Beyond *Utopia*: Thomas More as Political Thinker?

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The author:

Dr Paul is a Lecturer in the History of Political Thought at New College of the Humanities (NCH). She completed her Bachelor of Arts (BA) with Honours in History and Political Studies at Queen’s University, before completing her MA in Political Science at the University of Victoria, under the supervision of James Tully. Her doctoral work on sixteenth-century theories of political counsel was completed under the supervision of Quentin Skinner at Queen Mary, University of London. She works on Renaissance and Early Modern political thought and has published her research widely. In particular, she is interested in theories of counsel and advice-giving, and how these ideas interacted with theories of sovereignty in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. This has led her to a study of many of the major thinkers of this period, and she has published on Thomas More, Machiavelli and Hobbes. This work also led to a second research interest, that of theories of time, and she currently co-directs a research network on the Renaissance idea of kairos or the ‘opportune moment’.

The paper:

Thomas More’s place in the history of political thought is a precarious one, and is balanced almost solely on the reputation of a short text he published at the mid-point of his literary career, *Utopia*. This paper seeks to establish a profile of Thomas More as a political thinker, beyond an engagement just with his best-read work, *Utopia*. In so doing, we discover the foundation of More’s thoughts in an acknowledgement of essential equality, and a fear of the fragmentation of authority. For More, the body of the people holds authority, whether linguistic, religious or, as this paper shows, political. By way of an imagined moment of authorization, this power can represented in institutions, such as parliament, which then become the ultimate source of legitimate political authority. By examining More’s political ideas beyond *Utopia*, we see that More devises a rich political theory that calls attention to the artificiality of the political and the authority of the people.

Bibliography:


‘The Use of *Kairos* in Renaissance Political Philosophy’, *Renaissance Quarterly* 67.1 (2014), pp. 43-78.