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ON UTOPIA - BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND COMMUNISM

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Abstract: *The idea of a perfect State has been a matter of controversy since the beginning of times, being the source of many political opinions and ideologies. Freedom, religion, political order and, most importantly, the State itself are some of the issues which have been approached. Thomas More's 'Utopia' discusses intensely all these topics, setting as a starting point the works of Plato and Aristotle. In fact, the contribution of Plato's belief is of great importance. The present paper analyzes More's views concerning the perfect society, but it also aims at comparing this particular point of view with the modern world. Many critics believe that communism is a direct, modern replica of the ideas presented in this book. Thus, the analysis lays emphasis upon two perspectives of the concept called 'utopia': namely, the philosophical view and the communist regime. The perfect society might not exist, it might very well be a myth and people must find a way to co-exist in peace. In fact, this approach might be the closest one people can get to a utopia, especially in the modern world this request being quite difficultly to accomplish.*

Keywords: *utopia, philosophy, communism, perfect society.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout history different political systems were imagined and some even put into practice. One of the most discussed systems is the one imagined by Thomas More, which resembles a great deal with the communist regime imagined and organized by Marx. The intention of this paper is to identify those elements that could link the two political ideas, but also those that differentiate the two, because in the end the utopian society is named so as a mark of its inexistence.

Society is a human construction, which is bound to fail from time to time. The changing character of the human nature is what defines

us, thus for a society to work and fulfill the shifting and many needs that men may have, it must be also characterized by the power to be always 'under construction': that is, the way in which we organize the State where we live must not have a finite, clear form. It must be always open to change and to be able to keep up with its inhabitants.

2. UTOPIA AND COMMUNISM

2.1. What is *Utopia*?

Thomas More, an English lawyer and statesman, created in 1515 his most controversial and important work entitled *Utopia*. It is a novel, which reflects upon the

findings of a traveler, Raphael Hythloday, in terms of political organizing. He reaches an island, which is ruled in a way that is unknown to him, but not in a negative sense. The entire book is filled with word games having a philosophic meaning, starting with the name of the main character, which is connected with the Archangel Raphael, who represents the truth and the surname means 'the one who speaks without sense'. The word *Utopia* is a puzzle between its Greek meaning no place (*ou-topos*) and good place (*eu-topos*)

Even the name of the author has a certain significance meaning 'fool'. *Amaurot* is the name of the city which is so envied for its ruling system; it is considered a revelation in terms of politics, but actually the meaning of the word, once again a clever game, is 'dark', much as the name of an important river that passes through there Anyder ('without water'). After observing all these marks we can easily assume that more important issues are to be noticed. Actually, one very important question arises in the minds of many theorists. What did Thomas More want us to discover when he decided using all these names with the false purpose of proving the opposite. How should we interpret this action? Many say that the answer is quite simple. From the very beginning, the idea of reaching a utopian society seems to be an impossible mission, because this does not exist. Things tend to be something very different from what they truly are, thus managing in fooling even the most illuminated minds, creating a system, which, at a certain point, will fail.

In *Utopia*, however, besides the fact that all these points are reached, there are also important elements linked to power and its representative as well as to the ruling process, which are worth to be mentioned.

The managing of the island seems to be the main theme of the novel and as we have previously mentioned, the way in which it is conceived is quite similar to the communist view on this subject.

Thomas More tries through the book to set apart the social life of the European states of that particular period of time, which was frequently interrupted by the numerous political conflicts, wars, riots, all used in order

to establish order. Thus, reality uses chaos to establish order. This is where *Utopia* differs. Thomas More creates an island in which order, law and reason reign. Here, within the framework of this system, man does not know the meaning of the private property. It does not exist. Religion is not one, there are many ways in which citizens explain the existence of a superior power and this is because, unlike the reality of that period of time, on the island a high religious tolerance was practiced. It is true that this particular element can be explained from a historical point of view, but the importance of this issue remains the same. Religion is a key element of society, having a rather subjective nature and being responsible for many conflicts. Therefore, the perspective from which it is understood inside a certain system has a great value in the development of that entire leading process.

The principle from which the work evolves is that the 'whole island is like a single family'. The distribution of food, money and surplus, all are equally divided, all citizens having the same status within the society. Education is another element that seems to be in the author's attention. In schools, children are taught philosophy based on religious principles, ethics: the nature of human happiness, the relation of virtue and pleasure, what is true and what is considered to be false, the absurdity of fasting and so on. The Utopians were prepared to have a good knowledge about the human nature, being able to better understand the differences between them, which might destroy the achieved order.

Concerning the political management and the regime, Thomas More paints the picture of a democracy, having an elected sovereign, where duties are fulfilled by public agents, organized in steps, from the authority point of view, based on the proportional representation principles. The entire system is organized in this way, therefore every domain is carefully looked after, the role of authorities being that of concentrating on the ruling process.

As a difference between reality and Thomas More's world, the perspective on war is the following one: it is perceived as a brutal, violent habit, which is severely condemned. However, a classification of wars is made,



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they are either just or unjust, the first category being represented by the liberation wars and the defensive one.

Slaves existed inside the utopian society, they fulfilled the less rewarding tasks. Still, this position was considered to be a punishment, but seen as a moral and social alternative to the punishments received in real England, in that period of time.

2.2. The importance of *Utopia*

The work has been intensively studied throughout time, not only for its political value, but also for its literary importance. It is true that such a book, that attacks the political society, that manages in creating a new regime proposing clear cut rules in matters as religion education, justice and many more cannot pass unnoticed, but Thomas More's *Utopia* started a revolution in literature as well. The way in which the contemporary political regime introspection is motivated, the story that builds around it, these are all new elements that represent a first step in political literature.

Because of this book, because of the author's perspective upon the world, the human nature and the studies that focus on this particular aspect were once again put in the spotlight. *Utopia* is a perfect mixture of elements taken from Plato's philosophy and united with parts of Aristotle's view on the State.

In the minds of many theorists, *Utopia* is the clear statement of the superiority in quality of Thomas More's humanism, in contrast to the one belonging to the époque in which he lived.

2.3. What is Communism?

It is without doubt that the term *communism* is familiar to everyone. It is a political managing regime that has had the same impact as democracy all over the world,

in some parts we can even discuss of its supremacy. In order to talk about communism, as an ideology, it is imperative to mention the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, issued by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848, regarded as the founding document of communism.

This document sets the principles for this impressive movement. First of all, the entire community is perceived as a common group that should work for the State to grow, all citizens must participate in this process of economic and social development. Secondly, the notion of private property does no longer exist, it is replaced by a common property, which is used to gain money. The proletarians are the favorite social class, being considered a part of a great machine.

Further on, every citizen has the legal obligation to work and to produce for the State to proper. Also, for this prevision to be established, there were organized the so-called 'industrial armies', designed for agricultural activities.

What comes next and what is actually the most important action in this document is the necessity for an equal society from all points of view. This means that the community must have the same economic and social standards. Besides the fact that each citizen must submit to the same regulations, having a general applicability, the architecture of the cities came to reinforce this idea.

The border line between urban and rural became thinner and thinner because of the mixture between agriculture and the manufacturing industry.

Education is available for all children, being considered that an educated population is an advantage.

These are the principles drawn at the beginning of this movement. However, things changed a great deal, because each leader

understood these ideas in a different way, thus there was not only one manifestation of the regime, but several.

Education, for example, in many States was not used as it was supposed, but mostly as means of propaganda, children being taught to worship the leader.

Religion is not tolerated within the State, any form of religious expression being banned.

Communism was an interesting mixture between politics and economy, it has represented since its appearance a challenge for each leader, with a great trap inside.

The regime is well put together, giving one man full power and eliminating any threats that could rise from the community, but the person in charge must do so in order to maintain a balance within the society, not to give the population the impression of being watched, supervised or oppressed because in the end there is nothing more dangerous than the fury of the mob.

2.4. The Truth between Communism and Utopia

The purpose of the present paper is to prove that there truly is a connection between the two ideologies.

Utopia was designed as an imaginary escape from reality, as an alternative for the future, which is without question well constructed. There is a problem, though. The entire regime is mainly based on the morality of the human nature, which is in itself a trap. Thus, a question once again raises: Was *Utopia* built as a successful failure? Or is this only a desperate way out of a cruel violent escape?

The answers are hard to be found, because this particular action has had two consequences, very different in their nature and effects. One of them is the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* and the second one refers to the fact that this document has been actually applied.

Society is indeed in the middle of this discussion in documents, society and State, but the way in which it is conceived is of great difference.

The State is a construction that works in the benefit of the population, it is not a natural

giving, it must be taken care of, observed closely, but once efforts are made for its good evolution, the citizen can only gain from this.

In communism, and here we refer to the fact that the regime has been actually applied, because in the end this is what matters the most, only a small number of people could actually enjoy the benefits because the rest lived in poverty. Thus, equality disappeared from the very beginning in all aspects of the community, rights, earnings, liberties.

Utopia is based on liberty; free speech is encouraged, a correct leadership is sought. Communism is a totalitarian regime, a man holding all the power in State, trying to observe closely his 'kingdom', to control it. Freedom and liberties are words that seem to be forgotten.

Concerning property, one of the resemblances between the two, once again the motivation from which private property does not exist is a very different one in each case.

Utopia abolishes private property because it finds it useless in a society in which equality is the key purpose, while in the communism's case, property is used to gain a certain tax that theoretically goes to the State. Therefore, there is the moral motivation and the economic one.

The most debated and the most important difference is religion and its place inside and outside the State. *Utopia* has a high tolerance for religious expressions, while communism bans this practice totally.

Many theorists wondered if not this was the true flaw in the communist regime. Religion is a very powerful instrument, it can bring together and tranquil a mob, or it can make it even more violent.

History has managed to show us that religion is actually a force that should be taken very seriously into consideration. For example, in Romania in the Hunedoara County, it is situated one of the biggest monasteries in the entire country and it was built during the communist period.

How was it possible? The construction of the church was not stopped because it was considered the religion would keep the miners under control, a serious threat to the stability of the regime.



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3. CONCLUSIONS

The resemblance between the two works cannot pass unnoticed. Taking into account the timeline, it could be correctly said that the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* had as a main source of inspiration the book *Utopia* written by Thomas More. The differences appear in the way in which these principles announced in the book were interpreted.

Even though Thomas More wanted to build a regime based on human nature, it could not be possible. Power tends to completely change a sovereign, giving him a totally different perspective on life and on his abilities. Surely, the author identified this problem and perhaps this is actually his message to the world. There cannot be a flawless regime; a regime is a human construction, therefore it is bound to fall into traps of all sorts.

This is an example of an ideology, pushed to the extreme and it was applied in the real world.

What is going to happen to our society? Politics is one of the most important parts of life. We cannot ignore it. Would democracy

have the same faith? Further investigation in this sense will answer this question.

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