



EDUCATION IN THOMAS MORE'S UTOPIA

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Abstract: The essence of mankind is optimism. Therefore, he has always dreamed of a better future and a better world since the existence of humanity. Utopias are the establishment of this ideal society and order created by human consciousness. The term utopia was coined by Thomas More who was one of the distinguished authors of the sixteenth century. More's valuable work entitled 'Utopia' is considered by many as the best utopian writing. This work of art depicts an ideal society and in doing so relays many qualities desirable in an educational system. This study aims to explore Thomas More's Utopia in terms of education and to delve into the aims and principles of what More portrayed as an ideal system of education.

Key Words: Utopia, Education, Thomas More

THOMAS MORE'UN ÜTOPYASINDA EĞİTİM

Özet: İnsanoğlunun özünde iyimserlik yatar. Bu yüzden insanlık var olduğundan beri sürekli daha iyi bir gelecek ve daha iyi bir dünyanın hayalini kurmuştur. Ütopyalar bu insan bilincinin yarattığı ideal düzen ve toplum modelleridir. Ütopya terimi 16. yüzyılın seçkin yazarlarından biri olan Thomas More tarafından isimlendirilmiştir. More'un 'Ütopya' adını verdiği değerli eseri birçokları tarafından en iyi ütöpik çalışma olarak kabul edilir. Bu eser ideal toplumu tasvir etmiş ve bunu yaparken eğitim sisteminde arzulanan birçok niteliği anlatmıştır. Bu çalışmanın amacı Thomas More'un Ütopyasını eğitim açısından incelemek ve More'un tanımladığı ideal eğitim sisteminin amaç ve ilkelerini araştırmaktır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Ütopya, Eğitim, Thomas More

INTRODUCTION

Before delving into the aims and principles of Thomas More's system of education in Utopia, it is first necessary to try and define the word 'Utopia' and all it embraces. The term utopia was coined by Sir Thomas More in the early sixteenth century. It derives from two Greek words 'outopia' meaning 'nowhere' and 'eutopia' meaning 'somewhere good'. This combination suggests living in a world that does not exist but where one wishes to be. Utopia is an ideal that has attached mankind since the beginning of time. It is possible to encounter varied explanations related to utopia as a literary term. A good general definition of utopia appears to be that of Moritz Kaufman (1879:v):

'What is a Utopia? Strictly speaking, it means a 'nowhere Land', some happy island far away, where perfect social relations prevail, and human beings, living under an immaculate constitution and faultless governments, enjoy a simple and happy existence, free from the turmoil, the harassing cares, and endless worries of actual life.'

While J.C. Davis (1981) presents much the same characterization, in which utopia is defined as a method of envisioning social perfection in a way that distinguishes it from alternate ideal social structures, Berneri (1969:2) asserts that utopia is 'synonymous with a happy, desirable form of society.' Utopia, therefore, simply represents mankind's dreams of happiness, its secret yearning for the Golden Age, or, for its lost Paradise. Eurich (1967:vii) agrees with Berneri in stating that utopia is 'man's dreams of a better world.' Hence, utopia can be thought of as dreams or stories which reflect an ideal world with no pretence to reality. Fry's definition of utopia is different than that of Eurich. Fry regards utopia as a 'speculative myth' that positioned as a counterpart to the myth of the Golden

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Age which can be easily seen in various cultures. (cited in Klaic 1991:37) Thus, utopia does not exhibit what presumably happened once, but what could happen in the future; in this sense it is speculative myth, a myth in a predictive form. According to Morton (1969), utopia is an ideal commonwealth in a work of fiction created with the aim of assessing, criticizing and satirizing existing society. Thus, it can be claimed that the utopian spirit revealed through the written words of men who were critical of the day they lived in. Therefore it would not be wrong to say that utopias are the critiques of the present condition. Moreover, they can easily be considered as a magic mirror that reveals injustice, ugliness, that is to say, ills of the world where we live. Dragan Klaic (1991) agrees with various aspects of Morton's belief that utopia is held up as a mirror reflecting the ideal against the insufficiencies, backwardness, and squalor of reality. Utopia then becomes a critical tool, which exposes and ridicules the real world through distancing and distortion. Thus, the purpose of utopia is not only to create an ideal world and a happy life but also to criticize the existing order in a state.

Even though different definitions exist, there is a significant connection between all of these definitions. The two fundamental points shared by people who define ideal society models or utopia are that they all define a non-existent place as well as creating an ideal society while defining this non-existent place.

Man's vision of a better world has been a sustaining and dynamic force in his history from earliest times. It is possible to see the mark of utopia in various areas starting from the primitive myths belonging to the earliest times of humanity to legends of various cultures. However, according to a widely accepted thought, the development of utopian style, the dream to create an ideal society starts with Plato's 'Republic' which dates roughly from the time of the long war between Athens and Sparta. It was written in the midst of defeat and Plato must have had the feeling that something was radically wrong in a state that could be wrecked by war. Furthermore, he had seen the death of Socrates, his teacher, and had found of well of the presence of corruption and tyranny in the state. There can be no doubt that these events motivated him to construct the ideal commonwealth of 'The Republic'. Although 'The Republic' of Plato is accepted as the first written example of utopia by almost all of the studies and research on utopias, another and more important point underlined in those studies and research is the view that the great outpouring of utopian literature came after More. It was Sir Thomas More who thrust the word utopia in the canon of modern language. His book entitled 'Utopia' is not only an ideal state written under the influence of Plato, but also a novel written for the purpose of social satire and one of his most important attacks in his novel is on education. When classical utopias giving importance to education are compared, there is no doubt that after Plato it is Thomas More who deals with the issue of education elaborately. Having thus established a suitable working definition of what Thomas More meant by 'Utopia', the system of education in which More presented to his reader as an ideal or utopian system within a utopian society can now be analyzed.

RELATIONAS BETWEEN EDUCATION AND UTOPIA

Education is a pervasive preoccupation of many utopian writers. Due to this, many utopians wrote a great deal about education, and this clearly played a significant part in their picture of future society. The utopian point of view is an approach that could achieve some goals through some institutions. One of these institutions is education. This is why the utopian approach is inclined to realize most theories through education. As Hertzler (1922) stated in her book called 'The History of Utopian Thought', the fundamental leading instrument in realizing societal peace is education. Rather than a simple role, education receives a very special meaning in utopian literature. It is considered as an element having a progressive role towards a perfect state and society.

Most utopian thinkers and writers believe that the existing societal institutions are the source of societal malice. Therefore, it is rather difficult to get rid of this malice without experiencing an appropriate change in our societal institutions. When most utopias are studied, it is seen that education has received a paramount significance in realizing societal change and solving societal problems. According to Howard Ozman (1969:ix)

'(As utopians believe) ... that the great social problems of a society cannot be solved without changing the entire structure of the society within which these problems reside... they saw a twofold necessity for education, first, for the purpose of educating man to the need for great and important changes, and secondly, they saw education as a vehicle for enabling man to adjust these changes.'

Education is an essential instrument which is used to enable man to reach a better future and a better world. The writers go after the goal of creating an ideal world by using education. The desire for the perfection lies within the nature of utopian tendency. This is the reason why the designated function of education and the expectations of utopias from education intersect at the point of reaching an ideal future and a more affective society.

According to Öztürk (2006:7) in utopias, which are envisioning a perfect life and a perfect future, the concept of education has a fundamental function of arranging this environment. Utopias rely on education for the continuation of institutions. The concept of education presented in utopias, functions as a projection in order to understand the interpretation of society in utopias. Thus, the type of education necessary for an ideal society is presented because a utopian writer is a good observer of his society and will try to eliminate the reasons and find solutions for the wrong doings observed by him in the society through educational institutions.

Although purposes of education and societal objectives have been expressed differently in different utopias, the case presented in these utopias is that a perfect society and future can only be achieved through education. Therefore, it is important to study utopias with their educational dimension and to understand their message properly.

AIMS AND PRINCIPLES OF EDUCATION IN MORE'S UTOPIA

More's masterpiece is written in two parts. Book 1 of Utopia takes the form of an imaginary conversation between a fictitious voyager called Raphael Hythloday and a real-life civil servant whereas Peter Gilles which contains a diatribe on the social ills of England, Book 2 is a description by Hythloday of the various customs and institutions which make up this new island he has discovered. Among the key themes Hythloday discusses is the educational system on the island of Utopia. With words of More, Hythloday gives a detailed outline presenting the aims and principles of education in Utopia. To begin with, the first aim of education on this land is to provide an equal education to all citizens by eliminating class differences. In More's Europe, only the rich and powerful could hope to get an education. Therefore, the entire society did not have the opportunity for an education. More, thinking that class discrimination in education was unfair and a mistake, was defending education for all socio-economic levels. In More's opinion everyone is equal in value. This is why, there is no division of people into classes in Utopia. All citizens are equal, there is no privileged class and education is open to everyone. In addition, on the island of Utopia education is not reserved solely for men. Women are viewed as equals and are given the same educational opportunities as are men. Thus, gender discrimination is eliminated in the issue of education. Furthermore, More strongly believed that men and women should receive an equal education with no discrimination. Following his belief, More puts into real life practice his philosophy on education and provided his daughters with an excellent classical education, at a time when such learning was usually reserved for men.

'More's children were compelled to master not only Latin and Greek literature, logic and philosophy and the works of Church Fathers but also mathematics and astronomy. This education experience, in contradistinction to the rest of English society at that time, was offered to both men and women.' (Halphin, 2011:305)

The Philosophy of Education in Utopia is not reserved to a formal education but is an education continuing a life time. In Utopia, education in a formal school environment is not explained in great detail. Therefore, we can talk about the concept of a lifelong education rather than a traditional education delivered within the school system of the state on the island. Indeed, the biggest novelty of the Utopians is the fact that their education does not end at a certain age. According to Urgan (1984:66) in our age it has only recently been realized that education is not a process starting at the age of six or seven and ending at the age of twenty or so. However, More was aware of this fact, as early as those days, that education is a life long process and should continue until death. In order to provide continuous education in Utopia, we see educational activities such as morning lectures which start in the early hours of the morning and are open to everyone to attend before they go to work. This form of education also means to free the arts and sciences from the hands of the rich and the noble class and make it available to the public masses. What is more, it also shows that the system does not make any kind of differentiation on the basis of gender and provides an opportunity for education for women as well as men. In addition to this, the objectives of a life long education are being realized on the island of utopia. That is to say a person can find his profession and happiness only by stretching his limits. Everyone on the island can find the chance of continuously improving himself and make use of this

opportunity. None of the individuals see education as a means to obtain a higher status in society or to obtain material gains.

‘It is Utopian practice that public lectures are given before daybreak. Attendance at these is obligatory for those who have been specially chosen for the pursuit of learning. Nonetheless, person of all classes, both men and women, generally come in droves to hear these lectures, attending those which suit their fancy. But if anyone should prefer to give his time to studying his own craft (if they are of minds that are really not much given to intellectual activity), they are praised as being useful to the commonwealth.’ (More, 1989:50)

One of the primary objectives of education in Utopia is both intellectual enlightenment as well as to give a deep understanding of virtue and in turn instill a virtuous character in individuals. Education in Utopia places enormous importance on virtue and moral values which they believe will control the behavior of its citizens within the social structure. This is an education realized both through state institutions as well as through personal experiences of individuals during their life time. In this ideal state, teaching a trade is an essential subject since it has paramount importance for the individual to strengthen character which in turn will help the individual avoid committing a sin and living a life of inactivity. More tries to improve moral maturity by motivating the individual to work. The suggestions given to children at an early age help them to respect and protect the state. One of the fundamental principles of More's educational program is the protection of the nation and national state. The thoughts that spoil societal order in Utopia arise from bad morals as well. This is the reason why the education and training of children and the young is closely connected to moral education. In terms of the efforts exerted to have children with both knowledge and moral values More gives an example of moral education in showing how the Utopians create a culture in which the vanity of precious metals and gems are despised. They utilize psychological conditioning giving gems to children as playthings in the knowledge that they will be tossed aside as the child grows up.

‘In the first years of childhood, they are proud of such decorations and take pleasure in them. But when they grow up a little, they put them aside through a feeling of shame. Thereafter they see these decorations as belonging to small children and reject them as our little people do when they grow up and throw away rattles, marbles and dolls.’ (More, 1989:60)

The goal of education in Utopia is to prevent unwanted behaviours while teaching desired behaviours. The way to achieve this goal is to eliminate the factors causing the unwanted behaviours. At the time More wrote Utopia, England was struggling with unemployment, hunger, theft and hangings do to theft. More, as an individual living among these problems, had the opinion that the laws issued and applied by the state were both unfair and useless.

‘On this matter you, along with much of the world, seem like bad teachers who prefer beating their students to really teaching them. They set up heavy, terrible punishments when they should work at providing ways of making a living so that nobody has to steal and then die for it.’ (More, 1989:20)

According to More it is better to eliminate the circumstances causing crime instead of punishing a person who commits a crime.

‘unless you first find a cure for this evil, your boast that you are acting justly in punishing theft will be vain and misleading rather than true and beneficial. First you allow men to be brought up so badly that the gradual corruption of their character starts with their earliest years. Then you punish them for committing as adults crimes to which they have been inclined since childhood- what are you doing, I ask, except making them into thieves and then punishing them for it?’ (More, 1989:24)

Therefore, in Utopia every effort is explored to find a solution to eliminate corruption which can invade society resulting in immoral behaviors by individuals. The definition of the concept of education also expands at this point. Education is considered to be an endeavor directed not only to create desired behaviors in individuals but also to form a barrier to undesired behaviors and attitudes. The prevention of undesired, destructive and bad behaviors and

attitudes that are possible to develop in individuals are dealt together with the underlying factors and causes. Utopians work to eliminate these factors and causes. The objective of having virtuous, honest and knowledgeable individuals can not be achieved only with the education programs prepared for this goal. The main issue is to get rid of the conditions that prevent the realization of this goal. For instance, in a Utopian society in order to prevent bribery of judges and administrators, the instruments of the bribe such as gold and money are reduced to zero. Thus it will not be possible to see any cases of bribery because the factors causing corruption have been eliminated. In Utopia gold which represents the ambition to own material goods and estate, the source of societal corruption, is degraded by decorating criminals with gold earrings on their ears, gold chains around their necks and gold rings on their fingers.

Ozmon (1969:15) states in his book '*Utopias and Education*' that More believed that education was the greatest tool to eliminating crime which is one of the reasons he gives considerable attention to the education of the Utopians. He discusses the importance of environmental factors and felt that the kind and quality of education which children receive is directly responsible for the ideas and actions which they hold as adults. Following this rational, it is therefore the State who is responsible, either directly or indirectly, for its citizens being ill educated, thus the State has no right to try those citizens for crimes committed because of a lack of education or an improper or inadequate education. He strongly believes that the early formative education which a child receives should stress, above all, the futility of pursuing wealth and vain honors.

In Utopian education rewards as well as punishments are utilized in order to ensure correct behaviors and prevent people from committing crimes. As an example of a reward, in Utopia statues of virtuous people, who have done good things for the commonwealth, are erected. This functions as an inspiration for the citizens to live up to the standards established by their ancestors.

'They discourage crime by punishments and reward virtue by appropriate honors. Thus they set up statues in the marketplace for men who have done outstanding service for the republic. They do this honor the great deeds that were done. Moreover, this memory serves as a motive for the next generation and as a sort of spur to virtue.' (More, 1989:78)

The aim of education in Utopia is to not only teach theoretical knowledge but to teach Utopians how to internalize this knowledge by means of practice. In Utopia farming is the primary occupation. All children are trained from an early age in the field of agriculture. In this way, they learn how to cultivate soil. Ozmon (1969:15) states that 'work is considered an educational experience in Utopia. It is for this reason that the entire populace is trained in childhood for agriculture, and why they must participate in it.' Children first learn the knowledge needed at school. Later on, they are taken on field trips to farms to put into practice what they learned at school. The children on these field trips both observe the farmers working and gain some practical experience. Consequently, the knowledge becomes permanent. Thus, More emphasizes the importance of both the theoretical knowledge acquired at school as well as the practical application of this knowledge.

'There is one craft which is common to all, both men and women, and that is agriculture. All are trained in it from childhood. This is done partly by lessons that are taught in school and partly by going out to nearby farm fields as though for recreation. On these trips they do not merely look on, but wherever possible they do the actual physical work.' (More, 1989:49)

The target in Utopia is for people to continuously develop themselves. In Utopia the working day is restricted to six hours in order to provide maximum opportunities for people to engage in leisure pursuits, such as attending lectures, tending the garden or playing mind-expanding board games.

'They divide the day and night into twenty-four equal portions, and only six are assigned to work... all of the hours that are not given to work, sleep and food are left to the judgment of each individual. However, these hours are not for frivolity but for some useful task according to the individual taste. These periods are given to things of the intellect.' (More, 1989:50)

In Utopian education games are considered essential. The games they play in their spare time do not serve for entertainment purposes only, but are designed to improve thinking and to convey a particular message. On this perfect

island, games are regarded as a crucial learning tool and have a significant place in teaching the children to learn correct behavior and to improve their thoughts. Games are the first step in every child's education. All kids learn faster and retain more when they are engaged, involved and having fun. Therefore, games are an effective way in educating children. This is why Utopians use games as a primary learning tool to provide enjoyment and develop thinking. Through games a child learns the rules of living in a society, how to become a virtuous individual and learn how to use their virtues to overcome their vices. 'They do play two games not unlike chess. The first is a battle of numbers in which one number preys on another, and the second is a game in which vices battle with virtues.' (More, 1989:50)

Last but not least, teaching in the first language is a significant principal of Utopian education. Therefore, they conduct all of their studies in their native language. In terms of training and studies for Utopians, their native language is the medium learning tool. 'They do their studies in their native language, for it is rich in vocabulary and not unpleasant and really is a faithful witness to the speaker's thought content.' (More, 1989:62) Watson (1994) makes a comment on this issue stating that More's emphasis on the use of first language in teaching in Utopia is More's clear satire on the use of Latin rather than English for schooling which was in practice in More's England. Thus, it can be inferred that in Utopia language is clearly the key to communication and understanding. Therefore people can learn best through their mother-tongue. Studying all branches of learning which requires an in-depth understanding of concepts is easier in one's native language since it prevents people's misconceptions or misunderstandings. Language plays two important roles in the development of understanding in that it both accommodates a medium for learning and is a tool which helps people to construct a way of thinking. Thus, studying by using one's native language will make it easier for them to understand concepts.

CONCLUSION

Thomas More is one of the distinguished utopian writers who attached great importance to education. To Öztürk (2006:161) More considers education in Utopia to serve a dual purpose. He does not only assume that education encourages and protects the moral character of people and society but also believes that education is an objective in itself for material fulfillment. More views education as a vital method to produce behavioral changes in man. In Utopia, education is seen as a way to eliminate an action against the state and the socialization to be gained through education becomes an effective element for the continuation of the state. This shows that he sees education not only as a means to eliminate ignorance but also to improve congenital weaknesses and to suggest moral values.

Additionally, More believes that education is a continuous process lasting a lifetime. He advocated universal and compulsory education in the sixteenth century, an aim we still have yet to realize today. He thinks education itself has a practical value and is the right of all citizens. For education to be truly effective it must be taught in the student's native language, adequate leisure time must be given for the pursuit of higher education and games should be incorporated in the learning process. More claims that since education is the key to a moral and virtues society a system of reward and punishment helps maintain a crime free society.

Today, in the 21st century, when society is engaged in a search for new educational ambitions and strategies we would profit if we turn to some of our utopian writers in order to benefit from their thinking upon this subject. Philosophers and scholars throughout history have discussed the need for new purposes and new technological and social improvements, but very few of these critics have stated specifically what form these new improvements should take. In Thomas More's Utopia, More does not simply critique society and education but he takes it a step further and outlines for his readers not only the pitfalls that need improvement but he gives us the required steps to achieve the improvements and the standards upon which to measure its success. Taking all this into consideration, the aims and principles of education underlined by Thomas More in his powerful work "Utopia" will undoubtedly inspire current and future education philosophy.

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