HAL
open science

# ” No. I don’t think I am me. Not any more ”: Sacrificing the Self in Utopia

Meegan Louise Clark

▶ **To cite this version:**

Meegan Louise Clark. ” No. I don’t think I am me. Not any more ”: Sacrificing the Self in Utopia. 2018. halshs-01807526

**HAL Id: halshs-01807526**

**https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01807526**

Preprint submitted on 4 Jun 2018

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L’archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d’enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Copyright

**Students' best essays collection**, Meegan Louise Clark, Berlin, March 2018 (Pre-print version)

# "No. I don't think I am me. Not any more": Sacrificing the Self in Utopia

Meegan Louise Clark, Freie Universität Berlin

## Introduction

Throughout Utopian literature there has been a strong focus on the relationship between the individual and larger communities of varying scale. According to Davis, the aim of Utopia is "the reconciliation of limited satisfactions and unlimited human desires within a social context".[1] The impetus for conceptualising Utopia is often a perceived inadequacy in the resolution experienced in reality, in effect a crisis of the social contract on some level; consequently, these narratives are frequently embedded in the interstices of contemporary debates.[2] Traditionally, the proposals to redress this relationship seemed to give utopias either an anarchistic or archistic frame, with neither being particularly desirable; the former too free, the latter too repressive.[3] What effectively became negated, or absolved arguably, is the individual and the perceived agency of the individual within the given context of a society. Whilst early modern Utopias, such as those written by Thomas More and Francis Bacon, rather deny any unwillingness to conform to these societies, the aspects of struggle, reluctance and often sacrifice of those living in utopias came increasingly into the fore, evident in Dennis Kelly's postmodern 2013 television series *Utopia*,[4] as certain underlying assumptions of utopia were called into question. Thus, critical utopias were born, self-reflexive, ambiguous and with no claim to perfection,[5] encouraging the interrogation of underlying assumptions and critical engagement with the present,[6] with the potential "to *change the way we think*", as

[1] J. C. Davis, *Utopia and the Ideal Society: Study of English Utopian Writing 1516-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) 36.

[2] However, it is difficult to impress the importance of not relegating Utopian literature as purely reactive, didactic or as ephemeral, by rooting it too specifically in the respective contexts of genesis. This would diminish the constructive, transformative and imaginative aspects of the particular texts. For a better discussion on this matter see Davis, *Utopia* 12-19 and Fátima Vieira, "The Concept of Utopia," *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, ed. Gregory Claeys (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 18; Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination* (New York: Methuen, 1986) 6-8.

[3] Nicole Pohl, "Utopianism after More: the Renaissance and Enlightenment," *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, ed. Gregory Claeys (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 51-52.

[4] *Utopia*. Created by Dennis Kelly. Directed by Marc Munden and Rebekah Wray-Rogers. Performed by Alexandra Roach, Nathan Stewart-Jarrett, Adeel Akhtar, Neil Maskell, Paul Higgins, Fiona O'Shaughnessy, Paul Ready, Geraldine James, Michael Smiley, James Fox, Oliver Woollford, and Emilia Jones. Written by Dennis Kelly and John Donelly, Kudos, 15 Jan. 2013. Hereafter abbreviated as *Utopia*.

[5] Vieira 10.

[6] Vieira 23.

Sargisson would suggest.[7] Accordingly, the question of agency has become even more critical, Suvin demanding Utopianism to now provide this,[8] but is often now conceived as an impossibility in the face of globalisation, with Levitas questioning the transformative potential of Utopia, consigning it to the microcosm.[9] However, it will be posited here that the act of a willing sacrifice of individual identity in favour of a communal one, as can be found particularly in critical utopias, can be viewed as a method of a perceived reclaiming of agency in crises.[10]

## "Ye Are Not Your Own"[11]: More and the Individual

Greenblatt predominantly frames Thomas More's *De optimo reipublicae statu deque noua insula Utopia libellus vere aureus, nec minus salutaris quam festivus*[12] as More's attempt to resolve a personal crisis.[13] However, it was clearly geared towards a European audience,[14] as its prefatory letters by eminent contemporary humanists and publication history attests to. Written presumably between mid-July 1515 and September 1516, against the backdrop of humanist debates and continental commotions, such as the Italian Wars, and contemplating

---

[7] Ruth Levitas and Lucy Sargisson, "Utopia in Dark Times: Optimism/Pessimism and Utopia/Dystopia," *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, ed. Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan (New York, London: Routledge, 2003) 17.

[8] Darko Suvin, "Theses on Dystopia 2001," *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, ed. Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan (New York, London: Routledge, 2003) 187.

[9] Levitas and Sargisson 16, 23; Mark Jendrysik, "Fundamental Oppositions: Utopia and the Individual," *The Individual and Utopia: A Multidisciplinary Study of Humanity and* Perfection, ed. Clint Jones and Cameron Ellis (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2015) 41.

[10] My interest here is not dissimilar to Jones and Ellis's attempt to recover the Individual from the "*collective or social identit*[ies]" imposed and a deeper analysis of the relationship envisioned between them, see Clint Jones and Cameron Ellis, "Introduction," *The Individual and Utopia: A Multidisciplinary Study of Humanity and Perfection*, ed. Clint Jones and Cameron Ellis (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2015) 1-2.
I also speak of the Individual similarly to Jendrysik, who is interested in their "place […] and value", contrarily though, I am also engaging in how far this is allowed to turn into individualism as he defines it: "the unfettered pursuit of self-interest" (28). My purpose for doing so is to examine the extent to which the individual can sacrifice themselves at all.

[11] 1 Corinthians 6:19.

[12] Edward Surtz and J. H. Hexter. *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More: Utopia*, volume 4, ed. Edward Surtz and J. H. Hexter. (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1965). Hereafter abbreviated as *Libellus* and all subsequent references to this edition are in parentheses in the text.

[13] Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning. From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980) 12-13, 31-33, 56-58. Explicitly: the personal moral dilemma of joining the King's service, as More had been invited to. J. H. Hexter, "Introduction: Part I," *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More: Utopia*, volume 4, ed. Edward Surtz and J. H. Hexter. (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1965) xv-cxxiv; also considers the personal dimension in the composition, but does not limit it hereto (xxxiii, xl, lxxxiv). Freeman also obliquely follows Greenblatt (John Freeman, "Discourse in More's *Utopia*: Alibi/Pretext/Postscript," *ELH* 59.2 (1992): 289, 308-309, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org// stable/2873344> 11 July 2017.

[14] Terence Cave, "Introduction," *Thomas More's Utopia in Early Modern Europe: Paratexts and Contexts*, ed. Terence Cave (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2008) 7.

whether to join the King's service,[15] *Libellus* was published in 1516 in Louvain, in 1517 in Paris, and a more definitive version in 1518 in Basel, undergoing numerous reprints and vernacular translations by 1551.[16] The reproaches levelled against societal injustices and deficiencies are numerable and varied. Accordingly, the topics that More touches upon are tinged with concerns regarding culpability, governance, accountability and ability, far beyond the private/public dichotomy of his own being.[17] Furthermore, the trans-European audience is explicitly acknowledged: "[…] so [Hythlodaeus] rehearsed not a few points from which our own cities, nations, races and kingdoms may take example for the correction of their errors" (55), and leaves few countries exempt from direct or indirect critique. Yet the practicality of the notions put forth rests on the conceptualisation of the individual in a social context.

In More's fiction the emphasis on the utility of the individual in relation to the community, and on the willing collusion, aligned with natural inclination, of the citizens of Utopia to conform to the archistic structures is remarkable. Greenblatt notes, the underlying movement of the text is of a "steady constriction of an initially limitless freedom".[18] The curtailment of individuation[19] is achieved by homogenisation,[20] and a culture of honour and shaming whilst under neigh perpetual observation.[21] Further restrictions are set in the conditional needs of the Utopian society, always prevalent, to the degree that it may be questionable to what extent any individual need or desire may arise, or rather any sense of

---

[15] Hexter xv, xxvii-xli.

[16] On the editions and printing history see Edward Surtz, "Introduction: Part III," *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More: Utopia*, volume 4, ed. Edward Surtz and J. H. Hexter (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1965) clxxxiii-cxciv; and Vibeke Roggen, "A Protean Text: *Utopia* in Latin, 1516-1631," *Thomas More's Utopia in Early Modern Europe: Paratexts and* Contexts, ed. Terence Cave (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 2008) 14-31. For a tabular overview of the respective editions and vernacular translations see Terence Cave et al., *Thomas More's Utopia in Early Modern Europe: Paratexts and Contexts*, ed. Terence Cave (Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 2008) 277-286.

[17] My contentions against Greenblatt's reading echo Yoran's: there is no necessity to reduce the text to a psychoanalytic reading, which arguably diminishes the project's scope of engagement, particularly regarding issues related to international cooperation, peace and war. See Hanan Yoran, *Between Utopia and Dystopia: Erasmus, Thomas More, and the Humanist Republic of Letters* (Lanham, New York, Toronto et al.: Lexington Books, 2010) 173, 176-177.

[18] Greenblatt 40.

[19] The only outlets, such as gardening, reveal a desire for it, as this exposes a competitive streak in the society (Jendrysik 35). It extends to children being seen as resources to be distributed if they choose to pursue another craft (*Libellus* 127), families as means of expansion (*Libellus* 137) and death as a communal concern, wherefore permission must be granted in euthanasia (*Libellus* 187). See Paola Spinozzi, "*Acerba illa vita* velut *carcere atque aculeo*: Health or Death in More's *Libellus vere aureus:* Early Modern Thought and Contemporary Debate," *Utopian Studies* 27.3 (2016): 586-600, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable//10.5325/utopianstudies.27.3.0586> 15 June 2017, on the utilitarian approach on life in Utopia and for greater elaboration. Arguably the only distinctions that remain are sex and marital status.

[20] Greenblatt 39-41.

[21] Greenblatt 47-54.

inherent self.[22] Even the plurality of opinion, be it political or religious, is strictly monitored and structured; the first in its spatial arrangement, as any deliberation of politics outside of the designated forum "is a capital offence"[23] (125), and the second by exclusion. If an individual vocally advocates a superiority of a religion, they are banished or enslaved for public incitement (219). Atheists, though, are not considered human: "[…] they do not regard him even as a member of mankind, […] so far are they from classing him among their citizens whose laws and customs he would treat as worthless if it were not for fear" (221).

However, this passage leads us to a sticking point in More's text that is of particular relevance to the question of self: Are the Utopians capable of conceiving of humanity in the abstract? And in turn, are they able to differentiate themselves as individuals from that greater unit? Davis distinguishes the two books of More's work by the hierarchies of interest promoted in the respective parts; in the first, self-interest which is dominant in Europe, and in the second, the common interest which prevails in Utopia.[24] However, the Bible proffers conflicting views as to which interest ought to take precedence, in regards to salvation.[25] It is further complicated by the precept of original sin[26] and the question of the ability to fully exercise free will, which was arguably impaired as a result of the Fall.[27] Despite Kenyon concluding that no harm or infraction was perceived in limiting the Utopians' choice of behaviours, in light of the salvation to be gained should Utopia be implemented in a real context, which would already entail an important superseding choice, namely to create Utopia;[28] Baker-Smith and Davis rather suppose an absolution of moral choice altogether.[29] Nevertheless, these readings are rooted in the premise that the Utopians are capable of conceiving themselves in isolation, *in the same manner* that the Europeans of Book I are, where self-interest flourishes. The reason this question is of relevance ought to be clear: If the

---

[22] Baker-Smith also raises this question in Dominic Baker-Smith, *More's Utopia* (London, New York: HarperCollins Academic, 1991) 224. An example of conditional needs is when the State determines which profession ought to be pursued if an individual is proficient in more than one craft (*Libellus* 127).
[23] Albeit this is supposedly to prevent conspiracy from fermenting amongst the representatives, by means of transparency, however it could equally be seen as a form of preventing any larger congress of likeminded people, particularly ones that might forcefully disagree with communal decisions.
[24] J. C. Davis, "Thomas More's *Utopia*: sources, legacy and interpretation," *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*, ed. Gregory Claeys (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 35.
[25] Davis, Thomas More's 38.
[26] Pohl 57.
[27] Timothy Kenyon, "The Problem of Freedom and Moral Behaviour in Thomas More's *Utopia*," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 21.3 (1983): 352-357, 370, Project MUSE <https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.1983.0080> 11 July 2017.
[28] Kenyon 369-370.
[29] Baker-Smith 170; Davis, *Utopia* 39 n.81.

Utopians cannot self-identify, then no oppression or comprehension of an imposition of will is possible. If they are capable of self-identification, then to what extent, as this would implicate the degree of self-interest that could potentially be generated.

In truth, the answer provided by More is inconclusive. When describing the Utopians' study of logic he touches upon the concept of second intentions:

> In fact, they have discovered not even a single one of those very ingeniously devised rules about restrictions, amplifications, and suppositions which our own children learn in the *Small Logicals*. In addition, so far are they from ability to speculate on second intentions that not one of them could see even man himself as a so-called universal – though he was, as you know, colossal and greater than any giant, as well pointed out by us with our finger. (159)

Despite the ironic tone and possible disregard for the concept of second intentions,[30] the question of their ability to abstract between the individual and humankind[31] is obfuscated due to this. On the one hand, it would seem to imply they cannot ("so far are they from ability"), but on the other hand, the split itself seems highly doubted, both by the fact that the Utopians have not mastered this, which would imply, by humanist logic, the deduction to be unnatural and thus a contrivance of erring Europeans, or "a self-regarding irrelevance",[32] despite Hythlodaeus' assertion of accepted common knowledge; and due to the metaphor of the "giant" and the act of self-anointment ("pointed out by us with our finger"), implying possibly an excessive imposing ego, suggested to be something universal, but is not – the idea being exposed as nothing more than a vanity rooted in inflated pride. Then again, elsewhere, More evinces that the Utopians are very much capable of abstraction, apart from dehumanising atheists, namely in their dealings with the Zapoletans, whose eradication achieved by carrying out Utopian wars would make them "the greatest benefactors to the human race if they could relieve the world of all the dregs of this abominable and impious people" (207-209).[33]

---

[30] Edward Surtz and J. H. Hexter, "Commentary," *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More: Utopia*, volume 4, ed. Edward Surtz and J. H. Hexter. (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1965) 437-438.

[31] Susan Bruce, "Explanatory Notes: Utopia," *Three Early Modern Utopias: Utopia, New Atlantis* and *The Isle of Pines*, ed. Susan Bruce (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 223-224.

[32] Baker-Smith 179.

[33] These segments also expose the deep-rooted transnational contemporaneity of the text in its satiric approaches to educational debates, the Italian Wars and Swiss mercenaries. The irony of describing European treaties as "holy and inviolable" upheld "partly through the justice and goodness of kings, partly through the reverence and fear of the Sovereign Pontiffs" (*Libellus* 197) in wake of the Popes Julius II and Alexander VI would have been immediately apparent, as is the similarity between the Zapoletans and Swiss mercenaries, as remarked in the margins (*Libellus* 207). Confer Edward Surtz, "Introduction: Part II," *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More: Utopia*, volume 4, ed. Edward Surtz and J. H. Hexter. (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1965) cliii; and Hexter l. Surtz also draws particular attention to parallels with Italian humanist discourse in general, noting the recent activities of the Lateran Council that would have drawn English attention (Surtz, "Introduction Part II"

Accordingly, it might be surmised that the Utopians were conceived by More to be capable of differentiating between Utopians and Non-Utopians, but that within the Utopian community itself, this distinction is less clear. As Greenblatt argues, the destruction of the individual, however, is to be desired in this text[34] as it produces "a powerful sense of relatedness"[35] rather than any sense of singular selfhood within the society, which is discouraged, and a more encompassing self-perception encouraged, as noted by Hythlodaeus: "Thus, the whole island is like a single family" (*Libellus* 149). Additionally, the society imposes an "enforced unity",[36] however the desired pinnacle, of course, is the voluntary denial of self in favour of others, providing no self-harm occurs (which would impair the utility of said individual):

> […] unless a man neglects these advantages to himself in providing more zealously for the pleasure of other persons or of the public, in return for which sacrifice he expects a greater pleasure from God – but otherwise to deal harshly with oneself for a vain and shadowy reputation of virtue to no man's profit […] – this attitude they think is extreme madness and the sign of a mind which is both cruel to itself and ungrateful to nature […] (179)[37]

Of course, as soon as a difference between self and others is perceived, the potential for self-interest as a destructive force emerges. Yet, as we have also noted, although More conceived of the Utopians as being capable of this discernment, it is implied that the Individual, in the more abstract and embodied sense, is not perceived or even perceivable (as noted in their inability to comprehend second intentions)[38] – the question remains if this is by choice or by nature. If one decides this is not by choice, then this in turn would lead us to the questions as to whether human nature can change, and, if so, then how, and at what cost?[39] The tone More

---

clxxii-clxxviii, clxxii). Also consult Surtz, "Introduction Part II" cxlvii-cliii for a more detailed account of the satiric components.

[34] Greenblatt 41.

[35] Greenblatt 47; It is a modification of Hexter's "patriarchial familialism" (Hexter xli), due to the differences in conceptualising family life (Greenblatt 42-44).

[36] Jendrysik 34.

[37] Their founder would be an embodiment of this perceived virtue, as Baker-Smith notes that Utopus was completely "self-denying; [… and] legislates himself out of existence," rejecting his absolutist potential (153). See Baker-Smith also on the combinations of theories of pleasure that reconcile self-sacrifice, solidarity and the after-life (174).

[38] Baker-Smith explains that a modern conception of the Individual distorts More's Utopia to be perceived as more totalitarian than his contemporaries might have (221).

[39] It is noteworthy to mention here, that it is Hythlodaeus' inability to disregard his own inclinations, even at the cost of benefitting his family, that prevents him into entering any court, irrelevant of the (in)efficiency, as such self-sacrifice is too high a cost for him. "[…] As for my relatives and friends, […] I am not greatly troubled about them, for I think I have fairly well performed my duty to them already" (*Libellus* 55) and "As it is, I now live as I please […]" (*Libellus* 57). It is also ironic as he professes the Utopian way of life, where this behaviour would be presumably abhorred, to be the best and "[…] the only one which can rightly claim the name of a

generally adopts though, is of felicitous complicity and individual freedom to pursue happiness within guiding constraints laid down to optimize production and the chances of salvation, and where Utopians perceive themselves as an extension of one another, where no-one is beholden unto themselves.[40]

**"As We See Fit": Splitting the Self and Role in Bacon**

Bacon, however, does not take up the underlying radical tendencies of More's work, in regard to the suppression of individual and its self by social negation, but rather plays a tune of outward conformity. Despite partially touching upon the topics *Libellus* raised, but more ostensibly engaging in issues of structuring scientific endeavours and their relation to power,[41] Bacon's *New Atlantis*[42] seems to be driven by the latter and is concerned far more with worldly comfort than spiritual.[43] Published posthumously in 1627, it is preceded by a prefatory note, claiming the unfinished "fable" contained "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 […]" (127).[44] Framing its concerns thus, as to primarily pertaining to knowledge production, transmission, and application, although not necessarily limited

---

commonwealth" (*Libellus* 237). Accordingly, it is presumably his European capacity to discern between himself and universal humankind, by means of his education in the "*Small Logicals*," that blinkers him from ever being able to fully live in Utopia or bring it about.

[40] This would comply with Freeman's reading of the books and their composition, reconciling the text with More's life (esp. 308-309) but would also be iterated in the parerga of *Libellus* where Busleyden writes of More as "Regarding yourself as born not for yourself alone but for the whole world […]" (*Libellus* 33) which might very well encompass the general ethos of Utopian living.

[41] Bierman notes More's silence regarding the establishments of scientific institutions and endeavours (494). See also Judah Bierman, "Science and Society in the New Atlantis and Other Renaissance Utopias," *PMLA* 78.5 (1963): 492-500, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/460726> 15 May 2017; Eleanor D. Blodgett, "Bacon's *New Atlantis* and Campanella's *Civitas Solis*: A Study in Relationships," *PMLA* 46.3 (1931): 763-780, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/ 457860> 16 May 2017; and Timothy J Reiss, "Structure and Mind in Two Seventeenth-Century Utopias: Campanella and Bacon," *Yale French Studies* 49 (1973): 82-95, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2929569> 16 May 2017; for more comprehensive, in-depth analyses and comparisons to other Utopias.

[42] James Spedding, et al., *The Works of Francis Bacon*, volume 3, ed. James Spedding, Robert L. Ellis and Douglas D. Heath (London: Longman and co., 1857). Hereafter abbreviated as *New Atlantis* and all subsequent references to this edition are in parentheses in the text.

[43] That is not to say it has no part.

[44] Bronwen Price, "Introduction," *Francis Bacon's New Atlantis: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. Bronwen Price (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002) 1-2, 23 n.2, Directory of Open Access Books <https://www.doabooks.org/doab?func=fulltext&uiLanguage=en&rid=12662> 5 Jan. 2018. *New Atlantis* is considered as complete in this text, in line with Weinberger's reading. Cf. J. Weinberger, "Science and Rule in Bacon's Utopia: An Introduction to the Reading of the *New Atlantis*," *The American Political Science Review* 70. 3 (1976): 869-872, 882-885, JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1959872> 11 July 2017; and J. Weinberger, "On Bacon's *New Atlantis*," *New Atlantis and the Great Instauration*, ed. J. Weinberger. 2nd Edition (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2017) 133-134.

hereto,[45] rather than a European-scale systemic societal crisis as More perceived, the narrative itself is much more contained.[46] This shift in focus might account for some peculiar dissonances that riddle the text,[47] yet it may also just be a further opening of the tension between individuals and their community that More seemed at pains to explain away.

Bensalem is formally archistic but belies, as Weinberger has skilfully shown,[48] an anarchistic underbelly.[49] It is this duality, or split, of seeming (role) and being (self), that seems to pervade the Bensalemite society.[50] This is explicitly signalled when the visitors' fate is to be revealed by a stranger who introduces himself thus, "*I am by office* governor of the House of Strangers, and *by vocation I am* a Christian Priest; and therefore am come to *you* […], *both as strangers and* chiefly as *Christians*" (135; emphasis added). Although vocation might quite simply refer to a prior training, it could also imply a calling, a distinction that would be fostered by enforcing a duplication of labels unto the Europeans, one denoting a public perception ("strangers") and another pertaining to a more internal dimension of their identities ("Christians"). It is this tenuous relation that seems unsettling in the text, especially when applied to their societal structure. Bierman considers the political power as being

[45] David Colclough, "Ethics and politics in the *New Atlantis*," *Francis Bacon's* New Atlantis*: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. Bronwen Price (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002) 67-72, Directory of Open Access Books <https://www.doabooks.org/doab?func=fulltext&uiLanguage=en&rid=12662> 5 Jan. 2018. Counter to Colclough's dismissal of other readings, which he argues "ask[s] the *wrong* questions of the work" (62), when focusing on the text's silence regarding social structures, I consider these approaches equally valid and not exclusive.

[46] This does not mean that *New Atlantis* has no interest in other contemporary issues or those limited to England. For example, Jowitt astutely contextualises *New Atlantis* in relation to Bacon's shifting relationship to James I and his colonial policies, in addition to the spectre of 'the Jew' in politics. Although I do not share all of her assessments, a full engagement with the issue lies outside the scope of this paper. See Claire Jowitt, "'Books will speak plain'? Colonialism, Jewishness and politics in Bacon's *New Atlantis*," *Francis Bacon's* New Atlantis*: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. Bronwen Price (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002) 129-155, Directory of Open Access Books <https://www.doabooks.org/doab?func=fulltext&uiLanguage=en&rid=12662> 5 Jan. 2018. Also on the contextualisation of *New Atlantis* in colonial issues, see Irving, who stresses Bacon's underlying anxieties whilst linking it to his concerns on knowledge, and Lux, who draws attention to the relevance of China in *New Atlantis*. Sarah Irving, "'In a pure soil': Colonial anxieties in the works of Francis Bacon," *History of European Ideas* 32.3 (2006): 249-262; ScienceDirect <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0191659906000143> 3 Jan. 2018. Jonathan E. Lux, "'Characters reall': Francis Bacon, China and the entanglements of curiosity," *Renaissance Studies* 29.2 (2014): 184-20, Wiley Online Library <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi// 10.1111/rest.12060/epdf> 3 Jan. 2018.

[47] The narrative itself a very paradox given the Bensalemite laws enforcing secrecy (Weinberger, Science and Rule 873).

[48] Weinberger, "Science and Rule"; "On Bacon's *New Atlantis*".

[49] Whereas More constantly seems to open up limitless freedom only to restrict considerably (Greenblatt 40), Bacon seems to do the exact opposite, most notably in regard to Bensalemite concerns about murder, prostitution and the exacerbation the Adam and Eve pools pose (Weinberger, "Science and Rule" 881-882).

[50] Pohl calls them Atlantan (61).

separate from the House of Salomon,[51] possessing "isolation and autonomy"[52] despite their activities taking place everywhere,[53] essentially the State being "an almost foreign body of which they are scarcely a part";[54] contrarily though, it is an institution driven by individuals[55] who are only subject to their own restraint and morality which may restrict their pursuits.[56] Pohl justly contends, "They are indeed the true rulers of the Atlantan society",[57] and given the extent of their interests and potential for manipulative intercessions,[58] Weinberg's speculation of mass manipulation via psychedelics ought not to be dismissed entirely as misplaced modern conjecture.[59]

What follows then is two parallel existing societies, Bensalem – a monarchy and patriarchy adapted to longer lifespans, their society obscured, and a "fellowship"[60] of I's, the roots of their individuality presumably based on merit, but subject only unto themselves, who assume an almost occult quasi-stewardship of the former, revealing and concealing "as *we* think fit" (165; emphasis added). Between the first lack of identity due to a collapse into a faceless mass, roles and functions their only descriptors, and the second lack due to a superior nebulous "we," the constituents described similarly with a degree of inclination visible in their pursuits, the impression conveyed is of the insignificance of any and all individuals and their selfhood, the choice of volition irrelevant in face of self-perpetuating dynamic of discovery, wherein morality (and arguably personality) poses an obstruction to total knowledge.[61]

## "No. I Don't Think I Am Me. Not Anymore":[62] Positivizing Eradication

Dennis Kelly's 2013 television show *Utopia* revolves around the questions More raised as to whether human nature can change, and, if so, then how, and at what cost, with an inversion:

---

[51] Bierman 500.
[52] Bierman 496.
[53] Bierman 498.
[54] Reiss 93.
[55] Reiss 92.
[56] Weinberger, "Science and Rule" 881-885.
[57] Pohl 61.
[58] Of especial note is the ancillary material denoting their goals e.g. "Exhilaration of the spirits, and putting them in good disposition" (*New Atlantis* 167).
[59] Weinberger, "On Bacon's *New Atlantis*" 151.
[60] Bierman 500, 497.
[61] Weinberger also perceives a Bensalemite irreverence for morality ("Science and Rule" 881; "On Bacon's *New Atlantis*" 144). The aspect of perpetuity is arguably also evident in the feast of the Tirsan, promoting a vision of asexual perpetual existence, the mother kept out of sight or mind (*New Atlantis* 149).
[62] *Utopia,* specifically season 2, episode 6; hereafter abbreviated as (2:6) and all subsequent references to this edition are in parentheses in the text.

Set in contemporary British society, where self-perception is utterly undoubtable, it is the ability to participate in any larger sense of self beyond immediate embodiment that is scrutinised. The individual is at once all-compassing, yet therefore perceived as completely irrelevant, embedded in a set of seemingly self-perpetuating machinations of power, both political and capitalist – not unlike Bacon's utopia of continual discovery. As in Bacon's piece, it is also replete with shadowy parallel structures, simultaneously on the outside but essentially above, who operate and influence the highest levels of politics, the economy and society, though unelected and unaccountable, officially non-existent, and unfettered by policy, the necessity of transparency, or national borders, incumbent only unto goals they themselves define. What starts out as a group of fans of a graphic novel, all outcasts of a kind, searching for a sequel manuscript, quickly spirals into being caught up in a conspiracy, their adversaries a collective known only as The Network, seeking to impose sterility onto the majority of humanity as to ensure the future of humanity on the cusp on an eco-pocalypse. We have been living in a dystopic utopia since the onset of modernity, it would seem to argue.[63] With morality spinning on a gyroscope of conflicting interests to a countdown of a species-level self-annihilation and irrevocable implosion, the individuals are at once thrust into the midst of a situation where their actions may have an immediate impact: averting the release of a sterilising virus. Yet their involvement is almost coincidental, constantly placing them on the back foot, hence their preoccupations are determined by immediacy and propinquity, initially limited to survival. Accordingly, they provide an inadequate response to the adversaries' greater objectives, governed by long-term global forethought, engaging primarily with the threat of the sterilising virus rather than the issues of overpopulation and consequent ecological, energy and food supply crises The Network seeks to address.

Each and every one of the characters is overwhelmed at one point or another, if not constantly by the personal ethical and moral ramifications of the situations they are faced with, and to a certain extent the resultant implications at large. Wilson Wilson is a particularly interesting figure in this regard. He is introduced both driven by an extreme sense of self-interest, evident in his refusal to dress in blue, by which the group had intended to identify one another when meeting in real life for the first time, as "[I] don't look good in blue", and as being excessively possessive of his personal details, to the point of having blotted himself from all digital history (1:1), revealing a nihilistic drive compounded in his narcissism, with

[63] Confer Philip Carvel's speech (*Utopia* 2:1).

an almost paranoid, schizoid grasp on reality.[64] Nevertheless, he simultaneously longs to belong to a community, evinced in his online forum presence, and is yet unable to, due to lacking social decorum and an almost amoral willingness to embrace blunt facts of reality.[65] It is the latter trait that increasingly comes to dominate, quickly adapting to engage in violence, wherefore it ought not to surprise us, when he is converted, for lack of a better term, to The Network's cause, by Letts' and later Milner's relentless speeches on the state of the environment (1:5; 2:4). Despite grappling with the violence the choice inflicts, the spoon in season 2 increasingly symbolising his victimhood, lack of agency and his semblance of self as Wilson Wilson,[66] he ultimately sacrifices that Self − in wilfully killing Lee, when otherwise unnecessary (2:6), in order to regain agency in the communal identity of The Network with the role of Mr Rabbit;[67] to act in a manner he deems moral in the grand scheme of time, to exert influence in a problem that he would otherwise only be subject to. He is very aware of the implications and his own moral stance, neither fully agreeing nor disagreeing with The Network: "We should at least think about it […] because if they are right and we stop them, what does that make us?" (1:5) but also: "Losing that much life is never acceptable. But losing some is. […] I promise you, I'll be better than her" (2:6).

## Conclusion

As I have attempted to outline, the works investigated provide different takes on the relationship between the individual and society, they are essentially reimaginings redressing failures of the societies the authors lived in. More tries to maintain both a sense of self-identity whilst sacrificing it in part in favour of a communal identity, resulting in an extended self that may not be entirely natural, in order to achieve salvation, yet not succumbing entirely to predestination or resignation. According to Greenblatt his crisis was located in a perception

[64] His deep conviction of conspiracy theories and defence of the graphic novel as "opening a door … to reality" (*Utopia* 1:1).

[65] He blatantly admits to not expecting Ian to be black (*Utopia* 1:1) and seems romantically interested in Becky at times.

[66] Problematically, he is almost overly inscribed with symbolic signifiers even upon introduction, reflected both in his duplicated name, the t-shirt he wore initially bearing a stag on it – the relationship between animals and death is intriguingly subtle, but seems to function as harbingers in season 1, and well worth a more thorough analysis but also his repeated conversion; physical inscriptions of violence; and relationships to Arby and Milner, which figure as inverted mirrors; his colour coding and audio cues would be interesting to pursue in future elsewhere, as would the symbolic significance of his right eye being removed, however all this lies outside the scope of this paper.

[67] Interestingly, when inflicting the Chinese character upon his body – a scar associated with Mr Rabbit –, the act bears a momentary resemblance to the Japanese act of Seppuku (*Utopia* 2:6), yet again inscribing himself with symbolic significance and negating the counter-argument of an imposed Self, as his action avows to a deep degree of self-reflexivity.

of a world of madness;[68] an envisioned collapse or rather harmonious reconciliation of the private and public distinction, by means of relinquishing a possessive self-perception, was More's answer.[69]

Bacon, however, produces a split between seeming (role) and being (self), akin to More's dichotomy between the private and public, in order to address the crisis of a restriction of scientific endeavour, whilst the self though is either disavowed or else sacrificed on the altar of knowledge-worship in order to be unencumbered by morality, as Weinberger speculates.[70] Nevertheless a degree of self, as a constitutive part of a restricted "we", remains or is regained by means left deliberately obscure. Also of note is the openness towards intervening in human nature in order to achieve the necessary disposition.

Wilson Wilson, of Kelly's *Utopia*, also operates with the distinction between role and self that Bacon used, but sacrifices anything he may have considered his self in order to regain agency within a role that offers an identity within a species-identification, in light of the burgeoning crisis of overpopulation. Contrary to Jendrysik's assertion that "[i]n all utopias, individual political activity is reduced to exit",[71] here Wilson Wilson embraces the obliteration of self and actively engages in the maintenance of our critical utopia; it is the implication of this action and the dystopic tendencies it reveals that is unsettling.

However, in truth, the choices proffered in these Utopias between self-repression with a resignation of agency and self-sacrifice in order to perceive an attainment of agency, when faced with crises, are by no means comfortable. It is Bacon's legacy, though, the willingness to intervene in the construction of human nature, as explored by a number of post- and transhumanist authors, that is proving more fruitful for Utopian literature as means of envisioning alternative relationships between the Self and larger units, or to make the transition more palatable; with biochemical tweaking of aggression, for example, or by means of technologies that may bring about more compromising hive minds or swarm intelligences. It is these science-fiction speculations that maintain the spirit of Utopia and would be exceedingly engaging to explore in their precise manifestations, as they continue to force us to ask: What makes us human? What do we want to become? How? And, at what cost? But they also enable us to not only interrogate how we might be able to achieve a sustainable

[68] Greenblatt 14-16.
[69] Greenblatt would assert that this relinquishment does not fully occur (56-58), but his subject is More rather than the Individual in *Libellus* proper.
[70] Weinberger, "Science and Rule" 881-885.
[71] Jendrysik 37.

equilibrium between the I and Us – but whether we should. With recent investment in technologies of neural interfacing by companies such as Neuralink and Kernel,[72] these projects need to be addressed now in their inception, as the far-reaching implications for the social contract hold an extreme potential for generating systemic and fundamental crises that will undoubtedly exceed traditional national borders as we currently conceive them.

**Bibliography**

Baker-Smith, Dominic. *More's Utopia*. London, New York: HarperCollinsAcademic, 1991.

Bierman, Judah. "Science and Society in the *New Atlantis* and Other Renaissance Utopias." *PMLA* 78.5 (1963): 492-500. JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/460726> 15 May 2017.

Blodgett, Eleanor D. "Bacon's *New Atlantis* and Campanella's *Civitas Solis*: A Study in Relationships." *PMLA* 46.3 (1931): 763-780. JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable//457860> 16 May 2017.

Bruce, Susan. "Explanatory Notes: Utopia." *Three Early Modern Utopias: Utopia, New Atlantis and The Isle of Pines*. Ed. Susan Bruce. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. 213-231.

Cave, Terence. "Introduction." *Thomas More's Utopia in Early Modern Europe: Paratexts and Contexts*. Ed. Terence Cave. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2008. 1-13.

Cave, Terence et al., *Thomas More's Utopia in Early Modern Europe: Paratexts and Contexts*. Ed. Terence Cave. Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 2008.

Colclough, David. "Ethics and politics in the *New Atlantis*." *Francis Bacon's New Atlantis: New Interdisciplinary Essays*. Ed. Bronwen Price. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002. 60-81. Directory of Open Access Books <https://www.doabooks.org/ doab?func=fulltext&uiLanguage=en&rid=12662> 5 Jan. 2018.a

[72] See Cade Metz, "Elon Musk Isn't the Only One Trying to Computerize Your Brain," *WIRED* 31 Mar. 2017 <https://www.wired.com/2017/03/elon-musks-neural-lace-really-look-like/> 30 July 2017; Robin Mitchell, "How Elon Musk's Neuralink and Bryan Johnson's Kernal Are Bridging the Biological-Digital Gap," *All About Circuits* 4 June 2017 <https://www.allaboutcircuits.com/news/elon-musk-neuralink-bryan-johnson-kernal-bridging-biological-digital-gap/> 30 July 2017; and "The case for neural lace: Elon Musk enters the world of brain-computer interfaces," *The Economist* 30 Mar. 2017 <https://www.economist.com/news/science-and-technology/21719774-do-human-beings-need-embrace-brain-implants-stay-relevant-elon-musk-enters> 30 July 2017 for more details.

Davis, J. C. *Utopia and the Ideal Society: Study of English Utopian Writing 1516-1700.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Davis, J. C. "Thomas More's *Utopia*: sources, legacy and interpretation." *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*. Ed. Gregory Claeys. Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 28-50.

Freeman, John. "Discourse in More's *Utopia*: Alibi/Pretext/Postscript." *ELH* 59.2 (1992): 289-311. JSTOR < http://www.jstor.org/stable/2873344> 11 July 2017.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning. From More to Shakespeare.* Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Hexter, J. H. "Introduction: Part I." *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More: Utopia*. Volume 4. Ed. Edward Surtz and J. H. Hexter. New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1965. xv-cxxiv.

Irving, Sarah. "'In a pure soil': Colonial anxieties in the works of Francis Bacon." *History of European Ideas* 32.3 (2006): 249-262. ScienceDirect <http://www.sciencedirect.com//science/article/pii/S0191659906000143> 3 Jan. 2018.

Jendrysik, Mark. "Fundamental Oppositions: Utopia and the Individual." *The Individual and Utopia: A Multidisciplinary Study of Humanity and Perfection*. Ed. Clint Jones and Cameron Ellis. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2015. 27-43.

Jones, Clint and Cameron Ellis. "Introduction." *The Individual and Utopia: A Multidisciplinary Study of Humanity and Perfection*. Ed. Clint Jones and Cameron Ellis. Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2015. 1-8.

Jowitt, Claire. "'Books will speak plain'? Colonialism, Jewishness and politics in Bacon's *New Atlantis*" *Francis Bacon's* New Atlantis*: New Interdisciplinary Essays*. Ed. Bronwen Price. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002. 129-155. Directory of Open Access Books <https://www.doabooks.org//doab?func=fulltext&uiLanguage=en&rid=12662> 5 Jan. 2018.

Kenyon, Timothy. "The Problem of Freedom and Moral Behaviour in Thomas More's *Utopia*." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 21.3 (1983): 349-373. Project MUSE <https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.1983.0080> 11 July 2017.

Levitas, Ruth and Lucy Sargisson. "Utopia in Dark Times: Optimism/Pessimism and Utopia/Dystopia." *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*.

Ed. Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan. New York, London: Routledge, 2003. 13-27.

Lux, Jonathan E. "'Characters reall': Francis Bacon, China and the entanglements of curiosity." *Renaissance Studies* 29.2 (2014): 184-203. Wiley Online Library <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/rest.12060/epdf> 3 Jan. 2018.

Metz, Cade. "Elon Musk Isn't the Only One Trying to Computerize Your Brain". *WIRED,* 31 Mar. 2017. <https://www.wired.com/2017/03/elon-musks-neural-lace-really-look-like/> 30 July 2017.

Mitchell, Robin. "How Elon Musk's Neuralink and Bryan Johnson's Kernal Are Bridging the Biological-Digital Gap". *All About Circuits,* 4 June 2017. <https://www.allaboutcircuits.com/news/elon-musk-neuralink-bryan-johnson-kernal-bridging-biological-digital-gap/> 30 July 2017.

Moylan, Tom. *Demand the Impossible: Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination*. New York: Methuen, 1986.

Pohl, Nicole. "Utopianism after More: the Renaissance and Enlightenment." *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*. Ed. Gregory Claeys. Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 51-78.

Price, Bronwen. "Introduction." *Francis Bacon's New Atlantis: New Interdisciplinary Essays*. Ed. Bronwen Price. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2002. 1-27. Directory of Open Access Books <https://www.doabooks.org//doab?func=fulltext&uiLanguage=en&rid=12662> 5 Jan. 2018.

Reiss, Timothy J. "Structure and Mind in Two Seventeenth-Century Utopias: Campanella and Bacon." *Yale French Studies* 49 (1973): 82-95. JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org//stable/2929569> 16 May 2017.

Roggen, Vibeke. "A Protean Text: *Utopia* in Latin, 1516-1631." *Thomas More's Utopia in Early Modern Europe: Paratexts and Contexts.* Ed. Terence Cave. Manchester, New York: Manchester University Press, 2008. 14-31.

Spedding, James, and Robert L. Ellis and Douglas D. Heath. *The Works of Francis Bacon*. Volume 3. Ed. James Spedding, Robert L. Ellis and Douglas D. Heath. London: Longman and co., 1857.

Spinozzi, Paola. "*Acerba illa vita* velut *carcere atque aculeo*: Health or Death in More's *Libellus vere aureus:* Early Modern Thought and Contemporary Debate." *Utopian*

*Studies* 27.3 (2016): 586-600. JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325//utopianstudies.27.3.0586> 15 June 2017.

Surtz, Edward and J. H. Hexter. *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More: Utopia.* Volume 4. Ed. Edward Surtz and J. H. Hexter. New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1965.

Surtz, Edward and J. H. Hexter "Commentary." *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More: Utopia*. Volume 4. Ed. Edward Surtz and J. H. Hexter. New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1965. 255-570.

Surtz, Edward. "Introduction: Part II." *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More: Utopia.* Volume 4. Ed. Edward Surtz and J. H. Hexter. New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1965. cxxv-clxxxi.

Surtz, Edward. "Introduction: Part III." *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More: Utopia.* Volume 4. Ed. Edward Surtz and J. H. Hexter. New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1965. clxxxiii-cxciv.

Suvin, Darko. "Theses on Dystopia 2001." *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*. Ed. Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan. New York, London: Routledge, 2003. 187-200.

*The Bible. Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha*. Ed. Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

"The case for neural lace: Elon Musk enters the world of brain-computer interfaces" *The Economist*, 30 Mar. 2017. <https://www.economist.com/news/science-and-technology/21719774-do-human-beings-need-embrace-brain-implants-stay-relevant-elon-musk-enters> 30 July 2017.

*Utopia*. Created by Dennis Kelly. Directed by Marc Munden and Rebekah Wray-Rogers. Performed by Alexandra Roach, Nathan Stewart-Jarrett, Adeel Akhtar, Neil Maskell, Paul Higgins, Fiona O'Shaughnessy, Paul Ready, Geraldine James, Michael Smiley, James Fox, Oliver Woollford, and Emilia Jones. Written by Dennis Kelly and John Donelly, Kudos, 15 Jan. 2013.

Vieira, Fátima. "The Concept of Utopia." *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature*. Ed. Gregory Claeys. Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2010. 3-27.

Weinberger, J. "Science and Rule in Bacon's Utopia: An Introduction to the Reading of the *New Atlantis*." *The American Political Science Review* 70.3 (1976): 865-885. JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1959872> 11 July 2017.

Weinberger, J. "On Bacon's New Atlantis." *New Atlantis and the Great Instauration*. Ed. J. Weinberger. 2nd Endition. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2017. 133-157.

Yoran, Hanan. *Between Utopia and Dystopia: Erasmus, Thomas More, and the Humanist Republic of Letters*. Lanham, New York, Toronto et al.: Lexington Books, 2010.