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## The Realistic Desirability of Perfection in Thomas More's Utopia and John Milton's Paradise Lost

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THE REALISTIC DESIRABILITY OF PERFECTION IN THOMAS MORE'S *UTOPIA*  
AND JOHN MILTON'S *PARADISE LOST*

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### Abstract

This paper analyzes Thomas More's *Utopia* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost* to investigate the realistic desirability of perfection. The practices that ensure perfection in Thomas More's *Utopia* are realistically applied to society to determine if such practices would be feasible, accepted, or desired in society. Meanwhile, the reactions and comments on the lost perfection of the Garden of Eden in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* are analyzed as a template for navigating a fallen, imperfect world. By studying these two literary works together, this paper seeks to investigate the realistic desirability of perfection in society and the effects of chasing perfection.

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The Realistic Desirability of Perfection in Thomas More's *Utopia* and John Milton's  
*Paradise Lost*

## 1. Introduction

Thomas More's *Utopia* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost* both discuss perfect worlds and ideal societies. Yet, both literary works also suggest how that perfection is unrealistic and undesirable. More's *Utopia* describes the religious, social, and political practices that ensure the prosperity and stability of a perfect island society called Utopia. On the surface, it seems like the author approves of Utopian practices since Hythloday so fervently recommends them to More's character. However, the closing comments and critiques on Utopian practices by both characters create a mood of ambivalence towards Utopian practices, thus leading readers to question the realistic desirability of Utopian practices in an actual human society.

Meanwhile, Milton's *Paradise Lost* describes the original Garden of Eden and how we lost that perfection. Adam and Eve's sin is explicitly bemoaned and lamented, but then several characters provide consolation by suggesting how something better shall be achieved through the Fall. Though their reasonings differ, Milton and More both posit through their works that though humanity thinks they desire perfection, they actually prefer contexts of imperfection. Milton suggests how our fallenness gives us the opportunity to achieve greater joys than what we had in the Garden of Eden while More suggests how human pride makes perfection impossible and undesirable to humanity.

Since many Utopian practices require people to completely ignore their prideful instincts, humanity's pride would ultimately reject and rebel against the measures required to ensure the social and economic stability in a perfect, utopian society. Hythloday and More's character reflect this argument in their closing comments. As the text ends, Hythloday once again praises Utopian practices and wishes that the world would be so wise as to imitate them, but he also admits that it would be unrealistic to implement Utopian practices in the

world because human pride would be too big a hindrance (More 146). Meanwhile, More's character states that there are many Utopian practices he wishes to see in the world's governments, though he cannot agree with all the Utopian practices described by Hythloday (148). These comments imply that humanity will agree with a perfect society in the abstract, as Hythloday and More both praise Utopia and wish for the world to imitate their practices. However, Hythloday admits how pride reduces the feasibility of those practices in a real society while More doubts the desirability of those practices. Meanwhile, several characters in Milton's *Paradise Lost* overtly support my argument that humanity shall achieve greater joys through the Fall. For example, as the angel Michael is escorting Adam and Eve out of Eden, he comforts them by saying, "[thou] shalt possess/ A Paradise within thee, happier far" (Milton 12.586-7). So, Milton suggests that the Fall, despite descending humanity into a state of imperfection, allows humanity to achieve greater happiness within that imperfect state. In this paper, I will explore the various ways in which human pride rejects perfection in More's *Utopia*, and the various ways in which humanity may achieve greater joys through their imperfections in Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

Human pride may be interpreted as either a sinful pride (such as arrogance, vanity, or conceit) or a healthy pride (such as self-esteem or dignity). Hythloday's reference to human pride seems to assume the first meaning, asserting how Utopia would be a perfect society if sinful pride did not reject it. My paper will use both interpretations of human pride to show how Utopian perfection would be rejected. My first two points use the first interpretation of sinful pride to heighten how humanity is imperfect and will thus not accept or fit in a perfect world or society. I supplement these points with my analysis of Milton's *Paradise Lost* that suggests how we are happier in imperfect contexts anyways. My last two points use the second interpretation of healthy pride to highlight how Utopian perfection necessarily violates humanity's self-worth and dignity, and does not allow humanity to redeem their

fallenness by striving against evil. I strengthen these points with my analysis of Milton's *Paradise Lost* that shows how contexts of imperfection do allow for these things.

## 2. Alternative Readings of Both Texts

A few counterarguments posit how More's Utopian practices are endorsing and encouraging realistic societal reforms, such as the Utopian practice of religious freedom. In "Religious Freedom in Thomas More's Utopia", Sanford Kessler asserts how "Thomas More advocated religious freedom in Utopia to promote civic peace in Christendom and to help unify his fractious Catholic Church" (Kessler). He supports his interpretation by analyzing how religious Utopian practices influence their society. For example, he posits how they created a "limited type of religious freedom [that] made Utopia a theologically diverse, but morally unified society wholly free of religiously inspired violence" (Kessler). This analysis is supported by the Utopian law that "every man might be of what religion he pleased, and might endeavor to draw others to it by the force of argument and by amicable and modest ways, but without bitterness [or] violence" (More 129). This law allows Utopians the freedom to choose their own religion, while also preventing any religious antipathies.

Kessler also acknowledges how Hythloday describes pride as a "plague of human nature" (More 146) that would obstruct religious freedom, but accounts for this pride by positing how "the Utopians took a certain pride in forming and maintaining their own religious opinions without endangering their commonwealth" (Kessler). This is supported by the opinions of the Utopians' leader, Utopus, who thought that God "might inspire man in a different manner, and be pleased with this variety" (More 129). This belief accounts for human pride as Utopians may now take pride in their diverse forms of religion as being pleasing to God in its variety. So, Kessler strongly supports his views on religious Utopian

practices being a model for social reform in society, though even he must acknowledge that pride would be an obstacle that must be circumvented.

Another counterargument to my thesis is Jennifer Bishop's argument in "'Utopia' and Civic Politics in Mid-Sixteenth-Century London" that More's *Utopia* reveals of "an engagement with ideas of 'good government'" (Bishop 933) and "[exists] as part of a dialogue of reform" (952). Bishop supports her argument by exploring the historical context of the mid-sixteenth century when commonwealth reforms were being heavily emphasized: "contributions to commonwealth reform in the mid-sixteenth century could take a variety of forms, including new legislation, such as the Vagrancy Act; re-founded institutions, such as the Royal Hospitals; and the publication of new or translated texts, such as *Utopia*" (951). Bishop also asserts how "each of these forms provided a framework within which civic reform could be conceptualized, discussed, or enacted" (951). More's text reflects Bishop's assertion, in that the text discusses the political and social practices in Utopia, such as how their society elects their "Prince", "Philarch", and "Archphilarch" (More 59). Then Bishop supports her argument that *Utopia* is part of a dialogue of reform by referencing Sara Rees Jones's argument that More modelled Utopia's capital city, Amaurotum, after London to suggest to Londoners the higher purpose of their own civic institutions (Bishop 951). Bishop supports this argument with historical context as she states how "this 'reminder' would have been particularly relevant during the Edwardian reformation, when the control of poverty and vagrancy became a civic responsibility after the dissolution of religious houses and institutions" (951). Overall, though Bishop's argument of *Utopia* being a realistic call for reform is strongly supported by historical evidence and other scholars, her argument lacks textual evidence and does not address the realistic desirability of those Utopian reforms when implemented in an actual human society.



Several arguments are also made against my interpretation of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, such as Noam Reisner's argument that *Paradise Lost* sees humanity's Fall as inauspicious and damning. In *John Milton's "Paradise Lost": A Reading Guide*, Reisner argues that "Adam and Eve's loss of paradise [was] for Milton...an event of calamitous moral and spiritual error which mankind has slavishly repeated throughout its fallen history" (Reisner 1). In Milton's eyes, humanity's Fall in *Paradise Lost* symbolized a "triumph of tyranny over human weakness" (1) and a loss of "the single perfection and material unity of the one true God" (9) that humanity enjoyed before the Fall. This interpretation is supported by Milton's own opening comments on humanity's Fall. In Book 1, Milton begins his poem by describing "Man's first disobedience [that...]/ Brought death into the World, and all our woe/ With loss of Eden" (Milton 1.1-4). "Man's first disobedience" alludes to the original sin that caused humanity's Fall, while the diction used to describe that Fall ("death", "woe", "loss") heaps overtly negative connotations on it. This suggests that Milton has a negative perspective on humanity's Fall, and that he views the Fall as the root of all the sorrow and pain in the world. Milton also depicts God as viewing humanity's Fall inauspiciously. God sends an angel to warn Adam and Eve of "how [Satan] designs/ In them at once to ruin all mankind" (5.227-28). God's warning implies how the original sin will destroy mankind, tainting their perfection. So, there are several areas of *Paradise Lost* that support Reisner's unfavourable interpretation of the Fall.

There are also scholars who see Milton's *Paradise Lost* as a tragedy of free will and a condemnation of Adam and Eve as being responsible for the Fall. In "Eve and the Doctrine of Responsibility in *Paradise Lost*", Stella P. Revard argues that "the responsibility for [the Fall] lies with the husband who sanctioned [Eve's] exposure [to Satan as this] creates the climate for her fall" (Revard 69). This is supported by the text as Adam is depicted as being wiser than Eve and reluctant to separate from her. He warns Eve, "Firm we subsist, yet possible to

swerve” (Milton 9.359), predicting how they may “fall into [Satan’s] deception unaware” (9.362). Since Adam was wiser and more prudent, his failure to advise and “shape his wife's decisions” leads to him “approving her freedom [and thus causing] her fall and his own” (Revard 69). This is shown in how Adam is aware of the dangers of separating, yet he agrees to separate from Eve, thus willingly exposing them both to greater temptation.

Revard also supports her argument by noting how the Son assigns responsibility to Adam in *Paradise Lost*: “The Son [asserts] that Adam alone was responsible for his own sin. Yet he [also] makes Adam's responsibility almost directly proportionate to the degree he excelled Eve and was set in perfection and real dignity above her” (71). When Adam tries to blame the Fall on Eve, the Son reminds Adam that “God set [Adam] above her” (Milton 10.149) and that Adam’s “perfection far excelled/ Hers in all real dignity” (10.150-51). That being said, the Son asks Adam why “to [Eve]/ [he] didst resign [his] manhood” (10.147-48). The Son’s speech charges Adam for not guiding Eve’s decisions and for not preventing her exposure to temptation. This supports Revard’s claim that Adam is responsible for the Fall in *Paradise Lost*. So far, I have discussed several arguments that refute my thesis or offer alternative interpretations. Nevertheless, I believe that my interpretations are beneficial and strongly supported by the texts, and I shall now begin supporting my arguments.

### 3. Aversion to Rebuke, Joy of Forgiveness

Several practices of the Utopians suggest the impracticality, from a humanist point of view, of this ideal society ever being realized. For instance, the Utopian practice of constant surveillance, which aims to reduce vice through rebukes and instructions from others, would be rejected as our sinful, human pride would rebel against constant chastisement and orders from others. Thomas I. White supports this idea in “Festivitas, Utilitas, et Opes: The Concluding Irony and Philosophical Purpose of Thomas More's "Utopia"” as he argues how

“More consistently condemns common or public opinion as a guide to one's beliefs and actions” (White 141). More’s disapproval of being guided by public opinion suggests his ironic, rather than sincere, approach to Utopian surveillance practices that encourage Utopians to base their actions on the judgement of others. This ironic interpretation is supported by Hythloday’s stating that Utopian practices would be difficult to implement in other societies as sinful pride is an “infernal serpent that creeps into the breasts of mortals, and possesses them too much to be easily drawn out” (More 146). This comment satirizes previously commended Utopian practices as it suggests how human pride will realistically hinder the adoption of those practices. Initially, the Utopian practice where young people sit interspersed by the older people at mealtimes is commended for the fact that “the gravity of the old people, and the reverence that is due to them, might restrain the younger from all indecent words and gestures” (73). However, realistically, having society base their actions on the opinions of others may be counterintuitive since “common opinion is not shaped by reason and virtue, and it is therefore an unreliable guide to morality” (White 141). A satirical reading that factors in human pride also suggests that the young people will rebel against constantly having an elder “observe [their] temper” (More 74) as they will feel belittled and micromanaged, and consequently act out negatively. So, a satirical reading of Utopian practices of surveillance reveal how human pride would rebel against the desired outcomes of those practices.

This argument is supported by Ronald Huebert’s “Privacy: The Early Social History of a Word” where he posits that More’s “comprehensive, unrelenting network of [Utopian] surveillance” (Huebert 22) is merely an ironic method of underscoring the importance of privacy in society. This ironic reading supports my satirical interpretation of Utopian practices as it suggests how those practices are realistically undesirable. Huebert describes Utopian surveillance as “worse than being followed incessantly by the ever-watchful eye of

Providence” (22) as the reality of Utopian surveillance would be unnerving and overwhelming. For example, Huebert states how “sex in Utopia is not only—and not even principally—a private interaction between consenting adults [but rather a] subject of responsible public planning” (23). This evaluation is supported by the text as Utopian couples are presented naked to each other before marriage to prevent any hidden defects (More 104). Huebert’s overt aversion to this practice provides an example of a Utopian practice of surveillance that would be rejected by human society, thus supporting my argument.

Huebert supports the impracticality of Utopian practices of surveillance as he analyzes Andrew Marvell’s poems to show how privacy is important in protecting human pride: “what protects the speaker from outright ridicule is the fact that he’s completely alone” (Huebert 24). Establishing this importance strengthens Huebert’s claim that More is describing ironically Utopian practices of surveillance. He supports this claim by noting how “Hythloday” and “Utopia” are ironic names as they respectively mean “purveyor of nonsense” and “nowhere” (27). Heubert provides various pieces of evidence to support his claim that More depicts Utopian practices of surveillance ironically in order to underscore the importance of privacy in society. This ironic interpretation addresses how Utopian practices of surveillance are realistically abhorrent and how human pride requires an opposing practice: privacy. So, Heubert supports my claim that More depicts Utopian practices of surveillance satirically to highlight how those practices would be rejected by human pride.

Contrasting the constant chastisement and rebukes that our pride would reject in the perfect Utopian society, Milton suggests that humanity’s fallenness and imperfections lead us to greater joys by allowing us to experience God in new and different ways, such as through His mercy, grace, and forgiveness. John T. Shawcross supports this argument in *With Mortal Voice: The Creation of Paradise Lost* as he asserts how “we are all blind until we have experienced the trials of being mortal and have then bathed ourselves in the spirituality of

God's Logos" (Shawcross 16). So, through our fallenness, we experience more of God and thus achieve greater joy and spirituality. God's mercy and forgiveness are foreshadowed by the angel Abdiel's involvement with Satan and God's pardoning of the angel's error. After rebuking and rejecting Satan, Abdiel returns to heaven where God, instead of rebuking or punishing Abdiel, forgives Abdiel and praises him for returning. God says to Abdiel, "Servant of God. Well done; well hast thou fought/ The better fight" (Milton 6.29-30), praising Abdiel for seeking "To stand approved in sight of God" (6.36). Though God could condemn Abdiel for leaving Him to follow Satan, God instead shows His mercy and forgiveness by accepting Abdiel back into heaven and commending him for returning. This event foreshadows how humanity will also receive God's mercy and forgiveness after they sin, thus achieving greater joys by experiencing the fullness of God.

This comes to pass as God reacts to the Fall by sending the Son, a merciful and loving character who will sacrifice Himself to redeem humanity, to judge Adam and Eve. God's deliberate choice of such a judge for Adam and Eve demonstrates the love and mercy He offers humanity after the Fall. As Shawcross asserts, "The subject of man's disobedience has been used to exhibit the theme of God's love" (Shawcross 27). God confesses "I intend/ Mercy" (Milton 10.58-59) in sending the Son, who is "Man's friend, his mediator" (10.60). In turn, the Son proclaims that He will "mitigate their doom/ On [Him] derived" (10.76-77) and "temper so Justice with mercy" (10.77-78). This conversation displays how God treats humanity's sin with loving mercy. So, despite the Fall and the doom it imposed on humanity, a greater joy is achieved by humanity as God now offers mercy and forgiveness, something we could not experience in our pre-Fall state of perfection. Instead of the constant rebukes required in a perfect Utopian society, Milton suggests that humanity's imperfections allow them to experience forgiveness and mercy.

Further contrasting the unrelenting surveillance of Utopia that aims to reproach individuals and command them to perfection, Milton focuses on how humanity's imperfections open them up to receiving God's divine and healing grace. Benjamin Myers reflects this view in "Prevenient Grace and Conversion in *Paradise Lost*" as he argues that "the Fall is seen in its proper light only when it is viewed in relation to the ensuing intervention of the grace of God" (Myers 21). This grace is predicted in the opening lines of *Paradise Lost* as Milton foreshadows how, after the Fall, "one greater Man/ [will] Restore us, and regain the blissful seat" (Milton 1.4-5). Both God and the Son also mention the grace that will be offered to a fallen humanity; even as God predicts the Fall, He promises that "Man...shall find grace" (3.131); the Son repeats this promise, stating how "Man shall find grace" (3.227) and how grace will "find means, that finds her way/ [...] to visit all [God's] creatures" (3. 228-30). This grace leads humanity to greater joys as they can now experience God's mercy and restoration. Accordingly, "the destructive power of the Fall is [overcome as God brings] good from evil by showing grace and mercy to the fallen human race" (Myers 21). This restorative grace is described by God as He asserts how "Man shall not quite be lost, but sav'd who will; / [...through] grace in me" (Milton 3.173-74). God declares "I will renew/ [humanity's] lapsed powers" (3. 175-76) and promises that, "Upheld by me, yet once more [man] shall stand/ On even ground against his mortal foe" (3. 178-79). Though the Fall opened humanity up to imperfections, sin, and weakness, it also made humanity reliant on God's grace and mercy, indirectly leading humanity to attain greater joys by experiencing God's restorative grace. This benevolent consequence of imperfection starkly contrasts the inauspicious requirement for Utopian perfection, that is the unrelenting surveillance that aims to reprimand and control individuals.

#### 4. Striving to be Better Than Others, Striving to Better Ourselves

On another note, the Utopian practices that enforce uniformity in society would also be rejected by sinful, human pride because human pride pushes people to strive to be different (and thus better) than others. These human desires are admitted by Hythloday as he states how “there is in man a pride that makes him fancy it a particular glory to excel others in pomp and excess” (More 70). R. S. Sylvester supports this in “‘Si Hythlodaeo Credimus: Vision and Revision in Thomas More's ‘Utopia’” as he describes Hythloday’s descriptions of Utopia as “fanciful excursions [that ignore] the bleak contemporaneity of [...] the stresses and strains of human existence” (Sylvester 276). This suggests how Utopian practices ignore sinful, human pride, consequently implying how human pride will inevitably create the desire to be different and outdo others—and thus reject the Utopian practices that enforce uniformity in society. For example, this human desire to outdo others is acknowledged by Utopians as they take pleasure in “ordering their gardens so well [due to] an emulation between the inhabitants of the several streets, who vie with each other” (More 57). However, despite acknowledging this aspect of human pride, many Utopian practices do not account for it as they enforce uniformity and thus prevent people from being different or better than others. While Hythloday supports these practices as he “advocates a complete demolition job on the hierarchical society of Western Europe”, More “doubts [...] the validity of Utopian practices in [...] social organization” (Sylvester 281). These doubts are supported by how many Utopian practices ignore the impacts of human pride. For example, people will rebel against “there [being] no sort of trade that is in great esteem among [Utopians]” (More 61) as this uniform regard prevents people from taking pride in their trade since they do not feel like they are different or better than anyone. Next, people will reject how “throughout the island [Utopians] wear the same sort of clothes, without any other distinction [and] the fashion never alters” (61) as this uniform apparel prevents people from taking pride in their appearance. Overall, several Utopian practices that enforce uniformity in society would thus

be rejected due to humanity's pride pressing people to try to be different (and thus better) than others.

This argument is supported by Athanasios Moulakis's article, "Pride and the Meaning of 'Utopia'", where he asserts how More's *Utopia* can only "inform the action and conduct of [...] man, who can then seek to do the best in the circumstances and strive to right evils in full awareness of the conditionality of [...] all human [...] action" (Moulakis 248). Moulakis quotes how More himself stated that "nothing will establish [Utopia] upon this earth short of a second coming" (247), implying how his treatise may posit ideals that cannot be realized by human societies. This implication is supported by the fact that "Utopia" can be translated to mean "nowhere" (More 5). So, Moulakis's claim supports my own as we both posit how Utopia cannot be realistically established.

Moulakis further reflects this paper's claim as he explains how Utopia cannot be realistically established since one condition of human actions is pride. Utopian practices do not account for pride as "the absence of pride is the condition for the adoption of utopian institutions, not the result of their operation" (Moulakis 254). Moulakis expands on this by explaining how most people "would find the overwhelming sameness that goes with Utopian equality quite unbearable" (249), thus suggesting how the Utopian practices that enforce uniformity in society pose unrealistic expectations on people to overcome their sinful pride. One example of the overwhelming sameness in Utopia is how they all wear similar "upper [garments] which [...] are all of one colour" (More 66). Moulakis's analysis of Utopian practices supports the argument that Utopian practices expect, but cannot ensure, a dismissal of sinful, human pride and will thus be rejected as pride motivates people to try to outdo others. Moulakis also supports this argument as he emphasizes the inevitability of the sinful pride that is within all humans. He references "St. Benedict's warning [...] that pride is a monster hard to extirpate even in a monastic community" (254), thus suggesting how pride



will not be easily curbed by Utopian practices. Overall, Moulakis's claims reflect and strengthen the point that pride will reject the uniformity of Utopia.

Not only does sinful, human pride make us desire to be better than others by being different from them, human pride also propels the desire to be better than others by having more than they do and will thus lead human beings to reject Utopian practices that belittle material wealth and gain. The authors of "On Utopia—between Philosophy and Communism" reflect this idea as they posit how More's "entire regime is mainly based on the morality of the human nature, which is in itself a trap" (Pirnuta 480) since pride seems built into human nature. Hythloday demonstrates an understanding of this inherent pride as he states how "pride thinks its own happiness shines the brighter, by comparing it with the misfortunes of other persons" (More 146). With this in mind, the various Utopian practices that devalue material wealth seem unrealistic as sinful, human pride will encourage people to have more than others by chasing material wealth and gain. One such Utopian practice that depicts people as selflessly generous is how "when [Utopians] want anything in the country which [their town] does not produce, they fetch that from the town, without carrying anything in exchange for it" (54). The generosity in this practice is unrealistic because, as Hythloday points out, human pride will lead us to desire to have more than others. This prideful human desire will then encourage those towns to expand their land and either keep their resources or charge other towns for them. This shows how "a regime based on human nature [...] could not be possible. Power tends to completely change a sovereign" (Pirnuta 481) as their pride will persuade them to aggrandize themselves. So, human pride will rebel against these Utopian practices that minimalize material wealth and gain.

Moulakis's argument in "Pride and the Meaning of 'Utopia'" also addresses this claim as he explores how pride makes monetary Utopian practices unrealistic for human societies. Moulakis acknowledges how Utopia's "universal obligation to work [caused] the

absence of scarcity which is, in turn, the condition of the elimination of avarice” (Moulakis 252). However, he notes how “unlike absolute scarcity, no condition of natural abundance and no institutions can hope to eliminate relative scarcity” (252). This relates to how sinful, human pride is “incapable of satiation” (252) and “counts it a glorious thing to outdo others in the vain ostentation of things” (253). Moulakis explains how the sensation of scarcity is a feeling caused by pride that desires to have more than others and can thus never be satisfied. This explanation strengthens my argument as it suggests how many other Utopian practices would be rejected by human pride. For example, Utopians believe that “the folly of men has enhanced the value of gold and silver because of their scarcity” (More 78) and thus devalue it by giving it to prisoners and children. However, Moulakis’s argument shows how this practice is unrealistic since, even though no one is poor, human pride will still desire to have more gold and silver than others due to feelings of relative scarcity.

Furthermore, Moulakis notes how Utopian practices are unrealistic as they do not account for sinful, human pride: “the Utopians apparently maintain their characteristic virtues [...] even in situations [...] where pride would certainly find scope to expand if it were present in their breasts” (Moulakis 254). For example, when the Utopians’ “neighbours [...] desire that they would send [Utopian] magistrates to govern them” (More 110), Moulakis posits that human pride would lead those Utopian magistrates to demonstrate “favouritism or greed” (Moulakis 254). Overall, Moulakis argues how human pride makes the monetary practices of Utopia unfeasible to implement in human society.

Apart from Moulakis, Warren W. Wooden’s “Anti-Scholastic Satire in Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*” also supports my argument against monetary Utopian practices. Wooden argues how More’s character in *Utopia* offers more realistic solutions compared to Hythloday’s Utopian “communistic system” which only works “in Utopia where the citizens are [...] devoid of the unpleasant aspects of real people, [and thus] capable of socially

patterned perfection” (Wooden 38). Wooden continues to state how “the obvious practical difficulty with this [Utopian] design is that a fallible, variegated humanity will never conform to it” (38). These assertions suggest how the monetary Utopian practices require society to be perfect and devoid of human flaws, such as pride which will cause people to reject monetary Utopian practices.

Wooden then expands on his argument by analysing how More’s character in *Utopia* suggests how Hythloday’s argument that “the abolition of private property and money seem to have made Utopia a paradise” is merely “grandiose theorizing” that has “dubious applicability to the real world or the problems of real people” (39). In lieu of monetary Utopian practices, Wooden states how More’s character suggests “a pragmatic philosophy suited to the world as it is” (39), thus endorsing an “acceptance of reality, [and] the adoption of a practical, workable philosophy” (39). Wooden’s analysis is supported by the text as More’s character deems Hythloday’s theories on Utopia as “speculative philosophy” and instead proposes “another philosophy that is more pliable, that knows its proper scene, accommodates itself to it, and teaches a man with propriety and decency to act that part which has fallen to his share” (More 42). This discourse reveals how More’s character deems Utopian practices as unrealistic because it does not ‘accommodate itself’ to its ‘proper scene’ which is the flaws of humanity, such as pride. Overall, Wooden’s arguments support the idea that monetary Utopian practices would be rejected since they do not realistically account for human pride.

While More explores how pride seeks to be better than others and will thus reject several practices of a perfect Utopian society, Milton explores how we achieve greater joy in our imperfect, fallen state as we seek to better ourselves and repent to God, thus pleasing Him. Paul Hammond supports this in “Milton's Complex Words: Essays on the Conceptual Structure of *Paradise Lost*” where he explores how “before the Fall Adam and Eve were

naked but clothed in virtue” whereas their “nakedness after sin is full of turpitude [and] misery” (Hammond). Adam and Eve keenly feel this change in their nature, and are filled with a “shame and misery” that is “a necessary step towards [the] fruit of repentance” (Hammond). Adam and Eve reflect this process after the Fall, “naked left/ To guilty Shame” (Milton 9.1057-58) as they are “destitute and bare/ Of all their virtue” (9.1062-63). Keenly aware of their fallenness, they become “penitent” (11.5) and filled with “remorse” (11.6), striving to fix their mistake as they “confessed/ Humbly their faults” (11.8-9) from “hearts contrite, in sign/ Of sorrow unfeigned, and humiliation meek” (11.11-12). Humanity achieves greater joy through this humble repentance as the Son hears Adam and Eve’s prayers and describes humanity’s repentance as:

Fruits of more pleasing savour, from thy seed  
 Sown with contrition in his heart, than those  
 Which, his own hand manuring, all the trees  
 Of Paradise could have produced, ere fallen  
 From innocence. (11.26-30)

Due to this pleasing repentance, the Son advocates forgiveness to God, that humanity may be “reconciled” (11.39) with God and “may dwell in joy and bliss” (11.43) with Him. So, while human pride rejects Utopian perfection by seeking to be better than others, humanity’s fallenness leads us to greater joys by endowing us with repentant hearts that seek to better ourselves, which in turn please God and prompt Him to grant us greater joy and bliss.

Matthew Stallard strengthens this argument in *John Milton, Paradise Lost: The Biblically Annotated Edition* as he notes all the biblical allusions in *Paradise Lost* that reaffirm how God will bless those who repent to Him. Stallard notes how Adam’s plan to confess their sins to God “from hearts contrite, in sign/ Of sorrow unfeigned, and humiliation meek” (Milton 10.1091-92) alludes to the Bible verse, “The sacrifices of God are a contrite

spirit: a contrite and a broken heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (*King James Version*, Ps 51:17). This suggests how God will openly and eagerly accept those who repent to Him, as implied when God promises that He will save all who desire to be saved: “Man shall not quite be lost, but sav’d who will” (Milton 3.173). Stallard also relates Adam’s speech to 1 John 1-9: “If we acknowledge our sins, He is faithful and just, to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”. This Bible verse supports how a repentant heart avails humanity to greater joys as it allows us to be forgiven and cleansed by a faithful God. This renewal is shown as “Prevenient grace descending had removed/ The stony from [Adam and Eve’s] hearts, and made new flesh/ Regenerate grow instead” (Milton 11.15-17). The diction used, such as “new” and “regenerate”, connote how God’s grace had cleansed and restored Adam and Eve.

Moreover, Stallard analyses the angel Michael’s advice to Adam after the Fall: “thou mayest repent, /And one bad act with many deeds well done/ Mayest cover” (11.256-57). These lines allude to how “love shall cover the multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8), suggesting how God extends His love to those who repent. This love is foreshadowed as God plans to “place within [humanity] as a guide, /[His] umpire Conscience” (3.194-95) that those who repent and obey Him will be led and “to the end, persisting, safe arrive” (3.197). Here, Milton describes how humanity’s fallenness leads us to greater joys as he predicts how God will guide us and protect us, if we repent and obey Him. So, while human pride will reject Utopian perfection by seeking to be better than others, human imperfection will lead us to greater joys as we please God with our repentance and allow ourselves to be renewed and protected by Him.

## 5. Rejecting Overwhelming Control, Embracing Free Will

More also describes several Utopian practices that assert an overwhelming control over various aspects of the Utopians' personal lives, and such practices would be rejected by humanity's pride because this pride (or sense of dignity and self-respect) would want people to be in control of their own personal decisions. In "Hythloday's Utopia and More's England: an Interpretation of Thomas More's *Utopia*", Thomas S. Engeman supports this as he notes how "the problem of freedom [...] is absent [in Hythloday's narrative as] he is unphilosophic and exclusively oriented to practice" (Engeman 143). This suggests how certain Utopian practices do not realistically account for humanity's reaction to their reduced autonomy. For example, people would reject the Utopian practice of "[shifting] their houses by lots [every ten years]" (More 57) as it infringes on their freedom to choose and keep their living space. The same applies to other forms of free movement. If a citizen desires to travel, they must travel with a slave and obtain "a passport from the Prince, which both certifies the licence that is granted for travelling, and limits the time of their return" (75). People would reject this practice as it places several limitations on their freedom to travel, restricting them with the requirement of being accompanied by a slave, obtaining permission from authorities, and having limits on when they can return. Similarly onerous restrictions occur in Utopians' marital lives. Utopians "neither allow [...] polygamy nor [...] divorces except in the case of adultery or insufferable perverseness", in these cases "the guilty are made infamous and are never allowed the privilege of a second marriage" (105). People would reject this practice as it overtly controls their personal and sexual lives, as a couple cannot divorce even if they both want to while an adulterer is not allowed to marry for a second time even if someone is willing to marry them. Though these Utopian practices theoretically promote virtue, they will realistically be rejected by human pride as they strictly control people's domestic, personal, and sexual lives. This overwhelming control by Utopian practices and the Utopians' consequent lack of autonomy and would violate our human dignity and cause our human

pride to rebel against such Utopian practices and insist on being in control of our own decisions. So More's depiction of the extensive control exerted over Utopians by Utopian practices suggests how those practices would be rejected by human pride.

This argument is supported by George M. Logan's book, *The Meaning of More's Utopia*, where he interprets More's *Utopia* as a work of satire that criticizes Hythloday's "radical idealism" as consisting of a "closed inner world [...] not open to [...] correction, compromise or the interplay of perspective" (Logan 6). One such correction or interplay of perspective is Logan's assessment of "the repressive character of the Utopian constitution" (230). Though Hythloday "expresses both the characteristic libertarianism of humanism and the relatively relaxed attitude of most humanists" (230) in *Utopia*, Logan reveals that "Utopian life is highly regulated, and it exhibits all the greyness that seems an inevitable corollary of such regulation" (230). For example, when Hythloday's describes how a Utopian who wants to travel "obtains leave very easily from the Syphogrant and Tranibors" (More 75), his diction suggests relaxed laws and a high degree of freedom. However, the several other regulations of travel, such as the need for a passport, the time limit, and the mandatory travel companion (75), support Logan's evaluation of *Utopia* as being highly regulated instead of relaxed and free. Logan's repressive depiction of *Utopia* strengthens the perception that the way Utopian practices reduce its citizens' freedom would thus be rejected by human pride because it insists on being free.

Logan enters another area related to human pridefulness when he shows how "Utopian repressiveness reflects More's belief that a realistic assessment of man's nature suggests that the goal of freedom conflicts [...] with the maintenance of stability and efficient production" (Logan 237). Logan thus argues that human beings' natural desire for freedom will conflict with the stability and efficient production created by the repressive Utopian practices. This assessment supports my own argument as it reflects my claim of how

humanity's inherent pride (or dignity) will desire autonomy and freedom, and thus reject the repressive Utopian practices that excessively control their lives.

Similar to More's argument on how the overwhelming control required for Utopian perfection would be rejected by human pride, Milton argues that humanity gains greater joys through the Fall as we must now consciously choose to accept God's grace. Deni Kasa supports this argument in her article, "Arminian Theology, Machiavellian Republicanism, and Cooperative Virtue in Milton's *Paradise Lost*". Kasa argues that "instead of overpowering believers, grace gradually regenerates them until they are again capable of voluntarily performing acts of faith" (Kasa). This is shown after Adam and Eve receive judgement from the Son after the Fall. At first, they languish and dwell in their sorrow, as Adam is "to sorrow abandoned" (Milton 10.717) and Eve was "weeping [in] her lonely plight" (10.937). But then Adam recalls "with what mild/ And gracious temper [God] both heard and judg'd/ Without wrauth or reviling" (10.1046-48), alluding to the grace God offers humanity, even after the Fall. The reassurance of this grace then encourages Adam to "prostrate fall/ Before [God] reverent, and there confess/ Humbly our faults, and pardon beg" (10.1087-89). Their initial sorrow reveals how, though grace is offered to humanity, we must choose to accept it and be regenerated. The consequent of this acceptance is depicted as virtue and faith as Adam and Eve humbly repent and confess their sins to God, suggesting their intention to earnestly pursue virtue. This creates a greater joy for humanity as we may choose to accept grace and thus be aided in our pursuit of virtue, rather than be forced to accept grace and obliged to choose virtue.

Free will also enhances humanity's joy as it enhances our dignity and virtue through our conscious decision of goodness over evil. After the Fall, we are renewed by grace and given the choice of virtue or sin. As Kasa states, "renewed righteousness [is] a capacity for free will in the present... Milton presents agency as a gift that flows down to human beings



from God, enabling them to pursue virtue and good works as voluntarily as Adam once did” (Kasa). This renewed righteousness is exemplified by Adam and Eve when, after the Fall, they reconcile with each other and seek God’s mercy together. Though initially Adam treats Eve with “stern regard” (Milton 10.866), calling her “false/ and hateful” (10.868-69), her sorrow and repentance assuaged his anger and he says, “let us no more contend, nor blame/ Each other, blam'd enough elsewhere, but strive/ In offices of Love” (10.958-960). Adam’s evident change of heart implies his conscious choice to forgive Eve and choose love and peace over hate and blame. His previous choice of hate and blame enhance the virtue of his later choice of love and peace as it affirms how he has experienced both good and evil and is now consciously choosing goodness. So, while humanity’s pride will reject Utopia’s excessive control as we desire autonomy and freedom, humanity will achieve greater joy after the Fall as our free will enhances the virtue of our conscious choice to pursue goodness.

Milton further argues that humanity’s virtue after the Fall will be more pleasing to us since we must now freely choose to pursue virtue. This conscious choice would enhance humanity’s joy in being virtuous because our virtue would now carry more significance than it did if we simply chose it out of force or out of ignorance of evil. So, becoming aware of evil through the Fall increases humanity’s joy at being virtuous as we may now exercise our free will and consciously choose virtue; John C. Ulreich, Jr. supports this in “A Paradise Within: The Fortunate Fall in Paradise Lost” where he argues that “For Milton, the only thing that could possibly make the [Fall fortunate] is for it to be *our* guilt, the result of our own free choice” (Ulreich 352). Ulreich further claims that “To be of value, to God or himself, man’s love must be voluntary” (352). These arguments are supported by the text as God attributes humanity’s fall to free will and commends this free will, claiming “Not free, what proof could [humanity] have given sincere/ Of true allegiance, constant faith or love” (Milton 3.103-104), and asking “What pleasure I from such obedience paid, /When will and reason

(reason also is choice)/ ...Made passive both, had serv'd necessity, /Not me" (3.107-11). God highlights the necessity of free will in offering genuine obedience and suggests that virtue without conscious choice is unpleasing. This strengthens how, after the Fall, humanity's virtue is more pleasing as we are able to genuinely and consciously choose to pursue virtue.

Moreover, the Fall brings humanity greater joy as our conscious choice of virtue will lead us to consciously experience the benefits of virtue. This greater joy is foreshadowed by the angel Michael as he promises Adam and Eve that, though they must now leave Paradise, they will come to possess "A Paradise within [themselves], happier far" (12.587). This joy is also explained as Michael tells Adam, "Who seeks/ To lessen thee, against his purpose serves/ To manifest the more thy might: his evil/ Thou usest, and from thence createst more good" (8.613-16). These lines suggest that more good will come from the temptations of evil as humanity may exhibit their fortitude in consciously resisting evil and choosing virtue.

Ulreich reflects my claim as he asserts how "morality depends...on the conscious avoidance of [evil]" (Ulreich 355). A conscious choice to be virtuous would then increase humanity's joy as we would be consciously experiencing the benefits of virtue. In his article, Ulreich argues that "Obedience enables man to imitate God, not only to be like Him but to become more like Him" (362). In this sense, the Fall increases humanity's joys as we may now consciously strive to be more like God in our virtue. This is suggested in the text as God predicts how humanity will, "by degrees of merit raised, /[...] and] under long obedience tried" (Milton 7.156-58), be joined with God in "One kingdom, joy and union without end" (7.161). These lines emphasize humanity's trials of obedience which, after the Fall, we must now consciously undergo, and humanity's levels of virtues which we must now consciously cultivate. These conscious decisions to pursue virtue and obey God then increase our joy as we consciously work towards being joined with God. Milton's emphasis on how free will to

choose to pursue virtue will bring humanity greater joy reflects More's emphasis on how human pride desires autonomy and will thus reject the overwhelming control of Utopia.

#### 6. Instability as Ennobling, Imperfections as Glorifying

Finally, human pride (or human dignity or honour) would reject any Utopian practices that cultivate the stable and perfect Utopian society because human pride prefers a degree of instability where they can triumph over challenges, rather than a boring life of untroubled, unchanging stability. Jordan B. Peterson supports this in his lecture, "Biblical Series VIII: The Phenomenology of the Divine", where he argues that "we're not built for static utopia: we're built for a dynamic situation where there's demands placed on us, and where there's the optimal amount of uncertainty" (Peterson, Biblical Series, unpaginated lecture). This optimal amount of uncertainty would ennoble humanity by challenging us to overcome obstacles and inspiring us to work towards certain goals. In contrast, the perfect society of Utopia, where there is no adversity and no struggles, would bore humanity and eventually be rejected. Peterson supports this as he asserts how "a utopian vision of perfection [is] profoundly antihuman [as] human beings would go mad and break the system, smash it, just so that something unexpected and crazy could happen" (Peterson). He explains that "human beings don't want utopian comfort and certainty. Human beings want adventure, chaos, and uncertainty" (Peterson). More's novel supports this assessment as it demonstrates a static, boring perfection in the Utopians' daily, idyllic schedules. For example, in a twenty-four hour day, the Utopians "appoint six of these for work, three of which are before dinner and three after; they then sup, and at eight o'clock, counting from noon, go to bed and sleep eight hours" (More 62). Utopians leisurely go through their day with no excessive labour, plenty of unoccupied time, and no obstacles or difficulties to be overcome. Over time, since humanity's pride has nothing to overcome, this lack of challenges and abundance of spare

time would become boring and meaningless. Consequently, humanity would reject their perfect utopian system for a system with a higher degree of instability that would allow them to overcome challenges and thus be ennobled. So, human pride will desire a degree of instability since a dynamic situation will challenge us compared to the static, idyllic lifestyle of the Utopians that will only bore us.

Though Utopians “must employ [their free time] in some proper exercise” (More 62), such as “public lectures every morning before daybreak” (62) or “[entertaining] each other either with music or discourse”, this does not solve the problem of their static stability (63). Though these practices ensure that Utopians constantly edify themselves and avoid vain or evil pleasures, they do not ensure any challenges or difficulties for humanity’s pride to overcome and feel ennobled by. In fact, the process of edifying themselves when there is no adversity or afflictions around them may devalue the edification as meaningless since there are no circumstances that would ever challenge or oppose their edification. Peterson explains how challenging circumstances would benefit human pride as he explores “the successful hero myth” (Peterson). He analyzes the story of Sleeping Beauty from a psychological perspective, where the prince “escapes [the witch], and then conquers the worst thing that can be imagined, and is ennobled by that” (Peterson). This shows how overcoming challenges can elevate and dignify ourselves, thus benefitting humanity’s pride. So, Peterson’s lecture on how human beings want, and are ennobled by, uncertainty strengthens the argument that human pride, which seeks to overcome challenges for honor or glory, would reject Utopian practices that create an overly stable society.

In another lecture, “Notes on Reality and the Sacred”, Peterson also supports this argument as he explores the Daoist belief that the world “is made up essentially of chaos and order”, and that “the optimally meaningful life is to be found on the border between chaos and order” (Peterson, Notes on Reality, unpaginated lecture). He explains chaos as everything

we do not understand, where “you’re at sea or overwhelmed or things have fallen apart for you, and there’s too much of everything for you to deal with” (Peterson). Meanwhile, order is everything we do understand, where “nothing that’s interesting ever happens to you, nothing is anything but a repeat of all of all the things that you already know” (Peterson). Utopia’s society highly favors order, where nothing new happens and they repeat the same familiar routine every day (More 62). According to Peterson, this extreme does not provide an ‘optimally meaningful life’. Instead of extremes, he advocates for the border between chaos and order where “you’re secure enough to be confident but not so secure that you’re bored, and you’re interested enough to be awake but not so interested that you’re terrified” (Peterson). This suggests that Utopian practices that cultivate stability and perfection will create an overly ordered society that will bore humanity. This also suggests that humanity will seek a degree of instability to challenge themselves and create a meaningful life. Both these implications support my argument of how human pride (or human dignity) will reject Utopian practices that create stability and perfection.

As More argues that humanity desires a degree of instability in order to overcome challenges and be ennobled, so Milton argues that humanity achieves greater joys through the Fall as we are glorified when we participate in God’s salvation and triumph over evil. Sarah Van Der Laan supports this claim in “Waking Leucothea: An Unexplored Homeric Allusion in *Paradise Lost*” as she argues how “Milton constructs his model of human salvation [by presenting] human free will and an active partnership with the divine as heroic qualities, harnessed for heroic endeavours” (Van Der Laan 78). Van Der Laan explores how “Leukothea’s encounter with Odysseus illustrates the joint divine and human endeavour necessary to accomplish salvation. God provides the tools for salvation, but human beings must work with those tools, expending their own efforts to arrive safely at the shore” (75). These human efforts to achieve the salvation that God offers then brings glory to ourselves

and to God as we defeat evil, and Milton foreshadows this glory when he alludes to Leucothea in *Paradise Lost*: “Leucothea waked; and with fresh dewes imbalmed/ The earth” (Milton 11.135-136). This allusion to humanity’s heroic efforts to achieve God’s salvation is followed by descriptions of how Adam and Eve “found/ Strength added from above; new hope to spring/ Out of despair” (11.137-39), and God’s “promise, that [Eve’s] seed shall bruise [their] foe” (11.155). These descriptions foreshadow humanity’s glorious triumphs over evil as God strengthens us against evil, grants us hope against temptation, and vows that humanity will be able to fight back against evil. These descriptions also highlight the joint effort of humanity and God to overcome evil; though God provides humanity with strength and hope, humanity must choose to use those tools to fight their own battles against evil. So, Milton’s allusion to Leucothea suggests how humanity achieves greater joys through the Fall as we may choose to participate in God’s salvation and consequently triumph gloriously over evil.

The ability to choose to participate in God’s salvation grants humanity a degree of agency in overcoming our own temptations and challenges that then heightens our own glorious triumphs over evil. Van Der Laan supports this as she notes “the critical work free will must nevertheless do” (Van Der Laan 66) to participate in God’s salvation, arguing that Milton focuses on “each individual’s responsibility for his or her own behaviour and thoughts... and the power of men and women to affect their fate for good or ill” (67). This human agency is emphasized by the Son as He foreshadows how humanity will be “Tried in sharp tribulation, and refined/ By faith and faithful works” (Milton 11.63-64), which in turn “Resigns [humanity] up with Heaven and Earth renewed” (11.66). This speech underscores humanity’s effort in obtaining God’s salvation as the Son predicts how humanity will face challenging trials and highlights the constant labour that they must perform. This emphasizes each individual’s struggle with their own challenges and their own accountability in either

overcoming and learning from those challenges or being defeated by those challenges. The Son also places the onus on humanity to consistently cultivate and strengthen their faith and their relationship with God. This all foreshadows humanity's extensive efforts to participate in God's salvation. However, the Son's speech also offers glory to humanity in eventually being restored and resurrected, joining God and the Son in heaven. This glory is only heightened by human agency and the onerous work that each individual must choose to do to achieve this glory. So, the Son predicts how humanity will achieve glory through the Fall as we may choose to work hard and triumph over evil. Overall, Milton's suggests that humanity achieves greater joy in our imperfection by accomplishing glorious triumphs over evil, reflecting More's suggestion that humanity desires a degree of instability to be ennobled by overcoming challenges.

## 7. Conclusion

So far, I have outlined several Utopian practices that would realistically be rejected due to human pride and explained several ways in which humanity achieves greater joys after the Fall. Human pride would reject Utopian surveillance as we strive to avoid rebuke; Related to this, humanity achieves greater joy after the Fall as we come to experience, not God's punishment or reproach, but His forgiveness. Next, human pride desires to be better than others and would thus reject the social and economic uniformity in Utopia; Similarly, humanity achieves greater joy after the Fall as we seek to better ourselves and thus please God with our repentance. Human pride would also reject Utopian stability since a degree of instability is required for humanity to overcome challenges and be ennobled; Likewise, humanity achieves greater joy after the Fall as we are glorified when we triumph over evil. Lastly, human pride would reject the overwhelming social control of Utopia as we desire to be in control of our own decisions; In the same way, humanity achieves greater joys after the

Fall as this heightens our free will in choosing virtue. These points argue for how Utopian perfection is not realistically desirable or achievable as several practices required for that perfection go against our natural pride. These points also argue for how humanity is able to achieve greater joys in our current state of imperfection than in our pre-Fall state of perfection.

These are important arguments because they imply that perfection is not realistically desirable for humans, nor is it a guarantee of ultimate happiness for humans. If humanity would naturally reject Utopian practices, then Utopian perfection is not in fact desirable for humans. Likewise, if humanity can achieve greater joys in our state of imperfection, then perfection is not the panacea for all human problems that we often assume it is. These implications would, in turn, help ease the anxieties and miseries of those who strive for perfection in their lives— these implications suggest that perfection, while firstly being nearly impossible to achieve, is not even realistically desirable and will not make their lives better or happier. Another important implication of my argument is that human nature thrives under contexts of imperfection. Since humanity can achieve greater joys in our imperfections and would reject Utopian practices that ensure a perfectly stable and prosperous society, it follows that humans actually desire contexts of imperfection, such as Peterson's example of a state balanced between order and chaos. This implication would help people feel more at peace with their present situations because they would acknowledge how their hardships can help them grow and thrive, instead of viewing their struggles as imperfections that should be eradicated. Overall, a reading of More's *Utopia* and Milton's *Paradise Lost* as questioning the realistic desirability of perfection could help people feel more at peace with themselves and their current circumstances.



### Appendix: Presentation at the SPU Honors Research Symposium

My honours project is entitled “The Realistic Desirability of Perfection in Thomas More’s *Utopia* and John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*”. This topic explores a question that has always been an area of interest and a cause of doubt in my religious faith. I have always wondered if people really desire a perfect world and society and why or why not. This question has serious religious implications for me as the answer will influence my perception of the garden of Eden, heaven, and our capacity for happiness in a fallen world. My honours project specifically shows how my English literature degree has supplemented and strengthened my faith by allowing me to explore religious questions that the Bible has not answered for me. Religious issues such as death, love, and sin are often addressed in works of literature. By analyzing and interpreting such works, I receive different perspectives on religious issues and can contemplate my own opinions on those issues. The two literary works that I have studied are suitable to explore my topic as they both discuss perfect worlds. Milton’s *Paradise Lost* describes the original Garden of Eden and how we lost that perfection while More’s *Utopia* describes the extreme measures that would create a perfect society. Though their reasonings differ, Milton and More both posit through their works that though humanity thinks they desire perfection, they actually prefer contexts of imperfection; Milton suggests how our fallenness enhances our relationship with God, allowing us to experience God in a different way, such as grace, mercy, and forgiveness, while More suggests how human pride makes perfection impossible and undesirable to humanity.

In *Paradise Lost*, several characters support my argument that humanity shall achieve greater joys through the Fall. For example, as the angel Michael is escorting Adam and Eve out of Eden, he comforts them by promising them a paradise that they will achieve within themselves that will surpass the joy they had in Eden. So, Milton suggests that the Fall, despite descending humanity into a state of imperfection, allows humanity to achieve greater

happiness within that imperfect state. In More's Utopia, the two characters' ending comments on utopian practices raise doubts on the feasibility and desirability of those practices. For example, Hythloday praises Utopian practices and wishes that the world would be so wise as to imitate them, but he also admits that it would be unrealistic to implement Utopian practices in the world because human pride would be too big a hindrance. Human pride may be interpreted as either a sinful pride (such as arrogance, vanity, or conceit) or a healthy pride (such as self-esteem or dignity). Hythloday's reference to human pride seems to assume the first meaning, asserting how Utopia would be a perfect society if sinful pride did not reject it. My paper will use both interpretations of human pride to show how Utopian perfection would be rejected. My first two points use the first interpretation of sinful pride to heighten how humanity is imperfect and will thus not accept or fit in a perfect world or society. I supplement these points with my analysis of Milton's Paradise Lost that suggests how we are happier in imperfect contexts anyways. My last two points use the second interpretation of healthy pride to highlight how Utopian perfection necessarily violates humanity's self-worth and dignity, and does not allow humanity to redeem their fallenness by striving against evil. I strengthen these points with my analysis of Milton's Paradise Lost that shows how contexts of imperfection do allow for these things.

So in my first point, to explore my topic of the realistic desirability of perfection, I discuss how human pride would reject Utopian practices that open them to endless rebuke from others, such their extensive surveillance practices where everyone observes everyone. I compare this endless rebuke of Utopia with Milton's suggestion of how humanity's fallenness leads us to greater joys by allowing us to experience God in new and different ways, such as through His mercy, grace and forgiveness. Contrasting the rebuke in Utopia with the forgiveness of a fallen world reveals how the measures necessary for the perfection of Utopia will be rejected by human pride and how we will find greater joys in the contexts

of imperfection of a fallen world as our fallenness allows us to experience being forgiven and receiving mercy and grace. Next, I explore how the Utopian practices that enforce social and economic uniformity would be rejected by human pride because human pride pushes people to strive to be different (and thus better) than others. I compare this with More's suggestion of how we achieve greater joy in our imperfect, fallen state as we seek to better ourselves and repent to God, thus pleasing Him. This comparison shows how utopian practices would be rejected as people desire to be better than others while More's fallen world leads to joy as humanity can now seek to better themselves. So, the very reason a utopian practice (which allegedly leads to perfection) would be rejected becomes the same source of joy in a fallen world.

In my next point, I explore how the Utopian practices that assert an overwhelming control over the personal lives of utopians would be rejected as humanity's pride desires autonomy. I compare this with Milton's argument that humanity gains greater joys through the Fall as we must now consciously choose to accept God's grace. This comparison demonstrates how utopian practices would be rejected because they reduce humanity's agency over their own lives while Milton's fallen world leads to joy as it increases humanity's agency to live in sin or accept God's grace. Finally, I explore how human pride would reject any Utopian practices that cultivate the stable and perfect Utopian society because human pride prefers a degree of instability where they can triumph over challenges, rather than a boring life of untroubled, unchanging stability. I compare this with Milton's argument of how humanity achieves greater joys through the Fall as we are glorified when we participate in God's salvation and triumph over evil. This comparison illustrates how utopian perfection would be rejected as too stable while Milton's fallen world provides joy as the instability provided by sin allows humanity to be glorified when we triumph over it. All my points explore how utopian practices that cultivate perfection are not realistically

desirable, several practices would be rejected for various reasons. Meanwhile, all these points of contention are reversed in the contexts of imperfections in a fallen world to lead to greater joys. For example, we would reject utopian practices that enforce uniformity because we strive to be different and thus better than others, and this desire to be better leads to greater joy in a fallen world as we seek to better ourselves.

I conclude my paper by exploring the implications of my research: my arguments imply that perfection is not realistically desirable for humans, nor is it a guarantee of ultimate happiness for humans. This could help ease the anxieties and miseries of those who strive for perfection in their lives as these implications suggest that perfection, while firstly being nearly impossible to achieve, is not even realistically desirable and will not make their lives better or happier. Another important implication of my argument is that human nature thrives under contexts of imperfection. This implication would help people feel more at peace with their present situations because they would acknowledge how their hardships can help them grow and thrive, instead of viewing their struggles as imperfections that should be eradicated. Overall, a reading of More's *Utopia* and Milton's *Paradise Lost* as questioning the realistic desirability of perfection could help people feel more at peace with themselves and their current circumstances.

One topic that my research paper relates to is how research is a process of inquiry where we ask a question, we conduct research to answer that question, we conclude our research not only with an answer to our original question but also with multiple other questions that sprang from our research, and hopefully we continue to search for answers to the never-ending stream of questions. My research paper demonstrates this process of inquiry as it began with a religious question I had contemplated for some time which was, what will heaven be like? From within my context of sin and imperfection, I tried to understand the concept of heaven where everything would be made perfect. I could not find a model that was

agreeable to me because if we entered heaven as we are we would make it imperfect, but if our imperfections were purged from us then we would not be ourselves. However, given the Christian assumption that everything will be made perfect in heaven, I concluded that the first model of heaven (where we enter as we are, thus making heaven imperfect) could be rejected and the second model of heaven (where our imperfections are purged from us) could be accepted. So, this answered my original question of what heaven will be like. But this then led me to another question as my image of heaven then consisted of people that were not quite human, happiness that was not quite joy. This led me to question why I viewed perfection in heaven so strangely, and I concluded that it may be because I saw imperfections and flaws as intrinsic to humanity and to our happiness. This conclusion confused me because it suggested that perfection is not perfect (or at least it does not offer perfect happiness) while imperfection is preferable (and offers a richer joy than perfection does).

So, this answer finally led me to the question of my research paper: do humans realistically desire perfection or are we happier within our contexts of imperfection? I conducted research to answer this question by focusing on two literary works that provide examples of both a perfect society and a fallen society. By analysing these texts and comparing them, I was able to explore the measures necessary for perfection, the feasibility of implementing these measures in a human society, the mindsets in a fallen society, and the joys available to those in a fallen society. My research yielded the following answers to my question: perfection is not realistically desirable in a human society because we live within contexts of imperfection and these contexts also allow for several joys that contexts of perfection do not allow for. I think these answers are important because it could help people who strive for perfection understand that perfection is an unattainable ideal. This could help them feel more at peace with their own progress or status, thus creating a healthier and more effective mindset for them to strive to improve themselves. However, since research is a

process of inquiry that should never end, the conclusion of my research paper has created several new lines of inquiry to be explored. For example, if perfection is not realistically desirable and does not make us happier, this means that we should accept our flaws and our sins. But how can we know how to moderate this and consolidate our acceptance of our flaws with a constant struggle to improve ourselves? When may we embrace our fallenness and when must we repent for our sins? On the other hand, there could be religious implications from the conclusions of my research paper. My conclusion was that perfection is not realistically desirable in human societies. This could make someone question the realistic desirability of heaven but it could also support our strong need for God since perfection by ourselves is not perfect. If perfection by itself is insufficient in making us happy, this may suggest our need for something more, something spiritual or divine, like a god. This could lead to questions about heaven and how we will be changed in heaven and how exactly we will be happy in that context of perfection.

On another note, religion necessarily coincides with morality as our moral systems and values are created or dependant on our religious beliefs. So, my project also relates to how humans are moral, believing animals as it alludes to a Christian sense of perfection. In Christianity, there is the idea that when we die, we will be resurrected and ascend to heaven where we, and everything else, will be made perfect. This idea is entrenched in the doctrine that God makes humans inherently perfect but the flawed world that we live in inevitably makes us imperfect sinners. So, because we are made by God, we have an intrinsic perfection within us, but as soon as we are born into this fallen world we are tainted and can be seen as sinners. This doctrine of perfection provides a context for some believers to live in that reminds them that perfection and perfect happiness will be attained in the afterlife. This can be a source of joy and comfort for some people as they look forward to a state of eternal perfection in the afterlife while they live within this world that they view as imperfect and

sinful. However, some people who believe in this doctrine of perfection (that we have an intrinsic perfection within us) may begin striving for perfection in their current situations. These people may view hardships or struggles as imperfections and begin working incessantly to fix those imperfections or feel bad about those imperfections. This mindset is unsustainable as it cultivates the habit of fixating on what's going wrong and thus fixating on one's own inability to make things perfect and failing to reward or acknowledge one's own achievements. This leads to the belief that one is never good enough. This becomes a demoralizing state of mind that would eventually lead to burn out. Furthermore, as I explore in the conclusion of my research paper, this desire for perfection is not sustainable nor the key to perfect happiness. In fact, as I just mentioned, striving for perfection may be highly detrimental to our happiness and effectiveness. This desire for perfection is not sustainable because we live in a flawed world so our quest for perfection will inevitably and incessantly fall short, causing us to work harder and harder for something that is unattainable. This will lead to a huge detriment on our mental health, our morale, and our self-esteem as we convince ourselves that we are striving for something reasonable and attainable, and that the reason we fail to attain it is due to something inferior within ourselves. In addition to perfection being an unattainable ideal, my research paper also explores how, even if we did attain perfection, we would inevitably reject it because we prefer our contexts of imperfection and the liberties and joys that those contexts allow us. For example, the Utopian practices that create a perfect, stable and safe society would be rejected because we prefer our contexts of imperfection that allows for some instability. This instability allows us to be challenged and allows us to test ourselves, to fail or succeed in these trials.

So, not only is chasing perfection unsustainable, it is also not the road to perfect happiness since this pursuit would reduce our happiness and because we would reject perfection even if we did attain it. In my research paper, I conclude that a more sustainable

way of navigating our contexts of imperfection is to accept them and to strive, not for a perfection that is vague and unattainable, but to simply improve and better oneself. Chasing perfection within our contexts of imperfection is like running a race with no finish line. We frantically run faster and faster, desperate to reach the finish line, but we gradually get more tired and defeated, and there is no prize or end goal on the horizon. However, accepting our contexts of imperfection and striving to gradually improve ourselves is more like walking uphill, with small checkpoints. This is a much more sustainable mode of being as we strive to better ourselves, but we are not frantic or desperate because we can set attainable goals for ourselves that we can realistically see ourselves achieving. This method of navigating our contexts of imperfection also has several checkpoints where we can rest or reward ourselves for our efforts and achievements. This creates a healthy state of mind that acknowledges our own imperfections but is not defeated by them or desperate to escape them. Instead, this state of mind is happier by accepting our contexts of imperfection as it can now create attainable and realistic goals. By doing this, we strike a balance between striving to improve ourselves and accepting our imperfections. Neither complacent nor frantic, this state of mind can gracefully assess ourselves and create realistic goals to improve ourselves.



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