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Enclosed: An Analysis Of American Healthcare Policies Based On Thomas More's 'Utopia'

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Enclosed: An Analysis Of American Healthcare Policies Based On Thomas More's 'Utopia'

Writing Process

This piece was the final essay of ASI 110, otherwise known as the fall semester of freshman year in the Core Program. The first part of the assignment required a reconstruction of Thomas More's argument against enclosure in his work, *Utopia*. Then, the second part of the assignment called for a creative parallel of More's argument to the modern world. When selecting my topic, I chose to analyze the singular topic of healthcare rather than address multiple modern issues to more fully assess and relate the issues. After I wrote my reconstruction, I brainstormed issues prevalent in the 2016 presidential election and landed on healthcare, as my mom works in the healthcare field and I had an interest in thinking more deeply about the subject.

Course

ASI110

Semester

Fall

Instructor

William Trollinger

Year

2017

Enclosed: An Analysis of American Healthcare Policies Based on St. Thomas More's 'Utopia'

Maggie Cahill

In Book I of *Utopia*, St. Thomas More explores a logical argument against enclosure that applies reason and morality to emerging injustice (6-11) More conveys his own ideas in this fictional work by setting it on a fictional island and exploring the argument through the character of the explorer Raphael. He shares his ideas with Cardinal John Morton, a counsel to the king, and with an English lawyer who has a conflicting outlook. As More refutes his opponents through humanistic reasoning and evidence, he appeals to public fear with examples of the potential failure created by enclosure's negative effects on society. His critique stems from witnessing the excess and greed of late 15th and early 16th century lifestyles of the wealthy. More condemns the wealthy and outlines how their attitudes of superiority worsen the situation of the impoverished. More argues with a well-educated man through the counterarguments of an English lawyer who represents this wealthy perspective. More's argument about the poor's inescapable situation caused by enclosure relates to the modern issue of healthcare access and how withholding healthcare access negatively affects all tiers of society.

More's main argument in Book I condemns enclosure, a process by which wealthy individuals purchase land from farmers to raise sheep. This problem highlights the English loss of commons, a subsequent shift to private property, and the cycles of poverty and theft. The wealthy think they are doing people a service by providing them with finer wool, when actually they are creating an upheaval in the entire social structure. To support his argument, More claims enclosure destroys the land, disrupts agriculture, and contributes to the downfall

of farmers' livelihoods. The farmers who live on the land are left with no choice but to sell their land. This affects their entire family and makes their farming skills obsolete. As farmers seek new ways to make money, many cannot find work that utilizes their talents or pays enough for them to live. More reasons that a decrease in the number of farmers contributes to low supply and high demand, increased prices, and perpetuation of poverty as the rich control the land. For instance, the rich sell cattle for high prices because the importance of profit has surpassed that of running an honest business to serve the needs of the community.

More examines how this cycle leads to inevitably to begging or stealing that appears recreational or inherently evil as though farmers would choose to remain unemployed out of laziness. More indicates that robbery allows for independence, it is less shameful than begging, and becomes a legitimate means of income for those with no other solution to their troubles. More reasons that robbery becomes an intrinsic part of the economy once societal values shift to allow activities that depend on theft, drinking, gambling, or prostitution to fuel the economy. Since the few individuals at the top of the economic spectrum control most of the wealth, they find it easy to punish the people at the bottom who are left to steal. Even though the poor have few options to work, the wealthy feel entitled to enact punishment.

More addresses the wealthy counterargument that stealing is an act with an evil intent, by arguing that poor individuals may lack the skills needed for other occupations. When farming jobs disappear, workers are left with only the knowledge of their previous occupation. Jobs that are the only means of income and are meant to fully support the life of an individual are not adequate and the result is the family needs to steal in order to make a living. More explains how the association of theft with laziness is a problematic stigma that nobles employ despite the poor's lack of skills or work. Lords are more willing to feed nobles than the poor because of the poor's perceived status. The more the poor are ignored or stigmatized, the more likely they are to accept their "poor" label and resort to theft. More hypothetically argues that as soon as a nobleman becomes poor, no one will help him and he, too, will resort to theft. The issue lies in an individual's situation and status over their qualities or characteristics.

More claims that some jobs may only be temporary, such as a soldier's job that is only fully relevant during wartime. More provides an example of the French peacetime standing army embodying the epitome of less than full employment when not at war. With no other skills, full-time soldiers will seek a

reason to fight, illustrating an inability to productively engage in other areas of society. Men with other skills may even prove to be better fighters and strategists. If different jobs allow men to remain adequate fighters, a strong army can still exist and a standing army becomes unnecessary. More relates this case to the problem of citizen's limited skills due to enclosure.

To further his argument, More discusses the implications of punishing those immobilized by enclosure. More argues that even a punishment as harsh as hanging cannot prevent theft. The punishment's ineffectiveness, according to More, is not some unknown phenomenon, but rather lies within the system itself. A crime like theft does not deserve a punishment so brutal and final; instead, society should teach criminals how to be productive citizens. Logically, individuals will continue to steal if their lives depends on it. Punishment will not deter those whose lives are at stake. When poor individuals have nothing to lose, the severity of the punishment is irrelevant. More believes these thieves do not deserve the death penalty due to their misfortune.

To resolve the issue, More claims the wealthy ought to eliminate excess spending on drinking or gambling and funnel the money toward community improvement. Another option would be to create jobs on the land that the wealthy purchased to help citizens strengthen their own financial well-being. More suggests the restoration of farming and the regulation of wool production to renew a purpose for farmers and to decrease theft through employment. The root of the problem lies in the wealthy's power to strip individuals of their land and jobs. The limited skills of the farmers, and the resulting punishment for those left without options creates the problem. The modest percentage of wealthy people in society does not mean they should dictate to the majority their type of employment. More emphasizes the rich's obligation to ensure the opportunity of work for those who desire it, thus helping people to stay above the poverty line, and discourage theft. Although the wealthy believe punishment displays their strength, they can neither ignore nor address the systemic issue resulting from enclosure and harsh punishment for theft. More argues that the injustice of denying people jobs sets them up for failure and conveys weakness more than strength. He reasons that the punishment system creates a space in society for theft, but then it punishes those who commit theft.

More's argument against the gap between the rich and poor that is created by private ownership can be related to the modern issue of access to healthcare. A major boundary in today's American society involves the repeal of Obamacare

(the Affordable Care Act), which would leave millions of Americans without affordable healthcare. Although this issue may appear to cause problems for particular individuals, More's argument when applied to today implies that the expanded effects of loss of employment could provoke stealing: enough personal problems can create a larger societal issue that becomes difficult to solve. The issue of inadequate healthcare access begins on a personal level when an individual's income prevents budgeting money for healthcare costs not provided by an employer. Jobs like these also often lack necessary benefits to ensure basic human needs, an issue created by societal and governmental choices. This lack of benefits punishes those affected into a cycle of poverty and worsens their financial situation.

More would argue against the lack of benefits and the government's unwillingness to provide affordable options. This problem relates to the issue of the rich leaving the poor to fend for themselves financially, but without providing any options. Just as More described how the punishment of hanging is too harsh for a crime like theft, so, too, is the lack of access to affordable healthcare too harsh for those with inadequate benefits or low paying jobs. Low wage jobs, the lack of education, and the lack of assets to escape poverty are left to fester to the point that when individuals who want healthcare try to get it, they are constrained by the obstacle of finding affordable options. The lack of healthcare will eventually give society a cause to stigmatize and punish individuals without healthcare. This, in return, may contribute to the spread of diseases, increase the need for worker's compensation, or even push higher public taxes to cover the cost. Just as More reasoned that the solution to enclosure would be having the wealthy provide more opportunities for the poor to productively engage in society, he would reason that the wealth ought to be more evenly distributed in order to provide affordable healthcare. Additionally, the wealthy should seek to improve the poor's abilities through education or provide more benefit options rather than punish those in the cycle of poverty with no healthcare. This will help society at-large because benefits will encourage more people to work and will create a healthier, more productive society in which citizens work efficiently and cohesively.

More's argument against enclosure, the superiority of the wealthy, and the harsh and hypocritical punishments for theft are all creatively expressed through the fictional *Utopia* to illustrate his point rather than to lecture about it. To establish his credibility, More organizes his argument about enclosure as the

climax instead of the introduction in order to interest readers rather than making them feel at fault. More's logic behind the wealthy finding a way to fix the cycle of poverty and punishment can be related to the modern issue of affordable healthcare. More's argumentative style can be applied by current policymakers to avoid attacking either the wealthy or the poor. To create social change, the modern world can look at the issues More presents and how he presented them. More analyzed the layers of a problem rather than just the problem itself to draw conclusions about its effects on society. A perspective like this help stop the causes of the problem before the problem can spiral out of control.

Works Cited

More, Thomas. *Utopia*. Dover Publications Inc., 1997.