Bilal M. Hamdullah

CONCEPTS OF THOMAS MORE'S «UTOPIA»

Belarusian State University, Minsk;
bilalma2016@gmail.com;
scientific adviser – N. M. Shakhnazaryan, PhD, Ass. Prof.

The article is devoted to the social, historical, philosophical resources of the utopian concept of ideal state and society in the novel «Utopia» (1516) by outstanding thinker of English Renaissance Thomas More (1478 – 1535).

Keywords: Thomas More; utopia; republic; allegory; dialogue; humanism

Thomas More (1478 – 1535) was a lawyer, humanist and statesman. He served as Counsel of England from 1529 until 1532 and was condemned as a traitor for his refusal to accept King Henry VIII as Head of the Church of England. T. More was beheaded on July 6, 1535, on Tower Hill in London and canonized as a saint in 1935. Being outstanding representative of «Christian humanism» – all-European movement for unity of Christian faith and Greco–Roman ancient wisdom – T. More became «a Man for all seasons» (the title of R. Bolt's play (1966), dedicated to T. More).

«Utopia» is a philosophical and political fictional story written in Latin and published in the city of Louvain (1516) thanks Erasmus Roterodamus (1466 – 1536) – the closest friend of T. More. The story tells of the social, economic, political, cultural and religious norms of an isolated state, created on an unknown island, named Utopia. The author imagined the ideal state in the form of an island, "one of the best of the republics" [4, c.5]. The word «utopia» («missing place») was proposed by T. More as neologism and made up of the ancient Greek word «topos» («place») and negative prefix «ou». This principle of creating nominative neologisms is reflected in the capital city Amaurote, in the main river Ahydra (river without water), inhabitants Alaopolites (citizens without a city), their neighbours Achoréens (inhabitants without a country), etc.

T. More wanted to condemn the legitimacy of the egalitarian society, using the previous examples of ideal society project, connected with Plato's «Res Publica» (375 BCE) and Aurelius Augustine' «De civitate Dei» (426). «Utopia» had extended echoes among European intellectuals of his time until the XIX-th century, when the word Utopia became a designation for a literary genre ranging between fable and travel stories. Then it became a designation for models of ideal places for human living [1, p. 24]. The title «Utopia», chosen by T. More for his book

and his utopian state, was later bestowed upon all imaginary utopian novels (Francis Bacon's New Atlantis, 1627; Tommaso Campanella's La città del Sole, 1623, Denis Veiras' L'Histoire des Sévarambes, 1667, etc.) and dystopian novels (Aldous Huxley's «Brave New World», 1932; George Orwell's «1984»).

This novels' purpose is to give a picture of the world as it should be from the point of view of mentioned thinkers. When T. More wrote this book, he wanted to criticize the imperfect and partly criminal political situation in England of King Henry VIII as absolute monarch. More specifically, there are many arguments among scholars that utopia is serious and practical, and aim to reshape the political structure of society. There is no private property in T. More's «Utopia», as in Plato's «Res Publica», there is only public ownership and equality within the principle of «to each according to his need». Life in Utopia, based on the refuse of private property was the ideal model for the progressive and righteous life of community ought to follow.

Utopia begins with basic principle of all social institutions – elimination of private property. According to the traveler Raphael Hythloday, who was the only hero, visited the unknown island Utopia, property communism naturally eliminates class law and injustice. The abolition of class law and privileges is the resource of harmony in the distribution of wealth between all members of society. The contradiction problem of the one and the many, the city and the man, which the classical state and the Christian church tradition considered impossible to solve, was perfectly solved by the utopians [2, P. 138].

The island Utopia is divided into 54 cities, all designed in one style, except for the capital. All streets look the same everywhere, the houses have the same geometry, and the doors are without locks. Every decade, people change their homes, everyone wears the same clothes. Each person works six hours a day, sleeps at eight. Lessons are given to everyone in the morning according to their mental abilities, state rulers are elected only from educated men (so called philarchs). Medicine is free and publicly available

According to T. More, Utopia is politically necessary even for those, who don't want an alternative community at all. Utopia presents meaningful dialogue with "other" variant of social model, an interlocutor, with which everybody can clarify and promote his own ideas and ideals (even if they are leads to the conclusion that utopia is undesirable).

We need to clarify the concept of the meaning of utopia. Utopian project can be carried out from two points of view: the 1-st – speculative proposition of the utopian concept and the 2-nd – practical result of the theoretical plan's fulfillment. The aim of the theoretical point of view is to address some of the problems faced by utopian studies for discussion, choosing more progressive and humanistic ways of improving the imperfect sides of any state. The purpose is to illustrate the current variation in the use of the utopia concept, because this diversity arises only in part from a lack of conceptual rigor on the part of the commentators and mainly

from the range of questions and methods involved. It is important to compare any imaginary project of ideal society with all possible models of its real embodiment. The goal is not to impose doctrine, but to encourage communication around issues already addressed and to suggest new ones. Above all, it is encouragement to clarify the concept of utopia. Many of the problems besetting utopian scholars arise from the lack of a clear definition of utopia that separates its specialized academic use from its current meanings in everyday language [3, P.112].

The simple equation of utopia with a description of a good society (leaving aside the question of possibility) is not true, because positive and negative results of ideal conception's realization are dialectically related. Another is the equation of utopia with an ideal commonwealth. Some commentators argue that utopia is a literary genre, involving the fictional depiction of an alternative society in some detail. However, as we have already suggested, depictions of the perfect society (based on the agreement of individual and common interests of person and state) do not necessarily take the form of literary fictions – and indeed this form is only available under certain very specific historical conditions; is it then to be assumed that when these conditions do not exist, there are no utopias? Broader historical comparisons require more inclusive definitions, to accommodate changes in the way in which aspirations for a better life may be expressed [3, P. 5].

Utopian project is intended to shed light on the difference between this utopia and the system of government in Europe in the XVI-th century, which relied on self-interest and greed for power and wealth. This tendency to imagine ideal fairy-tale places has existed since the Greek era. T. More describes typical fictional cities devoid of war and in which wealth is distributed equitably.

The main distinguishing features of utopia as genre includes systemic description of all levels of society – from social and political institutions, inner and outer economics and policy, cultural life with art, science, religion, etc. As a rule, this description is the story, narrated by the active, well educated positive traveler.

Utopian novel has the form of free dialogue-talk between the fictional character (Raphael Hythloday) and real persons – the author (Thomas More), listening for Raphael) for the first time, and the author's friend (Peter Aegidius, 1486 – 1533), representing the narrator. T. More used the objective neutral language of treatise (method 'pro et contra' for formula proofs) and subjective emotional language of fiction (metaphors, allegories, satire, imaginary comparison, etc.).

T. More's philosophy is based on three principles, first: considering philosophy as a tool for renewal of the human conscience («ethical humanism», founded be Italian humanists (Mirandolla, 1463 – 1494) and developed by «Oxford humanists» (John Colet, 1466 – 1519; T. More). Second: political presence centers on a philosophical trilogy of power, love, and wisdom (social hierarchy, family privacy, human arts, empiric science, freedom of conscience in religion). Third: The ideal country is the city that can be described as a republic, in which the

principle of quality dominates all elements of social existence (synthesis of democratic republic and constitutive monarchy).

Although «Utopia» by T. More was written in XVI century, its themes and ideas are still relevant today. Social order, justice, role of state, scientific technology, ethical norms, religious consciousness continue to be important issues in modern society.

References

1. *Claeys G.* Utopia: The History of an Idea. London: Thames & Hudson, 2020.

2. *Engeman Th. S.* Hythloday's Utopia and More's England: an Interpretation of Thomas More's Utopia // The Journal of Politics: Cambridge University Press. Vol. 44. № 1 (Feb. 1982). P. 131–149.

3. *Levitas R.* The Concept of Utopia. – Ralahine Utopian Studies. Vol. 3 Bern: Peter Lang, 2010.

4. *More T.* Utopia / T. More. – London: Penguin Classics, 2003.