon’s imagination.
though they shared the same underlying referent. The modern Amerindian empires, then, appear to be inheritors of the cultural traditions of the old Atlantis, just as early modern European empires claimed a common lineage with ancient Greece and Rome. Yet we soon learn that the destruction of the old Atlantis is so complete that it creates a rupture between past and present. The “particular inundation” that destroys the early, post-diluvian world-order centred in the Americas empties the continent of its people, destroying the continuity of its ancient cultures and sending the scattered remnants of its people backwards in time.

Bacon’s narrative, then, appears to project the destruction of the New World back into the archaic past as an explanation for its present savagery. “So marvel you not at the thin population of America, nor at the rudeness and ignorance of the people,” Bacon writes:

   for you must account your inhabitants of America as a young people; younger a thousand years, at the least, than the rest of the world; for that there was so much time between the universal flood and their particular inundation. For the poor remnant of human seed which remained in their mountains peopled the country again slowly, by little and little; and being simple and savage people, (not like Noah and his sons, which was the chief family of the earth,) they were not able to leave letters, arts, and civility to their posterity. (3.143)

What’s interesting about this description of post-diluvian America is that Peru and Mexico do not appear in it at all. The great Amerindian empires are associated only with the distant past—with “Coya” and “Tyrambel”—while America after the flood is, according to the governor, only inhabited by a collection of small, scattered tribes of lawless, “rude” and “ignorant” people. How do we make sense of this absence? It is not as though Bacon was unaware of the scale and complexity of the Amerindian empires. In An Advertisement Touching An Holy War, for instance, the character Martius argues that in spite of their many

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49 Social and historical continuity is very important for Bacon, as the unity and continuity of Bensalem’s empire is cited several times as the means by which it produces knowledge and maintains the boundaries of the utopian enclave. See also Sharon Achinstein, “How To Be a Progressive without Looking Like One: History and Knowledge in Bacon’s New Atlantis, CLIO 17.3 (1988): 252-3.
barbarous customs, “yet the government of the Incaes had many parts humanity and civility,” and at the very least “reduced the nations from the adoration of a multitude of idols and fancies, to the adoration of the sun” (7.22). He goes on to describe the “magnificent temples,” “regular justice” and feudal loyalty practiced in both Peru and Mexico, and although we should not confuse his judgments with those of Bacon, we can still infer that Bacon was at least aware of the existence of empires in the New World—that is, societies with vassal states, complex divisions of labour, codified systems of law, extensive technical and architectural knowledge, etc.50 These societies are clearly not the small, lawless tribes of child-like people described by the governor, without “letters, arts, and civility.” There were certainly nations in the New World that early modern Europeans described in such terms, through the language of privation and lack, but Peru and Mexico are not easily reduced to this image of pure “savagery.” So it is a strange piece of cognitive dissonance for Bacon to allude to the great empires of the New World in his description of the ancient past while at the same time excluding them from his description of the present state of the Americas. It is true that by the time that Bacon is writing, the Inca and Aztec empires were more or less destroyed by the Spanish through war, disease, and famine; so Bacon may well speak of the empires in the past tense. What’s strange is that the destruction taking place in the present and recent past is projected backwards into the distant, mythological past, or is perceived to be a mere echo of a natural disaster that occurred in the distant past.

50 Bacon still considered these nations to be barbarous, of course, and because they practiced human sacrifice, he considered them to be “nations in name only” that had lost the right to govern and ought to be subjugated and reduced. The point is not that he considered them to be nations in right, but simply that he was aware that these nations also had “letters,” “arts” and even “civility,” in the narrow sense of “civil order” or government.
In his description of the foundational event which establishes his utopia, then, Bacon alludes to the ongoing destruction of the New World in the present while simultaneously obscuring the historical causes of that destruction. The destruction of the Americas, which was a recent historical event, becomes a natural disaster, an act of God in the mythic past. In the *New Atlantis*, the utopian enclave is formed through an act of genocide in the present encoded as a second flood in the distant past. This should give us some perspective when considering the implications of Bensalem’s autarky and its apparent withdrawal from political empire. The boundary of utopia is drawn through a catastrophic event which simultaneously *represents* and *obscures* the primitive accumulation that forms the basis for the new European empires. The New World empires are both alluded to and repressed in the telling of this story: they appear in Bensalem’s prehistory as a competing post-diluvian world-empire, but they are repressed or forgotten in the present, where they appear as nations in name only, or “savage remnants of humanity.” So, while it is true that Bensalem does not colonize the New World or extend its domains into the mainland, Bacon nevertheless makes the founding event of the *New Atlantis* an event which utterly destroys the New World as a political entity, turning it into a metonym for nature, a continent reduced to nature, its inhabitants reduced to a condition *ferae naturae*. For this reason alone we should not imagine that the peaceful extension of “human empire” described in the text is essentially anti-colonial or anti-imperial. In the *New Atlantis*, the political being of the Americans is erased,

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51 “Primitive accumulation” is not just the accumulation of raw resources, but a global transformation of social property relations that precedes and is the precondition for the emergence of capitalism. As Marx writes: “The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of black-skins, are all things which characterize the dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation.” See Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* vol. 1, Trans. B. Fowkes (London: 1976): 915.
and this erasure is imagined in mytho-poetic terms that disguise or displace the real violence underlying this erasure.

In the *New Atlantis*, the expansion of “human empire” means the extension of human control over nature, the expansion of humanity’s capacity to imitate nature and make it fruitful, to slow or reverse the process of decay and alleviate human suffering. But the humanization of nature also requires the assimilation or reduction of the *savage remnant* of humanity. While Bensalem appears to reject colonialism and empire, both as a means of material enrichment and as a civilizing mission, it nevertheless requires the destruction of the New World as a political entity in order to preserve its isolation and create the boundary between itself and the world. In this context the trade undertaken by the Merchants of Light can be seen for what it is: a mystification of exchange whereby no one is harmed or exploited and the pure, autarkic character of Bacon’s utopia is preserved in spite of the exchange. The “self-sufficiency” of Bensalem and the “non-colonial,” “anti-materialist” trade of the Merchants of Light is, in other words, ideology. The destruction of the Amerindian empires and the formation of a “New World” out of that destruction is what makes Bacon’s utopia possible. Moreover, Bensalem still requires the savage remnant in the present, for while Bensalem appears to be autarkic, it is nevertheless dependent on the “light” of an underdeveloped periphery as the raw material of *pattern* and *fact* that fuels the experimentalist enterprise of Salomon’s House. From this raw material the brethren of Salomon’s House derive observations, classificatory models, general axioms, works, and finally practical instruments for the control of nature and improvement of human life. The discovery of “the secret motions of things,” and the “enlarging of the bounds of Human Empire, to the effecting of all things possible” therefore requires the exploitation of a
barbarous periphery and the destruction of the Amerindian empires by Bensalem’s real-world European counterparts. The peaceful extension of human empire is thus dependent on the very thing which it is supposed to transcend.

The implicit unity of the two forms of empire is made explicit at the very end of the *New Atlantis*. When the Father of Salomon’s House at last promises to reveal the secrets of the Foundation to his Europeans visitors, giving the narrator “leave to publish” Bensalem, “for the good of other nations” (3.166), he leaves open the possibility of an alliance between Europe and Bensalem. The “publication” of this new empire of man calls to mind the prophecy of Daniel which serves as Bacon’s motto for the *Instauratio*. For Bacon, this prophecy clearly intimates that “the thorough passage of the world (which now by so many distant voyages seems to be accomplished, or in course of accomplishment), and the advancement of the sciences, are destined by fate, that is, by Divine Providence, to meet in the same age” (1.200; 4.92). The anticipated union of political empire and human empire at the end of the *New Atlantis* suggests that Bacon’s true utopia, the condition “touching the last ages of the world,” is not the isolationist, imaginary Bensalem which resides “in God’s bosom, in a land unknown,” but a Bensalem animated by real power—not a utopian enclave, but a world empire.

7. The Secret Motions of Things

The destruction of the New World is the foundational event of the *New Atlantis*, the event which isolates Bensalem and establishes the boundary between Bacon’s utopia and the rest of the world. But it is King Solamona who formalizes this separation as law, and it is his “College of the Six Days’ Works”—also called the “Foundation” or “Salomon’s House”—
that forms the core of Bacon’s utopian vision. It is Salomon’s House that creates the conditions for an ideal social order through the establishment of a new collaborative natural philosophy. This in itself is not very contentious. Most scholars take the view that Salomon’s House and its scientific and technological wonders form the core of Bacon’s utopia. But while critics have examined the relationship between the old and the new Atlantis and the institutional structure of Salomon’s House, they have not really analyzed the relationship between the destruction of the old Atlantis and the foundation of Salomon’s House as a relationship between boundary and core, or foundational event and utopian idea. I argue that while the core of Bacon’s utopia is formed through the foundation of Salomon’s House and its mastery of nature, the boundary is formed through the destruction of the New World and the reduction of the Old Atlantis to a state of nature. These two events are not unrelated. The foundational event that creates the utopian enclave is an act of genocide, displaced and reimagined as a force of nature or an act of God, and the core of Bacon’s utopia is an institution dedicated to controlling this force.

The core institution of Bensalem is, in effect, established as a defensive reaction to the destruction of the New World. A flood, an act of God, destroys the old Atlantis, and so the New Atlantis seeks to understand the “Works and Creatures of God” so that they might find out “the true nature of things, whereby God might have more glory in the workmanship of them, and men the more fruit in the use of them” (3.145-6). The study of the “true nature of things,” then, has both a practical and religious end—the Foundation extends human control over nature, improving the condition of human beings, and it glorifies and propitiates

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52 Peltonen, Whitney, Cowan, Colelough, and Irving all discuss the significance of Bensalem’s secrecy, its autarky, and its trade practices, but the story of the destruction of the old Atlantis is generally passed over or read as an allegory for Bacon’s relationship to his literary/philosophical precursors rather than as the foundational event which establishes and demarcates the boundary of his utopia.
the God who created nature and caused the flood. The flood and the religious symbolism surrounding it are central to the formation of both boundary and core. A second flood—a “particular inundation” following the universal one—destroys the Americas and isolates Bensalem, and a second ark carrying a perfected canon, a new covenant, arrives in Bensalem, affirming Bensalem’s special status as a nation singled out and chosen by God. Bensalem is itself a kind of ark—surviving a flood which destroys its neighbours, carrying with it the accumulated natural and cultural history and mechanical knowledge of the species as a whole. But if the story of the flood involves the displacement or erasure of recent history, the story of Bensalem itself is also subject to a kind of formal or symbolic displacement. Salomon’s House enlarges “the bounds of Human Empire,” but it also subsumes and integrates functions of the state while disavowing the political as an object of science. So while the formation of the boundary involves the erasure of the political being of others, the formation of the core involves the containment and displacement of the political as the key determinant of the utopian form.

If, as Colclough and Peltonen argue, the New Atlantis is not strictly a “utopia” in the Morean mould but is instead an allegory and a work of propaganda for Bacon’s own epistemology or method of reading, Bacon still clearly makes use of key generic elements of the “Morean” type: the frame story, the fantastic voyage, the hidden enclave-world and the ideal community. If the utopian form of the text is meant to function “allegorically” it still involves the encoding of Bacon’s epistemology in terms of an imaginary social order, even if

53 Bensalem is really the first Christian nation—the Bensalemites receive the canonical texts of Christianity before the canon is actually formed. See 3.137-9.

that social order remains obscure. Bacon’s college serves as an incomplete and fragmentary image of an ideal commonwealth, and even though the *New Atlantis* is written as a piece of propaganda for a new scientific research institute, the utopian form gives this particular institution larger political significance: the utopian form turns the ideal laboratory into the core institution of an *ideal state*. This produces a tension within the text between its *generic form* and its *propagandistic function*. Salomon’s House is a kind of research institute dedicated to the pursuit of *experimenta lucifera*—“experiments of light”—and the radical transformation of forces of production through the development and refinement of natural philosophy. But the social relations of production within the *New Atlantis* must appear to remain unchanged because the propagandistic function of the text requires that it serve as a *supplement*—but not a threat—to sovereign monarchical power.\(^{55}\) For this reason the text works to contain or repress the social and political import of transformed forces of production and this repression of the political is, I argue, key to understanding the utopian dimension of the text.

Bacon’s utopia sets up an opposition between the “political empire” of the Old Atlantis and the “human empire” of the New Atlantis, but this is not a stable or coherent opposition; the relationship between the old Atlantis and the new Atlantis reflects the central contradiction of Bacon’s utopian thought—his attempt to contain or displace the social and

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\(^{55}\) In the *Novum Organum*, Bacon emphasizes the distinction between “new motions” in “matters of state” and innovations and discoveries in the arts and sciences. Bacon wants to be clear that innovations in the field of natural science do not imply “innovations” in civil or political matters. “Surely there is a great distinction between matters of state and the arts,” he writes: “for the danger from new motions and from new light is not the same. In matters of state a change even for the better is distrusted, because it unsettles what is established; these things resting on authority, consent, fame and opinion, not on demonstration. But arts and sciences should be like mines, where the noise of new works and further advances is heard on every side” (1.198; 4.89-90). Bacon stresses this point again later in the *Novum Organum*: “the reformation of a state in civil matters is seldom brought in without violence and confusion; but discoveries carry blessings with them, and confer benefits without causing harm or sorrow to any” (1.221; 4.113).
political as meaningful determinants of the utopian form. The *New Atlantis* is, indeed, on one level about epistemology rather than politics—an ideal academy or college rather than an ideal social order. The *New Atlantis* sets out to describe the internal logic of an imaginary society, much like More’s *Utopia* or Campanella’s *Civitas Solis*, but it suddenly contracts into a discourse on an ideal institution within that society before abruptly breaking off. It is a utopia in which political institutions in general are underdeveloped and recede into the background while scientific knowledge and mechanical invention take the place of laws and customs as the principle determinants of the utopian form. The techniques and instruments of Salomon’s House appear to make Bensalem a utopia, not its laws or social practices, which are largely invisible. The *New Atlantis* presents itself, in other words, as an allegory for human empire realized through a political order which nevertheless remains hidden. The purpose or function of the text, it seems, is not to present an imaginary ideal social order which might serve as a critique of existing customs or institutions, but rather to provide an image of the *Instauratio Magna* as a royal institution, a collaborative research project backed by the power and resources of the state. This, after all, is the dream of the *Novum Organum*: “I plainly confess,” Bacon writes, “that a collection of history natural and experimental, such as I conceive it and as it ought to be, is a great, I may say a royal work, and of much labour and expense” (1.209; 4.101). The *New Atlantis*, I argue, provides an image of this “royal work.” But this grant of power introduces a contradiction: Salomon’s House continually expands the bounds of human empire and utterly transforms the forces of production while apparently leaving existing relations of production and political institutions intact. The revelation of the “secret motions of things” promised by the text, then, disguises a transformed social relationship between human beings themselves. Salomon’s House is both
the extension of the sovereign will and it is a substitute for the sovereign himself; it is both the “lanthorn” of the kingdom and the kingdom’s mind. It both fulfills and displaces the role of the sovereign, annexing crucial functions of state power.\footnote{Denis Albanese argues that the very absence of any detailed descriptions of political institutions and monarchical power suggests a displacement or transformation of sovereign power: “What is … remarkable is the manner in which the unarticulated, because unquestioned, can be transformed into the unnecessary: the structures of control emanating from the monarch presumed to govern Bensalemite society may as well not exist, since by the de facto weight of the narrative the text invests authority in the alternative of the scientific. In the space opened up by that alternative resides the possibility of reading otherwise, and hence of imagining a society not strictly tied to Stuart absolutism, or to any other avatar of monarchy.” See Albanese, op. cit. 515.} The political import of Bacon’s utopia is therefore esoteric; its customs and practices—including its isolationism and autarky—cannot be read on their face. For while Bensalem is presented as a simple reflection of the existing political order, glorified and improved by the powers of Salomon’s House, this improving power nevertheless presents a threat to that order, and the text defends itself against this reading, ultimately by breaking off before it can be fully expressed.\footnote{Albanese and Whitney argue that the abrupt ending of the New Atlantis and the unfinished or incomplete structure of many of Bacon’s other texts reflects the “open-ended” nature of Bacon’s epistemological project. See Albanese, op. cit. 523-3, and Whitney, Francis Bacon and Modernity (New Haven: Yale UP, 1986) 189-93. Rose-Mary Sargent argues that “From the standpoint of Bacon’s reform of natural philosophy, the fable could be considered complete because in it he did manage to provide his readers with a vivid image of how his notion of cooperative research based on a rational division of labour would result in a great society dedicated to enhancing the lives of its members” (163). But even in this context, Sargent points out, “there are inherent tensions in Bacon’s writing”—tensions between openness and secrecy, democracy and meritocracy. Sargent claims these tensions are inherent to the project of cooperative scientific research in general (168), although I would suggest many of these tensions are specific to cooperative research within institutions structured by capitalist relations of production. See Sargent, “Bacon as an Advocate for Cooperative Scientific Research,” in Cambridge Companion to Bacon, ed. M. Peltonen (Cambridge UP, 1996): 146-171.}

8. The Maker and the Knower

In order to reconstruct the political order underlying Bacon’s scientific utopia it is necessary to examine its key institution—Salomon’s House—and the relationship between this institution and Bacon’s natural philosophy. This is somewhat difficult to do since the passages describing Salomon’s House mostly contain descriptions of various works and
wonders and do not really provide us with a clear exposition of the means by which they are produced. The fantastic instruments of Salomon’s House are described in loving detail, providing an image of a universal natural science that delves into all the regions of the natural world. Salomon’s House, we are told, has deep caves “for the imitation of natural mines,” great fountains and artificial wells which prolong life, and enormous weather chambers and towers on mountain tops where the brethren of Salomon’s House “imitate and demonstrate meteors … thunders, [and] lightnings” (3.158). There are zoos and enclosures for experiments on beasts, where they “find means to make commixtures and copulations of different kinds.” In addition to breeding new species, they are also able to generate new life—“serpents, worms, flies, fishes”—out of dead organic matter (3.159). There are great furnaces which harness yet-unknown physical laws, producing “heats in imitation of the sun’s and heavenly bodies’ heats, that pass divers inequalities and (as it were) orbs, progresses, and returns, whereby [they] produce admirable effects” (3.161). There are perspective houses for the study of optics, sound-houses, perfume-houses and even “houses of illusion” to study the deceits of the senses. There are “engine-houses” that produce enormous cannons and strange automata which can “imitate … the flights of birds” and “imitate also [the] motions of living creatures” (3.163-4). From the mechanical replication of these motions, the Father of Salomon’s House tells us, “we have some degrees of flying in the air; we have ships and boats for going under water” and “divers curious clocks, and other like motions of return, and some perpetual motions” (3.164).

The description of the Foundation seems to have little systematic order, but there is an implied division of natural phenomena into different “regions”—the “Upper Region” corresponding to the study of astronomical or atmospheric phenomena, the “Lower Region”

58 i.e. “for the artificial production of minerals.”
in which geological or chemical processes are analyzed, and the “Middle Region” where biological specimens are studied. Certain Houses or laboratories within the Foundation are also dedicated to the development and refinement of particular senses—the “perspective-houses,” “sound-houses,” “perfume-houses” and “engine-houses,” for instance, each extend a particular sense, reproduce phenomena associated with that sense, and improve or enhance the functions or pleasures of that sense. The catalogue of laboratories ends with “houses of deceits of the senses” where, the Father tells us, “we represent all manner of feats of juggling, false apparitions, impostures, and illusion; and their fallacies”—not to deceive others, he says, for “we do hate all impostures and lies” and “have severely forbidden it to all our fellows, under pain of ignominy and fines, that they do not shew any natural work or thing, adorned or swelling, but only pure as it is, without all affectation of strangeness” (3.164). It seems the houses of illusion exist in order to assist the other houses in determining and cataloguing negative instances in a general process of induction by elimination. Salomon’s House must be able to imitate or replicate the “deceits of the senses” in order to successfully reproduce the effects of nature.

The description of Salomon’s House, then, implies a general schema for the study of nature in its various forms, but it does not provide a clear indication of a method, technique or epistemology. It appears to be a catalogue of the *fruits* of a method which itself remains hidden or obscure. But as Christopher Kendrick points out, the continual repetition of the verb “to imitate” does indicate something about the method or the tradition in which it is rooted. The things described are all characterized as *imitations* or *reproductions* of natural phenomena. Understanding is synonymous here with the capacity to imitate or reproduce an effect of nature under controlled, artificial conditions, and this suggests an epistemology
rooted in the “maker’s knowledge tradition”: “the old idea that to be able to craft a thing is to know that thing.”

Salomon’s House, in other words, has adapted a framework for knowing from the mechanical arts, in which “knowing” and “making” become equated in the process of reproducing or re-instantiating nature’s effects. Salomon’s House is able to discover the “secret motions of things” to the extent that it is able to recreate or imitate those motions “under constraint and vexed” (1.141; 4.29).

Kendrick’s use of the concept of “maker’s knowledge” as a framework for understanding Salomon’s House is based on Antonio Pérez-Ramos’ influential work on the regulative ideas that animate Bacon’s scientific project. For Pérez-Ramos, reframing Bacon’s philosophy within the tradition of “maker’s knowledge” allows us to better understand the centrality of “works” or opera in Bacon’s writing without reducing his epistemology to a crude form of proto-utilitarianism. The maker’s knowledge tradition “postulates an intimate relationship between objects of cognition and objects of construction, and regards knowing as a kind of making or as a capacity to make (verum factum).” The tradition goes back at least as far as classical antiquity, and does not imply a utilitarian or proto-utilitarian ethic according to Pérez-Ramos. It can be seen operating in diverse fields, from craftsmanship to theology, from the figure of the mechanic to the image of the Christian

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60 Antonio Pérez-Ramos, Francis Bacon’s Idea of Science and the Maker’s Knowledge Tradition (Oxford UP, 1988). Pérez-Ramos builds on the work of Paolo Rossi and Lisa Jardine. He focuses on three key “idea-types” in Bacon’s work: forma, opus, and inductio, of which the second is the most relevant to this chapter. See also Paolo Rossi, Francis Bacon: From Magic to Science, (London: Routledge, 1968), and Lisa Jardine, Francis Bacon: Discovery and the Art of Discourse (Cambridge UP, 1974).

61 Pérez-Ramos 48; “Truth is made”—an allusion to Giambattista Vico: “For the Latins, verum (the true) and factum (what is made) are interchangeable, or to use the customary language of the Schools, they are convertible.” Ancient Wisdom of the Italians, trans. L. M. Palmer (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988) 45.
creator-God, whose “omniscience qua Creator of visible and invisible worlds” makes him the knower/maker par excellence.\textsuperscript{62} What is made, then, is not necessarily an “instrument” or a useful thing, according to Pérez-Ramos, and while “works” (\textit{opera}) and “artefacts” (\textit{instrumentalia}) appear frequently in Bacon’s writing, the two are nowhere clearly identified. “Instead of artefacts, what Bacon’s science purports to unveil are Nature’s ‘effects,’ phenomena such as heat, colour, or motion, the investigation of which purports to illustrate the inductive method of exclusions.”\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Opéra}, in other words, are not exactly instruments, artefacts, or machines, but the reproduction, imitation or re-making of nature’s effects—the reproduction of natural motions, forms of magnetism, mineralization, generation, growth, heat, light, sound, etc. “\textit{Opéra} and ‘works,’” Pérez-Ramos writes:

\begin{quote}
  do not designate \textit{artificialia} as such, but the result of any such operation and the operations themselves which are purportedly guided by theoretical knowledge or, alternatively, lead back to it. It may well be that in some cases the re-instantiation of Nature’s effects—of the qualities of things our phenomenal world is made of—is conducive to the construction or fabrication of \textit{artificialia} like the mariner’s compass or the lightning-rod if magnetism or electricity are the objects of enquiry. But it is important to notice that it is only at this further stage that an artefact comes in; on this interpretation, the scope of human knowledge becomes a praxiology, a set of rules of successful operation which \textit{sometimes} can be translated into the terms of a particular technique.\textsuperscript{64}
\end{quote}

Thus, while \textit{opera} may lead to the production of \textit{artificialia}, the replication of the former does not necessarily lead to the creation of the latter, and while the “re-instantiation of Nature’s effects” may make the fabrication of useful tools more likely, the creation of \textit{works}—the imitation or re-making of natural phenomena—and not \textit{instruments} is the goal or purpose of Bacon’s science and the guarantor of its truth-value.

\textsuperscript{62} Pérez-Ramos 55.

\textsuperscript{63} Pérez-Ramos 142.

\textsuperscript{64} Pérez-Ramos 149.
“No wonder, then,” Pérez-Ramos writes, “that in Bacon’s *Nova Atlantis* the research programme of his ideal scientific community is described in terms which do not primarily evoke the world of man-made objects as its chief inspiration and aim.” As evidence of this claim, Pérez-Ramos quotes the famous passage from the *New Atlantis* in which the Father of Salomon’s House tells the narrator: “the end of our Foundation is the knowledge of *Causes* and *secret motions* of things; and the enlarging of the bounds of Human Empire, to the effecting of all things possible” (emphasis added 3.156). To argue that “the world of man-made objects” is not the inspiration and aim of Salomon’s House may seem counter-intuitive, especially since the Father of Salomon’s House immediately follows this speech with a catalogue of fantastic instruments. But upon closer inspection the “instruments” of Salomon’s House are indeed presented primarily as “works” in the sense of *imitations* or *reproductions* of the qualities or substrates of natural phenomena rather than *things* or *tools* per se: the synthetic production of minerals, the simulation of weather, the replication of the functions of animals and the motions of living and inanimate things—in other words, the reproduction of the “*secret motions* of things.” Of course, when reading this catalogue of imitated effects it is hard not to imagine the instruments or artefacts: the automata, the hybrid animals, the airplanes, cannons, and submarines, the celestial furnace and fountain of youth. Even if the descriptions are rather vague and without narrative structure, the subdivisions of the various “houses” evoke each sense in turn—optics houses, sound houses, bake houses, perfume houses, engine houses, houses of illusion, each producing wondrous effects and marvels to enhance, delight, and alter the senses. There is no doubt, too, that these imitations of natural phenomena—elements, humours, heat, light, motion, magnetism—are *useful* and

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65 Pérez-Ramos 148.
Bacon stresses their utility, their capacity to prolong and improve life, to increase productivity or project force. Pérez-Ramos, however, does not deny that technology has a certain “propaganda-value” for Bacon; he argues that technology, utility and the instrument are not in themselves the end, purpose or justification of his natural science.

The end of Bacon’s method, then, is to be understood as the production of opera or works, according to Pérez-Ramos, and knowing is understood as an act of doing or making. The “knower” and “doer/maker” are identified in Bacon’s writing, just as the fields of cognition and construction become intimately bound up with one another. “Works,” Pérez-Ramos argues, must be understood in the active sense here, as the act of working or constructing rather than the product or result of the work.  

It is for this reason, and not some crude proto-utilitarian ethos, that the “mechanical arts” are declared to be “by far the most important for philosophy.” The mechanic, craftsman, or inventor figures as the “epistemic prototype” of Bacon’s new scientist. As Pérez-Ramos writes, “it is only by imitating the ways of artisans and mechanics that the natural philosopher can come to grips with Nature and her mysteries.” The mechanical arts, he says, “set the pattern of thought for the Baconian enquiry as a whole, for the knower comes to be conceived as, ideally, he who makes, does, or produces.”

Although Pérez-Ramos introduces the concept of “maker’s knowledge” as an epistemological category, Kendrick uses this concept as a means of understanding social

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66 Pérez-Ramos 141.
67 Bacon, *Descriptio Globi Intellectualis*, in *Works* 1.730; 5.506.
68 Pérez-Ramos 145.
69 Pérez-Ramos 148.
relationships in Bacon’s scientific utopia. Since the *New Atlantis* is a utopia, Kendrick writes, “questions of experiment and method are, or ought to be, posed as social questions.”

Maker’s knowledge appears in the *New Atlantis* as an institution, and Salomon’s House itself is presented as a kind of guild. Kendrick sees the guild-form in Salomon’s House in the names given to the various branches and divisions of induction—the “Depredators,” the “Mystery-men,” the “Pioneers” or “Miners,” etc. Kendrick argues that “Just as London has its guilds or chartered companies in the spheres of handicraft—drapers, fullers, dyers, clothworkers, say—Bensalem has its companies in the sphere of induction, which seems every bit as natural to the Father as London’s trades to the reader.” The logic of the “guild-analogy” is apparent in a number of places in the text. When, for instance, the Father of Salomon’s House arrives in the capital city “in state,” dressed in ceremonial gowns adorned with sun-imagery, carrying a crosier and bearing all the symbolic trappings of secular and religious authority, he is accompanied by representatives of the guilds of the city who march with him in parade (3.155). The “officers and principals of the Companies of the City” are the only representatives of civil authority to walk with the Father of Salomon’s House—a significant gesture given the pomp and ceremony of event. But the relationship between Salomon’s House and the mechanical arts goes deeper than ceremony. The brethren of Salomon’s House, we are told, also have “novices and apprentices” (3.165), like other master-craftsmen, and in his description of the Foundation, the Father tells us:

> We have also divers mechanical arts, which you have not; and stuffs made by them; as papers, linens, silks, tissues; dainty works of feathers of wonderful lustre; excellent dyes, and many others; and shops likewise, as well for such as are not brought into vulgar use amongst us as for those that are. For you must know that of the things before recited, many of them are grown into use throughout the kingdom; but yet if

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70 Kendrick 1023.

71 Kendrick 1026.
they did flow from our invention, we have of them also for patterns and principals. (3.161)

What is interesting about this passage is not just the hint at unknown mechanical arts that produce a wide variety of fine materials, but the suggestion that the Foundation itself has the craftsmen and workshops to produce these materials. Solomon’s House is not just a laboratory; it is the centre of industrial production in the kingdom, and the materials and methods invented by the Foundation—both the things themselves and the “patterns and principals” by which they are produced—are disseminated throughout Bensalem. The Foundation has, in a sense, integrated the mechanical arts. Not only does it have its own workshops, its products and methodologies have “grown into use” or become commonplace outside the Foundation, transforming the way industrial production works throughout the kingdom.

There are, then, real associations being drawn between Salomon’s House, the mechanical arts, and the organizational structure of the guild. Kendrick develops this idea further and suggests that Salomon’s House is not exactly a guild per se, but something like a “second-level craft,” the “mystery of mysteries” which provides the mechanical arts with “superior autonomy and reflexivity.” As a social organization, Kendrick sees it as a kind of “state joint-stock guild,” reflecting the structure of one of the curious monopolistic failures that emerged in England around that time. Bacon himself participated in such a company, which was supposed to regulate cloth manufacture in the Midlands, both on the level of production and trade. For Kendrick, the structure of Salomon’s House in New Atlantis

72 Kendrick 1027.

unconsciously reflects the contradictions that emerge during this period of crisis in trade and craft organization, marked, “on the one hand, by the small masters’ desire to free themselves from an increasingly alienated and oppressive commercial class, and, on the other, by the mercantilist desire to coordinate an entire trade in the interests of state and nation.” Salomon’s House in effect represents “a symbolic resolution of the problems affecting industrial companies in the present;” it represents a unification of the interests of merchant and craftsman—mercantilism and the guild system.\(^{74}\) This is a fascinating and compelling argument, but this symbolic resolution, which Kendrick formulates at the end of his essay as “the freeing of local institutions” and the “autonomization” of the guild-form, is complicated by the centralizing, coordinating, and administrative functions of the Foundation, which begins to appear not just as a powerful and semi-autonomous joint-stock guild, but as the sovereign will of the state itself. The Foundation is not, I argue, autonomous, but integrative. There is a symbolic resolution effected by Salomon’s House, but it is riven with contradictions—the primary being the conflation of “maker” and “knower.”

A number of critics have argued that Salomon’s House appears to represent a powerful and autonomous scientific institution, but this vision of an autonomous research institute is grounded on a confusion inherent to the “maker’s knowledge” thesis.\(^{75}\) It should be stressed that while “maker’s knowledge” sounds like a concept which combines epistemology and social history, the concept as it is used by Pérez-Ramos is strictly an epistemological category, belonging to the realm of intellectual history. Pérez-Ramos is very wary of applying this category to what he calls “sociological readings.” In fact, he argues that

\(^{74}\) Kendrick 1026-7.

the concept of maker’s knowledge provides “a safe antidote” against the sort of
“sociologism” commonly associated with the analysis of opera in Bacon’s writing:
“Sociological fallacies are especially liable to occur precisely when dealing with the
Baconian image of scientia operativa as purportedly ‘arising’ from, or ‘responding’ to, the
needs or demands of a new mercantile class, whose mot d’ordre apparently was usefulness
and technical knowhow.” Pérez-Ramos wishes, in his words, to “exorcise” the fallacy of
sociologism, and rejects the notion that philosophical ideas must be framed within the
context of social and economic forces which are, in the last instance, their determinants.
Kendrick’s reformulation of the maker’s knowledge thesis in his analysis of the New Atlantis
is interesting and provocative since it attempts to embed Pérez-Ramos’s thesis within an
historical materialist framework. But this appropriation of the maker’s knowledge thesis
requires, I argue, a critique of Pérez-Ramos’ idealist and ahistorical conception of the
“maker” and the “knower.”

Pérez-Ramos is concerned mainly to situate Bacon’s work within a “history of ideas,”
but he does refer in passing to a “new ideology of work” which in the early modern period
was beginning to undermine the traditional valuation of the mechanical arts as an activity
unfit for free citizens and gentlemen, or “situated outside the realm of theoretical
discourse.” This new ideology, he writes, “has been variously regarded as a consequence of
the lowering of the barriers in the medieval guilds, the shifts in the class structure of society,
or the demands of new pressure groups in the early days of mercantilism and overseas

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*Pérez-Ramos 53.*

*Pérez-Ramos 144.*
expansion.” But this line of enquiry, which appears to be vaguely Weberian or Marxist in orientation, is of no great interest to Pérez-Ramos and he does not expand upon it. If “utility” and “progress” are at the heart of this new ideology of work, then such concepts “remain largely outside the epistemic field,” Pérez-Ramos writes, and “have more to do with the interests of groups or the fostering of modes of production than with the internal constitution and coherence of a cognitive programme.” “Utility,” the new “ideology of work,” is for Pérez-Ramos a mere “ideological excrescence.” It is the theoretical or epistemological shift that interests him, and while a correspondence is posited between a social transformation (or a transformation of relations of production) and the gradual acceptance of the mechanical model as a regulative idea for scientific enquiry, his conception of maker’s knowledge remains unaffected by the contradictions and class-antagonisms underlying this vaguely conceived “new ideology of work.”

The problem with this approach is that the “internal constitution and coherence of a cognitive program” does not remain unaffected by its so-called “ideological excrescence,” and this is illustrated in Pérez-Ramos’ own characterization of the Baconian natural scientist as a subject who combines the figures of the “knower” and the “maker-doer.” The new ideology of work that emerges in the early modern period does not in reality reflect the unification of these roles but rather disguises a new division of labour which increasingly alienates the actual maker from the direction and control of the productive process.

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78 Pérez-Ramos 144-5.

79 Pérez-Ramos notes in an aside that the “merits and limitations” of these approaches “are those customarily attached to sociological readings.” This seems to be a rather neutral appraisal, but given his earlier critique of “sociologism” and his dismissal of arguments that attempt to ground Bacon’s scientia operativa in social or economic imperatives, one cannot imagine he sees much merit in these approaches.

80 Pérez-Ramos 140.
“lowering of the barriers in the medieval guilds” did not exactly lead to the elevation of the status of mechanical labour. If we look at the history of manufacturing in England in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, we find that it is a period in which the “maker-knower” qua master craftsman was already losing control of the production process. Changes in the corporate structure and regulation of guilds increasingly subordinated journeymen and small yeoman masters to the liveried masters and merchant manufacturers, who coordinated workers within a variety of trades but were less involved in the material act of making. The expansion of rural cottage industry, or the “putting-out system,” also put external pressure on the guilds by reducing rural workers outside the jurisdiction of the guilds to wage labourers, entirely dependent on merchant capital for both raw materials and access to the market. In the putting-out system, merchant-manufacturers owned the raw material and the final product, and mediated every stage of production process. The merchant-manufacturers were the middlemen between the peasants and the waged artisans doing piece-work, between waged artisans working at different stages of the manufacturing process, and between the artisans and the purchasers of the final product. While the everyday activity of artisans in their homes and workshops was not systematically reorganized or subject to the kind of de-skilling and rationalized labour discipline that occurred in the factories of the later 18th century, the formal subsumption of labour to merchant capital did change workers’ relationship to their

81 See George Unwin on class stratification within early modern craft guilds in Industrial Organization in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1904) 41-69, and R.A. Leeson on the 1563 Statute of Apprentices, or “Queen Betty’s Law,” in Travelling Brothers: The Six Centuries’ Road from Craft Fellowship to Trade Unionism (London: Allen & Unwin, 1979) 59-78. For a more recent analysis of the structure and decline of the early modern English guild system from a political Marxist perspective, see Michael Žmolek, Rethinking the Industrial Revolution: Five Centuries of Transition from Agrarian to Industrial Capitalism in England (Leiden: Brill, 2013) esp. 57-74.

own labour and alienated workers from the products of their labour.83 They no longer owned the materials on which they worked or the finished piece itself. If “maker’s knowledge” is the idea that one knows a thing to the extent one can make it or reproduce its effects, we might ask ourselves, what knowledge does the maker lose when they no longer control, direct, or shape the social relations through which the act of making is performed? Even if they are still involved in craft production and have intimate knowledge of the entire process in a way that a factory worker performing the same repetitive task does not, in early modern England makers are increasingly alienated from the product of their labour and the social relationships through which the thing comes to be made. The makers no longer know the social product to the extent that they no longer make the social relationships that govern their making. The knower—the one who directs and controls the production of the total social product—is increasingly distant from the act of making. The growing acceptance of the mechanical model in the epistemic field, then, must not be understood as a straightforward desire on the part of the gentleman scientist to imitate the activity of artisans and mechanics, as Pérez-Ramos claims, but to appropriate, control, and redirect that activity. Bacon’s natural philosophy does not belong to an indigenous maker’s knowledge tradition; it colonizes and rationalizes that tradition. The “maker/doer” and the “knower/director” are not identified except in ideology. In reality they were already becoming distinct subjects—the old master craftsman dividing into the merchant-manufacturer and disenfranchised wage-labourer.

Of course, a useful analytical distinction can be made between opera and artificialia, between operation and utility, between epistemological and institutional ends in science, between the Baconian idea of science and its social context, between scientific rationality

83 See Žmolek, op. cit. 343-48.
and instrumental rationality as such. But Pérez-Ramos seems, in the end, to obscure the relationship between Bacon’s epistemology and its “ideological excrescence.” At the heart of the problem is the identification of “knowing” and “operating”—the identification of the gentleman scientist and the subject who makes or produces. A similar slippage occurs in Locke’s political philosophy between the person who labours and the person who owns and directs the labour of others. In the Second Treatise, for instance, Locke writes that it is the labour of the person who works on a thing that removes it from a state in common and makes it his private property: “The Labour of his Body, and the Work of his Hands, we may say, are properly his. Whosoever then he removes out of the State that Nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his Labour with, and joyned to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his Property.”\(^84\) But immediately following this paragraph he equates this personal and bodily labour with the labour of another owned or possessed by the subject: “the Grass my Horse has bit; the Turfs my Servant has cut; the Ore I have digg’d in any place where I have a right to them in common with others, become my Property, without the assignation or consent of any body.”\(^85\) For Locke, it is labour that justifies ownership. Through physical labour one removes a part of nature from “the common right of other Men,” making it one’s own. But what seems to be an unmediated relationship between “man” and “nature” actually involves a tacit identification of “man” and “master,” disguising a preexisting social relationship among human beings. The work of one’s servant is conflated here with the work of one’s own hands.

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\(^85\) Locke, op. cit. §28.21-24.
Something similar is going on in Bacon’s writing. If the mechanic or craftsman figures as the “epistemic prototype” of Bacon’s new scientist, it is not because the philosopher imitates the work of a mechanic; rather, the work of the mechanic become the object of “making” for the natural philosopher. The ideal maker-knower of the new science is not to be confused with an actual artisan or craftsman, a person who knows directly through making. The maker-knower is, rather, a gentleman who bends his learning, time, resources, and energy to the coordination and rationalization of work. In the Novum Organum, for instance, Bacon asserts that “a collection of history natural and experimental, such as I conceive it and as it ought to be, is a great, I may say a royal work, and of much labour and expense” (1.209; 4.101). It is, in other words, not only a new epistemological project, but also a social and institutional project that requires the coordination of the resources of the state and the employment and organization of large numbers of people. But the coordination of whose labour, by whom? Bacon laments elsewhere that natural philosophy, “has scarcely ever possessed, especially in these later times, a disengaged and whole man [vacantem et integrum hominem] (unless it were some monk studying in his cell, or some gentleman in his country-house), but that it has been made merely a passage and bridge to something else” (emphasis added, 4.79). On its own, natural philosophy becomes mere technique or training for more practical pursuits, and so, Bacon continues: “this great mother of the sciences has with strange indignity been degraded to the offices of a servant, having to attend on the business of medicine or mathematics” (4.79). In order to save natural philosophy from this “strange indignity” and restore it to its rightful place as the mother of sciences, natural philosophy must become the work of the “disengaged and whole man,” not isolated in his cell or country-house, but active and inner-worldly, coordinating and directing the work of
others. Bacon is speaking specifically of the isolation or disconnection of the natural philosopher from particular sciences or mechanical arts which remain therefore uncoordinated and unsystematic in their observations and experiments. This is framed as an epistemological problem, but it is also implicitly a social or organizational problem, and significantly, the figure who might provide organizational coherence—the maker-knower—is not a mechanic here but a gentleman. Following his description of natural science as a “royal work,” Bacon speculates on what might be possible if gentlemen were able to coordinate their work:

consider what may be expected (after the way has been thus indicated) from men abounding in leisure, and from association of labours, and from successions of ages: the rather because it is not a way over which only one man can pass at a time (as is the case with that of reasoning), but one in which the labours and industries of men (especially as regards the collecting of experience) may with the best effect be first distributed and combined. For then only will men begin to know their strength, when instead of great numbers doing all the same things, one shall take charge of one thing and another of another. (1.210; 4.102)

The coordination of the work of gentlemen—“men abounding in leisure”—is necessary in order for the new science to thrive. No mention is made, of course, of these men’s servants or the mechanics and craftsmen who would necessarily be employed in a project of this scale. The “labours and industries of men” here refers specifically to the work of gentlemen; the work of their servants is rendered invisible. But in the New Atlantis, where the social order underlying Bacon’s theoretical enterprise is briefly glimpsed, the Fathers of Salomon’s House do not work alone; they also have, “as you must think, novices and apprentices … besides a great number of servants and attendants, men and women” (3.165). As we shall see, the work of these men and women, while necessary, is presented as an act of making performed by their masters.
Pérez-Ramos is critical of sociologists who conflate opera and artificialia in Bacon’s work and ascribe a crude utilitarian ethic to Bacon’s scientific method. But by abstracting maker’s knowledge from its social and historical context, Pérez-Ramos ends up conflating “knower” and “maker,” presenting the ideological dimension of Bacon’s project as social fact. Pérez-Ramos claims that “the knower comes to be conceived as, ideally, he who makes, does, or produces,” and this is certainly true ideally, or on the level of ideology. But on the level of social and material production, “knowing” and “making” are embodied in distinct subjects. The knower, the one who directs and improves productivity, and the maker, the one who produces, are not united but divided by a gradual transformation of social relations of production which separates workers from the means of production. Kendrick’s application of this concept of “maker’s knowledge” to an analysis of Bacon’s New Atlantis is, I think, very productive, but it is a concept riven with contradictions and needs to be treated with caution. Bacon’s method should be understood, not as the elevation or valorization of the mechanical knowledge of craftsmen but as the appropriation, rationalization, and control of that knowledge. So while Salomon’s House might be described as a kind of “second-level craft,” the “mystery of mysteries,” or a “joint-stock guild,” the symbolic resolution that the Foundation effects—the union of the figures of knower and maker, or improver and producer—does not involve “the freeing of local institutions” like the guild, as Kendrick claims; nor does it imply “the idea of a state that becomes empire by receding, by allotting traditional institutions space to develop themselves.” The mechanical arts are not “allotted space to develop;” they are the objects of development. Indeed, the state does not recede in

86 Pérez-Ramos 148.
87 Kendrick 1037.
the *New Atlantis*, providing space for the free and autonomous development of traditional institutions and the new natural science—Salomon’s House becomes the state. This is the central contradiction and disavowed utopian core of Bacon’s work. The maker-knower needs to appear politically neutral—merely imitating the effects of nature and (indirectly) improving productivity while leaving the old social order intact. But the maker-knower is an ideological fiction hiding a new social relationship between maker and knower, a transformed social relationship between the person who works and the person who directs or improves the labour of others. And this transformed social relationship implies a threat to traditional institutions.

9. Salomon’s House and the Sovereign Will

A close analysis of the *New Atlantis* is important in this context for a number of reasons, not least because it reveals the necessary separation of maker and knower in practice. This separation becomes evident when we examine the intellectual sub-disciplines within Salomon’s House and the corresponding division of labour. Salomon’s House provides a model for an ideal college dedicated to the exploration of all the regions of the natural world, the human senses and even the limits of perception. But alongside Bacon’s description of the various branches of Bensalemite learning is a corresponding division of intellectual labour that might provide some insight into the general division of labour in his utopia. At the very end of the *New Atlantis*, the Father of Salomon’s House gives us a brief account of the “several employments and offices of our fellows,” from the collecting work of the “Merchants of Light,” “Depredators,” and “Mystery-men,” to the experimental work of the “Pioneers,” “Compilers,” and “Dowry-men,” and the higher-order theoretical work of the
“Lamps,” the “Inoculators,” and the “Interpreters of Nature.” There are thirty-six fellows or brethren employed by the Foundation—twelve Merchants of Light and three fellows employed in each of the other disciplines. The Depredators and Mystery-men perform very similar work to that of the Merchants of Light, for while the Merchants of Light “bring all the books, and abstracts, and patterns of experiments of all other parts,” the Depredators “collect the experiments which are in all books,” while the Mystery-men collect the experiments of the mechanical arts, liberal sciences, “and also of practices which are not brought into arts” (3.164). The general overlap between these two disciplines and the work of the Merchants of Light suggests that the Depredators and the Mystery-men perform the same work of collecting knowledge (in the form of texts, experiments, patterns, instruments, inventions, etc.), but they accumulate this material inside Bensalem, collecting the patterns and experiments of past generations that are scattered in books and forgotten to the present, or collecting the knowledge and intellectual labour of Bensalemite craftsmen and mechanics working outside the Foundation or in other unsystematic practices. Taken together, the three lower-tier disciplines—whose work essentially involves the appropriation of the intellectual labour of an underdeveloped periphery and a domestic working-class—make up fully one half of the Foundation.

The six remaining groups of fellows and brethren perform new experiments and derive observations, axioms, and “things of use.” The Pioneers and Miners design and enact new experiments, based on the knowledge collected by the Merchants of Light, Depredators, and Mystery-men. The Compilers “draw the experiments of the former four into titles and tables, to give the better light for the drawing of observations and axioms out of them.” The Dowry-men or Benefactors, finally, draw out of these experiments “things of use and
Organizational Structure of Salomon’s House

THEORY

INTERPRETERS OF NATURE
(draw out observations and axioms of a “higher light”)

LAMPS & INOCULATORS
的设计和执行实验

APPLICATION

DOWRY-MEN & BENEFACTORS
(develop things of use and practical instruments)

EXPERIMENT

COMPILERS
(draw out observations and axioms from experiments)

PIONEERS & MINERS
(设计和执行新实验)

MERCHANTS OF LIGHT
(collect texts, experiments, patterns, and inventions in foreign lands)

DEPREDATORS & MYSTERY-MEN
(collect texts, experiments, patterns, and inventions within Bensalem)

COLLECTION
practice for man’s life,” creating the tools and techniques that improve the condition of the state and preserve Bensalem’s natural abundance and self-sufficiency (3.165). But the work does not end there. “After divers meetings and consults of our whole number, to consider of the former labours and collections,” the process begins again at a higher level of abstraction. The Lamps “direct new experiments, of a higher light, more penetrating into nature than the former,” and the Inoculators execute these higher-order experiments. Finally, the Interpreters of Nature do the work of the Compilers at a higher level of abstraction—raising “the former discoveries by experiments into greater observations, axioms, and aphorisms” (3.165). It is interesting to note that there is no higher-order version of the Dowry-men or Benefactors, an observation which tends to support Pérez-Ramos’ argument that Salomon’s House, Bacon’s “ideal scientific community,” is described “in terms which do not primarily evoke the world of man-made objects as its chief inspiration and aim.”

Useful tools or artificialia do not appear to function as the principal justification or purpose of the Foundation; it is opera, the reproduction of effects and the derivation of laws and axioms that serve as the telos of the Foundation’s work.

On the one hand this suggests that utility is not the governing social principle of Bacon’s utopia; Pérez-Ramos is right to criticize readings of Bacon’s work that ascribe to him a crude and anachronistic utilitarianism. It is experimenta lucifera or “experiments of light” that are the end and driving force of Bacon’s methodology, but this focus on

88 Pérez-Ramos 148.

89 See also aphorism CXVI in the Novum Organum: “And as I do not seek to found a school, so neither do I hold out offers or promises of particular works. It may be thought indeed, that I who make such frequent mention of works and refer everything to that end, should produce some myself by way of earnest. But my course and method, as I have often clearly stated and would wish to state again is this,—not to extract work from works or experiments from experiments (as an empiric), but from works and experiments to extract causes and axioms, and again from those causes and axioms new works and experiments, as a legitimate interpreter of nature [Naturae Interpretes]” (1.212; 4.104).
experimenta lucifera is precisely what distinguishes the work of the Foundation from that of the mechanical arts and suggests an implicit separation of knower and maker in social practice. In the Novum Organum, for instance, Bacon writes:

the mechanic, not troubling himself with the investigation of truth, confines his attention to those things which bear upon his particular work, and will not either raise his mind or stretch out his hand for anything else. But then only will there be good ground of hope for the further advance of knowledge, when there shall be received and gathered together into natural history a variety of experiments, which are of no use in themselves, but simply serve to discover causes and axioms; which I call “experimenta lucifera,” experiments of light, to distinguish them from those which I call “fructifera,” experiments of fruit. (1.203; 4.95)

The work of the “Lamps” might be characterized as “experiments of light,” experiments “which serve to discover causes and axioms, which are of no use in themselves.” While the mechanic cannot on his own raise his mind or stretch out his hand beyond his particular work, in the New Atlantis Bacon imagines a new class of experimenters who might organize and systematize the work of actual mechanics, craftsmen, and labourers. The mechanical arts may serve as “conditioning images” or “ideal proto-types” for Bacon’s instauration, as both Kendrick and Pérez-Ramos assert, but none of the fellows of Salomon’s House are themselves makers or mechanics. Rather, the mechanical arts serve as a store of “patterns,” “instruments” and “experiences” which are collected and transformed into higher forms of light. The maker is not identified with the knower but becomes the material which is shaped by the knower. In practice, Bacon’s scientist is not a mechanic or a craftsman, but a gentleman, a “man of leisure” or what he calls a “disengaged and whole man,” whose labours are freed from instrumental ends. Only gentlemen have the necessary time and distance from practical activity to engage in an open-ended process of observing and reproducing nature’s effects.
While Bacon often posits the unity of “maker” and “knower” as a single subject in the *Novum Organum*, in his account of the organization of Salomon’s House we see how these two figures are divided in practice. The description of the Foundation’s intellectual disciplines reveals an implicit division of labour underlying Bacon’s scientific utopia. As we have seen, fully one half of Salomon’s House is engaged in what might be called “primitive accumulation,” not only in the sense of bare expropriation—the “collection” of light through an exploitative trade with a barbaric periphery and the “depredation” of the trade secrets of the guilds—but also in the sense of a radical transformation of social property relations which divorces the producer from the means of production. The craft secrets and mysteries of the mechanic are not just expropriated; the mechanical arts themselves are *integrated* into an entirely new and utopian mode of production. The nature of this system is only hinted at, but given the scope of the work and the massive material investment in the Foundation—its enormous weather chambers, deep subterranean mines, towers on mountaintops, numerous enclosures, ships, and laboratories—much of Bensalem’s economy must be bound up in the work of Salomon’s House. The Foundation is not just a college of thirty-six gentleman scientists; the number of people needed to design and operate the equipment and infrastructure of the Foundation would have to be immense. The thirty-six brethren must

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90 This transformation operates both externally and internally—in the colonies, Marx writes, “the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population” (915), and in the rural, domestic economy, the enclosure of the common lands: “The capital-relation presupposes a complete separation between the workers and the ownership of the conditions for the realization of their labour. As soon as capitalist production stands on its own feet, it not only maintains this separation, but reproduces it on a constantly extending scale. The process, therefore, which creates the capital-relation can be nothing other than the process which divorces the worker from the ownership of the conditions of his own labour; it is a process which operates two transformations whereby the social means of subsistence and production are turned into capital, and the immediate producers are turned into wage-labourers. So-called primitive accumulation, therefore, is nothing else than the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production. It appears as ‘primitive’ because it forms the pre-history of capital, and of the mode of production corresponding to capital” (874-5). See Part 8, “So-Called Primitive Accumulation,” in Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, Trans. B. Fowkes (London: 1976).
each represent whole *divisions* of researchers and labourers. Indeed, at the end of his description of the general division of intellectual labour, the Father of Salomon’s House tells us, almost as an aside, that “We have also, as you must think, novices and apprentices, that the succession of the former employed men do not fail; besides a great number of servants and attendants, men and women” (3.165). The mechanic, craftsman, apprentice, and servant are both *within* and *outside* Salomon’s House. They are both expropriated by and integrated into the Foundation. The Foundation is itself a kind of guild, with its novices and apprentices, but the “Fellows,” “Brethren” and “Fathers” of the Foundation—the figures who represent the ideal Baconian scientist—are not strictly analogous to master craftsmen; they integrate the light of the mechanical arts in their pursuit of *experimenta lucifera* and they assimilate elements of the organizational structure of the guild, but they are not themselves makers, producers, mechanics, or craftsmen. Like master craftsmen, they direct the work of apprentices and servants, but unlike the master craftsman their own work is not organized or limited by the material worked upon. The division of their intellectual labours is not analogous to the divisions between guild companies—they are not, as Kendrick suggests, organized like drapers, fullers, dyers or clothworkers, whose specialized labour is defined by the product or the practical skill performed, the “useful things” shaped by *ars mechanica*. The division of intellectual labour among the brethren is structured by *different phases of a generalized process of induction*. That is, none of the brethren are specialists in the making of any particular type of *thing*; they are specialists in the refinement of particular phases of an inductive process of reasoning—in *collection*, *observation*, *experiment*, *collation*, *axiomization* and *instrumentalization*. Their actual “making” is mediated by an army of servants and attendants whose own work more closely resemble that of craftsmen or
mechanics—or more accurately, wage labourers. The general division of labour in Bacon’s Foundation, then, involves an implicit separation of “maker” and “knower.” It is not that the two are identified, as Pérez-Ramos claims, but a new relationship between maker and knower is effected which is to extend human control over nature—a relationship whereby the mechanical arts are expropriated and integrated into a rationalized system of knowledge production.

An ethic of improvement, utility, and rationalization pervades the New Atlantis, but whatever social role the brethren of Salomon’s House play, it is not strictly analogous to either that of the master craftsman or the proto-capitalist merchant. There is no expressly “capitalist” market system internal to Bensalem that appears to exert systemic pressure to improve productivity, and Salomon’s House is not a profit-making enterprise. What social role do these idealized scientists perform then? They appear to combine the functions of gentleman, merchant, craftsman, priest, and scholar in a strange, kaleidoscopic fashion—they represent, as Kendrick argues, a symbolic resolution of several very different class-positions. In their capacity as Merchants of Light they organize trade and conduct espionage in the interests of the state. As Mystery-men they collect and collate the work of mechanics and craftsmen. The higher-orders of the brethren seem to have a status analogous to that of scholars, monks, or priests, and this quasi-ecclesiastical function, more than that of craftsman or merchant, is the dominant trope. The brethren, we are told, belong to the order which gave the mark of legitimacy to the miracle of the “pillar of light,” helping to convert Bensalem to Christianity. There is no distinct religious order that is mentioned prior to the conversion; it is, rather, the Fathers of Salomon’s House who intercede on behalf of the people at the
moment of the miracle, addressing God directly in prayer.⁹¹ The Fellows, Brethren and Fathers also perform the role of secular prophets when they leave the Foundation. Traveling from town to town “they declare natural divinations of diseases, plagues, swarms of hurtful creatures, scarcity, tempests, earthquakes, great inundations, comets, temperature of the year, and divers other things” (3.166). Like monks, the brethren also maintain corporate ownership of the infrastructure and useful things produced by the Foundation.⁹² Even the dress and bearing of the Father of Salomon’s House, his robes, crosier and pastoral staff, his aspect, “as if he pitied men,” are signs of ecclesiastical power (3.154). And beyond signs and gestures, the brethren of the Foundation also wield real power parallel to that of the court in that they are able to withhold their knowledge from the state itself. The brethren of Salomon’s House, the Father says, “take all an oath of secrecy, for the concealing of those [inventions and experiments] which we think fit to keep secret: though some of those we do reveal sometimes to the state, and some not” (3.165).

A number of critics argue that this secrecy implies Salomon’s House maintains a degree of autonomy from the state.⁹³ Kendrick, for instance, concludes that the New Atlantis presents us with “the idea of a state that becomes empire by receding, by allotting traditional

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⁹¹ One of the Fathers directly addresses God in a speech which marks the moment of conversion: “Lord God of heaven and earth, thou hast vouchsafed of thy grace to those of our order, to know thy works of creation and the secrets of them; and to discern (as far as appertaineth to the generations of men) between divine miracles, works of nature, works of art, and impostures and illusions of all sorts. I do here acknowledge and testify before this people that the thing which we now see before our eyes is thy Finger and a true Miracle” (3.137).

⁹² The Father of the Foundation repeatedly reminds us that “we have” or “we possess” each of the effects, patterns, instruments and works catalogued in his description of Salmon’s House. Kendrick argues that corporate ownership seems to be implied here (1024-25).

⁹³ Paolo Rossi, for instance, argues that the powers of Salomon’s House in the New Atlantis present us with “a clear, firm separation” between scientific and political institutions. See Rossi, “Bacon’s Idea of Science” in Cambridge Companion to Bacon, op. cit., emphasis original, 34. Likewise, David Colclough argues that “in the New Atlantis, the practice of science appears to be kept institutionally and geographically separate from politics, with considerable autonomy being given to the scientific community.” See Colclough, op. cit. 61.
institutions space to discover themselves,” a process which he also calls “the isolation/autonomization of the guild form.” ⁹⁴ But I would argue that the guild form and the mechanical arts are not “isolated” and “autonomized” in the New Atlantis; they are rather integrated and rationalized by Salomon’s House. The Foundation does not develop independently of the state; it takes over its functions. What we have is a situation wherein an institution created by royal fiat to investigate nature comes to supplant the organs of the state. It is not just that Salomon’s House takes on a quasi-ecclesiastical function that complements state power; the symbolic resolution effected by Salomon’s House entangles it within the numerous functions of sovereign power itself—in espionage and commerce, in foreign policy and the manufacture of armaments, in the policing of public knowledge and the regulation of domestic trades.⁹⁵ The Father of Salomon’s House seems to represent de facto the will of the sovereign, for he alone acts to annul the isolation of Bensalem and reverses the policies of the founding king. As Albanese points out, the New Atlantis reflects back to the reader an idealized image of the Jacobean monarchy, transfigured by the power of Salomon’s House, but it also seems to imply the superfluity of the monarch:

The apparent vacancy at the monarchical center of the New Atlantis embeds within it an alternative text, susceptible of a different reading in light of the agenda of the English Revolution, and of social reformers during the period interested in the Baconian program. The removal of natural philosophy from the possible disposal of royalist prerogative is sustained by the structure of the New Atlantis, with its kingship most potent in the mythology of the past, and with the hegemonic presuppositions of the House of Salomon obscured by the scattered signs of conventional authority.⁹⁶

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⁹⁴ Kendrick 1036-7.

⁹⁵ When the Father of Solomon’s House says they sometimes keep their inventions and experiments secret from the “state,” he seems to be referring to what we would call the “public” rather than the government.

⁹⁶ Albanese, op. cit. 518.
King Solamona, we should remember, established the utopian order through two decrees: the isolation of the state and the foundation of Salomon’s House. These two sovereign acts, like the channel dug by King Utopus and the collectivization of property in More’s *Utopia*, mark the boundary and define the core of Bacon’s utopia. In both cases, *a sovereign will is needed to imagine these acts*. At the very end of the *New Atlantis*, however, the Father of Salomon’s House gives the narrator “leave to publish” news of the kingdom, “for the good of other nations” (3.166). It is the Father of Salomon’s House, not the king, who reverses the foundational act of King Solamona. It is the Father of Salomon’s House that ends Bensalem’s isolation and leaves open the possibility of an alliance between Bensalem and England, between “human” and “political” empire. This conflation of sovereign power and the power of the Foundation is also where the text breaks off.

In his preface to the *New Atlantis*, Bacon’s secretary, William Rawley, claims that the *New Atlantis* is a “fable” devised to exhibit: “a model or description of a college instituted for the interpreting of nature and the producing of great and marvellous works for the benefit of men, under the name of Salomon’s House.” Rawley tells us that Bacon “hath proceeded, as to finish that part,” and that he “thought also in this present fable to have composed a frame of Laws, or of the best state or mould of a commonwealth; but foreseeing it would be a long work, his desire of collecting the Natural History diverted him, which he preferred many degrees before it” (3.127). According to Rawley, then, the work is both finished and unfinished at the same time; the key institution—the model college—is complete, but the “frame of Laws” and the description of the “best state or mould of a commonwealth” are simply abandoned by Bacon, who became too absorbed in his natural history to complete the project. This college is itself not entirely “utopian” either according to Rawley, for while it is
a model “more vast and high than can possibly be imitated in all things; notwithstanding most things therein are within men’s power to effect” (3.127). In this sense Colclough and Peltonen are right: the propagandistic function seems to predominate. What we have is an ideal college or scientific institute—an allegory for a method or an image of an institution within the state, and not strictly speaking the ideal social order itself. But Salomon’s House is also the core institution of Bacon’s projected utopia—the “noblest foundation,” the governor says, “that ever was upon the earth; and the lanthorn of this kingdom” (3.145). Salomon’s House is the core idea of the New Atlantis and in Salomon’s House we catch a glimpse of the structure of the society which it serves; or rather, in the fragmentary description we get a sense of the scale and organizational structure of Bacon’s imagined college, whose social and political functions do not simply aid but actually displace or supersede those of the state. This displacement of state power is precisely what must be repressed in the text, for the narrative breaks off just as the true scale and function of the Foundation begins to make itself felt, and the college begins to appear to be not simply a department or office of the state, but the sovereign will acting on the state itself.
CHAPTER III

The Sovereign Planter: John Milton and Paradisial Utopia

1. Paradise and Utopia

In the previous chapter I argued that the utopian core of Francis Bacon’s scientific work is his concept of “Human Empire” and his belief that the fall of humankind might be partially redeemed through the reformation of natural philosophy. The New Atlantis is presented as a prefiguration of this new human empire, and Salomon’s House appears as the sovereign will of a new kind of state extending its dominion over nature itself. The story of the fall, the loss of paradise, and the memory of an original, humanized nature is at the heart of Bacon’s utopia, but paradisial imagery is central to utopian discourse more broadly. Several other early modern English writers use the idea of an original earthly paradise to imagine possibilities that lie dormant in the present. Thomas More uses the metaphor of sheep devouring men to depict greedy, rapacious landlords in his Utopia, an ironic inversion of Isaiah’s prophesy in which the sheep lie down with the wolf and nature returns to a peaceful, Edenic, humanized condition.1 More’s description of Utopia also relies heavily on allusions to the classical Golden Age of communal ownership and natural abundance in which scarcity and exploitation are unknown. Gonzalo’s description of his ideal commonwealth in William Shakespeare’s Tempest also draws on imagery from the classical Golden Age mixed with allusions to Michel de Montaigne’s “Of the Cannibals.”2 His


conflation of the Golden Age, primitive savagery, and the ideal plantation is presented as absurd and comical, but these themes are given more serious and pragmatic consideration by other early modern writers. Gerrard Winstanley, the mid-seventeenth century Digger leader, invokes the original Edenic condition as a way of imagining the possibility of a new social relationship in the present, one in which all land and property would revert to common use and all social distinctions would be levelled. Nature under the collective dominion of man would become more bountiful, Winstanley says, and the earth would become again a “common treasury for all,” offering itself freely “without respect of persons.”³ This image of an original equality was not peculiar to the radical fringe. Isaac Barrow, not by any stretch a Digger or Leveller, writes about that “Inequality and private interest in things,” which he says “were the by-blows of our Fall.” Barrow, in his homily, claims that “sin introduced these degrees and distances, it devised the names of rich and poor; it begot these ingrossings and enclosures of things; it forged those two pestilent words, meum and tuum, which have engendered so much strife among men.”⁴ Barrow does not make this observation in order to argue for the abolition of private property in the present, but he nevertheless implies the

³ Gerrard Winstanley, “The True Leveller’s Standard Advanced” (1649), in The Law of Freedom and Other Writings, ed. Christopher Hill (Cambridge UP, 1973) 78. The curse of Adam is closely associated with enclosure and the emergence of private property in Winstanley’s writings. Describing the consequences of the fall and the loss of Eden, Winstanley writes: “And hereupon the earth (which was made to be a common treasury of relief for all, both beasts and men) was hedged into enclosures by the teachers and rulers, and the others were made servants and slaves: and that earth, that is within this creation made a common storehouse for all, is bought and sold and kept in the hands of a few, whereby the great creator is mightily dishonoured, as if he were a respecter of persons, delighting in the comfortable livelihood of some and rejoicing in the miserable poverty and straits of others. From the beginning it was not so” (78). A year later Winstanley writes an extended allegorical account of the original Edenic state in “Fire in the Bush” (1650), op. cit. 211-272.

possibility—now lost—of a communal condition of social equality, in which all things were “promiscuously exposed to the use and enjoyment of all,” and natural abundance insured everyone could draw freely from the common stock “assuming as his own what he needed.”

While speaking of the singular, unfallen Adam, Barrow slips into the plural, imagining an original communal right of use for “all” and “everyone.” The singular, unfallen Adam stands in for humanity as a whole, and his dominion is imagined, at least potentially, as a communal right. Even John Locke’s description of the origin of private property assumes an original “community of all things” based on a reading of the grant of dominion in Genesis as a grant to all humankind, and not just Adam and his royal progeny.

Given the frequent allusions to the myth of Eden and the Golden Age in early modern political, scientific, and utopian discourse, it is odd that Milton scholarship has generally passed over the utopian dimension of *Paradise Lost*. This is particularly surprising since Milton, like More and Bacon, was not just a writer but a public figure—a politically committed propagandist for the Cromwellian regime. Many scholars and historians have closely analyzed the use of republican rhetoric in *Paradise Lost* in order to make sense of the complex, seemingly paradoxical allegory of rebellion and revolution which the narrative seems to evoke. There is no shortage of historicist readings of *Paradise Lost*. The

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5 Hill 283.

6 John Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*, ed. P. Laslett (Cambridge UP, 1960) 1.35. See also 2.25.

7 There are a few notable exceptions such as Christopher Kendrick’s *Milton: A Study in Ideology and Form* (New York: Methuen, 1986) 188-96, and Amy Boesky’s essay, “Milton’s Heaven and the Model of the English Utopia,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 36.1 (Winter, 1996): 91-110. The utopian impulse in the poem is discussed only briefly in Kendrick’s book, however, and Boesky’s essay focuses on the social organization of Milton’s heaven rather than the division of labour in the earthly paradise.

encyclopaedic breadth of the poem has also been the subject of numerous studies. Miltons’
epic integrates and refashions several ancient and early modern literary genres, including
classical epic, romance, lyric, pastoral, and georgic, along with hexameral and
historiographic writing, travel writing, the tragic soliloquy, and the philosophical dialogue.⁹
Each of these generic elements has been closely analyzed, but rarely has the utopian
dimension of the text been acknowledged. Some of the central themes in *Paradise Lost*—
cosmopoeisis, human dominion, the discipline of pleasure—are key themes in early modern
utopian discourse, and can be found in the utopias of More and Bacon, but the relationship
between *Paradise Lost* and early modern utopianism remains underdeveloped. The Hebraic
paradise myth served as an image of utopian transformation for a variety of Milton’s
contemporaries, and that alone would seem to suggest that *Paradise Lost* could also be read
as a utopian text, or at least as a text in which the utopian impulse plays a significant role. So
what explains the exclusion of *Paradise Lost* from studies of the genre?

For one thing, while Milton very consciously crafted his poem in response to specific
genres like the Virgilian epic or the Christian hexameron, he had very little to say about
utopia. In his political writing, Milton was somewhat ambivalent about utopian schemes, at
least to the extent that they might involve withdrawal from the world. In *Areopagitica* he
argues that any endeavour to improve public morals through strict censorship is bound to fail,
since such an enterprise, if it were serious about its aims, would require a total transformation
of society along the lines of Plato’s *Republic*, leading to the regulation all forms of
expression—“all recreations and pastimes”—from music to dress to eating, drinking, and

⁹ For a summary and analysis of various approaches to genre in *Paradise Lost*, see Barbara Lewalski,*Paradise Lost and the Rhetoric of Literary Forms* (Princeton UP, 1985).
“mixt conversation.” Such minute and total regulation of public morality is impossible, he argues, and even if it were somehow possible to enact such laws, they would only weaken or diminish people’s capacity for virtue while making life ever more miserable: “to sequester out of the world into Atlantic and Eutopian polities, which never can be drawn into use, will not mend our condition,” Milton writes. Our real task, he says, is “to ordain wisely … in this world of evill, in the midd’st whereof God hath plac’t us unavoidably.” But while Milton is certainly critical of the kind of utopian thinking that evades the complexities of moral and political reform or cultivates a false, “cloister’d vertue,” he does not dismiss “Atlantic and Eutopian polities” altogether. In An Apology Against a Pamphlet, Milton derides Joseph Hall’s anti-utopian satire—Mundus Alter et Idem—calling it “tankard drollery,” and “the idlest and paltriest Mime” of the utopian form. Utopia, he says, is a “grave and noble invention,”

which the greatest and sublimest wits in sundry ages, Plato in Critias, and our two famous countreymen, the one in his Utopia, the other in his new Atlantis, chose, I may not say as a field, but as a mighty Continent wherein to display the largenesse of their spirits by teaching this our world better and exacter things, then were yet known, or us’d.

Even if Milton remained ambivalent about utopian speculation in the realm of public affairs, his characterization of the genre, not as a minor “field,” but a “mighty Continent”—a wide discursive space open to exploration—implies a certain respect for the utopian form.


11 Areopagitica, op.cit. 2.526.

12 Areopagitica, op. cit. 2.515.

13 Milton, An Apology against a Pamphlet Call’d a Modest Confutation of the Animadversions upon the Remonstrant against Smectymnuus (1642), CPW 1.880-1.

14 An Apology against a Pamphlet, op. cit. 1.881.
Nevertheless, it would be difficult to argue that Milton consciously placed his paradise within this continent.

The greatest difficulty we face when trying to read *Paradise Lost* in the utopian mode, however, is not the absence of any clear intent on the part of the author, but the contrasting, even opposed set of generic and thematic concerns at play in the poem. The invisibility of the utopian dimension of *Paradise Lost* may be due, in part, to the absence of an obvious secular, ideal commonwealth and the predominance of the epic, tragic, pastoral, and hexameral modes, which are not generally associated with utopia. For most of the poem’s readers today, the Genesis story is understood to be a story about a lost origin rather than a possible future. Paradise appears to be pre-political, indeed pre-historical, and the eschatological themes with which the poem engages—origin, creation, original sin, etc.—can appear far removed from the thematic concerns and social function of the conventional utopian narrative, with its dry, descriptive tone and prosaic form, its emphasis on a secular, future-oriented ideal or displaced possibilities in the present. But while paradise and utopia appear to be opposed terms or imply a series of paired oppositions—mythic past and possible future; Edenic garden and ideal *polis*; pre-political and post-political order—I will argue that these oppositions are in fact internal to *Paradise Lost*. By retelling the story of the loss of paradise during this period of revolution, restoration, and growing empire, Milton conjures utopian possibilities or possible futures that the poem then frustrates, abandons or disavows.

I will focus on the representation of labour and dominion in *Paradise Lost* and the contradictions that arise from re-imagining an unfallen moral economy of work and desire. Milton’s poem hints at alternative possible futures in its representation of labour and nature in the unfallen state. Paradise initially appears to be the seed-form of a new state, a colony
that might expand to enclose the surrounding “nether Empire” of the Earth, rising, through labour, the control of excess, and the discipline of bodily desire, to dissolve the boundary between matter and spirit, Earth and Heaven. This future is never represented directly, however, and two contradictory forms of social organization appear in the earthly paradise. On the one hand, Milton’s paradise is a kind of primitive, patriarchal commons in which work and play, labour and eros, are identical to one another; on the other hand, Adam and Eve share an anachronistic bourgeois sensibility that tends to separate work from play and undermines the erotic-allegorical dimension of their labour. Labour appears to be both the “lowest end of human life” (9.241) and the principle sign of Adam and Eve’s humanity, an act which “declares [their] Dignity, / And the regard of Heav’n” (4.619-20). How these two tendencies might be reconciled is unclear. Either this contradiction is one of the principle causes of the fall, or the fall makes it impossible for the author to imagine any such reconciliation. In either case, the poem is structured around this foreclosed reconciliation and gains its narrative tension as the reader imagines, in spite of the known end of the story, an alternative, future, utopian Eden.

Before proceeding further it is necessary to first justify reading *Paradise Lost* as a work of utopian literature and consider more carefully the reasons why it has generally been excluded from studies of the genre. To that end I will review some key scholarly works on early modern utopias from the mid- to late twentieth century and examine the rationale various writers have used to define utopia and paradise, either in opposition to one another or

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16 Cf. Kendrick, op. cit., who argues that the utopian dimension of the poem “[opens] up a major narrative possibility which runs athwart the predestined path of the fall story.” The “utopian amplification” of the Genesis story, he writes, “demands to be read in itself, as if for the first time, and thus works to seal off predestination from the paradise narrative” (189).
as generic subspecies that arise from a developmental process through which the modern, rational utopia emerges from a prehistoric, mythological paradise. I argue that the utopian dimension of *Paradise Lost* is largely made invisible by this opposition, and while there are very real and important analytical distinctions to be made, paradise and utopia are mutually constitutive and dialectically related in the early modern period. *Paradise becomes utopian* in Milton’s epic poem, and just as early modern utopian literature draws on the imagery and *topoi* of classical and biblical origin myths, paradise itself becomes rationalized and future-oriented in the early modern period.

2. Myth and Reason

Scholarship on the history of utopia has long recognized the influence of paradise myths or paradisal imagery on the formation of utopian discourse in the renaissance. In order to define utopia conceptually or historically, however, a line is generally drawn between modern utopias and pre-modern utopian propensities, impulses or wish-images. “Paradise” becomes the term around which a variety of pre-modern pre-figurations of utopia are organized. Glenn Negley and J. Max Patrick argue this in their 1952 anthology, *The Quest for Utopia*. The developed form of utopia begins with the Greeks, especially Plato, according to Negley and Patrick, but the idea of paradise and the Golden Age is presented as evidence of the universality of the utopian idea, which, they argue, is common to both “primitive and sophisticated men.”17 “Conceptions of Paradise, Arcadia, the Golden Age, the Island of the Blest, Gardens of Eden, and the Land of Cockaigne are reiterant in human thought,” Negley and Patrick claim: “They begin as myths and then develop into

comprehensive descriptions of ideal societies.”  

Paradise, in this formulation, is imagined to be the mythological precursor to the rational utopia. While paradise is an unconscious wish-image, utopia is a self-consciously fictional account of the political structure of a state or community. So while utopianism can be found almost everywhere, and especially in paradise and golden age myths, utopia proper only emerges with the idea of a rationally ordered state and a model of a possible ideal:

Amongst the ancient Hebrews, Amos, Hosea, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel show incipient utopianism, and similar threads are discoverable in most ancient peoples. But the Greeks seem to have been the first to write comprehensive accounts of functioning imaginary societies, sometimes upholding them as ideals or models towards which men should strive; sometimes proposing them as hypothetical standards by which men could test their own societies; and sometimes inventing them as an exercise of the imagination or as a vehicle of philosophical speculation.

Utopian literature is defined as an exercise in philosophical speculation or an ideal model to which a given society could strive—a definition that contrasts utopia with previous paradise myths which are neither comprehensive descriptions of a fully formed political order nor functional models of future possibilities in this world. Paradise, by this definition, is the

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18 Negley and Patrick 252.

19 Negley and Patrick 3.

20 Negley and Patrick 257, emphasis added. Joyce Hertzler makes a similar argument in The History of Utopian Thought (New York: Cooper Square, 1923/1965), although Hertzler stresses the affinity between the works of the Hebrew prophets and the Greek philosophers. “Behind the Utopias lies the utopian spirit, that is, the feeling that society is capable of improvement and can be made over to realize a rational ideal.” (2). The “utopian spirit”—like the “utopian idea” or “incipient utopianism” in Negley and Patrick—precedes utopia as a literary form and finds its first prominent expression in the Bible. “From the earliest Hebrew prophets on we have more or less conscious ideals of this kind expressed,” Hertzler writes, and includes among these “more or less conscious” expressions of rational social improvement Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel (3).

21 Miriam Eliav-Feldon in her study of early modern utopian thought also defines utopia as a possible, this-worldly ideal, that is presented “as if functioning in the present” (Realistic Utopias: The Ideal Imaginary Societies of the Renaissance, 1516-1630 [Oxford UP, 1982] 4). While she acknowledges that the term can refer to a number of different forms of social ideality (including intentional communities), for her purposes utopia is defined as “a literary work describing an ideal society created by conscious human effort on this earth.” She goes on to say, “This definition excludes any vision of an ideal existence that is other-worldly, unattainable, or dependent either on wonders of nature or on divine intervention” (2). Eliav-Feldon distinguishes what she calls
opposed term against which utopia is defined, or else the seed of an idea which has yet to emerge from its mythological, mystical, and pre-political shell.

A.L. Morton in *The English Utopia* (1969) presents Cokaygne—a variation on the paradise myth—as another early, incipient form of the utopian impulse, although unlike Negley and Patrick, Morton argues that this earlier form persists as a parallel, subterranean stream of utopian thought well after the emergence of the dominant form in early modern humanist-utopian discourse. “Utopia begins with the Land of Cokaygne—the serf’s dream of a world of peace, leisure and abundance,” Morton writes, and “the Cokaygne dream persisted as an almost secret tradition under the surface, while the main stream of utopian thought passed through other channels.” While other writers focus on classical or biblical sources for early modern utopias, Morton argues that this folk tradition, deeply rooted in both pagan and Christian golden age mythology—saturnalia and carnival—anticipates elements of philosophical humanism and the European enlightenment. “Cokaygne can be seen as a rough and early foreshadowing of Humanism, the philosophy of the bourgeois revolution,” Morton argues, because implicit in this celebration of earthly, material excess and social levelling is the Baconian ideal of the “conquest of nature by man” a conquest made possible because in Cokaygne humanity is imagined to be a part of nature rather than set apart from it by the fall. “Humanism,” for Morton, implies “the possibility and fact of progress.” Cokaygne bridges the historical gulf between mythological and historical forms of utopian ideality

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“utopia proper” from other ideal social forms, including “glorifications of a primitive Golden Age,” which she characterizes as “a paradise lost of innocence and of life according to nature, sometimes in a mythological past, sometimes in the New World before the Europeans came and destroyed it. But it is an unredeemable paradise, and therefore *it is a lamentation rather than a model to be emulated.*” (emphasis added, 3) It is unclear why Eliav-Feldon believes paradise was viewed as an “unredeemable” past in the early modern period, since there is ample evidence that this was not a universal belief.


23 Morton 44-5.
because of its rejection of a static, fallen condition and because of the worldly nature of its paradisial imagery. Cokaygne made the satisfaction of human desires in this world an end in itself, and

Humanism made it possible to believe that man could mould the world in accordance with his desires. ... Without such a belief the very conception of Utopia is impossible, and this is why we find no conscious and fully developed utopian thought between the philosophers of the classical world and those of the dawn of the bourgeois revolution. 24

While Morton emphasizes the survival of popular forms of the utopian impulse and the way in which the Cokaygne and paradise stories respond to the desires of particular classes at different moments in history, he also reproduces a teleological account of the emergence of utopia which frames golden age mythology as part of the prehistory of utopia. For Morton, as with Negley and Patrick, paradise and Cokaygne are precursors, “rough foreshadowing” of the humanist utopia. Utopia only appears in its fully developed form in the classical and early modern periods when humanity is supposed to have become a conscious historical subject, or could at least imagine a rational, secular reordering of the world.

Robert C. Elliot, also emphasizes the parallels between utopia and Cokaygne. In The Shape of Utopia (1970) he associates the satirical dimension of the renaissance utopia with the “ritual mockery” of carnivalesque traditions, which are rooted in the myth of the golden age or the earthly paradise. “Utopia is the secularization of the myth of the Golden Age,” Elliot writes: “a myth incarnated in the festival of the Saturnalia. Satire is the secular form of ritual mockery.” 25 For Elliot, Cokaygne and the earthly paradise are living traditions that span vast historical distances, from the saturnalia and carnivals of the ancient and medieval

24 Morton 45.

worlds to the “Big Rock Candy Mountain” of depression-era America. “The Golden Age and Cockaigne provide the elements out of which the intellectual concept of utopia develops,” Elliot writes:

> When belief in the historical reality of the Golden Age broke down, it became possible to bring many of the ideal elements of the myth into closer relation with the realities of man’s existence. Philosophers transferred the notion of an ideal life in the irrecoverable past into utopian tales of what the world might—even should—be like; the myth, that is, provided sustenance for a conceivable reality. … The Golden Age and utopia, the one a myth, the other a concept, are both projections of man’s wishful fantasies, answering to the longings for the good life which have moved him since before history began.”

Elliot stresses the persistence of Cokaygne and the myth of an earthly paradise in the present, but he also argues that utopia is the quintessential modern expression of this archaic form. Paradise is the seed-form out of which utopia develops. Utopia is characterized as a “secularized myth,” a rational “concept” and a “conceivable reality” which develops out of and responds to a universal, prehistoric wish-image.

Frank and Fritzie Manuel provide a psychoanalytic variation on these ideas in their wide-ranging study, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (1979). The Manuels devote several chapters to paradise and the golden age and argue that “paradise in its Judeo-Christian forms has to be accepted as the deepest archaeological layer of Western utopia, active in the unconscious of large segments of the population, even when they did not read

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26 Elliot 6-7.

27 Harry Levin, in *The Myth of the Golden Age in the Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1969), makes a similar claim and suggests utopia is the secularized, future-oriented counterpart to the golden age. The golden age, he writes, “takes us back to Genesis, the beginning of all things in whatever version and when the outlook is reversed under modern conditions, it looks forward to a millennial ending. The expected rule of heaven on earth, the spiritual faith in a Millennium, is secularized into the temporal notion of a Utopia, which in turn affects political thought and programs of revolutionary action” (xv). See also Appendix B, “Some Paradoxes of Utopia,” 187-93.
the books in which the varieties of this experience assumed literary shape." While the idea of paradise is, according to the Manuels, "virtually universal in mankind," it was assimilated by succeeding generations in Europe in a variety of different forms, so that by the time the Western utopia was born in the early 16th century, "paradise was present on all levels of psychic existence," and for that reason Edenic imagery and themes pervade early modern utopian literature from Thomas More onwards. But while the paradise myth is deeply seated in the cultural history and collective unconscious of early modern European writers, according to the Manuels, the early modern utopia emerges as a caesura or rupture within that tradition. There is, they write,

a distinction between religious paradise and modern utopia that establishes a caesura and bestows a unique character upon utopias that are born in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The paradises of Judeo-Christian religion were brought into being by a transcendent God, and the time and nature of His Creation were dependent upon His will alone. Utopia is man-made paradise on earth, a usurpation of His omnipotence. It is a Promethean act of defiance of the existing order of the world. The difference between paradise and utopia is framed as an opposition between a transcendent and immanent historical subject. The emergence of utopia requires the disenchantment of paradise. It is only when plain belief in paradise became weakened or attenuated that utopia came into being, according to the Manuels, and with this coming-into-being, paradise is buried beneath layers of cultural memory. It remains in the present only as a vestigial form: "The natural history of paradise might serve as an introduction to the history of the self-conscious, deliberately fabricated utopias of modern times, for in most of them vestiges of paradise can be discovered, like the structures of superseded forms in

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29 Manuel & Manuel 112.

30 Manuel & Manuel 112.
biological evolution.”31 Paradise, for the Manuels, belongs to the pre-history of utopia—its “deepest archaeological layer” or its unconscious, prehistoric form—and where it appears within utopian discourse it is as a remnant or vestigial element that no longer has a function or purpose but nevertheless leaves a trace in the form. While utopia is imagined to be a self-conscious, purposive, living idea, paradise appears as an unconscious, fossilized image.

The common problem running through these various accounts of the relationship between paradise and utopia is the problem of defining and accounting for the moment of transition. If one frames the relationship between paradise and utopia as a developmental process spanning prehistory to the present, it is necessary to give an account of the transformation from one form to the other. A number of writers have anticipated the problem of explaining the transition and attempt to give this process of rationalization a material basis. Karl Mannheim, for example, in his classic 1929 work, Ideology and Utopia, posits a transitional historical moment in the development of the idea of utopia during which paradise in some sense overlaps with or takes on some of the positive attributes normally attributed to utopia. Mannheim writes:

As long as the clerically and feudally organized medieval order was able to locate its paradise outside of society, in some other-worldly sphere which transcended history and dulled its revolutionary edge, the idea of paradise was still an integral part of medieval society. Not until certain social groups embodied these wish-images into their actual conduct, and tried to realize them, did these ideologies become utopian. ... [W]ish-images which take on a revolutionary function will become utopias.32

31 Emphasis added, Manuel & Manuel 112. Krishan Kumar makes a very similar argument in Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1987): “The Golden Age, the ideal city and the rest constitute the essential ‘pre-history’ of utopia,” Kumar writes: “Like many prehistoric fragments, they remain embedded in the later forms; or, to change the figure somewhat, we may say that they live on in the Unconscious of utopia, giving it much of its motivation and dynamism. But, no more than the id can be identified with the ego, can these utopian ‘pre-echoes’ be identified with utopia itself” (20).

It is important to note that Mannheim is not concerned here with the generic or formal properties of texts, but rather their social function and emancipatory potential for social and political movements. So while he does not share the view expressed by Negley and Patrick and Eliav-Feldon, among others, that utopia is a “self-conscious fiction,” he nevertheless shares with them the belief that utopia is a this-worldly, possible ideal. To the extent that paradise becomes a realizable ideal for some revolutionary groups and served as an image of radical social transformation, paradise was, however briefly, “utopian.” But this brief moment in which paradise appears to serve a utopian function is not exactly an intermediate stage in the development of an idea but a periodic and recurring phenomenon. Mannheim is thinking of the German Peasants’ Revolt, Thomas Münster, and the Anabaptists when he refers to the utopian potentiality of the paradisial wish-image, but paradise took on a revolutionary function in both earlier and later periods, from the Hebrew prophets in the ancient world to the Brethren of the Free Spirit in the late middle ages to the Diggers, Levellers, and Fifth Monarchists in the early modern period.33

The humanist utopia did not supersede paradise in the renaissance; paradise persisted (perhaps still persists) as a revolutionary idea. It could be argued that paradise becomes utopian in Mannheim’s sense whenever the carnivalesque rituals and millenarian dreams associated with golden age mythology and Cokaygne exceed the limits of feudal and early capitalist ideology and appear, for a moment, possible or realizable.34 Paradise and utopia are

33 See Mannheim, op. cit. 190-7. The utopian dimension of the writing of these millennial sects, which often draws on paradisial imagery, has been noted by others including the Ernst Bloch in *Principle of Hope*, vol. 2, Trans. N. Plaice, et al. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986) 509-15, Morton, op. cit. 12-13, the Manuels op. cit. (181-201; 332-366) and Kumar op. cit. 10-19.

34 This is implied by Mannheim when he argues that “a state of mind is utopian when it is incongruous with the state of reality within which it occurs,” and, when passed onto actions, tends “to shatter, either partially
not exactly stages in the development of an idea; they form an opposition through which we in the present define our own modernity. To paraphrase Max Horkheimer and T.W. Adorno, paradise is already utopian, and utopia reverts to paradise.\textsuperscript{35} Utopia does not supersede paradise or render it vestigial or obsolete; utopia makes paradise historical, but it does so only through imaginatively suspending history. If the opposition is viewed diachronically, paradise will always appear to be a \textit{pre}-historic remnant, the unconscious, mythical, seed-form of utopia. But if the two concepts are grasped synchronically and dialectically, then paradise and utopia do not appear as discrete stages in a developmental process but as terms of a dialectic animating this process.

In diachronic formulations, paradise belongs to the pre-history of utopia as its mythic prefiguration, negated and sublated by the emergence of utopia itself. Paradise appears as the universal, transhistorical unconscious substrate out of which utopia—particular, active, historical, rational—is formed. The relationship is framed as a developmental or evolutionary process whereby an earlier, unconscious, other-worldly, or mythological wish-image is superseded by a rational, conscious, this-worldly, immanent and historical concept. But to what extent do utopian modes of discourse constitute a break from paradise or from earlier mythological modes of wish-fulfillment? Early modern utopias often require an imaginative leap outside the lived, material conditions of their authors. They also often appear as idealist games of authorial mastery, ahistorical and essentially unrealizable. Utopia begins from nowhere, and this is often seen as the limit of utopian thought—its regression to myth or irrational wish-fulfillment. Friedrich Engels, speaking about the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century utopian

socialists—Saint-Simon, Charles Fourier, and Robert Owen—argues that what makes their work “utopian” is their very faith in a “kingdom of reason” that is at heart the “idealized kingdom of the bourgeoisie.” Because they aspire to realize the bourgeois ideals of freedom and equality without directly challenging the system of private property through which such ideals are actualized, the projects they inspire are brittle, fleeting enclaves, incapable of transforming the world in any meaningful way. Their approach is utopian rather than scientific, Engels writes, because their socialism is imagined to be “the expression of absolute truth, reason, and justice,” and since these absolutes stand outside history, their realization is imagined in fantastical or idealist terms: “[they have] only to be discovered to conquer all the world by virtue of [their] own power.” This critique of 19th century utopian socialism could be applied to other forms of utopian speculation, before and since. Wherever an ideal society is conjured out of reason and imagination, divorced from practical political activity or the particular social, economic, and historical conditions that block its realization, we often find that the “kingdom of reason” which serves as its telos is indistinguishable from myth. As the young Marx writes in a letter on the limits of utopian socialism, “the world has long been dreaming of something that it can acquire if only it becomes conscious of it,” and revolution, therefore, “is not a matter of drawing a great dividing line between past and

37 Engels 60-1.
38 Even the most radical utopias constructed in this way, out of rational blueprints and fantastical desires, can be seen as “idealized kingdoms of the bourgeoisie.” As Marx and Engels put it in their characteristically polemical style, the utopian socialists “still dream of experimental realization of their social utopias, of founding isolated phalanstères, of establishing ‘Home Colonies,’ or setting up a ‘Little Icaria’—pocket editions of the New Jerusalem—and to realize all these castles in the air, they are compelled to appeal to the feelings and purses of the bourgeois.” Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Manifesto of the Communist Party (New York: International Publishers, 1948) 41.
future, but of carrying out the thoughts of the past.”39 For Marx, the visions of the utopian socialists are themselves still part of this dream—prophesies and dogmatic prefigurations of a future they cannot bring into being. But if we recognize that utopia necessarily involves an uneasy tension between this-worldly and other-worldly ideality, possible and impossible worlds, conscious and unconscious design, historical development and transhistorical stasis, then we might begin to see that the critical function of utopia does not rely on the presentation of a rational goal, proposition or blueprint, but involves instead the revelation of a *limit-concept* similar to that of paradise—something that can be thought but not fully understood. Any given instantiation of the utopian impulse is always bound up with its paradisial opposite in complex and unexpected ways. Far from being a superseded vestigial form within the structure of utopia, paradise is the principle of *growth*, the fertile garden within the frozen, calcified utopian polis. Paradise is the imaginative leap outside existing conditions to which utopia—this-worldly and rational—must otherwise conform. The problem with the diachronic models outlined here is that they frame utopia as the *end* of a process of development—its mature form. Utopia, however, is not itself the conscious realization of a prehistoric desire; it is defined and animated by that desire, but it does not fulfill it. The mythic wish-image is not superseded by the rational concept.

### 3. Abundance and Scarcity

The relationship between paradise and utopia has generally been understood in terms of a process of development whereby a pre-modern, archaic wish-image is superseded by a rationally constructed, self-conscious fiction. *Paradise Lost* appears to be neither of these

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things. It is easy to see why utopian studies has generally overlooked Milton’s epic poem. Of the authors mentioned here, only Morton and the Manuels mention Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, and they do so only in passing. The diachronic model for understanding the relationship between paradise and utopia is the dominant view shared by formalist, historicist, Marxist, and psychoanalytic scholars alike. It is a model that is appealing because it is consistent with other familiar historical narratives about the European renaissance and enlightenment which are understood as stages in a historical process of secularization, rationalization, and disenchantment. What I propose instead is a synchronic-dialectical approach which does not present the two terms as sequential or overlapping historical stages, but historicizes the opposition itself. Paradise does not simply precede utopia; utopia creates its paradisial opposite, projecting backwards onto paradise the irrational and other-worldly within utopia itself. But before elaborating on the implications of this theory and demonstrating how it might be relevant to a reading of *Paradise Lost*, it is useful to first consider a third position—what I call the synchronic-analytical approach, best represented in the work of J.C. Davis.41

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40 In the conclusion to their chapter on paradise, the Manuels write that “the manifold uses of paradise have surely not been exhausted here,” and confess that they “have avoided discussing its two most magnificent embodiments in Western culture, the poems of Dante and of Milton” (62). They do not, however, explain why they pass over these important texts, even though classical and Biblical iterations of the paradisial wish-image are discussed at some length. Morton, on the other hand, attempts to read *Paradise Lost* as a kind of utopia, although he does so only briefly and speculatively. “We might almost say that the Eden of *Paradise Lost* was Milton’s Utopia,” Morton writes: “a Utopia which contains many of the traditional features of the Earthly Paradise …, and which, in the first enthusiasm of the revolution he had hoped to see realised on earth. Later, after the slow fading of hopes under the Commonwealth and the final blow of the Restoration, he transferred his Eden to the distant past and the distant future (89). Morton does not elaborate on the connection between Milton’s poetic representation of Eden and his republican convictions and simply concedes that “if Milton was the supreme religious Utopian of the English Revolution, his Utopia was so concealed that he himself was probably unaware of it as such.” (90) Paradise, then, is once more relegated to the unconscious of utopia, but this time it resides in the unconscious of an individual poet.

Notwithstanding its limitations, this model provides some useful insights that can be adapted
to an historical materialist account of the relationship between paradise and utopia in the
early modern period.

In *Utopia and the Ideal Society*, Davis begins his study of renaissance English utopias
by addressing the problem of how to define his subject matter. Literary historians tend to
draw vastly different conclusions about the nature of utopia, he argues, because “the
adjective ‘utopian’ is being used as a catch-all label for all forms of ideal society,” when
utopia should really be understood as one species of the genus “ideal society writing.” 42 This
category error leads writers to make contradictory claims about the nature of utopia. Some
will argue that in utopia, humanity appears at one with nature, while others claim that utopia
subjugates and disciplines human nature; the state withers away in some accounts, or it
becomes more complex and integrated with society in others; utopia denies original sin or it
assumes the wickedness of humanity, and so on. 43 Davis seeks to resolve these contradictions
through the application of a clear and rigorous analytical distinction between utopia and other
forms of the ideal society. He argues that Cokaygne, arcadia, the perfect moral
commonwealth, and the millennium are all alternative forms of the “ideal society,” related to
but distinct from utopia itself. 44 Utopia is not presented as the fully developed form of the
ideal society, but one form among others. What each type shares, Davis argues, is a
preoccupation with the collective problem of scarcity. Scarcity and the distribution of desires
and satisfactions is the structural problem underlying all forms of the ideal society. “All

\[42\] J.C. Davis, *Utopia and the Ideal Society: A Study of English Utopian Writing, 1516-1700*

\[43\] Davis 18.

\[44\] Davis 18-19.
societies,” Davis writes, “must solve the problem of relating the existing and changing supply of satisfactions, some of which are by nature limited in supply, to the wants of a heterogenial [sic] group, the desires of which will be, in some respects, unlimited.”45 This gap between desire and the satisfaction of desire is conditioned by particular material and social relations; scarcity can result from natural or technological limits to the satisfaction of desires, or it can be the product of an unequal distribution of satisfactions and social constraints on what can and cannot be desired. Davis argues that Cokaygne, arcadia, the perfect moral commonwealth, the millennium, and utopia each deal with the problem by finding different ways of resolving the gap between the totality of competing individual desires and the collective means of satisfying them: Cokaygne and arcadia magically increase the supply of satisfactions; the perfect moral commonwealth artificially moderates human desire; the millennium defers the problem, while utopia accepts the limits of nature and the excesses of desire and seeks to reorganize social institutions to overcome the collective problem of scarcity.

At polar extremes in this model are Cokaygne and the perfect moral commonwealth. Davis argues that Cokaygne solves the collective problem of scarcity by imagining a radical change in the supply of satisfactions. In Cokaygne, nature offers itself freely and demands little or no effort. Roast geese and larks smothered in stew fly into the peasant’s mouth. All things and all women are common.46 The grossest appetitive and sexual desires are freely satisfied. The perfect moral commonwealth, on the other hand, involves a change in the nature of desire itself and usually involves moderating or restraining human appetites. It is an

45 Davis 20.

46 Cokaygne, carnival, and saturnalia usually invoke a narrow, often misogynistic, vision of sexual liberation.
essentially conservative vision. In the perfect moral commonwealth, desire is brought in line with necessity and the limits of nature while the structure of society and traditional social distinctions remain unchanged. While Cokaygne expands and fulfills unlimited desires, overturning social distinctions in the process, in the perfect moral commonwealth desire is controlled and disciplined, and “each man becomes good and functions perfectly in his station.”

Situated between these two poles, Davis argues, is arcadia, or the worldly paradise:

The arcadian tradition solves the collective problem by postulating both an abundance of satisfactions and a moderation or simplification to a ‘natural’ level. So it forms a half-way house between the Land of Cockaygne, with its emphasis on gross abundance, and the perfect moral commonwealth, with its insistence upon men’s reconciliation with the status quo, upon moral conformism; but it forms a blend quite unlike the two alone.

In arcadia, nature is humanized or subject to human desires, but those desires are also limited, innocent or in some sense underdeveloped. Because arcadia involves a transfiguration of both nature and desire, it lays greater emphasis on the integration of human beings and their natural environment. Arcadia represents the free satisfaction of limited desires in a pre-political, Edenic state. It satisfies desire without inflaming desire, and establishes a perfect social order without a state or commonwealth.

What distinguishes utopia, according to Davis, is its refusal to suspend, dissolve, or wish away the problem of scarcity. The other forms of the ideal society involve some kind of imaginative suspension of the gap between limited satisfactions and unlimited human desires.

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47 Davis 29.

48 Davis 26.

49 The Millennium, according to Davis, is a special case and essentially defers the collective problem of limited satisfactions and unlimited desires. There is generally little description or analysis of the social order that is to arise from the Millennium, but the few glimpses we get usually invoke some combination of Arcadia and the Perfect Moral Commonwealth.
Cokaygne idealizes nature; the perfect moral commonwealth idealizes humanity; arcadia idealizes both, while the millennium defers the problem altogether. “In utopia, it is neither man nor nature that is idealized but organization,” Davis writes: “The utopian seeks to ‘solve’ the collective problem collectively, that is by the reorganization of society and its institutions, by education, by laws and sanctions.” Utopia involves the perfect social-technical organization of the capacities of a fallen humanity living within a fallen, unyielding nature. There is no magical resolution of the gap between nature and human desire:

The utopian is more “realistic” or tough-minded in that he [sic] accepts the basic problem as it is: limited satisfactions exposed to unlimited wants. He seeks a solution not by wishing the problem away nor by tampering with the equation. He does not assume drastic changes in nature or man.

Instead, the solution to the collective problem is found through the reorganization of collective capacities. There is no human or natural transfiguration, no deus ex machina. The problem of unlimited desires and limited satisfactions is presented as a given. The utopian, in this formulation, is a realist. Davis claims that of all the various forms of the ideal society only utopia is truly of this world, bound by its laws, which are understood to be determined, in the last instance, by scarcity. Utopia may thus be understood as an immanent critique of the collective problem of scarcity.

In practice, though, it is difficult to distinguish between forms of the ideal society that conform to the law of scarcity—i.e. “utopias”—and those that violate it. In fact, Davis himself seems to understand this and suggests that his distinctions should be understood as “heuristic devices … not intended as descriptions of mutually exclusive realities.”

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50 Emphasis added; Davis 38.
51 Davis 37.
52 Davis 19.
different species of the ideal society are, he says, “not in practice mutually exclusive, although their premises make them logically inconsistent with one another.”Davis does not elaborate as to why, if they are logically inconsistent, these types are intertwined with one another in practice. He seems to suggest that his heuristic device still holds because each text can be analyzed as a mixed form structured by the tension between two or three of these ideal types. But the rationale for these analytical distinctions was to resolve the contradictions that emerge when theorists and historians confuse utopia with other species of the ideal society. If contradiction is inherent to the subject matter, then it cannot be resolved by positing ideal types, even if they are presented only as heuristic devices. The mixed form of the ideal society does not appear to be an exception but is, rather, the rule. Is Bacon’s *New Atlantis* a utopia or a perfect moral commonwealth? Davis suggests it is both. Are Winstanley’s tracts utopian or millenarian? Davis posits a gradual shift over time from the millenarian and moralist writings of the early Winstanley to the utopian *Law of Freedom*, which still retains elements of the earlier forms as residual traces. What we find in practice is that within the genus all sorts of admixtures of the various subtypes combine with each other and with utopia. In fact, I would argue that utopia is especially open to hybridity and may be understood as the particular form that brings these disparate types into relation with one another. This might explain why it is so often confused with the genus of the “ideal society type.” It is through the early modern utopia that we see juxtaposed for the first time the worldly, classical ideal commonwealth and the other-worldly Christian messianic kingdom,

53 Davis 20.

54 See Davis 119-21; 180-82.
New World “savagery” and the primitive apostolic church, the ideal absolutist state and its
carnivalesque inversion.

In order to move from the logic of the abstract type to the structure of individual texts
or the practices of particular political movements it is necessary to make the leap from
analytical distinction to dialectical relation. If utopia is the particular form that brings the
various sub-types of the genus together, it is also set apart from them because it conforms to
the limits of the real understood as a condition of scarcity. This formulation would appear to
make utopia and arcadia the central opposition in Davis’ schema: if utopia conforms to the
reality principle, arcadia violates it; if utopia idealizes social organization, arcadia idealizes
the primitive state of nature; if utopia mitigates scarcity through collective action, arcadia
abolishes it through natural abundance; if utopia balances the equation of satisfactions and
desires, arcadia imagines a transfiguration of both nature and desire. While Davis stresses the
opposition of Cokaygne and the perfect moral commonwealth as the central opposition
within the genus, they may actually be seen as falling somewhere in-between utopia and
arcadia, tampering with only one side or other of the equation. The ideal garden and the ideal
polis represent the opposed ideals of integration with nature and domination over nature,
satisfaction of desire and restraint or control of desire. The two characteristics which,
according to Davis, distinguish arcadia from utopia also go to the root of the very definition
of utopia as such. While “arcadia emphasizes the integration of man and nature,” utopia
“seeks to illustrate man’s capacity to dominate nature.” While the arcadian “simplifies
human desires and at the same time throws great stress on their satisfaction,” utopia, by
contrast, “seeks to act out a pattern of restraint.”

55 Utopia and arcadia thus represent opposed

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conceptions of nature and desire, and opposed conceptions of the reconciliation of nature and desire.

But this opposition between integration and domination, satisfaction and restraint, must be understood dialectically. In Bacon’s *New Atlantis*, for instance, the expansion of “Human Empire” involves both domination of and integration with nature, or rather, it seeks the reestablishment of humanity’s more perfect, unfallen dominion over nature.

“Domination” is not something alien to the Christian paradise. The very idea of an unfallen nature requires the projection of human purposes and human desires onto nature. Integration and domination—of nature and other people—are both implicated in Bacon’s concept of “Human Empire.” Likewise, the elaborate “pattern of restraint” in More’s *Utopia* is described in quasi-Epicurean terms that blur the line between the satisfaction and control of desire. In *Utopia*, the control of individual avarice, the abolition of private property, and the institution of penal servitude allow for an enormous expansion of the supply of satisfactions and the free time to enjoy them. The text is structured by the unresolved tension between the satisfaction of desire and the control or moderation of desire. Everywhere in Utopia—from the gold chamber pots and slave chains to the rationalization of work and leisure time—“satisfaction” and “restraint” mutate and intermingle. The “pattern of restraint” typified by More’s *Utopia* is at the same time a hierarchy of pleasures. Any examination of the relationship between paradise and utopia in the early modern period, I argue, must approach these terms as dialectically related rather than analytically distinct types of the ideal society.

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Davis’ key insight is to frame the relationship between paradise and utopia in the early modern period as structurally opposed solutions to the problem of scarcity rather than stages in the development of reason. The problem with his model is that he does not adequately historicize the concept of “scarcity,” and this leads to some unnecessarily rigid analytical distinctions. The equation of satisfactions and desires is understood by Davis to be a necessity imposed on all societies by the limits of nature, and so conformity to the law of scarcity is understood to be synonymous with reason and realism. Arcadia, he argues, “tamps” with the laws of nature and human desire, while utopia is consistent with them. Implicit here is the assumption that scarcity is a universal, transhistorical condition underlying all social life. Of course, there are indeed real material limits and social constraints placed on the satisfaction of needs and desires in all historical contexts. The problem is that these limits have not always functioned as economic motives and so scarcity has shaped social and political life—and the political imagination—in radically different ways in different contexts. As Ruth Levitas points out in her critique of Davis, the gap between desire and satisfaction cannot be understood as a given, “since needs and wants themselves are socially constructed and … are so constructed in interaction with available means of satisfactions.” In any given society, she writes, “the relationship between wants and satisfaction is a dialectical one, not one of an a priori, intrinsically unbridgeable, gap.”\(^{57}\) The structure of desire and pleasure is culturally and historically specific, and utopian literature represents a speculative exploration of the nature of desire under hypothetical conditions; it is not simply a model of how to best satisfy existing needs and wants given existing social and material constraints.

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It is important to stress the crucial role that the concept of scarcity plays in utopian literature from the early modern period onwards, but it is also necessary to stress that a lack of productive capacity is not a universal, transhistorical problem. In advanced capitalist economies like our own, economic crises tend to be crises of over-production. Without sufficient outlet for excess production, capitalist economies tend towards contraction and depression. Growth in marketing and advertising in the post-war period was a direct response to the real need to produce desire since increases in efficiency lead otherwise to a fall in the rate of profit. The relationship of needs and desires to satisfactions cannot, therefore, be reduced to an abstract universal formula of “limited satisfactions exposed to unlimited desires.” Excess production exposed to limited demand can, under certain circumstances, be just as destructive as war or famine and can itself be the cause of war and famine. Scarcity is nevertheless experienced as a necessity under capitalism since crises of overproduction lead in the long-run to financialization, market volatility, high unemployment, and the imposition of ever greater austerity. While the abolition of scarcity has now become technically achievable, scarcity nevertheless confronts us as a social necessity and a law of nature. In early and pre-capitalist societies, however, we encounter a different problem: while periodic and acute scarcity has always been a problem for pre-capitalist societies, scarcity did not always function as an economic principle. Scarcity as an economic motive—an imperative to labour or improve efficiency—is really a consequence of the commodification of land and labour and the exposure of basic needs to market forces. In pre-capitalist societies, scarcity could be framed in ethical or religious terms, as punishment for individual or collective moral failings, or as a consequence of the fall, but rarely was it experienced as an imperative.

58 War and military armament are, of course, other outlets for excess production.
to improve labour. For most people there was no intrinsic relationship between the experience of want and the need to compete with others to improve productivity or gain access to the means of subsistence. Only when land and labour were commodified and the relationship between satisfaction and desire began to be imagined as a potentially self-regulating mechanism—a law of supply and demand—did the problem of scarcity begin to appear as an equation to be solved.

The truth in Davis’ argument, however, is that scarcity was beginning to be experienced as an economic principle governing everyday life in early modern England as agrarian capitalism began to displace the English peasantry, separating them from direct, non-market access to the means of subsistence and dissolving old social obligations and protections. Moreover, the principle of scarcity was also then being used to justify the enclosure and expropriation of land in England, Ireland, and the Americas, since enclosure was, quite rightly, seen to create wealth and improve efficiency even as it increased poverty and led to the dislocation of large masses of people. Stories about the poverty of the Irish or the Amerindians, their inability to improve the land or govern their passions, their exposure to extreme deprivation and want, all served as rationales for further conquest, displantation, and assimilation. Primitive accumulation was, in a sense, creating the conditions for a new kind of scarcity: a form of scarcity that was chronic and immensely destructive, but also dynamic and creative—a *productive scarcity*.

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The relationship between utopia and paradise in the early modern period must be understood against this historical backdrop of enclosure and imperialist expansion. If, following Davis’ key insight, we are to understand paradise and utopia as structurally opposed solutions to the problem of scarcity, we should, I think, recognize that the kind of scarcity that is implicit here—a regulative, productive scarcity—is an historically specific rather than universal condition. Utopia is more “realistic” in its representation of the problem of scarcity only in the sense that it embraces the possibilities opened up by this new productive scarcity. The utopist surveys the massive social dislocation that results from the emergence of capitalism and European imperialism as the ground for a new and better social order. Even as More and Bacon criticize aspects of enclosure and imperialism, their utopias nevertheless reflect and develop potentialities implicit in the very object of critique. If early modern representations of paradise, arcadia, and Cokaygne provide much more fanciful and unrealistic solutions to the problem of scarcity, they should not be understood to be simply irrational fantasies of social equality and material abundance left over from the archaic or pre-historical past; they are, rather, idealizations of the “primitive” and the “common” in the present. In however fantastic a form, paradise in the early modern period represents an imaginary escape from the very problem of scarcity to which utopia must conform.

Paradise, however, cannot actually escape the problem of scarcity any more than utopia can solve it, and the two impulses—escape and control—are present in both utopia and paradise. In the most well-known and complex work of early modern hexameral poetry, Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, the distinction breaks down entirely. Paradise becomes utopian in Milton’s epic poem. The relationship between epic and empire has been the subject of several important recent studies of *Paradise Lost*, but this chapter will explore the related but
much overlooked question of the relationship between hexameron and utopia. The meaning of Milton’s imperial epic can be developed through an analysis of its relationship to the utopian mode. The utopian dimension of Paradise Lost has rarely been explored, however, because paradise and utopia are still seen as either discrete stages in the development of reason or structurally opposed solutions to the problem of scarcity. The idea of paradise and the idea of utopia imply opposed conceptions of nature and desire and opposed conceptions of the reconciliation of nature and desire. But this opposition, if it is real, must be understood dialectically. In Paradise Lost, as in the Genesis story, the problem of scarcity seems to be suspended or made irrelevant, but the very abundance of nature becomes a threat that must be contained. The struggle to improve nature becomes the main occupation of the inhabitants of Milton’s Eden. The contradictions that arise from the representation of this unfallen moral economy of work and pleasure are also closely tied to the scene of the fall, and in narrative terms the unfolding of this contradiction directly precedes and provides the opportunity for the temptation of Eve. Adam and Eve first become separated from one another in Eden as a result of an argument over the meaning and function of their labour, the necessity or arbitrariness of the task, and its instrumental or moral character. In Milton’s representation of nature, labour, and desire, the lineaments of possible utopian futures can be perceived hanging in the balance at the moment paradise is lost.

4. The Sovereign Planter

One of the ways in which utopia is set apart from paradise is the meaning ascribed to labour in the ideal society. Utopias typically involve the creation of social and political institutions and the rational organization of physical and intellectual labour as solutions to the problem of scarcity. Paradise, by contrast, appears to make both political institutions and labour itself unnecessary since natural abundance and human temperance magically resolve the problem of scarcity. In Milton’s paradise, however, Adam and Eve still labour even though nature offers itself freely and all things are framed by the “sovran Planter /… to man’s delightful use” (4.691-2). This is not in itself unusual, of course. Adam’s labour is frequently referenced in renaissance art, poetry and religious homilies, and in Genesis Adam is instructed to “dress and keep” the garden of Eden before the fall, implying some form of labour takes place in the unfallen state. But Milton gives this labour a peculiar logic that appears to be underdeveloped in earlier iterations of the myth. A number of scholars have pointed out that the labour Adam and Eve perform in the garden functions as an allegory for self-discipline and control.62 This moral-allegorical dimension is indeed important, but labour in Milton’s paradise is not only allegorical. In Paradise Lost, unfallen nature—while fertile and superabundant—is not perfectly adapted to human ends and must be physically restrained, cleared, cut back, and controlled in order to preserve the enclosure of paradise. In Paradise Lost, nature in its unfallen state is not entirely humanized. Wrested from Chaos by the “sovran Planter,” Eden still has a tendency to become “luxurious,” “wanton,”

“overgrown, grotesque and wild.” Left unchecked, nature returns to the chaos out of which it was formed. Unfallen nature in *Paradise Lost* is not static, but has a vital, generative power of its own that exceeds and disorders the form given to it. What is unique and interesting, then, about Milton’s representation of pre-fallen labour is that he gives this labour a *rational basis*. Labour is not just an arbitrary imposition placed upon Adam and Eve to ensure they are not idle. In *Paradise Lost* Adam and Eve’s labour is *necessary*. The reformation and reordering of nature in Eden is essential to the maintenance of order and is needed in order to prevent Eden from regressing back into wilderness. The very superabundance that magically removes the threat of scarcity also becomes, in *Paradise Lost*, an imperative to labour.

Milton’s representation of pre-fallen labour in *Paradise Lost* draws on a Protestant tradition of interpreting Genesis 2.15. In this passage from the Jahwist account of the creation story, “God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.” Pre-reformation exegetes generally allegorize this passage or stress the pleasure and delight Adam received from cultivating the soil before the fall. In the *Judean Antiquities*, Flavius Josephus touches on the question of Adam’s labour and suggests that God intended Adam to live in ease, “with all things such as contribute to enjoyment and pleasure arising automatically in accordance with [his] providence, without toil and hardship.”

According to Philo, God provided Adam all the means of living well in order that he might be free to contemplate the wonders of God’s creation. In the unfallen state, Philo writes: “Nature seemed almost to cry aloud in so many words that like the first father of the race they were to

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63 See especially 4.131-83, 4.610-33, and 9.201-25

spend their days without toil or trouble surrounded by lavish abundance of all that they needed.” Nature, he says, gives itself to man in that original state, and all good things “coming forth spontaneously and all in readiness” made physical labour unnecessary. But Philo also claims that God left “to the cultivator,” that is, Adam, “the superintendence and the work of caring for [the garden], such as watering it, tending it, nurturing it, spading it, digging trenches, and irrigating it with water.” It was also necessary to guard the garden, Philo says, against wild animals, drought, and rainstorms, although he does not explain why there would be wild animals or natural disasters in paradise, or why paradise should need cultivation at all if all good things come forth spontaneously and in lavish abundance without any need of toil.

In De Genesi ad Litteram, Augustine claims that in the unfallen state “there was no painful effort but only pleasure and enthusiasm when the gifts of God’s creation came forth in joyful and abundant harvest with the help of man’s effort.” Adam’s labour helps to bring this harvest about, but this work was more like leisure or a pastime, described as a “spiritual pleasure” freely wished, “and not in accordance with what bodily needs might force upon him against his will.” Sensing an ambiguity in the Greek that was not present in the Latin


67 Ibid. Ambrose repeats Philo’s claims in his reading of paradise, saying that “although … Paradise did not require labor in the fields, the first man, even in Paradise, undertook a kind of toil so as to furnish a law for future ages by which to bind us to the performance and to the preservation of our bounden duty and to the function of supporting hereditary succession.” See Saint Ambrose, Hexameron, Paradise, and Cain and Abel in The Fathers of the Church, vol. 42, trans. J. Savage (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1961) 303.

translation, Augustine suggests that we might actually read this passage to mean that God placed Adam in paradise to cultivate and guard *humanity*, and Adam himself is the garden that God cultivates. 69 Aquinas in the *Summa Theologica* likewise shifts the subject of labour from man to God, and says Adam is placed in Eden in order that God might “work in man and keep him.” While Adam is also to dress and keep the garden, such cultivation, he writes, “would not have involved labor, as it did after sin; but would have been pleasant on account of man’s practical knowledge of the powers of nature.” 70 Neither Augustine nor Aquinas view this work as actual labour, but interpret it to be either an allegory for the operation of God’s creative power, or a pleasant pastime or spiritual activity that has no explicit practical purpose or instrumental function. In fact, to say that Adam’s physical labour was *necessary* in paradise, according to Aquinas, would confuse fallen with unfallen labour, and would imply that paradise was not perfect or not ordered to man’s benefit. 71

The use of Genesis 2.15 in homilies against indolence or in praise of the virtue of physical labour becomes much more common following the Reformation. 72 Protestant writers and clergymen such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Donne, John Salkeld,

69 Augustine 8.10.19-23. Augustine argues that Gen. 2.15 should read “And the Lord God took the man whom He made and placed him in Paradise in order to cultivate him so that he would be just and guard him so that he would be safe …. For God does not need our service, but we need His rule that He may cultivate and guard us” (8.11.24).


71 Aquinas Q102 A3.

72 The notion that Adam and Eve’s work was a deterrent to idleness is expressed in Barhebraeus’ *Scholia on the Old Testament* and in the 13th century text *The Book of the Bee* written by bishop Solomon of Akhlát. Solomon asks “Why did God say ‘to till it and to guard it?’—for Paradise needed no guarding, and was adorned with fruit of all kinds, and there was none to injure it—unless it were to exhort him to keep His commandments, and to till it that he might not become a lover of idleness.” Solomon of Akhlát, *The Book of the Bee*, trans. E. Budge (Piscataway: Gorgias, 2006) 18. This reading, however, is the exception rather than the rule for pre-Reformation exegetes; for Protestant writers, the problem of idleness is central to their interpretation of the passage. See also Corcoran, *Milton’s Paradise with Reference to the Hexameral Background*, op. cit., 55 n59.
George Walker, John White, Alexander Ross, and Gervase Babington all begin to interpret the instruction to dress and keep the garden literally, and read the passage as a sign of the intrinsic dignity of actual physical labour or as a warning against the sin of idleness. The gloss in the Geneva Bible on Gen. 2.15 notes that even in the unfallen state, “God wolde not haue man ydle, thogh as yet there was no nede to labour;” Luther and Calvin express similar sentiments. In his Lectures on Genesis, Luther writes that while “work … in the state of innocence would have been play and joy … it is appropriate here also to point out that man was created not for leisure but for work, even in the state of innocence. Therefore the idle sort of life, such as that of monks and nuns, deserves to be condemned.” Luther dismisses Augustine and Aquinas’ claim that God was to do the working and protecting, saying “the text speaks solely of human work and protecting.” Calvin, too, uses this passage to argue that human life is given meaning though work and God’s intent was always to prevent idleness, even in the unfallen state. “Men were created to employ themselves in some work, and not to lie down in inactivity and idleness,” he writes. This labour was pleasant and free from trouble and weariness, but “since, however, God ordained that man should be exercised in the culture of the ground, he condemned in his person, all indolent

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76 Luther, ibid.
The custody of the garden and its fruits was given to man, Calvin says, “on the condition, that being content with a frugal and moderate use of them, [he] should take care of what shall remain. … Let him so feed on its fruits, that he neither dissipates it by luxury, nor permits it to be marred or ruined by neglect.” Other Protestant writers used the passage to condemn mere contemplative activity or to praise the active life. John Donne argues that the injunction to dress and keep paradise makes the building of paradise a this-worldly, present concern and not something to be passively contemplated or anticipated. Man, he says, “is not placed in this world onely for speculation; He is not sent into this world to live out of it, but to live in it; Adam was not put into Paradise, onely in that Paradise to contemplate the future Paradise, but to dress and keep the present.” Such interpretations seem to have been fairly common, and they present a challenge to Augustine and Aquinas’ readings, which stress the allegorical dimension of Adam’s work and his freedom from physical labour. Some writers also invoke the passage to attack the indolence of the rich. John Salkeld uses it to condemn not only the contemplative life in general, but also those idle gentlemen who live off the labour of others. Even “where there was no neede of labour God would not haue man idle,” he observes: “not an ill item for our lazie gallants, who think their gentilitie to consist in idleness, and a point of honour to lieu of other mens labour.”

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78 Calvin 125.


80 Arnold Williams writes that “this sort of application was probably fairly common, for [French theologian and mathematician] Mersenne feels called, on this text, to defend the contemplative life against Luther and the heretics who had attacked it.” *The Common Expositor*, op. cit. 110.

This obsession with idleness reflects a certain anxiety among early modern Protestants with the absence of necessity in Eden and the lavish abundance of nature in the unfallen state. While Protestant writers usually note that Adam’s labour was joyful and easy work, unlike their ancient and medieval predecessors they do not allegorize it or entirely collapse the distinction between work and play. Adam’s work was imagined to be delightful, but it was still supposed to be real, physical work. Adam’s dressing and keeping is read literally, and the moral character of his work is imagined to be an expression of the intrinsic value and dignity of labour in general. But this interpretation introduces a contradiction: read literally Adam’s labour appears to be an arbitrary task without any real meaning or purpose since the abundance of unfallen nature should make all tilling and sowing unnecessary. Adam is essentially tasked with busywork in spite of the fact that this work is also supposed to express his dignity and purpose as a human being. All commentators, ancient and modern, agree that Adam’s labour was meant to be a sign of obedience, but it is not clear why so many Protestant writers saw in this sign of obedience the form of purposive activity—tilling the soil, cultivating the land—without any actual purpose outside the performance of duty. Fear of idleness in the unfallen state made them stress the physicality of the work, but this only heightens the tension between the free satisfaction of bodily needs and the imperative to labour.

Most Protestant commentators on Genesis do not attempt to resolve the contradictions implicit in their literal interpretation of Adam’s labour. It is enough for them to note that Adam performed his duty, and while it was not necessary, it was also an easy and joyous task to perform. Milton is a notable exception in that he gives Adam’s physical labour both purpose and necessity. Like other Protestant writers, Milton emphasizes the fact that work
and duty belonged to the original state and that since Adam and Eve were without sin they
could not have been indolent. However, Milton goes a step further and stresses the *necessity*
of Adam and Eve’s labour while still maintaining the perfection and super-abundance of
unfallen nature. Adam’s work was, for Milton, the performance of duty, but it was not an
arbitrary task. Adam and Eve must work to control the excessive fertility of nature. Their
work, then, does not exactly involve planting or tilling the garden, but *restraining* and
*subduing* its luxuriant growth and imposing order on nature. Adam and Eve do not need to
help the garden grow, but they need to regulate that growth and restrain its tendency towards
excess.

A number of writers have suggested that one of the most strikingly original features
of *Paradise Lost* is its representation of unfallen nature as “tending to wild” and several have
suggested that this representation of nature gives Adam’s labour a purpose which is lacking
or is underdeveloped in earlier interpretations of the story. J. Martin Evans argues that in no
previous Eden had there been anything “overgrown,” or “wanton,” “unsightly” or
“unsmooth.” Milton’s Eden does not have the stability and timeless perfection attributed to
it by earlier poets and artists, Evans writes: it will not stay perfect on its own accord but
requires human labour if it is not to be overwhelmed and engulfed by the surrounding
wilderness. Joseph Duncan suggests that while most writers focus on Adam’s planting or
sometimes ploughing as necessary or beneficial work, “Milton conceived paradise as a wild
plateau with an eternal spring and superabundant yield, rather than as a cultivated garden.”
Duncan notes that Milton’s Adam and Eve “chiefly need to lop, prune, and clear the
luxuriant growth,” and so their work is not so much about *planting* as *clearing*—holding

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82 Evans, op. cit., 249.
back the growth of nature rather than helping the garden to grow. Likewise, for Barbara Lewalski, Milton effects “a redefinition of the state of Innocence which is a very far cry from the stable, serene completeness attributed to that state both in myth and in traditional theology.” In contrast to previous iterations of the myth, *Paradise Lost* presents Edenic life as “radical growth and process.” By reframing unfallen nature in this way, Lewalski claims that the charge to dress and keep the garden is made a necessary task and so Milton departs from much biblical exegesis which saw in it “merely a provision for pleasant exercise, or a deterrent to idleness, or else—in Augustine’s symbolic reading—a directive to man to care for his own soul or a promise that God will work in man as in a garden.”

Evans and Lewalski make sense of Milton’s departure from exegetical tradition by showing how his representation of nature resolves contradictions inherent in conventional interpretations of Adam’s labour. But while Evans’ and Lewalski’s readings offer many fascinating insights, they also tend to stress the coherence of this narrative and pass over new contradictions that are created as Milton attempts to reconcile Protestant teachings on idleness with the super-abundance of unfallen nature. In his attempt to represent Adam and Eve’s labour in paradise as both a moral duty and a practical necessity, that is, in his attempt to make this labour rational and purposeful rather than simply a sign of obedience, Milton does not exactly resolve the central contradiction that underlies Protestant interpretations of paradisial labour, but rather crystallizes it or makes it visible. While the paradise of ancient and medieval exegetical tradition began to appear at odds with a Protestant and increasingly

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85 Lewalski 89.
capitalist ideology of work discipline, the literal interpretation of the injunction to dress and keep the garden which emerged in Protestant homilies against idleness introduced other problems. The literal interpretation could not make sense of Adam and Eve’s labour except as a sign of obedience, and so their labour appears to be an arbitrary imposition lacking any necessity in itself. Milton’s attempt to preserve both the meaning and physicality of Adam and Eve’s labour, however, imbues nature with a chaotic vitality which must be actively subdued prior to the fall. Dominion is not simply given in *Paradise Lost*; it must be exercised, even in the unfallen state. In Milton’s epic, the excessive, exuberant growth of unfallen nature threatens the coherence of paradise and must be restrained, controlled and ordered by human labour. The very perfection of the Edenic state—its natural abundance and the free satisfaction of desire—also represents a threat to the stability of that state.

5. The Verdurous Wall

In *Paradise Lost*, Edenic nature is frequently represented as “tending to wild” or exceeding human design or control. The first glimpse we have of this unfallen nature is the wilderness surrounding paradise. Eden is bounded by a wall of wild growth which acts as a barrier separating the wilderness of Adam’s “nether Empire” from the “enclosure green” of Paradise itself. When Satan first sets foot on the earth in Book 4 he finds himself in this wilderness and journeys by foot to the wall of paradise. “On he fares,” Milton writes:

…and to the border comes
Of *Eden*, where delicious Paradise,
Now nearer, Crowns with her enclosure green,
As with a rural mound the champaign head
Of a steep wilderness, whose hairy sides
With thicket overgrown, grotesque and wild,
Access deni’d; and over head up grew
Insuperable highth of loftiest shade,
Cedar, and Pine, and Fir, and branching Palm,
A Silvan Scene, and as the ranks ascend
Shade above shade, a woody Theatre
Of stateliest view. Yet higher than thir tops
The verdurous wall of Paradise up sprung:
Which to our general Sire gave prospect large
Into his nether Empire neighbouring round. (4.131-45)

This is the first view we have of unfallen nature, and while it is described as a “lovely landscape” capable of inspiring “Vernal delight and joy, able to drive / All sadness but despair” (4.152-6), it is also described as “overgrown, grotesque and wild.” Of course, the term “grotesque” in this context suggests a complex, intricate, or irregular form, and is not usually taken to imply ugly distortion or unnatural exaggeration. But the term does not just suggest complex vegetive patterns or picturesque irregularity; even in Milton’s time it could be used to evoke the fantastically extravagant.\textsuperscript{86} Moreover, since the neighbouring adjectives—“overgrown” and “wild”—also imply excessive growth or fertility, we can picture here a form of the nature that is beautiful, but also in some sense exceeds human design or control. Paradise is surrounded by a “steep wilderness,” a “savage hill” whose “hairy sides” “so thick entwin’d,” Milton writes, “As one continu’d brake, the undergrowth /

Of shrubs and tangling bushes had perplexed / All path of Man or Beast that pass’d that way” (4.174-6). Unfallen nature is lovely, but at least outside the enclose of Eden, it is also savage and wild, overgrown and tangled, perplexing and grotesque—a twining mass of growth that rises up into a steep “verdurous wall” that seems to both protect and menace the enclosure around which it circles.

\textsuperscript{86} The OED cites John Hall’s \textit{Paradoxes} (1653) and John Dryden’s \textit{The Hind and the Panther} (1687) as examples of texts that use the word to refer to designs or forms that are “fantastically extravagant” or “characterized by distortion.” See “grotesque,” in the \textit{Oxford English Dictionary}, 2a.
The wall of paradise is, of course, rather ineffective as a barrier against Satan, who leaps over it with ease, but we also find that as a boundary separating the enclosed garden from the surrounding wilderness it is surprisingly permeable and unstable. Even within the garden, unfallen nature is represented in a state of exuberant disorder. When we first catch a glimpse of paradise itself, Milton gives us a view of Edenic nature unrestrained by “nice art” or the rigid order of the formal renaissance garden. The narrator attempts to tell, “if Art could tell,” what nature was like before the fall:

How from that Sapphire Fount the crisped Brooks,
Rolling on Orient Pearl and sands of Gold,
With mazy error under pendent shades
Ran Nectar, visiting each plant, and fed
Flow’rs worthy of Paradise which not nice Art
In Beds and curious Knots, but Nature boon
Pour’d forth profuse on Hill and Dale and Plain,
Both where the morning Sun first warmly smote
The open field, and where the unpierc’t shade
Imbrown’d the noontide Bow’rs: Thus was this place,
A happy rural seat of various view … (4.236-47)

Both the “nice Art” of the formal garden and the art of the poem itself are presented as inadequate representations of unfallen nature, the abundance of which “pour[s] forth profuse” over the landscape, fed by a river that rolls over “Orient Pearl” and winds through the garden with “mazy error.” Milton represents this profusion of luxuriant growth synaesthetically, dissolving the boundaries between the senses in his description of Eden. “The Birds,” he writes, “thir choir apply; airs, vernal airs, / Breathing the smell of field and grove, attune / The trembling leaves” (4.264-6). Not the birds, but the “airs” themselves breathe in the odours of the field and grove and harmonize with the movements of the leaves. Sound, colour, smell, and movement blend with one another to create a disorienting effect.\textsuperscript{87} A

\textsuperscript{87} For an analysis of the synaesthetic construction of this passage as a sign of the utopian “sensuous plentitude” of Eden, see Christopher Kendrick, \textit{Milton: A Study in Ideology and Form}, op. cit. 191.
catalogue of other wondrous gardens and sites of temptation—the “field / Of Enna,” the “Grove / Of Daphne,” the “Castalian Spring,” the “Nyseian Isle” and “Mount Amara”—appear in a sweeping paralipsis, alluded to and then discarded as fictions or pale imitations of paradise (4.269-81). Milton’s description, like the garden itself, is full of “mazy error,” negative allusions and impossible, synaesthetic constructions which also seem to evoke a surprisingly familiar English landscape, a “happy rural seat of various view” filled with recognizably English plants and flowers.  

Paradise does not have the formal symmetry and artful order of the renaissance garden, fixed “in Beds and curious Knots,” but almost anticipates the romantic English landscape garden, including irregularity, profusion and “error” as essential aspects of its design.

The “mazy error” and profusion of unfallen nature in Milton’s paradise still seem quite different from the wilderness outside the wall, which, “overgrown, grotesque and wild,” presents an impediment to human ends or designs. But even within the walls of the garden itself we find the same tendency towards excessive growth and chaotic fertility. In fact, the narrator implies that within the garden there are already waste regions or regions which have returned to wilderness in spite of Adam and Eve’s efforts. When Satan roams through paradise, he passes “Through wood, through waste, o’er hill, o’er dale” (4.538), and when Raphael makes his descent into the garden we see him moving through:

A Wilderness of sweets; for Nature here  
Wanton’d as in her prime, and play’d at will  
Her Virgin Fancies, pouring forth more sweet,

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Wild above Rule or Art, enormous bliss. (5.294-7)

So even within the walls of paradise nature is “Wild above Rule or Art,” and while it is described as a “blissful field” and a “Wilderness of sweets,” filled with groves of myrrh, “flow’ring Odors, Cassia, Nard, and Balm,” this profusion of wild growth also presents an obstacle to human will and an impetus to labour. The garden contains, Adam says, “branches overgrown, / That mock our scant manuring,” and Eve describes the garden as filled with “wanton growth” which “derides” their efforts, “tending to wild” (4.627-29; 9.211-12). Adam describes this wanton growth as “unsightly and unsmooth,” and the narrator too describes fruit trees which, having grown “overwoody reached too far,” and now need human hands “to check / Fruitless imbraces” (4.630-1; 5.213). Adam insists that they will nevertheless “keep from Wilderness with ease” (9.245), but this also implies that the surrounding wilderness is constantly encroaching upon them or that the garden itself has a tendency towards excessive growth which must constantly be checked by human intervention. All of this suggests that the barrier does not really keep the wilderness out. The boundary between the wilderness and the enclosed garden—between nature outside human habitation and nature adapted to human ends—is not a built structure shaped by human art, but a “verdurous wall” and a tangled mass of growth that blocks and perplexes “all path of Man.” The wall which marks the boundary between paradise and the surrounding wilderness is itself the wilderness as synecdoche.

As in More’s Utopia or Bacon’s New Atlantis, Milton confronts the problem of situating his paradise within the world—within a world which, while unfallen, is still subject to a kind of uneven development. By presenting unfallen nature in a state of dynamic growth and superabundance, “tending to wild,” Milton introduces an element of instability and
temporality that makes his paradise structurally very similar to utopia. For Davis, as we have seen, arcadias differ from utopias in that while the former resolve the problem of scarcity by humanizing nature or magically expanding the abundance of nature, the latter overcome scarcity through a more rational social organization of labour. But in *Paradise Lost* we find that the expansion of satisfactions does not alone resolve the problem of scarcity because this very abundance creates a kind luxuriant overgrowth which threatens the stability of the Edenic order and becomes itself an impetus to labour. Scarcity is removed, along with “irksome toil,” but only so long as Adam and Eve work to prevent the chaotic overgrowth of nature, both externally and from within. The problem of scarcity is resolved, but as in utopia, it is resolved through organizing and disciplining labour. Scarcity is absent but remains in the background as the future consequence of the fall, the punishment for allowing the garden and the self to regress. The prohibition against eating the forbidden fruit is, in part, a prohibition against idleness, and the threat of death is bound up with the threat of scarcity. By representing Eden’s very abundance as an imperative to labour rather than as a condition free from labour, Milton’s paradise becomes utopian in character, or rather, in his attempt to provide a rational basis for Adam and Eve’s labour, he draws out the utopian dimension implicit in earlier iterations and interpretations of the myth.

6. Work and Play

“Organization” and “discipline” may seem odd words to apply to Adam and Eve’s work since it is routinely described as a “pleasant task” and a “sweet labour.” Adam seems to imply that they spend a lot of their work time eating and talking and mixing their labour with the “sweet intercourse / Of looks and smiles” (9.238-9). Clearly no foreman or taskmaster is

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90 Davis, op. cit. 24-37.
keeping track of their work shifts. Rarely do we see them at work since the narration in paradise usually begins with a break in their labour—Raphael’s midday visit in Book 5, for instance, or Adam and Eve’s evening rest or morning prayers in Books 4 and 5. When Adam and Eve are working the narrator tends to wander off, or else turns around to describe the plans and schemes of their unseen observers. When we first catch a glimpse of the pair they are resting in the shade after a morning working in the garden, but very little is mentioned of this work which occurs outside the frame of the poem. Their leisure rather than their work is what we see:

They sat them down, and after no more toil
Of thir sweet Gard’ning labor than suffic’d
To recommend cool Zephyr, and made ease
More easy, wholesome thirst and appetite
More grateful, to thir Supper Fruits they fell,
Nectarine Fruits which the compliant boughs
Yielded them, side-long as they sat recline
On the soft downy Bank damaskt with flow’rs. (4.327-34)

The labour they perform seems to be a pleasure in itself or is a kind of free exercise of the body. Their labour amplifies other pleasures—appetite, thirst and rest—which might otherwise find less “wholesome” means of amplification. The work they perform is also limited by the pleasure derived from it. There is, Milton says, no more toil than sufficed to make ease more easy, pleasure more pleasurable. When they rest, “compliant boughs” yield them all the food they need. Nature offers itself to them freely without effort as they recline at ease on a bank of flowers.

The absence of direct representation of Adam and Eve’s labour is not unique to Paradise Lost. Narrative descriptions of Adam and Eve’s labour are largely absent from early modern hexameral poetry. In Josuah Sylvester’s translation of Guillaume de Saluste Du Bartas’ Divine Weeks, for instance, Adam is not idle, but his work is described rather
abstractly or by way of metaphor. Adam’s labour is a kind of “dance” or a “pleasant exercise,” but what he actually does is left unclear. “For Edens earth was then so fertile far,” he writes:

That he made only sweet assayes in that,  
Of skilfull industry, and naked wrought
More for delight, then for the gaine he sought.  
In briefe, it was a pleasant exercise,  
A labour like’t, a paine much like the guise
Of cunning dancers, who although they skip,  
Run, caper, vault, traverse, and turne, and trip,
From morn till even, at night againe full merry,
Renew their dance, of dancing never weary. 91

Adam’s labour is described rather obliquely as the “sweet assayes … / Of skilfull industry”—not concrete action, but effort, skill, and industry in the abstract. Du Bartas is less interested in what Adam actually does than he is in the pleasure Adam derives from the work. All we learn is that it is a “labour like’t,” and it is performed as dancers or hunters might perform their labour, that is, by “following their desire.” 92 Other writers are even more oblique. In Hugo Grotius’ Adamus Exul, Eve gestures to the various “kinds of plants this wide plantation [arbustum] bears,” but God is the one who plants in Grotius’ tragedy, and Adam and Eve are never pictured at work. 93 Similarly, in Giambattista Andreini’s L’Adamo, the “Tiller of the fair celestial meadows” is God, and human work in paradise seems to be


92 Ibid. 2.2.323. Planting and pruning does take place in Du Bartas’ paradise, but these actions are undertaken by God, not Adam. “God himselfe (as Gardner) treads the allies,” he writes:

With trees and corne covers the hils and vallies,
Summons sweet sleepe with noise of hundred brooks
And sunne-proofe arbors makes in sundry nookes:
He plants, he proines, he pares, he trimmeth round
Th’ever-green beauties of a fruitfull ground. (2.2.71-6)

unnecessary. Andreini’s Eve tells us that “If I should wish for food or drink, behold, / Ready for me are fruits, milk, honey, manna.” Joost van den Vondel’s *Adam in Ballingschap*, follows the same pattern. The garden is planted by the deity, and Adam and Eve’s work is not depicted in any concrete way. “This garden by the Deity / Was planted as man’s calm abode,” Adam says, “With all that heart could wish bestowed / And tilth for loving husbandry.” Nothing more is mentioned about their work. Milton, unlike his contemporaries, develops a rationale for Adam and Eve’s work that involves re-imagining the very structure of nature, but direct depiction of Adam and Eve’s labour still seems to be difficult for him. While their work is pushed into the background, however, we can still infer from Milton’s attempts to rationalize and make sense of their work that Adam and Eve’s “sweet gard’ning labour” occupies a considerable amount of time and energy, and may in fact take up most of their waking hours.

The importance of their work and the amount of time and energy devoted to it is actually described fairly early on. At the end of Satan’s first day in paradise in Book 4, Adam begins to speak to Eve about time, the marking of time and the division of time into day and night or periods of work and rest. Adam’s observations on the marking of time lead into a lengthy digression on the nature and purpose of their labour, the intrinsic dignity of labour, and the differences between themselves and the other animals. As evening approaches, Adam says:

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95 Andreini 243.
th’ hour
Of night, and all things now retir’d to rest
Mind us of like repose, since God hath set
Labor and rest, as day and night to men
Successive, and the timely dew of sleep
Now falling with soft slumbrous weight inclines
Our eye-lids; other Creatures all day long
Rove idle unemploy’d, and less need rest;
Man hath his daily work of body or mind
Appointed, which declares his Dignity,
And the regard of Heav’n on all his ways;
While other Animals unactive range,
And of thir doings God takes no account.
Tomorrow ere fresh Morning streak the East
With first approach of light, we must be ris’n,
And at our pleasant labor, to reform
Yon flow’ry Arbours, yonder Alleys green,
Our walk at noon, with branches overgrown,
That mock our scant manuring, and require
More hands than ours to lop thir wanton growth:
Those Blossoms also, and those dropping Gums,
That lie bestrown unsightly and unsmooth,
Ask riddance, if we mean to tread with ease;
Meanwhile, as Nature wills, Night bids us rest. (4.610-33)

While Milton stresses the pleasure and ease of Adam and Eve’s work and is careful not to depict it too concretely, they clearly spend a great deal of time on their pleasant task. Their work seems to occupy far more time than the six-hour work shift of Thomas More’s Utopians, for instance. From “first approach of light” until the “hour of night” Adam and Eve have work to do, and although it is pleasurable and is interspersed with meals, rest and conversation, it is not exactly reducible to play. It is contrasted, after all, with the play of the other animals, who “rove idle unemployed” or “unactive range,” and of whose doings “God takes no account.” The unactive activity of other creatures is presented as pure play, performed only for itself or for human pleasure. When Adam and Eve rest from their labour, for instance, “About them frisking play’d / All the Beasts of th’ Earth”—sporting, chasing and gamboling “to make them mirth” (4.340-6). Adam and Eve are also playful, but they
divide their time between work and play. Labour and the division of purposive activity from non-purposive activity is what distinguishes human beings from the other animals according to Adam. While other animals ignore the passing of time and the cycle of night and day, God, he says “hath set / Labor and rest, as day and night to men / Successive,” and so the awareness of time, the marking of time, and the division of time into periods of work and rest are closely associated in Adam’s mind with his own humanity and capacity for reason. “Man hath his daily work of body or mind / Appointed,” Adam says, “which declares his Dignity, / And the regard of Heav’n on all his ways.” Adam affirms the intrinsic dignity of labour as the key feature which distinguishes humanity from other creatures. Human beings are aware of time, they divide time into work and rest, purposive and non-purposive activity, and this work time elevates human beings and human activity to something dignified and worthy of the attention of God.

This stress on the dignity of labour, the division of time into labour and rest, and the distinction between elevated human labour and the idleness and unemployment of the lower animals is consistent with many Protestant interpretations of the injunction to dress and keep paradise. A strain of Weber’s “Protestant ethic” animates Paradise Lost, but it is not the association of idleness with animality alone that implies a specifically Protestant ethic; it is Adam and Eve’s inner-worldly asceticism, their need to control waste and excess, and the performance of their daily work as a kind of secular calling which is of crucial significance here.⁹⁷ Many of the themes and ideas that Adam introduces in his speech on the division of

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⁹⁷ Weber argues that Reformation creates a new understanding of the concept of a “calling” (Beruf). While secular, everyday labour was sometimes held in high esteem in the Middle Ages, Weber writes, “what was definitely new was the estimation of fulfillment of duty within secular callings as being of the absolutely highest level possible for moral activity. It was this that led, inevitably, to the idea of the religious significance of secular everyday labor and gave rise to the concept of the calling. So in the concept of ‘calling’ is expressed that central dogma of all Protestant denominations which rejects the Catholic division of Christian moral
time and the dignity of labour recur in other parts of the poem, particularly at the beginning of Book 9 where Eve argues for a general division of labour and tries to make sense of their work as a means of earning their rest and subsistence. Although Adam is critical of what he sees as Eve’s preoccupation with the “lowest end of human life” and her strict interpretation of the injunction to labour, Adam’s own criticisms are premised upon a set of associations which suggest that he nevertheless shares with her a proto-bourgeois world-view. This dispute, moreover, is not merely incidental or accidental in relation to the larger themes in Milton’s poem. It plays a key role in the unfolding narrative arc of creation, temptation, and fall. Adam and Eve’s argument over the meaning and purpose of their work is what leads to their separation, and this separation is presented by the narrator as the proximate cause of their fall. The question of how or why they work, then, is important because the preoccupation with the function of labour and the rationalization of labour reveals a utopian impulse at work in the poem and is also one in a series of dangerous, possibly unanswerable questions which leads to the loss of paradise itself.


98 I am referring here specifically to the Weltanschauung of the early modern English bourgeoisie and sectors of the landed gentry engaged in capitalist agriculture. The bourgeoisie elsewhere in Europe in the 17th century were not necessarily bound by the same kind of market imperatives as the English and so were motivated by a different set of cultural and ideological frames of reference. The French bourgeoisie, for instance, largely derived their income from their control of state offices and so had other, non-capitalist means of extracting surpluses. For a critical analysis of the “bourgeois paradigm” and the conflation of capitalist with bourgeois ideology, see Ellen Meiksins Wood’s Liberty and Property (London: Verso, 2012) 290-300, and The Pristine Culture of Capitalism (London: Verso, 1991) 1-20.
7. Divided Labours

At the beginning of Book 9, before they set to work, the narrator tells us that Adam and Eve “commune” as to “how that day they best may ply / Thir growing work: for much thir work outgrew / The hands’ dispatch of two Gard’ning so wide” (9.201-3). Eve, addressing Adam, begins by considering the means by which they might better divide their work-time in order to deal with the encroaching wilderness: “Adam,” she says,

well may we labor still to dress
This Garden, still to tend Plant, Herb and Flow’r,
Our pleasant task enjoin’d, but till more hands
Aid us, the work under our labor grows,
Luxurious by restraint; what we by day
Lop overgrown, or prune, or prop, or bind,
One night or two with wanton growth derides
Tending to wild. Thou therefore now advise
Or hear what to my mind first thoughts present,
Let us divide our labors, thou where choice
Leads thee, or where most needs, whether to wind
The Woodbine round this Arbour, or direct
The clasping Ivy where to climb, while I
In yonder Spring of Roses intermexc
With Myrtle, find what to redress till Noon:
For while so near each other thus all day
Our task we choose, what wonder if so near
Looks intervene and smiles, or object new
Casual discourse draw on, which intermits
Our day’s work brought to little, though begun
Early, and th’ hour of Supper comes unearn’d. (9.205-25)

Eve makes several original and unsettling observations here which respond to and elaborate on Adam’s earlier reflections in Book 4 on the need to divide time between work and rest. First she sees that the scope of the work exceeds their efforts and suggests that at least until their numbers grow and more hands are able to assist them, they must divide their labours in order to work more efficiently and as a means of better dividing work and play. Second, she introduces an idea that remains only implicit in Adam’s earlier speech—the idea that their
rest and sustenance must be earned through work and could possibly go “unearned” if the task remains incomplete.

There are several ambiguities or potential confusions that arise from Eve’s argument for a general division of labour in paradise. It should be noted that the idea of a divided paradise was not strictly speaking an innovation on Milton’s part. Corcoran notes that in a few non-canonical variants of the story the garden was divided between Adam and Eve, with Adam tilling the north and east, while Eve gardened in the south and west.99 In these stories the division of the garden was used to explain the separation of Adam and Eve at the moment of temptation, but in no early account was this division ever instigated by Eve and it certainly was not presented as a means of improving their productivity.100 At first glance, however, it might not seem that Eve really argues for a division of labour at all, at least not in the sense of a division of work through specialization, with each person mastering specific tasks in order to improve overall productivity. Rather than specialization, she seems to suggest they pursue whatever tasks they wish to perform or seem most necessary, but to pursue them on their own in order to avoid the distraction of each other’s company. According to this reading, the “division of labour” which Eve suggests is of the most basic or fundamental kind—not the specialization of work but the division of work from play. The division which she is suggesting, then, might not really be a division within labour but the division of labour from other, non-instrumental activity. She is essentially expanding on the implications of Adam’s speech on the general division of time into periods of work and rest and arguing that

99 The division of Eden between Adam and Eve is described in the 3rd to 5th century Greek text, The Apocalypse of Moses, and the 9th century Vita Adami et Evae derived from this earlier text. See Corcoran 54.

100 Corcoran argues that Milton represents Eve as the cause of this division in order to exonerate God “from having so arranged the work of the first couple as to leave Eve exposed to temptation,” and so illustrates “her obstinate presumption” (126). I argue, however, that this conscious division of labour follows from Milton’s attempt to give unfallen labour a rational basis.
in each other’s company, looks, smiles and casual discourse “intervene” or “intermit” their labour and so disrupt the division of time which Adam claims is necessary for human beings to distinguish themselves from animals and exert dominion over nature.

But Eve is not simply arguing that they ought to work separately in order to better divide their time between work and play; there is also implicit here an argument for specialization as a basis for a division of labour. Adam, she says, should wind the woodbine or the ivy around the nearby trees while she tends a “Spring of Roses intermixt / With Myrtle.” This might not seem like much of an argument for specialization since there is not, at face value, any purpose or rationale for dividing their work in this way. But read alongside other passages in which Adam and Eve work separately or together, these distinct tasks—winding vines, tending roses—have an allegorical significance tied to gender, fertility, and sexuality. The division of labour which Eve proposes is essentially a gendered division of labour and it is already implicit in the way they go about their work. In Book 8, for instance, when Eve leaves Adam and Raphael alone to discourse on the nature of the cosmos, we see her for a moment going out

> Among her Fruits and Flow’rs,
> To visit how they prosper’d, bud and bloom,
> Her Nursery; they at her coming sprung
> And toucht by her fair tendance gladlier grew. (8.44-7)

Eve’s work is generally associated with tending and nurturing flowers. Flowering plants appear to be the part of nature given over to her particular care and knowledge. In Book 11 she is said to have named the flowers, like Adam who gives names to the animals. This act of naming implies a special knowledge of the natural world, and although it is limited in scope and is not granted the same significance as Adam’s act of naming, it nevertheless implies
specialization and a division—however unequal—of knowledge and labour.\textsuperscript{101} This division of labour with its implied hierarchy of duties is not arbitrary; it has psycho-sexual meaning associated with Eve’s gender. Eve herself is often described as a flower, and her femininity is associated with the object of her labour. At the moment of temptation, separated from Adam, we find Eve “Veil’d in a Cloud of Fragrance, where she stood, / Half spi’d, so thick the Roses blushing round,” and it is in “This Flow’ry Plat, the sweet recess of \textit{Eve},” that Satan first approaches her (9.425-6, 456).

The task Eve assigns to Adam is also implicitly gendered work and has allegorical significance tied to his sexuality. While Adam in Book 9 is tasked with winding the woodbine or ivy among the trees, in Book 5 Adam and Eve work together and “led the Vine To wed her Elm.” The image of the vine coiled around the elm is a conventional emblem of marriage and fertility that appears throughout classical literature—in Horace’s \textit{Odes}, for example, or Catullus’ \textit{Epithalamion} and Virgil’s \textit{Georgics}.\textsuperscript{102} In Milton’s poem, the vine is also gendered female and

\begin{quote}
spous’d about him [the elm] twines
Her mariagable arms, and with her brings
Her dow’r th’ adopted Clusters, to adorn
His barren leaves. (5.215-19)
\end{quote}

The allegorical significance of this passage has often been used to explain Adam and Eve’s labour in psycho-sexual terms; by leading the vine “to wed her Elm,” Adam and Eve’s work

\textsuperscript{101} See 11.273-7. Nyquist notes that Eve’s act of naming does not have the same meaning as Adam’s act of naming, and “seems never to have had the precise status of an event. … Eve’s ‘naming’ becomes associated not with rational insight and domination but rather with the act of lyrical utterance, and therefore with the affective responsibilities of the domestic sphere into which her subjectivity has always already fallen” (100). See Mary Nyquist, “The Genesis of Gendered Subjectivity in the Divorce Tracts and in \textit{Paradise Lost}, in \textit{Re-membering Milton: Essays on the Texts and Traditions}, eds. M. Nyquist & M. Ferguson (New York: Methuen, 1987) 99-127.

\textsuperscript{102} See Evans, op. cit. 250-1.
inscribes the traditional emblem of marriage onto the natural world—feminine beauty and fertility supported by masculine strength. This has been noted by a number of critics. Michael Lieb, for example, claims that “the underlying image undeniably relates to the basic sexual metaphor of propagation,” and the work they perform is thus a “generative occupation” that reflects in miniature the creative activity of God: “Adam and Eve cause a wedding to occur between plant and plant, so that barrenness may be avoided. Consequently, there is a creating of fruitful growth through sexual union and creative ordering of what is disordered as God creates life from Chaos.” Lewalski argues that this passage reflects the moral-allegorical dimension of Adam and and Eve’s work. “Much of the work Adam and Eve perform in Eden,” she writes, “is an image of the work they should accomplish in the paradise within.” Similarly, Evans uses the passage to argue that Adam and Eve’s physical relationship to the garden can be read as “an image of their psychological relationship both to their own passions and to each other,” and so the harnessing of natural abundance represents an internal struggle to control and direct their own passions.

The division of labour in Book 9, however, undermines this relationship. The communal work that earlier symbolized the marriage of masculine and feminine traits is replaced with a gendered division of labour which is implicitly sterile. When Eve suggests they divide their labour so that she might be free to tend the flowers while he “winds the woodbine” around the trees, or “direct[s] the clasping ivy where to climb,” she is essentially

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104 Lewalski, op. cit. emphasis added 93.

proposing that he wind his own tree, so to speak. In Book 5, the vine wedded to the elm yields heavy clusters of grapes; in Book 9 the clasping ivy and woodbine are merely decorative and lack fruit or flower. By contrast, the solitary Eve in her “Flowr’y Plat” works “to support / Each Flow’r of slender stalk,” but she is also “mindless the while, / Herself, though fairest unsupported Flow’r, / From her best prop so far, and storm so nigh” (9.427-33). Milton’s description of Adam and Eve’s divided labour alludes to and inverts the conventional emblem of the vine and elm. At the moment of temptation we see the elm without the vine, barren and sterile, and the vine without the elm, unsupported and weak.

The division of labour which Eve suggests, then, implies both specialization and separation. It is a gendered division of labour, a more rigorous separation of work and play, and it physically separates the pair while weakening the patriarchal bond between man and woman symbolized in their communal work. Adam’s response makes this connection between specialization and separation explicit; specialization and the drive to improve productivity, he says, leads to separation, isolation and drudgery. For Adam, specialization and separation lead to the division of work from Eros which earlier appeared intimately connected in the image of the vine and the elm. But while Adam anticipates the potential weakness engendered by this division of labour, he is also mindless of how his own reflections on the meaning and purpose of their labour already presuppose this division. In responding to Eve, Adam begins by praising her industry and her concern for household economy: “Well has thou motioned,” he says,

well thy thoughts imployn’d
How we might best fulfil the work which here
God hath assign’d us, nor of me shalt pass
Unprais’d: for nothing lovelier can be found
In Woman, than to study household good,
And good works in her Husband to promote.
Yet not so strictly hath our Lord impos’d
Labor, as to debar us when we need
Refreshment, whether food, or talk between,
Food of the mind, or this sweet intercourse
Of looks and smiles, for smiles from Reason flow,
To brute deni’d, and are of Love the food,
Love not the lowest end of human life.
For not to irksome toil, but to delight
He made us, and delight to Reason join’d.
These paths and Bowers doubt not but our joint hands
Will keep from Wilderness with ease, as wide
As we need walk, till younger hands ere long
Assist us… (9.229-47)

Adam infers from Eve’s speech a concern with productivity and economy, a desire to
preserve and maintain their material resources, and he is not in principle opposed to her
improving spirit. As he explains his reservations, however, he begins to speak of the
implications of her reasoning in somewhat different terms. His attention shifts from the
narrow question of how to best pursue “household good” to the broader question of the
meaning or purpose of their work. Dedication to householding and practical labour is
praiseworthy, he says, but labour is still the “lowest end of human life,” and as the lowest end
it is necessary but it is also not the main, overriding principle of conduct. It is not, in other
words, an end in itself.

There is a marked shift in Adam’s reasoning from Book 4 to Book 9. In Book 4
Adam argues that work and rest must be separated and that their labour is so essential to their
humanity that it “declares [man’s] Dignity, / And the regard of heaven,” distinguishing
human beings from the lower animals who “rove idle unemployed.” In Book 9 he changes
his tune and argues that it is play not work which separates them from the animals. Humour,
love and play is what sets them apart from the beasts, Adam says, for the smiles and laughter
which interrupt their work “from Reason flow” and are, he says, “to brute deni’d.” Physical
labour, which earlier appeared to be the essence of human dignity, is now regarded as the “lowest end of human life.” It is important to note that Adam is not just arguing for a more reasonable balance between work and play in Book 9; he is claiming that they are, in some sense, inseparable. Work and Eros are bound up with one another in his mind, so while labour declares their dignity and is necessary in order to tame the wilderness, a strict division of labour from play would undermine the erotic-allegorical dimension of their work and so turn it into mere toil. Adam is essentially arguing that while their work is necessary, no separation, specialization, or division of labour is necessary to improve it. If their work is necessary, Adam says, together their “joint hands / Will keep from Wilderness with ease.”

Adam does not seem to believe that they must earn their food through their work. Both material sustenance and the “sweet intercourse / Of looks and smiles,” which Adam calls “food of the mind,” are accounted free gifts of God that cannot really be earned.

What Adam does not seem to recognize, however, is that their labour is nonetheless already divided. There is already an implicit gendered division of labour alongside or within their communal work. We see it in Book 4 when Raphael visits them and Eve is tasked with preparing their food while Adam and Raphael use the occasion of the meal to discuss the nature of angelic digestion and the relationship between corporeal and incorporeal forms. Eve prepares the food which Adam and Raphael use as the basis for their metaphysical speculations. When Adam begins to inquire about the nature of the cosmos itself and seems “Entr’ing on studious thoughts abstruse” (8.40), Eve takes her leave and goes off on her own to tend to her nursery of flowers. What we see in Books 4 and 8 is a gendered division of labour which contrasts masculine intellect with feminine care-giving—a division which also implies a further division between the masculine public good and feminine “household
Adam is unable to see the division of labour implied in this patriarchal order since it has never before confronted him as something opposed to his own pleasure. So when Eve dutifully expresses the desire to perform her role more effectively in a way that denies him pleasure, Adam resists, seemingly unaware that she is essentially giving voice to a condition that already exists in the way they perform their work.

Eve introduces a question, then, that is not resolved in any satisfactory way: how should their work be divided? Adam’s response is somewhat inadequate since he simply ignores the existing gendered division of labour and so cannot provide any rationale for it. Eve’s preoccupation with household good allows her to perceive the limitations of their work, but the problem of how to best divide their labour does not at first appear to her as a question of equity but rather one of efficiency. The work exceeds their efforts and she imagines that without a more rational division of labour they may not be able to earn their food. It is a strange fear to hear expressed in paradise. Even if it is supposed to be unfounded we are still confronted with the problem of its origin. Where does Eve’s desire to earn her food come from?

A clue might be found in one of Satan’s monologues. A similar anxiety is expressed by Satan at the beginning of Book 4 when he describes the paradox of debt in which he and the other angels are bound, both prior to and after their fall. Satan in this rare moment of honesty reflects on the generosity of God. His service was not hard, Satan says: “What could be less than to afford him praise, / The easiest recompense, and pay him thanks, / How due!”

\[106\] The distinction between a masculine public sphere and a feminine private sphere is implicit from the moment we first hear Eve speak. As Nyquist argues, Eve’s first speech “plays a pivotal role, historically and culturally, in the construction of the kind of female subjectivity required by a new economy’s progressive sentimentalization of the private sphere” (120). Eve’s Narcissus moment and the subjective experiences she relates “are represented as having taken place before any knowledge of or commitment to Adam. That is, they are represented as taking place in a sphere that has the defining features of the ‘private’ in an emerging capitalist economy: a sphere that appears to be autonomous and self-sustaining even though not ‘productive’ and in so appearing is the very home of the subject.” Nyquist, “Genesis of Gendered Subjectivity,” op. cit 120.
But Satan’s pride makes this form of exchange impossible. He finds himself “lifted up so high” that

I sdein’d subjection, and thought one step higher
Would set me highest, and in a moment quit
The debt immense of endless gratitude,
So burdensome, still paying, still to owe;
Forgetful what from him I still receiv’d,
And understood not that a grateful mind
By owing owes not, but still pays, at once
Indebted and discharg’d. (4.50-7)

Adam and Eve are bound up in a similar paradox of debt and absolution. They must work because nature otherwise tends to wild and they must control its excessive growth while restraining their own desires. Nevertheless they are constitutively unable to truly complete this task. The work “outgrows” them and this overgrowth is not simply a product of Eve’s imagination, for the narrator himself tells us that “much their work outgrew / The hands’ dispatch of two Gard’ning so wide” (9.202-3). While Adam insists they “will keep from Wilderness with ease” without any division of labour, there is no explanation as to how this could be possible unless we are to understand that God intervenes to relieve them of their growing work. This seems to be the implication, anyway: the work outgrows them just as, from Satan’s perspective, the Angels’ “debt immense” continually grows and can never truly be repaid. But just as that debt is also continually forgiven through worship, through each sign of gratitude, so too Adam and Eve’s work, while necessary, is never “strictly imposed,” and so while the work outgrows them, the performance of it is also enough to release them from necessity. This forgiveness of the debt, this freedom from necessity, is perceived to be an act of immense charity on the part of God, and yet it is also the source of considerable anxiety for God’s creatures—human and angelic—since every moment must be experienced simultaneously as a state of absolution and indebtedness. The tension is never resolved—or it
is continually resolved and continually renewed. Their task is felt to be easy and pleasant and at the same time it is infinite, continually outgrows them, and is utterly beyond their capacities. Why should we be surprised, then, that they might secretly wish to “quit that debt immense”? For Satan this desire leads to open rebellion, but Eve’s diligent pursuit of household good also betrays a desire to be released from the debt and to earn her food through her own work. Adam and Eve’s argument about the meaning of their work, then, touches on the paradox at the heart of Protestant moral economy—individual works will not save you, but works, raised to the level of an ethical system structuring everyday life, nevertheless serve as a sign of sanctification.¹⁰⁷ It is such a sign that Eve is looking for through the transformation of their daily work. Adam’s response is an attempt to disabuse Eve of the notion that their labour is strictly imposed, but while his argument is sound he misses the point entirely, for such an argument cannot release her from the anxiety created by God’s gift. There is no way out of the anxiety produced by this protestant moral economy of grace, and it is one of the engines of acquisitive self-denial that, according to Weber, came to serve as an “ethic” or an ideological justification for the kind of single-minded accumulation and systematic improvement which had increasingly become economic imperatives in early modern England.

A few critics have argued that the separation scene in Book 9 reflects, in microcosm, the tension between conflicting ideologies of work and social organization. J.B. Broadbent, for instance, claims that Eve “puts efficiency before community” in her pursuit of household good, and this conflict between efficiency and community divides Eve from Adam, opening

¹⁰⁷ See Weber op. cit. 78-80.
up the space necessary for the temptation of Eve.\textsuperscript{108} Alastair Fowler, while wary of readings which anachronistically describe Eve as an “efficiency expert,” still concedes that “insofar as she argues about means without considering ends, Eve resembles, in a general way, the modern technocrat.”\textsuperscript{109} Teresa Michals suggests a more contemporary model for Eve’s instrumental rationality might be the “improving landlords” of seventeenth century England. Michals argues that Adam and Eve’s debate over how best to pursue their task reflects an ideological conflict between feudal and early capitalist social values. Labour in paradise, she argues, is both “a means of mobility and a guarantee of stasis,” since it both allows for the possibility of rising into heaven and works to maintain a natural hierarchy. “Through the double function of labor,” Michals writes, “the poem’s gardening scenes try to negotiate the distance between feudal notions of ascribed rank and early capitalist notions of achieved rank, to resolve the tension between the conflicting values of hierarchy and of meritocracy.”\textsuperscript{110} While Adam uses the language of fealty and argues for the unity of labour and everyday life, Michals argues, Eve uses the language of merit and seeks a more rigorous division between the two. Maureen Quilligan makes a similar claim. “In Adam’s view,” she writes:

[the] taskmaster God is one to whom he and Eve owe feudal fealty, one who makes no division between labor and living, or labor and leisure. Eve envisions an entirely different arrangement, in which one “earns” the right to supper. Two different economic organizations find expression here—baldly put, a feudal arrangement, in


which God is lord, and a protocapitalistic one, in which the laborer hires out his physical exertion and is paid in terms of how much he has achieved.111

For Quilligan and Michals, Adam and Eve give expression to two competing world-views rooted in two contemporary, overlapping modes of production. *Paradise Lost* dramatizes the conflict between feudalism and agrarian capitalism in the moment leading up to the scene of temptation. Eve’s ethic of improvement divides work and leisure, bends human life to its lowest end, and undermines the patriarchal, feudal order of paradise. The separation of an entrepreneurial Eve from “domestic Adam,” Michals argues, also inverts traditional gender roles and precipitates the loss of paradise.112

It is a provocative thesis; the conflict between achieved merit and hereditary right, fealty and indebtedness, affective and contractual bonds, is played out in a number of different places in the poem. Nevertheless, it is difficult to ascribe a strictly “feudal” or “early capitalist” ethos to either Adam or Eve alone. As Michals notes elsewhere, the language of merit and fealty is used in complex, seemingly contradictory ways by both the loyal angels and the rebel host. After the war in heaven, for instance, “Messiah’s supremacy is declared through a conspicuously oldfashioned and chivalric ceremony composed largely of pieces from English coronation ritual, but in the midst of these feudal ceremonies he is ‘found / By merit more than birthright Son of God.'”113 In Satan’s rhetoric, too, we find appeals to fealty and merit, ascribed rank and achieved rank. The rebel angels are, Satan says, “self-rais’d / By our own quick’ning power” (5.860-1),

and if not equal all, yet free,

112 Michals 510.
113 Michals 504; *PL* 3.308. For a close analysis of this ritual, see also Stevie Davies, *Images of Kingship in Paradise Lost* (Columbia: U of Missouri Press, 1983) 135-44.
Equally free; for Orders and Degrees
Jar not with liberty, but well consist.
Who can in reason then or right assume
Monarchy over such as live by right
His equals, if in power and splendor less,
In freedom equal? (5.791-7)

Satan, of course, also speaks these words from his “Royal seat / High on a Hill, far blazing” (5.756-7), while in hell he is “rais’d / above his fellows, with Monarchal pride / Conscious of highest worth” (2.427-8). The conflict between ascribed rank and achieved rank, then, cuts across the conflict between Satan and the Son. Likewise, the conflict between Adam and Eve cannot really be reduced to a conflict between the principles of fealty and merit. If the relationship between work and Eros is a source of conflict in Book 9, and if this reflects a deeper ideological conflict between decaying feudal social norms and emerging bourgeois values, neither Adam nor Eve can be said to give perfect expression to one side or the other of this conflict. While Adam seems to be critical of Eve’s single-minded pursuit of her calling, her preoccupation with the “lowest end of human life” and her desire to earn her subsistence, he also asserts the intrinsic dignity of labour and argues that it is necessary to divide work and play if they are to distinguish themselves from the animals. His assertion in Book 9 that their undivided labour will be enough—in spite of the fact that the work clearly outgrows them—is an assertion of the supremacy of grace, which is perfectly consistent with the Protestant ethic. Adam assures Eve that their labour is not so strictly imposed, but this does nothing to allay Eve’s fears since God’s grace is really the cause of her anxiety and is the reason she feels compelled to find new ways of improving their labour. In their argument over the meaning and purpose of their work, then, Adam and Eve both give voice to different sides of the Protestant ethic: on the one hand their labour appears to them as something intrinsically pious, practiced as though it were a calling or a form of worship that declares
their dignity as human beings; on the other hand, work alone is insufficient and they are wholly incapable of completing the task without God’s grace. In their attempt to understand and rationalize their own work, we see the emergence of the Protestant ethic, or the projection of the ethic backwards into paradise. The conflict between them is not, strictly speaking, a conflict between a feudal and proto-capitalist ethos; rather, it is a conflict between the Protestant ethic and its own capitalist “spirit.”

On both the literal and allegorical level, Adam and Eve’s work conforms to the logic of the Protestant ethic. Their work is the work of moderating desire—curbing “wanton growth” and restraining the natural abundance of paradise which otherwise tends to wild. The purpose of their labour is literally to control and harness material excess, and this compulsion to control excess—a compulsion shared by both Adam and Eve—is characteristic of a proto-bourgeois world-view. This might seem to be a leap. It is one thing to say Milton’s Adam and Eve are Protestant in their theological suppositions or even that they embody Weber’s ethic in their relationship to their work; it is quite another to suggest that Adam and Eve are prototypically bourgeois. The relationship between the Protestant ethic and the “spirit of capitalism” is complex, and it is not my aim to reconstruct or defend Weber’s thesis here.\footnote{Andrew Milner, for instance, argues that Weber’s focus on Calvinism as the quintessential early bourgeois ideology is misplaced. Following Hugh Trevor-Roper, he points out that Calvinism dominated in relatively peripheral or backwards regions like Scotland or Gelderland and was, he argues, often a hindrance to the development of capitalism (91-2). “In so far as the doctrine of predestination can have had any value to the early bourgeoisie,” he writes, “it would have derived from its provision of an alternative basis for legitimate authority to those of ‘tradition’ and ‘hereditary right.’ But Calvinism only went half way; that basis still resided outside the discrete rational individual” (92). Milner goes on to argue that Milton’s peculiar theory of election might, in fact, be a more coherent expression of the ideology of Independency and early bourgeois rationality: “The strength of the Miltonic theory of election is that, unlike Calvinism, it both provides an alternative basis for legitimate authority to that of hereditary right and emphasizes that success is a product of individual merit” (93). This is an interesting proposition, although perhaps a simplification of Weber’s thesis; Weber does indeed focus on Calvinism, but his understanding of the “Protestant ethic” is abstracted from the specific theological premises of Calvinist doctrine. Christopher Kendrick briefly outlines the conventional Marxist critique of Weber: “whatever the determining conditions of Protestantism, the Protestant ethic can only represent the mediating contradictions between two modes of production if the material conditions for such mediation are in place. If the conditions for the competition of individual capitals do not exist, if capitalist relations of
Nor do I wish to imply that Protestantism in all its diversity is unambiguously capitalist or proto-capitalist in spirit. Weber himself is careful to point out that while the Protestant ethic was adapted to the subjective, psychological requirements of capitalist accumulation, there is no simple causal relationship between Protestantism and the emergence of capitalism. The Protestant ethic did not emerge as a religious justification for the pursuit of profit as an end in itself, even if later it began to serve that function. The Protestant ethic was, rather, an attempt to dissolve the distinction between lay and monastic life or secular and religious vocations. When I claim that Milton’s Adam and Eve are both prototypically bourgeois I do not mean that they are engaged in profit-maximizing behaviour, since obviously there are no money or markets in paradise, but I do claim that the compulsion to earn, to control excess, avoid idleness, improve efficiency, and to treat labour as a secular calling is characteristic of proto-bourgeois ideology. While there is nothing specifically bourgeois about moderation per se, the compulsion to improve labour and engage in ascetic practices as part of one’s secular duty does suggest the emergence of something like proto-bourgeois consciousness. Adam and Eve’s work of reforming and controlling excess in unfallen nature may be understood as a kind of worldly asceticism. In Weber’s terms, it is an “inner-worldly” or this-worldly asceticism—inner-weltliche Askese—a form of discipline and self-control that does not

production are not at least incipient, then the Protestant ethic can hardly hale them into the world, but will rather remain more or less seamlessly imbedded in the theological framework which determines it” (9). This is accurate but it is also not entirely inconsistent with Weber thesis, since Weber is usually careful to note that Protestantism in no way determines the emergence of capitalism in any straightforward sense. See Andrew Milner, John Milton and the English Revolution: A Study in the Sociology of Literature (London: MacMillan, 1981) 91-3, Hugh Trevor-Roper, Religion, the Reformation and Social Change (London, 1967) 6-7, and Christopher Kendrick, Milton: A Study in Ideology and Form (New York: Methuen, 1986) 8-9.

115 See Weber, op. cit. 29.
withdraw from the world but seeks to transform it and dissolve the distinction between this world and the next.\textsuperscript{116}

The inner-worldly asceticism of Adam and Eve, the rationalization of their work as means of controlling excess, is part of what makes \textit{Paradise Lost} utopian. Scarcity seems to be resolved magically through supernatural abundance, but the fact that this abundance also necessitates human labour and produces a drive to \textit{improve} labour suggests that Milton’s paradise combines elements of the arcadian and utopian modes. The gap between desire and the satisfaction of desire is not resolved in Milton’s poem, for even though nature offers itself freely and all needs are satisfied without effort, the very super-abundance of nature becomes an imperative to labour and control appetite. Unfallen nature in \textit{Paradise Lost} is not humanized \textit{in itself} but as a consequence of human labour. Adam and Eve’s work is necessary and it is a means to achieve a future ideal social order which is not, essentially, incommensurable with embodied, earthly existence. Paradise is not presented as a static, timeless and unchanging state, but is, as Lewalski notes, a dynamic process of growth and development.\textsuperscript{117} Paradise, like utopia, is \textit{future-oriented} in Milton’s poem, and Adam and Eve’s role in bringing about this future involves the active transfiguration of the existing world, not passive contemplation or anticipation of heavenly worlds to come. Even Milton’s future heavenly ideal is not so alien and other-worldly, just as his earthly paradise is not so static, frozen, innocent and timeless. Paradise is given temporal and narrative breadth,

\textsuperscript{116}Milton’s representation of the eroticism of the unfallen state and the practical necessity of Adam and Eve’s labour distinguishes his worldly paradise from Augustine’s monastic, other-worldly paradise. Adam and Eve’s direct, non-ritualized relationship to the divine in \textit{Paradise Lost} is also suggestive of a kind of inner-worldly asceticism. In Milton’s description of Adam and Eve’s worship, he stresses the spontaneous, unmediated relationship they have with God, lacking the formalized ritual or codified practices of a monastic or priestly caste. Adam and Eve are described as conducting their prayers in “various style,” spontaneously, with “prompt eloquence” directly inspired by God. See 5.144-51.

\textsuperscript{117}Lewalski op. cit. 88.
materiality and physical necessity, growth, and futurity. Paradise becomes this-worldly and historical; it becomes utopian.

8. Forbidden Fruit and Fruit Ambrosial

When Raphael admonishes Adam in Book 8 to “be lowly wise” he is not telling Adam that he is incapable of understanding the movements of celestial bodies or the nature of life beyond his own world, nor does he suggest such knowledge is taboo; rather, he is saying the only means by which he might begin to grasp things “obscure and subtle” is through the active transformation of this world (8.173). Understanding “things remote / From use,” Adam learns, is not as important as knowing “That which before us lies in daily life” (8.191-3). Anything more, Adam says, “is fume, / Or emptiness, or fond impertinence, / And renders us in things that most concern / Unpractic’d, unprepar’d, and still to seek” (8.194-6). Milton seems to be stressing here the primacy of practical reason over metaphysical speculation. It is practice, the understanding of “things at hand” and of use in everyday life that is of the utmost concern. But this emphasis on practice and practical reason is not meant to be a limitation or a barrier to human understanding. Raphael does not say that the limitations of human understanding are immutable and fixed, but rather points the way to greater understanding through the active life and the pursuit of one’s calling. He is not just reminding Adam of God’s injunction not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. The command to “be lowly wise” also directs Adam and Eve to focus on their earthly labours, for this work not only occupies their daily life; it also serves as the means by which they might effect a transformation of their world. As Raphael tells them in his speech on the nature of corporeal and spiritual forms, if human beings are able to contain the super-abundance of nature and
their own sensual appetites, if they are able to refrain from consuming the excess—the forbidden thing—then their bodies and minds may by degrees be transformed so that they too might “participate with angels” and eat “fruit ambrosial” as a reward for their obedience and restraint (5.427; 494). Raphael tells Adam that “in Heav’n the Trees / Of life ambrosial fruitage bear, and vines / Yield Nectar,” which the angels eat and drink (5.426-8). “Time may come,” he says:

when men
With Angels may participate, and find
No inconvenient Diet, nor too light Fare:
And from these corporal nutriments perhaps
Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit,
Improv’d by tract of time, and wing’d ascend
Ethereal, as wee … (5.493-99)

The “fruit and flower ambrosial” in Paradise Lost functions as a substitute for the forbidden fruit and seems to provide a way out of the symbolic opposition Tree of Life / Tree of Knowledge which structures the original story in Genesis. Impossible to eat, and so unable to offer either life or knowledge, the fruit of heaven nevertheless serves as a sign of a possible future reconciliation of obedience and desire—the negation of the negation of the forbidden thing. So long as they continue to control material excess and restrain immoderate desire, the earthly, forbidden fruit will be transformed into something as yet unattainable, and Adam and Eve will not be compelled to make the false choice between life and knowledge.\(^{118}\)

Satan, of course, offers an alternative interpretation of the relationship between life and knowledge, and an alternative model of self-mastery. At the end of the first day of the war in heaven, Satan discovers that ethereal life can be reduced to its material elements in order to serve as an engine of war. That which Raphael holds up as an end in itself and a

\(^{118}\) The Greimas square on the following page provides a sketch of the structural relationship between the “forbidden fruit” of Eden and the “fruit ambrosial” of heaven.
Structure of Oppositions: Forbidden Fruit and “Fruit Ambrosial”

S1: The Tree of Knowledge—the forbidden thing in paradise which you must not eat.

S2: The Tree of Life—a necessary condition of paradise which you must eat to live.

~S1: Not the Tree of Knowledge—not forbidden in paradise “Earthly fruits” (sensuous, material) which you may eat.

~S2: Not the Tree of Life—not a necessary condition of paradise “Fruit and flower ambrosial” (spirituous, ethereal) which you cannot (yet) eat.
reward for obedience—the “ambrosial fruitage” of heaven—is held by Satan to be merely superficial, the “bright surface / Of this Ethereous mould,” which draws its life force from “materials dark and crude,” deep underground and hidden from view (6.472-78). The “Plant, Fruit [and] Flow’r Ambrosial” of heaven grow out of these dark materials, he says, becoming living matter as it responds to the touch of “Heav’n’s ray,” but Satan is not interested in these living things, which he sees as mere adornment (6.480; 6.474). He proposes instead a mining expedition to harness these materials in their original state—“in thir dark Nativity”—so their raw power might, he says, “yield us, pregnant with infernal flame” (6.475-82). Raw matter untouched by heaven’s ray has its own vital force, Satan suggests: a dark but “spirituous and fiery spume” that might conceive in them a new power (6.479). This is not exactly one of Satan’s deceptions. He is certainly right about the structure of matter in heaven if judged according to the limits of his own instrumental logic: the dark materials beneath heaven do have a kind of “spirit” of their own, a spirit that makes the rebel angels themselves “pregnant with infernal flame,” and this force is enough to provoke the overturning of heaven on the second day of the war. What we see here is a mirror image of the act of transgression in Genesis: the “fruit ambrosial” of heaven is not tasted or consumed by the rebel angels, but the infernal flame from which this life is derived is grasped by Satan’s intuitive intellect and is made to serve as an instrument of death.

What is remarkable about Raphael’s description of a future heavenly paradise and Satan’s description of the material structure underlying the bright surface of heaven is that the distinction between this-worldly and other-worldly ideality begins to break down. The future heavenly body and the body of the earthly garden are not fundamentally dissimilar, and the bright “Ethereous mould” of heaven with its “Plant, Fruit, Flow’r Ambrosial” is
shown to be the refined form of an original, dark and spirituous matter. The transformation of
the human, corporeal body with its discursive and rational faculties into the angelic,
empyreal body with its intuitive intellect is a process of gradual growth, development, and
refinement of the same underlying substance. The two bodies are not ontologically different.
When Raphael sits down to eat with Adam and Eve, it is not an illusion or a polite gesture;
Raphael eats the fruits of paradise “with keen dispatch / Of real hunger,” and appears to both
need and enjoy food (5.435-6). The angelic body, like the human body, digests gross matter
and transforms it into more spirituous forms, and through this process of digestion,
“corporeal to incorporeal turn[s]” (5.413). If angels are said to be “incorporeal” in Milton’s
universe it is not because they are immaterial but because they are composed of
homogeneous, internally undifferentiated vital matter of “liquid texture.” They “live
throughout” Raphael says, “Vital in every part, not as frail man / In entrails, heart or head,
liver or reins” (6.344-46). Their incorporeality does not imply an ontological difference but
greater purity only and a lack of organic differentiation. Vital in every part, their organs,
senses and intellect are essentially one unified faculty:

All Heart they live, all Head, all Eye, all Ear,
All Intellect, all Sense, and as they please,
They Limb themselves, and color, shape or size
Assume, as likes them best, condense or rare. (6.350-53)

They are infinitely supple creatures of diffuse, vital energy capable of intuitive reasoning, but
they are not immaterial or wholly autonomous; like all creatures, Raphael says, they need to
be sustained and fed, and they are bound up within a kind of cosmic food chain in which the
grosser elements feed the purer. There is, in Paradise Lost, a universal necessity to eat, a
material interdependence that is common to all things.
The “materialism” of Milton’s heaven has occasionally raised difficulties for his readers. Samuel Johnson famously remarked that: “the confusion of spirit and matter which pervades the whole narration of the war of heaven fills it with incongruity; and the book in which it is related is, I believe, the favourite of children, and gradually neglected as knowledge is increased.”\(^{120}\) This confusion of spirit and matter, however, is not limited to Books 5 and 6. It pervades the whole universe of *Paradise Lost*. Milton’s monism is central to his work and cannot easily be explained away as a crude plot device designed to provide some exciting action sequences in the narration of the war in heaven. A variety of ancient and patristic sources may have influenced Milton’s account of the structure of matter and his *ex Deo* theory of creation.\(^{121}\) While certainly heterodox and unusual, Milton’s monistic account of creation is carefully formulated and is shaped by contemporary theological and scientific debates concerning the structure of matter and nature of the soul. The ontology of Milton’s epic has been the subject of numerous recent studies that have attempted to situate it in its historical and intellectual context. Stephen Fallon’s work has been influential in this area, and explores how Milton’s ontology differs in striking ways from the natural philosophy of his contemporaries, particularly the dualism of Descartes and the Cambridge Platonists and the mechanistic materialism of Hobbes.\(^{122}\) Others have explored how Milton’s ontology shapes the relationship between his poetics and his theology. David Hart, for

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\(^{119}\) See *PL* 5.414-26.


instance, has suggested that Milton’s monism allows for a kind of narrative expansion of elements of Christian theology resistant to narrative, and Stephen Hequembourg argues that his monism literalizes scriptural topoi which have traditionally been understood in metaphorical terms.¹²³

The political import of Milton’s monism has received less attention, however, although Fallon briefly explores the political implications of Milton’s ontology in his book, and John Rogers provides a longer analysis of the politics of the early modern “Vitalist Moment” and its influence on Milton.¹²⁴ Fallon and Rogers both provide what are essentially analogical readings of Milton’s natural philosophy, arguing that the concept of a unified, hierarchical continuum of vital matter provides the ontological ground for his conservative republicanism. While this reading offers many fascinating insights, the vitality of matter in Paradise Lost, its capacity for autonomous growth and development, is not, I argue, strictly speaking analogous to a diffused, hierarchically distributed sovereign power, but is precisely that intransigent, primitive will in all things that makes human labour and rational social organization necessary. While the relationship between the structure of nature and political ideology in Paradise Lost may indeed be described in analogical terms, the analogy reflects back to us the contradiction between the natural and meritocratic hierarchies that underlie Milton’s conservative republican politics. In order to grasp this contradiction we need to understand the relationship between the structure of matter and the structure of society in the poem not through analogy alone but as a literal socio-metabolic process mediated by labour.


The vitality of matter in Milton’s paradise does not just provide the ontological ground for his republican politics; Milton’s monism and his vitalism provide a rational basis for human labour in the Edenic state, and this makes Milton’s paradise structurally very similar to utopia.


In order to understand Fallon and Roger’s arguments regarding the political import of Milton’s monism it may help to briefly examine some passages from Milton’s prose and poetry in which his monism and vitalism are expressed. Milton’s monism is evident in a number of places in his later works, but it is most clearly expressed in his De Doctrina Christiana. In that manuscript, Milton writes about the indivisibility of the body and soul and describes the human body as an animated, rational, self-moving substance:

Man is a living being, intrinsically and properly one and individual. He is not double or separable: not, as is commonly thought, produced from and composed of two different distinct elements, soul and body. On the contrary, the whole man is the soul, and the soul the man: a body, in other words, an individual substance, animated, sensitive, and rational.

For Milton, soul and body are one indivisible unity comprised of a single—animate and material—substance. While in De Doctrina Christiana Milton refers specifically to the relationship between soul and body (or spirit and body), Paradise Lost is more expansive and provides an account of the underlying structure of matter in general. Milton’s monistic

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126 De Doctrina Christiana in CPW 6.317-18. Elsewhere in Christian Doctrine Milton writes: “The idea that the spirit of man is separate from his body, so that it may exist somewhere in isolation, complete and intelligent, is nowhere to be found in scripture, and is plainly at odds with nature and reason” (CPW 6.319). There are some earlier intimations of this idea elsewhere as well. See Fallon, op. cit. 83-98.
vitalism is evident in a number of places in *Paradise Lost*, such as in Book 7 where God infuses his “vital virtue … throughout the fluid mass” of Chaos (7.232-42). But the clearest and most detailed account of the animate, self-moving structure of matter is found in Raphael’s discourse on corporeal and incorporeal forms. This long excursus on prime matter and the dynamic hierarchy of being that arises from it anticipates the problem of representing heaven and narrating the story of the war in heaven. By framing the differences between spiritual and corporeal beings as differences of *degree* rather than differences of *kind* (5.490), Raphael is able to present his description of the war in heaven in a way that is adequate to human sense and human reason without presenting those events in purely metaphorical terms. Raphael’s speech provides narrative coherence to the story that follows, but in the process he also outlines a general theory of matter.

Raphael tells us that all things are derived from one primal matter, and everything is organized into a single hierarchical continuum of vital substance.127 From one God proceeds “one first matter all,” he says,

\[
\text{Indu’d with various forms, various degrees} \\
\text{Of substance, and in things that live, of life;} \\
\text{But more refin’d, more spirituous, and pure,} \\
\text{As nearer to him plac’t or nearer tending} \\
\text{Each in thir several active Spheres assign’d,} \\
\text{Till body up to spirit work, in bounds} \\
\text{Proportion’d to each kind. (5.472-79)}
\]

The “one first matter” from which all things are derived takes different—corporeal and incorporeal—forms and there are “various degrees / Of substance,” but the substance referred to here is *singular* and includes more and less refined gradations of the same underlying

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127 As we shall see, the *ex deo* account given here and in *De Doctrina*, exists uneasily alongside an account of primal chaotic matter in Book 2, which seems to precede God’s creative act in Genesis.
matter.\textsuperscript{128} It is not a static hierarchy, however, since a process of refinement is implied in which various beings are not just placed or assigned, but also “tend” towards different spheres and move along a hierarchy of being “in bounds / Proportioned to each kind.” To illustrate his point, Raphael provides an image drawn from the natural world: the figure of the flowering plant, which grows out of the earth and is gradually “sublim’d,” becoming “More aery” as it develops, from root to stalk to leaf and flower (5.479-90). As Fallon and Hequembourg have noted, the figure of the flowering plant in Raphael’s speech is both a simile and synecdoche of the dynamic, hierarchical structure of vital matter.\textsuperscript{129} The relationship between the different parts of the plant mirrors the hierarchically differentiated structure of vital matter and the growth and reproduction of the plant reflects the dynamic process of digestion and sublimation that gives rise to this structure. The plant draws nutrients from the earth and extends its form into ever more intricate and delicate structures until “last the bright consummate flow’r / Spirits odorous breathes” and is transformed into fruit, “Man’s nourishment,” which in turn is “sublim’d / To vital spirits” through the process of digestion that feeds the higher faculties of sense, intellect, and reason (5.481-4). The different parts of the plant represent different gradation of vital matter, and the plant’s metabolism is one of the processes by which matter is refined. Process and structure are united in this image of vital matter. Corporeal and incorporeal forms, discursive and intuitive reason, human and angelic bodies are but “various degrees / Of substance” (5.472-3) and

\textsuperscript{128} Phillip J. Donnelly in his critique of Fallon claims that in Milton’s ontology there is an implicit distinction between “matter” and “body,” and citing this passage he argues that Milton is describing two distinct substances formed out of one underlying matter. However, I would argue that it would be more accurate to say Raphael is referring to “various degrees” of one material substance, not two distinct substances. See “‘Matter’ versus Body: The Character of Milton’s Monism,” \textit{Milton Quarterly} 33.3 (1999) 81.

\textsuperscript{129} Fallon, \textit{Milton Among the Philosophers}, op. cit. 105; Hequembourg, “Monism and Metaphor in \textit{Paradise Lost},” op. cit. 156-7. See also Christopher Kendrick’s analysis in \textit{Milton: A Study in Ideology and Form}, op. cit. 181-3.
gross matter is “by gradual scale sublim’d” (5.483) into ever more complex and spirituous structures by a process that is not just analogous to digestion, but is literally a metabolic process of sublimation and refinement. The process by which matter is refined into spirit is itself a material process.

Fallon argues that this vitalist materialist world-view may have appealed to Milton for ethical and political reasons as it provides the ontological basis for a republican body politic: “one can see how Milton, a revolutionary who distrusted the masses, could find attractive a picture of a scale of homogeneous matter crowned by rare spirits,” Fallon writes.130 Milton, like many other revolutionaries of the time, struggled with the problem of how to build a free commonwealth when the people whose freedom he sought to guarantee were also an intransigent “Image dotting rabble” who did not seem to desire liberty.131 Eventually he would draw a stark contrast between the “rude multitude” or the “dregs of the populace” and the more refined members of the middle class who were to take on the task of governance.132 “More just it is doubtless, if it come to force,” Milton writes, “that a less number compell a greater number to retain, which can be no wrong to them, thir libertie, then that a greater number for the pleasure of their baseness, compell a less most injuriously to be their fellow slaves.”133 In A Readie and Easy Way, Milton imagines an oligarchy of puritan saints, drawn from and selected by only the most refined and qualified citizens who would serve as guarantors of the people’s liberty. It would be necessary, he writes, to “wel-qualifie and refine elections: not committing all to the noise and shouting of a rude multitude, but

130 Fallon 109.
131 Eikonoklastes, CPW 3.601
133 Readie and Easy Way, CPW 7.455.
permitting only those of them who are rightly qualifi’d, to nominat as many as they will.”

These nominees would in turn select electors and candidates from among themselves. It is the middle class, and not “the dregs of the populace” who should rule, Milton writes, for it is “the middle class which produces the greatest number of men of good sense and knowledge of affairs.”

“Presumably middle-class Independents such as Milton himself,” Fallon writes, “could speak for the people, as a monarch could not, because they were the flower of the nation, ‘more refin’d spirituous and pure.’”

Milton’s ontology provides the ground for a free commonwealth, according to Fallon but “in the descent along the graded scale of animate matter we witness the metaphysical version of Milton’s distaste for the unruly material of the mass of his countrymen.” That scale, he argues, “both unites and holds apart the refined spirits and the clotted and imbruted dregs [and] is the metaphysical counterpart of a political vision of republican rule of and for all the people by the chosen few.”

Fallon frames the relationship between Milton’s ontology and his politics in terms of a structural analogy. The concept of a unified, homogeneous continuum of vital matter provides a model of power diffused through a hierarchy of being in which all creatures have relative autonomy of will but are also governed by the “more spirituous and pure.” This natural hierarchy is no conventional chain of being, however, since all creatures in this hierarchy share the same underlying substance and are bound up together in a dynamic metabolic process.

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134 Readie and Easy Way, CPW 7.442-3, emphasis added.

135 Defence of the English People, CPW 471.

136 Fallon 109, quoting from Raphael’s speech on the hierarchy of vital matter in Paradise Lost (5.474).

137 Fallon 110.

138 Fallon 103.
scala naturae and provides the ontological ground for a liberal model of achieved merit as opposed to fixed, hereditary right. Rogers makes a similar claim in his work on the “vitalist moment” of the late seventeenth century. “The science of self-moving matter, for all the participants of the Vitalist Moment,” Rogers writes, “functions as a flexible, politically resonant form of ontological speculation.”¹³⁹ It was able to serve this function, he argues, both because of the revolutionary context in which it emerged and because there was already an assumed correspondence between the structure of the physical world and the structure of society: “It is the period’s analogical imperative, I believe, that cultural pressure always pushing for the structural alignment of representations of political and material organization, that best explains this appearance of an alternative science at a moment of political and social conflict.”¹⁴⁰ For this reason, Rogers argues, we can trace the outlines of Milton’s late theory of the polity from Raphael’s description of first matter in Paradise Lost. Like Fallon he sees in it a conservative republican impulse. “Inflexible stratification is as much the focus of Raphael’s vision as ontological mobility,” he writes: “the ‘things’ of Raphael’s nature, like the citizens of Milton’s projected society, are circumscribed by ‘assign’d’ spheres and ‘proportion’d’ bounds. Milton’s pained political resignation to a doomed politics of minority rule finds sanguine cosmological justification in Raphael’s hierarchical continuum of body and spirit.”¹⁴¹

Like Fallon, Rogers draws an analogy between the hierarchical continuum of vital matter in Paradise Lost and the rule of middle-class puritan “saints” in Milton’s later

¹³⁹ Rogers 2.
¹⁴⁰ Rogers 9.
¹⁴¹ Rogers 111.
political writing such as the Readie and Easy Way. Unlike Fallon, however, he will also claim that elsewhere in Milton’s epic the vitalist structure of matter is given a more subversively “liberal” capacity for self-movement and autonomous development.

Nevertheless, Fallon and Rogers share the belief that in Milton’s epic, the capacity for self-movement in matter is analogous to a capacity for self-direction and self-governance in human beings. The vitalist dimension of Milton’s materialism is what distinguishes his world-view from that of the deterministic and “authoritarian” mechanical-materialist philosophy of Hobbes. While vitalism is acknowledged to be deeply flawed as an explanation for natural phenomena, the liberal implications of Milton’s ontology—even if distorted by an elitist, pessimistic republicanism—are still valued as an attempt to preserve the free subject in the face of Calvinist and Hobbesian forms of determinism. The vital dimension of matter is what provides the ground for the subject’s liberty and free will according to this reading; if the masses lack the capacity for self-governance, it is because they lack this vital energy. The intransigence of the masses, then, is attributed to their relative lack of virtue or spirit which makes true democracy impossible and necessitates a governing council of the “more refin’d, more spirituous, and pure.”

There is, however, a difficulty with this analogical interpretation of Milton’s vitalism. Vital matter in Paradise Lost is governed by both a self-organizing and disaggregating principle. Or rather, without direction, the capacity for autonomous generation “tend[s] to wild” (9.212), or follows a pattern of luxurious excess and chaotic disaggregation. While unfallen nature is more humanized and subservient to human ends, the greater “life force” of unfallen nature—its primitive will or its greater capacity for spontaneous, self-moving, autonomous development—still necessitates human labour and active dominion. A greater
capacity for self-movement is not to be confused with a greater capacity for self-rule. The clearest example of this disjunction between material vitality and ethical or political virtue is the fallen angels, who actually appeal to their autonomous self-moving agency, their “own quick’ning power” to legitimate their rebellion (5.861). The rebel angels retain most of what makes them “spirituous and pure” in the physical sense even after their fall. Of course, Milton presents the fallen angels’ reasoning as spurious and their bodies are increasingly debased and contaminated by gross matter as the poem unfolds—from the scene on the lake of fire in Book 1 where Satan had not yet lost his “Original brightness,” “nor appear’d / Less than Arch-Angel ruin’d, and th’ excess / Of Glory obscur’d,” to the twining mass of serpents in Book 10 where Satan along with the rebel host are reduced to the lowest animal form, filling Pandemonium “thick swarming …/ With complicated monsters” (1.592-4; 10.522-3). But even that debasement is presented as a temporary, if recurring, punishment, and the fallen angels do not really lose their angelic capacity for self-movement in the sense that their bodies remain “vital in every part” (6.344), still capable of fluid transformation, metamorphosis, and flight, still rhetorically subtle and capable of intuitive reason, even if it causes them pain. In a sense, their more refined and pure bodies are not so much debased as they are turned into instruments of torture—so immortality is retained, but in a state of physical and mental anguish; the capacity for flight retained, but with nowhere to go to escape this suffering; the capacity for metamorphosis retained, but bent now to the imitation of lower things. This debasement, then, still implies a distinction between physical self-movement and ethical self-governance or self-mastery.

This is not to say there is no correspondence or affinity between the vitality, purity, and self-movement of matter and the virtue, refinement, and self-government of free
subjects. Adam, after all, is promised a new, empyreal body and an expanded intellect as a reward for his obedience, and if the bad angels do not entirely lose their angelic form, they are still physically mutilated by their fall. But the relative vitality of matter is still out of alignment with—or non-identical to—ethical virtue or purity. This disjuncture between a natural hierarchy of being and a moral hierarchy of worth or merit opens up a gap between appearance and reality that allows for error and misrecognition—as, for instance, when Satan slips by Uriel on his way down to earth, fooling for a moment even the “sharpest-sighted Spirit of all in Heav’n” (3.691). If the vitality and self-movement of matter bears some affinity to the freedom and self-mastery of the political subject, the parallel is not perfect and we are meant to treat this parallel with caution as a potential source of deception and error.

While the continuum of vital matter described by Raphael may suggest a model of diffused hierarchical power, there is nonetheless a tension within this model between the relative vitality and self-movement of matter and the relative virtue or self-mastery of political subjects. The capacity for self-movement in living things is not exactly analogous to a capacity for self-government in *Paradise Lost*, and we can see this disjuncture everywhere in the poem, from the rebellion of the highest angels to the exuberant excess of still-unfallen nature. It is not a lack of vitality that makes nature rebellious or intransigent in the poem. Rather, it is the very vitality of nature—its capacity for self-generation, self-creation, autonomous growth and development—that threatens the stability of Eden. Adam and Eve do not labour to make paradise more abundant, but to control its super-abundance and restrain its excess, the vitality which otherwise tends to wild. In fact, the self-movement of matter—its autonomous, generative capacity—is not simply a sign of self-mastery; it is the very thing which must be mastered.
One could say that the text produces or suggests the analogy between the structure of nature and the structure of society. Fallon and Rogers are not wrong about that. But it also introduces a problem—the slippage between physical self-movement and ethical self-mastery. At any given moment, the relative vitality of matter may be seen as either a sign of self-mastery or the spark of a rebellious, primitive will. The vitality of matter might be understood as a condition of the creature’s freedom, but it is not exactly identical to “freedom” any more than it is identical to virtue. Vital matter in *Paradise Lost* is the dialectical unity of autonomy and obedience, growth and restraint, excess and control. A striking image of higher vital matter might be found in the extended synaesthetic descriptions of the Garden of Eden, which is “above Rule or Art,” or the subtle, empyreal bodies of angels, as “Total they mix, Union of Pure with Pure / Desiring”—simultaneously sexual and asexual at once (5.297; 8.627-8). Creatures become more “spirituous and pure” to the extent that excess is controlled or desire is restrained, but more “spirituous” creatures do not suppress or reduce that excessive desire so much as they harness or sublimate it. This idea is repeated elsewhere in Milton’s writing. In *Areopagitica*, for instance, Milton asks:

“Wherefore did [God] creat passions within us, pleasures around us, but that these rightly temper’d are the very ingredients of virtu?” Passion and desire, here, are not opposed to virtue but are the very means by which it is expressed, and likewise, the self-movement of matter is neither opposed to nor identical with the self-mastering subject but is its primitive, uncultivated form: “how much we thus expell of sin, so much we expell of vertue,” Milton continues,

for the matter of them both is the same; remove that, and you remove them both alike. This justifies the high providence of God, who though he command us temperance,
justice, continence, yet powrs out before us ev’n to a profusenes all desirable things, and gives us minds that can wander beyond all limit and satiety.142

Even in the unfallen state, Milton gives Adam a mind that “can wander beyond all limits and satiety.” At the core of Milton’s theodicy is this ever-present tension between excess and restraint, self-movement and self-rule, and in Paradise Lost this tension is built into the very structure of matter. Vital matter is excess restrained.

This tension between self-movement and self-rule can be seen at play in Milton’s descriptions of Chaos, that stormy abyss of uncreated being out of which God creates the universe. Chaos appears as a primal condition of pure, disaggregating self-movement, unrestrained by any form-giving principle (2.897-8). In this original state, the elements, or rather the qualities of elements, “hot, cold, moist, and dry, four Champions fierce,” “Strive here for Maistry, and to Battle bring / Thir embryon Atoms” (2.898-900). Milton describing this condition slips back and forth between allegorical figuration and negation, as if to emphasize the impossibility of directly representing this original, uncreated being. Chaos, he writes, is a “wild Abyss”:

The Womb of nature and perhaps her Grave,
Of neither Sea, nor Shore, nor Air, nor Fire,
But all these in thir pregnant causes mixt
Confus’dly, and which thus must ever fight,
Unless th’ Almighty Maker them ordain
His dark materials to create more Worlds … (2.910-16)

Not elements, but qualities; not atoms, but “embryon Atoms;” not water, earth, air, or fire, but the “pregnant causes” of each “mixin Confus’dly,” at once embattled with and indistinguishable from one another—this is Chaos: both the womb of nature and its grave, the beginning and end of things, the “dark materials” out of which God creates the world, and perhaps other worlds too. At the beginning of the creation story in Book 7, Milton’s God

142 Areopagitica, CPW 2.527-8.
“vital virtue infus’d, and vital warmth / Throughout the fluid Mass” of primal matter, which is “uniform’d and void,” but “circumscribed” or contained and no longer at war with itself (7.226-37). This “vital virtue,” infused into the fluid mass, is essentially a form-giving principle, a kind of restraint, direction or control that acts upon the pre-existing, self-moving, chaotic “dark materials,” spinning out from them the elements and dividing light from darkness. All matter in Milton’s universe is formed out of the vital virtue of God and the dark materials of Chaos, and all matter, therefore, has both a self-organizing and disaggregating tendency. These two tendencies—self-movement and self-organization—are so completely bound up with one another that they cannot be separated without unravelling the very structure of matter. Even Edenic nature, which is so perfectly self-organizing that it “pour[s] forth profuse” without any human effort (4.243), nevertheless becomes disaggregating by virtue of its own fecundity, which is why it requires human labour and direction. Self-movement and self-organization are non-identical, dialectically united principles underlying Milton’s universe.

This is, in the end, consistent with Fallon and Rogers’ conclusions regarding the political import of Milton’s vitalism; the structure of matter in Paradise Lost does indeed provide the ontological ground for a conservative republican world-view. But for Milton, the relationship between nature and society is not strictly speaking analogical. There is a literal metabolic process through which the two are connected. Human beings participate in this process and give it meaning through their labour. The unity and non-identity of physical self-movement and ethical self-mastery ensures that the precise relationship between natural

143 This might explain why uncreated “dark materials” out of which matter is formed can be described only negatively—“neither Sea, nor Shore, nor Air, nor Fire”—or by way of allegory.
hierarchy and meritocracy remains undecidable, and this reflects a central contradiction inherent to republican ideology. But the structure of matter in *Paradise Lost* is not just a reflection of republican ideology; republican ideology, projected backwards into paradise, undergoes a mutation and becomes *utopian* in character. The utopian order that emerges is not just a political order, but a unified social and cosmological schema. Fallon and Rogers overlook this utopian dimension because they overlook the mediating role of labour when analyzing the relationship between the structure of nature and the structure of the commonwealth, or the physical organization of matter and the social organization of human subjects. Labour—creative activity—is the form-giving act that shapes matter according to human ends, and it is through their labour that Adam and Eve *imitate their creator* and transform their own bodies and minds, rising along the hierarchy of vital matter to “participate with angels” (5.427). The vitalism of matter in *Paradise Lost* provides a rational basis for Adam and Eve’s work, giving it meaning and purpose, and this process of rationalization makes paradise utopian.

10. Futures Lost

The very superabundance of unfallen nature undermines the stability of paradise, and this contradiction opens up a space for narrative breadth within the pre-fallen state, which otherwise lacks a sense of time, development, conflict, growth, and change. The superabundance of this vital nature is also what makes Adam and Eve’s labour necessary, and the preservation of the Edenic state is therefore predicated upon the control of excess and a rational division of work and play. These three conditions—futurity, materiality, and social organization—are, I argue, what make Milton’s paradise utopian. If paradise and utopia
represent opposed conceptions of nature and desire or opposed solutions to the problem of scarcity, in Milton’s poem the opposition is contained within paradise itself. Nature is superabundant, magically resolving the problem of scarcity, but this very excess nevertheless necessitates human labour and the social organization of labour. Both nature and social organization, then, are idealized. Milton’s paradise combines the principles of integration and domination which, according to J.C. Davis, characterize the arcadian and utopian modes. Nature is not perfectly humanized and human desires are not reflexively moderated in the original state. On the contrary: excess must be restrained and controlled in order for paradise to exist at all. The vitalist materialism of Paradise Lost gives Edenic nature a capacity for self-movement and a tendency towards both spontaneous generation and chaotic disaggregation, and the very excess of nature introduces the problem which it was supposed to suspend or magically resolve—the problem of how to balance desire and the satisfaction of desire.

Milton follows conventional Protestant readings of Gen. 2.15 that literalize the command to cultivate the Garden of Eden, but as he expands the story and attempts to reconcile the literal-physical and moral-allegorical dimensions of Adam and Eve’s work, Milton develops a more complex and heterodox vision of the social and material basis for the Edenic state. As Lewalski notes, the structure of nature, its tendency towards unrestrained, chaotic growth, reflects a new kind of paradise that is not a static, perfected order, but a dynamic equilibrium—a process of growth and change that requires continual guidance in the form of moral and physical labour. Adam and Eve are given the task of clearing the

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144 Davis, op. cit. 24.

surrounding wilderness—their “nether Empire”—and extending human dominion over nature. As stewards of the “sovran Planter,” they must subdue, restrain and control nature, bringing the whole world within the enclosure of Eden. One consequence of this dynamism is the expansion of narrative breadth and dramatic tension, and this leads to the introduction of historical time into the earthly paradise. Paradise has a past and potentially a future. Part of what gives *Paradise Lost* its dramatic tension in spite of the known end of the story are the hints at possible futures, now lost—other unfallen worlds that are not represented directly but are alluded to by Raphael and Michael.

One of these future unfallen worlds is the primitive patriarchal communism of Adam’s rule in which work and Eros are united, and marriage is the “sole propriety / In Paradise of all things common else” (4.751-2). Although the narrator is not speaking of a possible future, we must nevertheless ask ourselves, “common to whom?” Kendrick argues that “Milton’s story of origins acknowledges an allegorical dimension here, and that the natural individual(s) on which it focuses prefigure a whole society.” Why else would Milton imply a distinction between a sexual commons and a commons of “all things else” if there is no *third*, no society outside the marital union? The idea of a “community of all things” in paradise evokes other, more subversive, interpretations of the Genesis story, and it evokes too the classical pagan Golden Age, in which an entire human community is pictured living without property, the land itself being, in Ovid’s words, “common to all as the air or the sunlight.” The Golden Age becomes an alternative future in Milton’s poem, although it is a possibility riven with contradictions. In theory there should be no division of labour in

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this future society since work and play intermingle throughout the poem, but in practice, as we have seen, there is a distinction maintained between work and play, and an unacknowledged pre-existing gendered division between intellectual labour and affective labour. This patriarchal ideal is reflected in Michael’s description of the immediate descendants of Noah, who live in a state of “fair equality, fraternal state,” and “spend thir days in joy unblam’d, and dwell / Long time in peace by Families and Tribes / Under paternal rule” (12.22-24). This second beginning for humanity, while fallen, provides a glimpse of what might have been a permanent order if Adam and Eve had not fallen.

Humanity, Michael says regretfully, would have spread over the face of the earth, and “From all the ends of th’ Earth” they might have journeyed in pilgrimage to Eden, the “Capital Seat” of humankind, “to celebrate / And reverence thee [Adam] thir great Progenitor” (11.343-6).

This is one possible future lost. But the image of primitive patriarchal communism provides an incomplete picture, for even in the unfallen state we see an incipient, proto-bourgeois consciousness expressed by Eve, which gives rise to the compulsion to earn, to control excess, avoid idleness and improve efficiency as a means of creating something like an order of achieved merit. Both Adam and Eve are implicated in and give expression to the conflicting values of primitive patriarchal communism and proto-bourgeois meritocracy, however, and the poem never decides between these two principles. Milton gives the story of the loss of paradise narrative tension by setting in motion this dialectic of primitive communism and proto-capitalism—prehistorical past and historical present. The possible but unrealized future of paradise, only hinted at by Raphael and Michael, is imagined to be some kind of reconciliation between these two principles: “fair equality and fraternal state”
coupled with a natural hierarchy of achieved merit in a world radically transformed through pious labour performed as a secular calling.

This utopian future is not represented directly but can only be inferred from Raphael and Michael’s brief allusions and Adam and Eve’s own speculations on the meaning and purpose of their work. It is a future lost at the end of the poem, and with it “all the riches of this World” that Adam once enjoyed, “And all the rule, one Empire” (12.580-1). Michael tells him that although he has lost this empire he may still “possess / A paradise within …, happier far” (12.586-7), and this turn inward has sometimes been interpreted as a rejection or disavowal of more expansive interpretations of the grant of dominion, which saw in Genesis the possibility a new future society, a new paradise, discovered or built through human effort and human knowledge. But this new “paradise within” is not exactly quietist renunciation; it serves instead to cultivate an inner-worldly asceticism that might make this longing productive. The powerful sense of longing which the poem evokes is as much about a lost future as it is about a lost past.
CONCLUSION

The early modern concept of utopia, whether understood as a literary genre, a political program, or an impulse within literary and non-literary texts, has its roots in much earlier traditions. We can find elements of the renaissance utopia in the classical model commonwealth—Plato’s Republic, Plutarch’s Sparta—and in Greek, Roman, and Hebraic stories of a lost paradise or Golden Age. Early modern utopian literature also draws on the deep stream of millenarianism within the Christian tradition—the eschatological commentaries, apocalyptic sermons and jeremiads that anticipate the messiah and a future divine kingdom on earth. The utopian impulse can be found in medieval popular culture, in the poems and ballads about Cokaygne, that peasant’s Eden in which no one labours and nature offers itself freely. It can be found too in the Roman Saturnalia and the medieval festival of Carnival, the Feast of Fools and the Abbeys of Misrule, with their parodic rituals and symbolic suspension and inversion of the social order. Whether understood as a literary genre or a cultural practice, whether viewed as the spirit of the perfected absolutist state or the anarchic, carnivalesque spirit of social inversion, whether seen as a lost origin or an anticipated future, a this-worldly or other-worldly ideal, almost all of the elements of renaissance utopian literature can be found already in its classical and medieval antecedents. But while most of its formal elements are borrowed from older traditions, the early modern period nevertheless gives us the name and the genre through which we form a concept uniting these disparate literary and cultural sources.

Utopian literature provides us with an image of the early modern future constructed out of fragments of anachronistic, pre-modern social relations, cultural practices, and political institutions. These fragments of historical forms serve as the raw material for utopian
cosmopoiesis, the creative act of “world-making,” which is presented to the reader as an isolated enclave on the periphery of the world. Utopian literature involves a kind of imaginative displacement through which different worlds—disparate historical periods, cultural forms, and modes of production—are brought into contact. At its extreme limit, this utopian displacement of historical time involves the coincidence of mythological prehistory with the author’s own present. An original, humanized nature or an original form of communal property is juxtaposed with and partially integrated into a rationalized system of labour discipline and knowledge production, animated by an early capitalist ethic of improvement. The utopian rupture of historical time is made imaginable only through the discovery of the New World and the conquest of people who, to the conquerors, seemed to exist outside history.

One of the key questions or problems that inspired this dissertation was a desire to better understand the function of paradisial imagery within a genre that, for us, seems to be defined by a future-oriented ideal. Early modern utopian literature seems to offer a glimpse into the formation of a concept of history as secular and progressive before the enlightenment concept of historical progress had become the dominant narrative frame. But the persistence of the paradise myth within early modern utopian literature seems to complicate a teleological reading that places utopia within a historical process of rationalization and disenchantment. Indeed, far from moving towards or developing the idea of a secular, future-oriented ideal, utopian literature from this period seems to be fixated on a distant present in which radically different places and times—including places and times that appear to exist outside European history—are momentarily brought into contact. The early modern utopia is not a movement towards a secular ideal future, but a contraction and shattering of the historical continuum such that secular and paradisial ideals become coincident while remaining non-identical. It is the simultaneity and
non-identity of these displaced historical forms and \textit{topoi}, not their resolution in some anticipatory secular future, that gives these works their lasting appeal—their utopian dimension.

This dissertation has focused on the two most influential works of early modern English utopian literature, More’s \textit{Utopia} and Bacon’s \textit{New Atlantis}, reading them alongside \textit{Paradise Lost}, the most well-known and carefully studied work of early modern hexameral poetry. Limiting the scope of the dissertation to these three canonical texts was motivated, in part, by a desire to engage in a detailed, close reading of the key formative works in the genre. Their centrality within their respective sub-genres—social utopia, scientific utopia, hexameron or paradisial utopia—permits a certain amount of generalization. Nevertheless, further research into the relationship between utopian and paradisial narratives in the early modern period would benefit from a more wide-ranging study of the many other major and minor utopias written in this period—Tommaso Campanella’s \textit{Civitas Solis}, Johann Andreae’s \textit{Christianopolis}, Margaret Cavendish’s \textit{Blazing World}, James Harrington’s \textit{Commonwealth of Oceana}, Joseph Hall’s \textit{Mundus Alter et Idem}, Henry Neville’s \textit{Isle of Pines}—as well as works in genres or traditions related to paradise writing, such as arcadian or pastoral poetry, folk ballads about Cokaygne, robinsonades, and early modern travel writing. Travel writing is particularly relevant since these quasi-anthropological accounts of the customs and practices of people outside Europe did not just provide raw material for utopian cosmopoiesis; they provided the \textit{narrative frame} and \textit{imaginative space} for utopian speculation. The nations and people described in these accounts, however, were usually understood to inhabit, not a utopian \textit{future}, but a distant \textit{past}—often a prehistoric past, frozen in time at the moment of the fall. European accounts of people inhabiting what appeared to them to be a paradisial or fallen antediluvian past were a significant formative influence on utopian literature, and although I discuss this influence in a number of different
places in this dissertation, a more wide-ranging and detailed close reading of sixteenth and
seventeenth century travel literature would undoubtedly provide many other important insights
into the structure and formation of early modern utopian literature and the relationship between
the utopian and paradisial modes.

Framing utopian cosmopoiesis as a projected “human empire” allows us to see how the
telos of utopia is bound up with its paradisial origins. Human empire is the utopian realization of
the grant of dominion in Genesis, combining a sense of longing for a lost paradise with utopian
expectation and an imagined projection of the utopian fiction into the world. A formal or
symbolic resolution of real social contradictions, utopian literature nevertheless leaves a trace of
the antagonisms it is supposed to resolve, and this trace is most visible at points where longing
and expectation overlap—where the paradisial and utopian modes intersect. This often takes the
form of an inverted or negative image of paradise—sheep devouring men in Book 1 of Utopia
for instance, or gold slave chains in Book 2—bizarre figures which suggest the persistence of an
unassimilated, non-human subject within a universalizing, utopian human empire. Paradisial
imagery, then, often marks the limits of a particular mode of utopian speculation, and is attached
to the thing which utopia both requires and disavows for its own coherence.

The concept of “human empire,” as it is developed in this thesis, provides a new
perspective on the relationship between utopia and paradise in the early modern period, framing
these terms as mutually constitutive and dialectically related ideas. This approach may offer a
new perspective on the relationship between utopian discourse and early modern social contract
theory. The emergence of the early modern concept of a “state of nature” in the works of
Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau is coeval with renewed interest in utopian speculation in the mid-
to-late seventeenth century and the utopian transformation of the idea of paradise in this period
may have provided a model for imagining an original pre-political condition. This is perhaps under-theorized since there is nothing distinctly “utopian” about Hobbesian or Lockean states of nature if we use the term narrowly to refer to a mode of ideal society writing concerned with a future-oriented secular commonwealth. Social contract theory is about understanding the constitution and legitimation of social relations in the present through reconstructing the foundational event of the social order as it emerges out of a hypothetical state of nature. Utopia, by contrast, appears to be a purely literary exercise of creating imaginary possible future societies shaped by idealized institutions or customs. But if we think of utopia in more fundamental terms, as the projection of a foundational event onto blank social space outside history, then we may begin to understand how the utopian mode may have come to shape the formation of the idea of a “state of nature” in early modern social contract theory. Understanding the dialectical relationship between utopia and paradise in the early modern period, then, may allow us to see the utopian dimension of early modern social theory.
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