

The Differences between Plato's *Republic* and Thomas More's *Utopia*

Abstract

This article aims to explain the concept of utopia, to analyze and clarify the differences between two books about utopia- Plato's (428/427-348/347 BC) *Republic* (380 BC) and *Utopia* (1516) by Thomas More (1478-1535); to discuss the importance of these books. The word 'utopia' is derived from ancient Greek language, combining the words 'ou' which means 'not'; the word 'eu' which means 'good'; and the word 'topos' which means 'country'. So 'utopia' means 'good' but 'impossible country'. It is a way of expression of a perfect or ideal society for its citizens. Utopists' aim is to show the possibility of creating a better society or state. As each utopian builds his model of a society, he criticizes the problems of his time. In this article, Plato's *Republic* and *Utopia* by More will be analyzed as examples of the utopian genre.

Keywords: More, Plato, utopia, imaginary, perfection, society, state model

Öz

Bu makalenin amacı, ütopya kavramını açıklamak, Platon'un *Devlet*'i ve Thomas More'un *Ütopya*'sı arasındaki farklılıkları belirtmek, her iki kitabın önemini tartışmaktır. 'Ütopya' kelimesi eski Yunan dilinden 'değil' anlamına gelen 'ou'; 'iyi' anlamına gelen 'eu'; ve 'şehir' anlamına gelen 'topos' kelimelerinin birleştirilmesi ile oluşmuştur. Yani, 'ütopya' 'iyi' fakat 'mümkün olmayan' yer anlamına gelmektedir. 'Mümkün olmayan' yer anlamına gelse de, ütopya vatandaşları için mükemmel ya da ideal toplumun ifade ediliş biçimidir. Ütopyaçıların amacı daha iyi bir toplum ya da devlet kurmanın mümkünlüğünü göstermektir. Her ütopyacı kendi toplum modelini inşa eder, döneminin problemlerini eleştirir. Bu makalede, Platon'un *Devlet*'i ve Thomas More'un *Ütopya*'sının, ütopya türünün bir örneği olarak ve bu sınıflandırma kapsamındaki çalışmalar içerisindeki önemi analiz edilecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: More, Plato, ütopya, hayal, mükemmellik, toplum, devlet modeli

Introduction

In order to better understand differences between Plato's (428/427-348/347 BC) *Republic* (380 BC) and More's (1478-1535) *Utopia* (1516), one should first know the concept of *utopia*. The word 'utopia' has been used by Thomas More, but the concept of an ideal society goes back to the period of Plato, even earlier, but the word 'utopia' was not used by Plato and earlier philosophers for describing their ideal societies; they used the concept of 'Golden Age' for such kind of utopian societies in ancient Greece.

The word 'utopia' is derived from the word 'topos' which means 'country' in ancient Greek language. Whereas utopia means an 'impossible world', it is a way of expression of an ideal society that offers a perfect life for its citizens. Utopia, which is a kind of imaginary design, is also a place based on the purpose of creating better society or a state model. Although imaginary, utopias are not completely detached from reality, and only formed by dreamers. Utopians understand the real world well, and they approach critically to reality. Their aims are to change wholly the existing system. Utopianism aspires to an alternative world, cannot be achieved, but can be imagined. Utopia is based on the idea that the world is not perfect and its aim is to reform it. According to Ruth Levitas, who is a sociologist, utopia is "desire for a better way of being" (2010, p. 9).

According to the Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature (p.1152),

The word utopia first occurred in Sir Thomas More's book of that name, published in Latin as *Libellus ... de optio reipublica statu, deque nova insula Utopia* (1516; "Concerning the highest state of the republic and the new island Utopia"). In *Utopia* More describes a pagan and communist city-state in which institutions and policies are entirely governed by reason. The order and dignity of such a state was intended to provide a notable contrast with his

description of the unreasonable state of the Europe of his time, which he saw being divided by self-interest and greed for power and riches.

Utopian literature is actually criticism of the period in which is written, at the same time, utopic texts mention a future hidden in these situations or circumstances. Therefore, we must read them as political texts rather than literary. It would be better to describe utopias as 'drums of war' than imaginary places. Because the aim of utopia is to eliminate the source of badness, poverty, inequality and injustice in the society. So we can analyze the books '*Republic*' and '*Utopia*' by this way. Although it is imaginary, both of two books describe the ideal government as well.

The utopian city, dreamed and imagined by philosophers, had a great impact on the march of human civilizations, in the East and West. Those philosophers who wrote philosophical books or had an impressive experience in life, expressed their ideas about building a virtuous and perfect society. The most known of them are Plato, Thomas More, Saint Augustin, Al Farabi, Tommaso Campanella, Francis Bacon. Each one of these has put together the fundamental nature of his ideas and what he has drawn from the culture of his time, in a book, but in addition to study the reality of his work and his efforts to meet people's needs. Moreover, overcome the hardships, the existence of all people, in an ideal city, happy collaborators. Plato's *Republic* was, and still is, a solid foundation and an important source for all the virtuous cities written by philosophers after him. Every philosopher builds his civilization, addresses the problems of his time, wherever he is and in which culture he has lived. He draws inspiration from Plato's *Republic*. Plato was almost allocated as the head of the city. He was aiming to raise the philosopher king now societies - in his opinion pleased if the king ruled the philosopher. According to Plato, if the king is a philosopher, this means that the rulers of the city will be wise enough to administer the affairs of the state full. Although the philosophers will deal with the problems from multiple perspectives, they are going to pay particular attention to the city's governor. The dialogue in the *Republic* is the most important of what Plato wrote for its various theories, which has been related to the general view of the life of man and society. In the history of philosophy, it had an unprecedented impact. Plato searches for, in the dialogue of the *Republic*, the image of the ideal state in which justice was achieved; he also places a neighboring republic in ten pamphlets.

The dialogues of the *Republic* do not belong only to the field of philosophy, but rather to stronger representation in the field of moral philosophy. They also contain the historical achievements in the field of metaphysics, as they contain the theory of knowledge. Plato's purpose was to clarify the importance of integrity and justice for human beings.

Many scholars regard Plato's *Republic* as the main source of utopic works and all types of social engineering. In his book *Republic*, Plato represents an ideal society and defines an ideal society in terms of justice, education, work system and many other aspects of a society.

The term, Utopia, however, was coined by Thomas More. He also deals with an ideal society in a different manner in his book "Utopia". He rehashed thoughts of Plato and came up with his own idea of "utopia". Firstly, More wrote the second section of "*Utopia*", then in 1516 he wrote the first section and finished the book. So, it can be thought that he aimed to create his perfect ideal society at first and then show how bad conditions of United Kingdom and all European countries were when compared with his *Utopia*. In this sense, *Utopia* has a great value. Because, in neither Plato's *Republic*, nor in later utopian works were criticized the negative sides of the societies in which are lived. The effects of Renaissance and humanism are clearly seen in *Utopia*. Whereas in Medieval ages religious believed that happiness was only possible in the afterlife, in the Renaissance people wanted to be happy not in the other world, but in this real world and right now. The center of the world was human in the Renaissance period unlike in the Medieval Age (it was- God). Thomas More believed that human-being is a supreme being that God created; he can solve the problems using his mind and can build perfect or ideal societies. Thomas More understood that this ideal society may be different from the society which he lived. In this sense, he tried to create a new, perfect country, which is called "*Utopia*". More defends that people can reach perfection in the social system in his book. He begins Book I with panegyric words to king of U.K –Henry VIII.

Henry VIII., the unconquered King of England, a prince adorned with all the virtues that become a great monarch, having some differences of no small consequence with Charles the most serene Prince of Castile, sent me into Flanders, as his ambassador, for treating and composing matters between them. (1516, p. 11)

In the passage above, although he was against the royal system and defends democracy in *Utopia*, he praises King Henry VIII. It may be because of the injustice of royal system of that time. One would lose his life if he made the king angry. In the book, Thomas More meets Peter Giles in Antwerp, and Giles introduces Raphael Hythloday to More. Raphael is a sailor, from Portugal. He knows and can speak Latin and Greek languages very well; he is interested in philosophy. Raphael gives everything which he has to his brothers, and goes the long way around the world. More invites Giles and Raphael to his garden, and they start to talk about places which Raphael has visited. Raphael tells the different varieties of government systems of the places which he visited, and he explains what is right or wrong in these systems, good and bad sides of them. Raphael's vast knowledge influence More and Peter. So, they wonder why he does not become an employer in the service of a king. Raphael denies his superior and says that even if he was so qualified, he would not accept to work for a king. He explains his idea with this sentence: "... most kings are more interested in the science of war- which I don't know anything about, and don't want to- than in useful peacetime techniques." (More,1516, p.42). The dialogues between of the three men stand out in Book I. It is focused on England. The penal codes, unfair income distribution, social injustice in England are criticized, the economic problems of other European countries, as well. According to Raphael the primary reason of unfairness and poverty in the society is not allocating national wealth fairly. He asserts if a few of people has tremendous wealth while most people live in poverty, we cannot talk about happiness in such kind of country. H. W. Donner explains it as "a most emphatic contradiction of the very principle of communism" (Donner, 1945, p. 66). More aims to show failures of the governments, particularly in justice and economy. Thus, in Book II, he could create a society in better or even in perfect conditions. Book II begins with a meal where More, Peter Giles and Raphael Hythloday come together. Here, Raphael gives details about Utopia and its basic features such as geography, marriage, family, religion, education, social structures. For instance, in Utopia, there are 54 big and well-planned towns in which all people speak the same language, and farming is their main activity. (More,1516, p.70). According to gender and marital status all Utopians wear same clothes. "Even the Mayor himself wears perfectly ordinary clothes without any special head-dress." (More,1516, p.106). It is related with equality between people in Utopia. Girls after 18, boys after 22 can marry. Divorce is only permitted under special circumstances, those who do not obey this law become slave. (More,1516, pp.103-4). Men and women in Utopia are equals. But this equality only in the labor and the army system are seen. Man is the head in a family and if necessary, he can punish his wife (More, 1516, p. 104). Karl Kautsky (1959, p. 227) rightly criticizes the inequality between men and women in the family. He says that it is not only contradictory to modern socialism, but also to More's socialism. There is tolerance for all religions in Utopia. Even so, the faith of most of Utopians converted to Christianity. Utopians work only six hours a day; three hours in the morning, three hours in the afternoon. Karl Kautsky in his work *Thomas More and his Utopia* (1959, p.198) points out that Marx's views about working hours which he argued in *Das Capital*, have resemblance to More's thoughts. According to Marx working hours can be lessened providing that the capitalist production system is avoided.

These two works can be regarded as the most important works in the line of works related to utopia, and they share the same reasoning: an ideal society.

However, there are serious differences between these two works as they were written many centuries apart. To begin with, while More was affected by Plato's "*Republic*", in fact, More just took the idea of establishing a perfect and ideal society. He created a completely different country from that of Plato's. The most obvious difference is the structure of the societies: whereas there is a class-based society in Plato's ideal society like producers (money-lovers), guardians (honor-lovers), and philosopher-kings (wisdom-lovers), in More's perfect country no such classes exist. In addition to this, More's *Utopia* differs from the Plato's *Republic* in terms of laboring system. Utopians work in any kind of jobs, but in *Republic*, everyone must work in one job which is suitable for him, nobody can meddle with the others' works. Even, Plato defines justice and injustice through labor system. He

claims that doing one's own work is justice; on the other hand, injustice is the conflict of three classes in the labor system, that is, exchanging their parts; and it is very harmful for the authority. For instance, if someone is a part of the money-making class and attempts to join the class of judges or soldiers, he just gives harm to the society. Because money-making class does not have the appropriate tools and honors of the soldiers; soldiers have no capacity to judge like the wisdom-lover class. Plato thinks that things such as injustice, ignorance, cowardliness, immorality are the result of the turmoil and up-down movements in classes. He supports this with these words: "Meddling and exchange between these three classes is the greatest harm that can happen to the city and would rightly be called the worst thing someone could do to it" (Plato, 380 BC, p.109 434c.). The other difference between More's *Utopia* and Plato's *Republic* is about forms of governmental systems. Whereas More believes and defends that the best regime is democracy, Plato argues that there are five forms of regimes, and five forms of souls. It means according to the government there are different types of citizens, and the good and the right regime is monarchy or aristocracy.¹The other four governments are bad and mistaken (Plato, 380 BC, pp.121-122).

According to Plato, in a monarchical system, the city is like a person, and this is the most important aspect of a unified government. So, everyone will say 'mine' or 'not mine' for the same things, people will share pains or pleasures, have the same purposes and benefits; they will not have separate wives, children, and money. In other words, they will have no private things except their own bodies. This is how all the conflicts that rise among people because of money, family, children etc. will be overcome. So, they will not cause any harm to the society (Plato, 380 BC, pp. 136-137-139). In addition, he asserts that kings must also be philosophers because only they have political power and intelligence.

However, Plato (380 BC, p. 181) explains that some people are born to be philosophers and politicians; some are created as ordinary people to do everything without thinking. Even further, he claims that philosophers are divine beings, and the rest of the people are only human (Plato, 380 BC, p.209). Although Plato's ideas about equality between men and women show some similarities with More's ideas, they also differ significantly from each other at certain points. Like More, Plato also defends that it does not matter being man or woman to do anything. Women can also work in any occupations that men do. However, Plato (380 BC, p.157) claims that women are weak by nature while men are strong, so men are better than women in all works. Plato utilizes the equality between men and women for the safety of the society. He says that the creation of women is also suitable for being guardians as men are. So they will marry each other, they will go to war together, even they will take their children who have capability for fighting in a war (Plato, 380 BC, p. 467a). Plato isolates guardians from the rest of the people and gives privileges to them such as making sacred marriages or having sex more than people of other classes.

In Plato's *Republic*, like everything, women are also common; all guardians both women and men live together, have common houses, meals, even children; they join in all physical activities together. However, from Plato's point of view, the concepts of marriage and family are different from those of More's. According to Plato some beneficial marriages are considered as sacred. People who can marry are selected depending on certain regulations. So the best men match with the best women while the inferior men and women match with each other. In addition to this, the best men and women will have sex more than the most inferior men and women. Thus, the offspring is bettered. Moreover, the children of good parents are taken and brought up by nurses in a private part of the city, but if you are children of inferior parents or born defective, you will be brought up in an isolated and confidential place. So, the good line of the guardians will not be broken. Mothers whose tits are full of milk are brought to the nest and they feed the children without knowing whose children they are. The number of marriages are decided by the rulers according to war, disease, and such kind of factors, so that the city becomes neither too big nor too small (Plato, 380 BC, p.134). A woman is able to bear children from the age of 20 to 40, it is till 55 for a man to reproduce. If a human-being has a child except in reproduction periods, it will be accepted as offense against the republic and religion, and the child will be called as "unhallowed"; the government will not feed it (Plato, 380 BC, pp. 132,134-5). In *Utopia*

¹ Monarchy and aristocracy are the same forms of government. If the power has one single ruler is called monarchy, if the power is shared among few selected people is called aristocracy.

children are fed by their mothers in the nests. Another difference between More's *Utopia* and the *Republic* is that *Utopia* is based on equality of property, but Plato thinks that property is just for the guardians and the philosopher-kings (Plato, 380 BC, p.195). According to Plato, philosophers are divine-beings while the others are just human-beings (Plato, 380 BC, p.171).

To sum up, although there are some similarities between the two works of utopia, in fact there are a lot of differences almost in every aspect of society. Besides, both of them are very essential works as utopic genre. Although there are some utopic cities before Plato, his *Republic* can be considered as the main inspirer source of utopian works. Especially in utopian works after *Republic* can be seen the traces of Plato. Each utopist creates his ideal society by inspiring Plato's thoughts. In this sense, the importance of Plato cannot be denied. The important point about Thomas More is that he is who gave the name "utopia" as a genre. Even More is affected by Plato and writes his book *Utopia*. Of course, it is not the only reason of his importance. More creates almost perfect society in his book in terms of family structure or working system. So, More's *Utopia* can be considered as the first utopic book in modern sense. Besides, whereas he creates his ideal society, he also criticizes the society in which he lived. This criticism is not common in the other utopic works.

Conclusion

The aim of this article is to give an explanation about the concept of utopia; to analyze the books "Republic" by Plato and Thomas More's "Utopia", and show the differences between these two books; to tell the importance of *Republic* and *Utopia*.

The word 'utopia' is derived from ancient Greek language, combining the words 'ou' which means 'not'; the word 'eu' which means 'good'; and the word 'topos' which means 'country'. So 'utopia' means 'good' but 'impossible country'. Although there are a lot of explanations about utopia, utopia is a way of expression of an ideal society that has perfect qualities for its citizens. It is based on the purpose of creating better society or a state model. Utopian literature is actually criticism about the situations of the period in which is written, at the same time it is texts that mentions the future is hidden in these situations or circumstances. Therefore, we must read them as political texts rather than literary. Because the aim of utopia to eliminate the source of badness, poverty, inequality and injustice in the society.

The concept of utopia is known to have been used by Thomas More, an English humanist, but the concept of an ideal society itself does not begin with More. The concept of utopia goes back to the period of Plato, even earlier, but Plato and earlier philosophers did not use the word 'utopia' for their ideal societies. Many scholars refer to Plato's (428/427-348/347 BC) *Republic* (380 BC) as the main source of all types of social engineering and utopic works. In the *Republic* Plato tries to depict an ideal society and describes an ideal society in terms of justice, education, warfare and many other aspects of a society. The term itself, however, was coined by Thomas More (1478-1535). In his work, *Utopia*, More also fictionalizes an ideal society in a different manner. These two works can be regarded as the most important works in the line of works related to utopia, and they share the same rationale: an ideal society. Of course, there are serious differences between these two works as they were written many centuries apart.

As is mentioned before, *Republic* (380 BC) is regarded as the main source of all types of social engineering and utopic works. Even More himself is affected by Plato and his book *Republic*. But More takes the idea of creating a new and perfect society from Plato. He creates completely different country in *Utopia* from Plato's *Republic*. However, More affects with his book *Utopia* those who come after him such as Thomas Campanella, Francis Bacon. When analyzed these two books, although there are a few similarities between *Republic* and *Utopia* in some aspects, it is clearly seen there are strict differences between them. These differences are in government, politics, economics, work system, marriage, family, justice, equality, class system. These differences give them importance in utopian literature.

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