Revisiting the Concept of "Just War"

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Etymologically, utopia means “nowhere” but in reality, it means “everywhere.” Utopia starts at the individual level to spread to the community and beyond. Someone once said, “Everybody wants to change the world, nobody wants to change himself.” We all remember Martin Luther King’s speech, “I Have a Dream.” We recall Cervantes and his famous Don Quixote de la Mancha. We also remember the worst: Hitler and the Holocaust. Jesus himself came up with his own utopia: “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). To have a dream is one thing; to make it reality is another. Dreams often conflict with reality, because dreams require others to agree, freely or forcefully, before they can take root and transform.

Thomas Mores’ Utopia is such a dream, never challenged by reality. What if utopia, however, had to challenge reality? Would it have a feasible chance? Would utopia still be utopia? Throughout the centuries, different utop-
pia, have emerged (religious, ideological etc.), most of them conflicting, each propagating its own vision. The question, then, is, “What happens when one utopia conflicts with another?” A fortiori, or when one utopia is expansionist or subject to the expansion of another utopia. The globalized world levies threats and challenges that need to be braved. Is resistance to such overwhelming evolution possible? Natural right supporters\textsuperscript{104} legitimize their right to resist. They even classify such resistance as a moral duty. The question became even more persistent with the influence of Christian idealism; a religion built on peace, forgiveness, and nonviolence\textsuperscript{105}. We end up wondering, therefore, whether Christian-\emph{ism} is nihilist by essence or not.

If we would simply rely on the teachings of Jesus himself, we would find no justification to resort to violence under any circumstance. Early Christian philosophers had to rely on the answer given by John the Baptist to a soldier in order to back up their theory by extrapolation

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\textsuperscript{104} Locke considers the right of self-defense as the first Natural Law. Each person owns his or her life and no other person has a right to take that life. Consequently, a person is entitled to resist aggressive attacks. John Locke, “An Essay Concerning the True Original, Extent, and End of Civil Government,” 1690, para. 11, 17, 18, 172, 222.

\textsuperscript{105} “Do not take revenge on someone who wrongs you. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Matthew 5:39). “Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). “Jesus said... ‘all who live by the sword will die by the sword’ (Luke 22:51). “Do not repay evil with evil” (Peter 3:9). Our Scriptures tell us that if you see your enemy hungry, give food, or if thirsty, give drink. “Your generosity will surprise him with goodness. Do not let evil get the better of you; get the better of evil by doing good” (Romans 12:21).
\end{footnotesize}
of a “just war.” Just War theory is essentially the right to self-defense. To sum up, the whole issue is one of modus vivendi, i.e. facing external threats to its existence. Just War theory does not deal directly with internal threats. What happens, for instance, in the case where a subversive attitude is being demonstrated within a specific modus vivendi?

A Modus Vivendi Built Upon Peace

Prima facie, the Utopians in More’s Utopia, hate war, which they consider inhuman and an act not even practiced by the beasts in the animal kingdom. For them, the so-called “glory” achieved in war seems inglorious. They train constantly, however, in the disciplines of war. Both men and women are involved in such trainings, ever-ready for any exigency. Limited reasons condition their engagement in war: (1) to defend their country; (2) to defend their friends; and (3) to deliver a weak nation from oppression or tyranny. Utopians would rather honor strategy over gaining victory through great bloodshed. Once war is declared, they circulate leaflets across the enemy’s country, offering a generous reward to anyone who assassinates the king or other leaders, in order to sow suspicion and dissent throughout the enemy nation. Their greatest treasures,

106- As the saying goes, Si vis pacem, para bellum. If you want peace, prepare for war: Epitoma Rei Militaris, by Publius Flavius Vegetius Renatus.
gold and silver, are dedicated for use in wars. They are, therefore, able to offer lavish rewards to enemy defectors and are able to employ mercenaries at a handsome rate.

They honor the idea of hiring mercenaries, such as the Zapoletes, a race in a nearby country who are brutish, strong, and brave fighters, whom they employ to send into battle. They are pretty much aware that those mercenaries have no principles of loyalty and could be persuaded to defect to the enemy side if paid more, but Utopians are generally in a position to outbid their competitors, which they do readily, calculating shrewdly that a large number of the mercenaries will be killed and will never live long enough to collect their pay. Utopians prefer to avoid engaging their own citizens in battle unless their own country is invaded, and in such an event, they recruit volunteers only. Women, who are willing, are encouraged to accompany their husbands and stand with them in battle. Once involved in an armed conflict, special trained forces would be sent to capture, kill, or seek out the commander of an enemy force. If they gain the upper hand and the enemy retreats, they prevent their troops from engaging in random, disorderly pursuit; instead, avoid wholesale slaughter, preferring to take prisoners. Under certain circumstances, they would fake a retreat to trap an unwary enemy. Their light body armor offers suitable protection and allows
for marching long distances or swimming. Part of their training is to swim in armor. In the case of their offense strategy, they prefer the use of battle-axes, rather than swords and bows and arrows, given their skill, strength, and accuracy with the former. They are innovative and are able to create special weapons for war. They do not destroy or plunder a captured city or waste the fields of the enemy, and they observe exceptional clemency toward the defeated nation, with the exception of the leaders who instigated the war and those among the enemy who oppose the surrender. A conquered nation is, however, obliged to pay tribute to reimburse the Utopians for their expenses in the conduct of the war. This payment can be in either money or the rich estates of the defeated country.

More’s treatment of war is longer than any other topic, with the expectation of religion, and that is surprising because war was not a subject of predilection on which he was especially knowledgeable and probably was one in which he had no great interest. For instance, he represents the Utopians, as loathing war, giving the impression that he perceives it to be unwise and spiteful. Utopians perceive war as a dirty affair; therefore, they consider themselves justified when they resort to any necessary action. Incitement, bribery, and deceit to kill appear to be the better alternative. They are determined to win by whatever means, but they strive to limit ca-
suvalsies, especially among their own people. Using mer-
cenaries to fight battles was common on the European
continent for centuries; sometimes entire military bri-
gades were hired under the command and supervision
of a *condottiere*.107

The weakness of the system was that hired troops could
be bribed to change sides. Furthermore, if one troop of
mercenaries faced another mercenary outfit, the combat
often lacked ferocity and the casualties were kept to a
minimum, since neither army was fighting for a cause
that meant much to them. In More’s time, it was becom-
ing obvious that a troop of amateurs, formed of farmers
and shopkeepers might perform better in the field than
the foreign professionals, because they were fighting for
their survival. It should be noted here, however, that the
discussion of mercenaries is less applicable to England
than to Continental nations and that the attitude of the
Utopians toward the loss of life among their hired Za-
poletes appears rather cruel.

As noted earlier, both women and men were trained
in warlike exercises, and women could join men into
battle if they were willing. The question of whether or
not they bore arms and engaged in the actual slaughter

107- “Condottiere, plural Condottieri, leader of a band of mercenaries engaged to fight
in numerous wars among the Italian states from the mid-14th to the 16th century;
the name was derived from the *condotta*, or “contract,” by which the condottieri put
themselves in the service of a city or of a lord.” See: https://www.britannica.com/
is unclear. The presence of women on the battleground was by no means an innovation. Amerigo Vespucci reported customs showing that women might sometimes be used to carry supplies for their soldiers in during war. They sometimes served simply to provide soldiers with moral support. Socrates, for instance, had proposed having the women accompany their soldiers and some records reveal that Germanic and Swiss armies brought women into the fight. The types of weapons and the armor mentioned show clearly that the Utopians engaged in a rather archaic form of combat. The most noticeable feature is the absence of any mention of firearms. This is surprising in view of the fact that gunpowder had been introduced into warfare a century and a half earlier and was coming into fairly general use by the beginning of the 16th century.

More may have thought that the use of cannons was a little too sophisticated for those remote islanders. Possibly, he had an aversion to that “villainous saltpeter” that was spoiling the heroics of knightly combat, much as Hotspur’s messenger had. We know that Henry VIII retained his confidence in the longbow, believing it was a weapon England should rely on in its wars, because twenty-five years later he commissioned Roger Ascham to write a manual on archery to encourage its continued use.\footnote{Ascham’s \textit{Toxophilus} ("Lover of the Bow") was written in the form of a dialogue}
In refraining from plundering captured cities or ravaging farms, the Utopians demonstrate a stage of progress toward civilized behavior that corresponded to other aspects of their policies in conducting wars, i.e. attempting to limit bloodshed in combat.

When we compare More’s Utopians to a group that arose in Europe in the Eleventh century, the Cathars, we are able to approach this Modus Vivendi from another angle, namely, from the angle of turmoil. The story of the Cathars may give us an insight into how and why More’s imaginary Utopians live the way they do, especially when it comes to war.

A Modus Vivendi in Turmoil: The Cathars’ Experiment

Much is known about the Cathars, but what may be important for our purposes in terms of analyzing More’s work, is that in opposing the Catholic Church, they established an anti-sacerdotal party that protested against what they considered to be the spiritual, political, and moral corruption of the church. St. Bernard of Clairvaux, although opposed to the Cathars, famously wrote of them in his well-known Sermon 65 on the Song of Songs:

If you question the heretic about his faith, nothing is more Christian; if about his daily converse,

and published in 1545 as the first book on archery in English as far as we know.
nothing more blameless; and what he says he proves by his actions. . . As regards his life and conduct, he cheats no one, pushes ahead of no one, and does violence to no one. Moreover, his cheeks are pale with fasting; he does not eat the bread of idleness; he labors with his hands and thus makes his living. Women are leaving their husbands, men are putting aside their wives, and they all flock to those heretics! Clerics and priests, the youthful and the adult among them, are leaving their congregations and churches and are often found in the company of weavers of both sexes.109

When a key leader of the anti-Cathar persecutions, Bishop Fulk, excoriated the Languedoc Knights for not pursuing the heretics more diligently, he received the following reply, “We cannot. We have been reared in their midst. We have relatives among them and we see them living [utopian] lives of perfection.”110 Catharism stands for “the pure ones.”111 It was a Christian dualist or Gnostic revival112 movement that thrived in some areas

112- Cathar theology was essentially Gnostic. They believed in the existence of two “gods”: one evil and one good. The evil one, in charge of all the visible and material
of Southern Europe, particularly northern Italy and the south of France, between the Eleventh and fourteenth centuries. Cathar beliefs varied from one community to another, because Catharism was initially transmitted by ascetic priests who had set few guidelines. The Roman Catholic Church denounced their practices, including the *Consolamentum* ritual, by which individuals were baptized and raised to the status of “perfection.”

Their roots seem to go back to the Paulician movement in Armenia and Anatolia. Even though the term “Cathar” had been used for centuries to identify the movement, it is unclear as to whether the movement used this name of itself. How familiar with the history of this movement More was, is unclear, but it is unlikely that he had not been exposed to many of their teachings, even though the sect was all but gone during his time. The belief that only two gods existed, one being good and the other evil, was a central Cathar belief. They considered, for instance, that the god of the *New Testament*, creator of the spiritual realm, was the good god. In contrast, they regarded the god of the *Old Testament*, creator of the physical/material realm as evil and things in the world, was held responsible for all the atrocities in the world, including those described in the *Old Testament*. The good one, on the other hand, was the one the Cathars worshipped and was responsible for the message of Jesus. They, therefore, made every effort to follow the teachings of Jesus as closely as possible so as to avoid being rebuked.

identified as Satan. This evil god created all visible matter, including the human body, tainted with sin from the beginning of creation. Cathars maintained the belief that human spirits were the genderless spirits of angels trapped within the physical creation of the evil god, and that they were condemned to an eternal incarnation until they could achieve salvation through a ritual called the consolamentum\textsuperscript{114} wherein they reached perfection. Obviously, this belief gravely contradicted the dogmas of the Catholic Church. From the very beginning of his pontificate, Pope Innocent III attempted to put an end to Catharism by sending missionaries and by persuading the local authorities to act against them. Pierre de Castelnau, the papal legate, was assassinated in 1208, while returning to Rome after excommunicating Count Raymond VI of Toulouse, whom he considered to be too lenient with the Cathars\textsuperscript{115}.

Once again, investigating the beliefs and history of the Cathars may shed some light on why More chose to write Utopia in the first place; it also provides much food for thought when it comes to the history of Just War theory.

\textsuperscript{114} Margaret Schaus Women And Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia (New York: Taylor and Francis Group, 2006)

\textsuperscript{115} Jonathan Sumption, The Albigensian Crusade (London: Faber and Faber, 1999).