

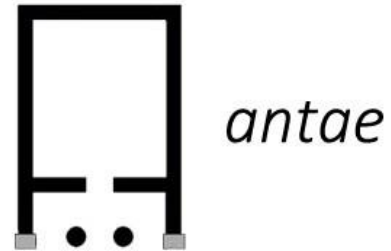
Humanitarianism: Between Realism and Utopia

Lars Löfquist

antae, Vol. 4, No. 1 (May, 2017), 102-113

Proposed Creative Commons Copyright Notices

Authors who publish with this journal agree to the following terms:



- a. Authors retain copyright and grant the journal right of first publication with the work simultaneously licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution License](#) that allows others to share the work with an acknowledgement of the work's authorship and initial publication in this journal.
- b. Authors are permitted and encouraged to post their work online (e.g., in institutional repositories or on their website) prior to and during the submission process, as it can lead to productive exchanges, as well as earlier and greater citation of published work (See [The Effect of Open Access](#)).

antae is an international refereed postgraduate journal aimed at exploring current issues and debates within English Studies, with a particular interest in literature, criticism and their various contemporary interfaces. Set up in 2013 by postgraduate students in the Department of English at the University of Malta, it welcomes submissions situated across the interdisciplinary spaces provided by diverse forms and expressions within narrative, poetry, theatre, literary theory, cultural criticism, media studies, digital cultures, philosophy and language studies. Creative writing and book reviews are also accepted.

Humanitarianism: Between Realism and Utopia

Lars Löfqvist

Uppsala University

Texts in the utopian literary genre can often be seen as abstract and irrelevant to real world issues. The charge of utopianism can be levelled against any serious social criticism that dares to ask fundamental questions about the ideal society and where our contemporary society falls short. In parallel, humanitarianism, or organised emergency relief aid, is sometimes understood as surrender in the face of human suffering. It aims to provide temporary help for those suffering from war but it does not ask the fundamental questions about the cause of human suffering; after all, ‘just because lives are no longer at immediate risk does not mean that suffering has ended or that other destructive forces that might appear in the future have been removed’.¹ As such, humanitarianism can neither bring about long term changes for human beings nor provide overall social goals and sources for social criticism. This critique can be answered by claiming that humanitarianism simply represents the only realistic approach to alleviate some of the world’s misery.

Instead of accepting the dualism that utopia is irrelevant and humanitarianism is uncritical, I propose that there are links between utopian thinking and humanitarianism. Utopian thinking can be more or less realistic and humanitarianism can be more or less utopian. I will argue that humanitarianism can be understood as an attempt to establish a realistic utopia. The case will be illustrated by comparing Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516) with Henry Dunant’s *A Memory of Solferino* (1862). The first work established the term “utopia” and is a clear example of this genre. The second work is the foundational text for the Red Cross movement and modern humanitarianism. As we will see, there are obvious differences between the two texts—but there are also stark similarities in the themes they discuss. Both authors try to strike a balance between accepting the socio-political status quo of their time and challenging this state.

As a starting point, it is relevant to emphasise that, besides political philosophical treaties, social criticism can be done in many literature genres. One is the utopian tradition.² This tradition is here understood as being characterised by an approach that starts in an abstract ideal that provides an indirect tool for comparison with the actual world. A typical historical example for this tradition is Plato’s *Republic*.³

There are different types of writing in the utopian tradition. One can make a distinction between classical utopias, which include More’s, and the modern utopias. The classical utopians are primarily interested in comparisons between the ideal and the real: ‘[t]he Platonic state was and

¹ Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss, ‘Humanitarianism: A Brief History of the Present’, in *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics*, ed. by Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), pp. 1-48, p. 3.

² It is reasonable to talk about a tradition in the sense that there are numerous individual works that share the literary format which provide a specific way of thinking about society and to judge its merits and faults.

³ See Plato, *The Republic*, trans. by Desmond Lee (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

is regarded as an ideal or chimera impracticable of realization among men'.⁴ However, the modern utopian thinkers also take into consideration how to bring about utopia here and now. Modern utopian thinkers are steeped in the enlightenment tradition of progress. Instead of looking at the world as stable or even in decline, the modern utopian thinkers presume that the world can get better.⁵ Another relevant distinction is that a text can present a "utopia" in many different ways. It does not have to follow a certain literary form of expression such as presenting a distant society. One example of a modern utopian writer was the industrialist Robert Owen, who believed that new social conditions and institutions could change humans: 'Man was essentially a healthy animal in body and mind, and he was fundamentally good; what was necessary for his proper development was a fitting environment'.⁶ By changing the environment, we can overcome maladies such as crime and suffering. Following this, Owen also made practical steps towards this ideal by building utopian societies, which all failed.⁷

When a text or thinker is facing the charge of utopianism this usually suggests that the proposals or ideas are seen as unrealistic. The key issue concerns what "realistic" is supposed to entail. I propose that "realistic" should not be understood as accepting any particular socio-political order as given but should be understood as accepting some human conditions, motivations or drives as a necessary part of any possible social future we have. "Utopia" is simply the word we use to describe that social future. Obviously, then, utopia can be realistic.

The idea of a realistic utopia is not in any sense novel. Political philosopher John Rawls claimed that 'political philosophy is realistically utopian when it extends what are ordinarily thought to be the limits of practical political possibility and, in so doing, reconciles us to our political and social condition'.⁸ In Rawls's thinking, the realistic utopia pushes the boundaries of what it thought to be possible. This can be compared with the conception of utopia defended by Robert Nozick. Accordingly, Nozick defined utopia as being, 'in some restricted sense, the best for all of us; the best world imaginable, for each of us'.⁹ The stress on restrictions means that Nozick too believed that we cannot have social goals that are too aloft from the world we live in or the way we are as humans. Perhaps the utopian society is not something that we can bring about today—but it might be there for the next generation. This exemplifies the above idea that utopian thinking can be more or less realistic. To be realistic, it must accept some features of human nature and society as given.¹⁰

In order to illustrate the concept of realistic utopia, the rest of the essay is structured through a comparison between More's *Utopia* and Dunant's *A Memory of Solferino*. Regarding these

⁴ Joyce Oramel Hertzler, *The History of Utopian Thought* (London: Forgotten Books, 2015), p. 100.

⁵ See Elisabeth Hansot, *Perfection and Progress: Two Modes of Utopian Thought* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1974), p. 9.

⁶ As quoted in Hertzler, p. 217.

⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 220.

⁸ John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (London: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 11.

⁹ Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1974), p. 298.

¹⁰ Human nature refers to fundamental ideas about how humans are as a species. Two examples of such ideas are Plato's claim that a human soul has three parts and Aristotle's idea that human beings, like other species, have a final end which we must seek to realize. Despite these two examples, it is not necessary for ideas about human nature to take an essentialist form. See Plato (above) and Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by J.A.K Thomson (London: Penguin Books, 2004).

sources, we should note that *Utopia* was written in Latin and *A Memory of Solferino* in French; there have, additionally, been numerous English translations over the years. For *Utopia*, I will consult the standard translation by Logan, Adams and Miller from 1995, whereas, for *A Memory of Solferino*, the main source is the version from 1959, originally published by the American Red Cross.

More's *Utopia* and Dunant's *A Memory of Solferino*

Thomas More's *Utopia* consists of two parts. The first part is a political conversation between More's alter ego and a small circle of people including Raphael Hythloday, a well-travelled sailor and explorer. The conversation turns to several subjects: one main issue is the punishment of thieves and the situation of the poor in England.¹¹ Hythloday analyses the causes of poverty and deems these unjust.

The second part of the text is Hythloday's story about his time on the Island of Utopia. He describes the island and its inhabitants in great detail with special emphasis on social issues. The island of Utopia includes numerous differences compared to More's own society and becomes an instrument of comparison and critique. The utopian society features stark differences from our own. One distinct feature is that they consider gold to be useless whereas health and wisdom are held in high regard as characteristics that lead to a good life. Even if More portrays the story as being descriptive, he ends the second part by suggesting that there are things in utopian society that one can wish would also become part of English society.¹²

Dunant's short text, in contrast, is a vivid depiction of the battle between the armies of Austria-Hungary and a coalition led by France. Dunant describes the day before the battle, the battle itself, and its outcome. On the surface, one can claim that Dunant's text is primarily a journalistic description of a historical event that ends with a few practical suggestions. But as many others have pointed out, the main text is not only a description of a battle; it includes a conscious selection of different parts of the battle and its aftermath while drawing explicit normative/prescriptive conclusions from this background. One of the main points of the text is the numerous depictions of how wounded soldiers suffer after the battle and the futile attempt to alleviate this suffering.¹³ These observations provide the background for Dunant's explicit political and normative proposals of establishing volunteer organisations that can provide medical relief in war and a convention to protect medical personnel in war.¹⁴

More's book projected the word "utopia" into the English language and beyond. It is itself an archetype of utopian literature as presenting a stark contrast to the author's own society. But what is utopian in Dunant's book? Is the concept of utopia at all relevant for such a text? One

¹¹ See Thomas More, *Utopia*, in *More: Utopia. Latin Text and English Translation*, ed. by George M. Logan et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 57.

¹² See More, pp. 153, 173, 249.

¹³ See John F. Hutchinson, *Champions of Charity: War and the Rise of the Red Cross* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), p. 15.

¹⁴ See Henry Dunant, *A Memory of Solferino* (Geneva: International Committee of the Red Cross, 1959), pp. 115, 126. <<https://www.icrc.org/eng/assets/files/publications/icrc-002-0361.pdf>>. [Accessed 24 April 2017].

could argue that his policy suggestions are not very far-reaching and thus hardly constitute a utopian departure from existing realities. Such a claim reduces both Dunant's vision and the impact of the book. Daniel Thürer forcefully argues that Dunant's ideas were radical at a time when there were no broad international agreements on the treatment of wounded in war: '[t]he original Geneva Convention of 1864 constituted a first step towards a fundamental change in the structure of international law, gradually opening it up to embrace individuals and civil society'.¹⁵ In addition, the state of military medical resources was bad. Although there are examples of voluntary relief efforts, like those of Florence Nightingale, the military establishment itself only provided a limited degree of professional help for their soldiers. The effects of this were captured in Dunant's description of the battle and its aftermath.¹⁶ Thousands of wounded died because of simple infections and poor treatment. They also perished because of lack of water. Many did not have the chance of leaving this life with a little comfort from another fellow human. Dunant's text describes this suffering and builds a moral argument that the soldiers were worth more help than they in fact received.¹⁷

What is remarkable is that Dunant managed to spread his ideas to influential Europeans and brought around real change in the international community. Although many helped with the efforts, it is clear that Dunant's book was the spark that encouraged the establishment of Red Cross societies and inspired the first Geneva Convention in 1864.¹⁸ The fact that several states accepted the convention and its limitation on their sovereign power was a clear extension of what was believed to be possible in international relations: it opens the door to a redefinition of international law.¹⁹

Similarities between More and Dunant on war

Although there are many differences between the two thinkers I am here presenting—their professions, for instance, and the political realities they lived in—they still share a number of similarities. One important similarity is that they were both devoted Christians. More was executed by Cromwell for his reluctance to accept the Anglican Church instead of the Catholic one.²⁰ Dunant was raised in a Calvinist protestant home and early on became active in Christian relief organisations; the fervour of his religious belief is in fact illustrated by the way he saw himself as an instrument of God.²¹

¹⁵ Daniel Thürer, 'Dunant's pyramid: thoughts on the "humanitarian space"', *International Review of the Red Cross*, 89(865) (2007), 47-61, (p. 50).

¹⁶ See Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), pp. 78-80.

¹⁷ See Dunant, p. 126.

¹⁸ See International Committee of the Red Cross, 'Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field' (Geneva, 22 August 1864). <<https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Treaty.xsp?documentId=477CEA122D7B7B3DC12563CD002D6603&action=openDocument>>. [Accessed 24 April 2017].

¹⁹ See Thürer, p. 50.

²⁰ See Travis Curtright, *The One Thomas More* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2013), p. 176.

²¹ See Hutchinson, p. 12.

It is not surprising that their beliefs also influenced their writings. More emphasises that the Utopians share most of the key tenants of Christianity. This includes the belief in one God, the maker of the universe. They believe in the immortality of the soul and the coming afterlife.²² Dunant provides several arguments as to why one should help those who suffer in war, one of these arguments being that there is a specific Christian dimension to alleviate suffering. He presents a list with examples on how others have helped the wounded and this includes both Church officials and lay-people.²³

More offers a chapter devoted to the subject of war, one reading of which maintains that it is a satire over how war was fought in More's own society, which struggled with a bloody civil war. Elisabeth Hansot goes so far as to claim that this is the obvious interpretation of the text: 'More's treatment of war is clearly a satire on contemporary practice and not to be taken seriously'.²⁴ Be that as it may, we can still consider what he writes on the subject, noting especially that the Utopians are not pacifists; they are clearly ready to go to war, not only to defend themselves but also to support their allies and just causes. But the Utopians' actual conduct in war is restrained. They are sensitive to the fact that it is often the leaders of other countries that are their enemies. Ordinary persons are not inclined to conflicts, which means that they do not shy away from the assassination of enemy leaders, spreading rebellion and paying mercenaries. They do everything in their power to reduce the effects of war on their own society. This comes from the deep belief that Utopian citizens are not cannon fodder, and they prefer to use their huge supplies of gold to buy their victory. This is a price that they see fitting since they do not value gold or similar treasures as others do. It is especially relevant to note that they do not believe that people with material riches should be honoured simply because of their richness. Such honour is utter madness to the Utopians.²⁵

More also describes the Utopians as having specific norms about the conduct of war. With regards to the treatment of enemies and the holding of truces, Utopians are morally strict. They do not burn the lands of their enemies nor do they hurt a man that is unarmed.²⁶ In defending themselves, they seem content with winning the battle and do not seek to settle for an unjust peace, a peace where the victorious seek to exploit the defeated.²⁷ More notes that the Utopians also keep prisoners of wars as slaves, but he presents this practice as relatively limited. The Utopians are in general not in support of slavery.²⁸

²² See More, pp. 219-25.

²³ See Dunant, pp. 116-18.

²⁴ Hansot, p. 70.

²⁵ See More, pp. 201, 207, 205, 155.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 217.

²⁷ More notes that the Utopians collect the costs for the war from their defeated enemies but does not seek revenge on the civilian population: See More, p. 217. This does not hold true when the Utopians assist their allies. In the war between Nephelotes and the Alaopolitans, the Utopians side with the former. The Alaopolitans are defeated and the Utopians hand them over to the Nephelotes for enslavement: See More, p. 203.

²⁸ See More, p. 185.

An interesting omission in Dunant's text is that he did not condemn all wars as immoral in themselves.²⁹ There is one section of *A Memory of Solferino* that presents a clear picture of Dunant's thinking about war. He notes that the efforts of the 'Society of the Friends of Peace' have not been effective, that there are many new forms of weapons and that there is a European state of mind which makes war probable. What he proposes is to take some time in peacetime to organise volunteers who can help the wounded.³⁰ This supports Michael Barnett's evaluation of the younger Dunant: 'Dunant was not a pacifist—he wanted to humanize war, not outlaw it'.³¹

Since Dunant did not criticise war itself, he became a target of critique that claims that his efforts turned into an indirect justification of war as a practice and that his reputation as a man of peace is unfitting. One source of critique was Nightingale, who argues that a voluntary medical help organisation would relieve the governments of their responsibility to care for their soldiers and thus make war too easy.³² A response to this critique is that Dunant was simply well-informed about the political ideas in Europe at the time, and therefore proposed an extension of the contemporary thought to its reasonable limit. As Barnett puts it, 'the impact of the book owed much to being the right message at the right time'.³³ But, as we shall see later, Dunant eventually came to accept pacifism which provides another understanding on the ultimate aim of *A Memory of Solferino*.

Both More and Dunant avoid a black and white analysis of war. One explanation for this similarity can be their familiarity with the Christian "Just War" tradition. More was a convinced Catholic, and the church had long endorsed this idea. Theologian St. Thomas Aquinas provided one description of what constitutes this "just war", noting that war is sinful and against the virtue of peace. However, according to him, there are conditions in which war can be justified. The first condition is that the correct authority, the sovereign, decides on an act of war. The second condition is a just cause: war should be a response for wrongdoings. The third and final condition is that war is to be waged with right intentions, to do good or to avoid evil. This includes the aim of achieving peace and punishing those who have done wrong.³⁴ It seems that the Utopians are proponents of an idea of the "just war", and this interpretation finds further support in More's explicit statements that the Utopians only go to war for good reasons.³⁵

Protestant reformer John Calvin defended a particular interpretation of the "just war" tradition with which Dunant must have been familiar. Calvin agrees with many previous theologians that Christians have a duty to engage in war under certain conditions, and argues that a state has a mandate to defend religion and to punish evildoers. In addition, Calvin shared St. Augustine's

²⁹ See Stephen Hopgood, 'Saying "No" to Wal-Mart? Money and Morality in Professional Humanitarianism', in *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics*, ed. by Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), pp. 98-123, p. 101.

³⁰ See Dunant, p. 115.

³¹ Barnett, p. 80.

³² This critique was repeated several times. As an example, in July 1864 she wrote a letter to Thomas Longmore, a member of the British delegation to the Geneva Congress in 1864, in which she expressed her concerns. Nightingale argued that governments and not volunteers should help the wounded. See Hutchinson, p. 40-41.

³³ Barnett, p. 78.

³⁴ See David D. Corey and J. Daryl Charles, *The Just War Tradition: An Introduction* (Wilmington, NC: ISI Books, 2012), pp. 77-79.

³⁵ See More, p. 201.

notion that the reason for evil in general and war in particular is that humans are still tainted by original sin, a sin that makes us lust for power and vengeance. War is also part of God's punishment for this sin.³⁶ This relatively bleak picture of the human condition could have affected Dunant when he wrote his book, and offers a suitable explanation as to why Dunant did not believe that war could be avoided.

Differences between More and Dunant on war

We must also note the difference between these two thinkers. More is explicit with the Utopian's general idea about war: 'Unlike almost every other people in the world, they think nothing so inglorious as the glory won in battle'. One can infer that war is not morally good and that war does not make us virtuous, and this is perhaps best illustrated when the Utopians consciously hire the Zapoletes, a people they despise, for serving in their armed forces. More explains this by saying that the Utopians, 'as they seek out the best possible men for proper uses, hire these, the worst possible men, for improper uses'.³⁷

The above supports the idea that More wanted to react against the norms of his time which found war a noble activity. As evidenced earlier, the idea that war is noble is one with deep roots, and we can notice that many typically masculine virtues like courage were associated with war; a classical thinker like Aristotle stressed that courage requires dangers and the highest danger can be found in warfare.³⁸ It is uncontroversial to claim that Aristotle's positions on this issue would not have received praise from the Utopians.

Dunant's portrayal of the Battle of Solferino does not explicitly reject the idea that war can have some positive moral value. Instead, there are several parts where he stresses the moral qualities of soldiers, such as their bravery—most notably the French. The French soldiers are not only brutal and aggressive in the actual battle but also friendly and helpful to the fallen enemies. One of the Austrian commanders comments upon this attitude from the French soldiers by saying: 'What a nation you are! You fight like lions, and once you have beaten your enemies you treat them as though they were your best friends!'.³⁹ John Hutchinson observes that 'Dunant praised the French army not only for "the courage of its officers and men" but also for "the humanity of simple troopers"'.⁴⁰

Since Dunant explicitly points out this particular character of the French, it is clear that he believed that one can be a morally good soldier through showing virtues such as bravery. This position is in line with Calvin, who argued that there was a firm Biblical basis for soldiering: a soldier can both shed blood and be a good Christian.⁴¹ More's position does not exclude moral goodness for soldiers since the Utopians are good even if they sometimes have to fight, but it

³⁶ See Corey and Charles, pp. 108-9, 54.

³⁷ More, pp. 201, 209.

³⁸ See Aristotle, p. 67.

³⁹ Dunant, p. 53. See also pp. 33, 51.

⁴⁰ Hutchinson, p. 15.

⁴¹ See Corey and Charles, p. 109.

is clear for More that military service itself is not associated with special moral worth. Taking up arms is a last resort and there is no special value associated with the military.⁴²

Other parts of Dunant's work, however, which focus on the actual effects of the battle, call any attempt of interpreting him as an enthusiastic supporter of war into question. He stresses the contrast between the healthy young men who went into the battle and the crippled and wounded left to fend for themselves in their final moments. One example is the following scene: "I don't want to die, I don't want to die!" shouted a Grenadier of the Guard fiercely. This man who, three days earlier, had been the picture of health and strength, was now wounded to death'.⁴³ In his reflection on the actual number of wounded and dead, Dunant stresses that the battle must be seen as a great catastrophe independent of any questions of glory.⁴⁴ His position seems to be that, perhaps, there are places for glory in war, but it is also clear that the prize for this glory is sometimes too high.

Another difference between More and Dunant is their perspective on the international aspect of war. More's primary focus is the state of Utopia, which includes a description of its allies and enemies.⁴⁵ Dunant describes the armies in the conflict, their actions and the relationship between them. However, he also takes a step further and considers how different antagonistic parties can agree to help all wounded. For Dunant, it is clear that the cause is more important than the arguments, and that he 'uses any and every reason he can think of for giving aid'.⁴⁶ This includes reference to a common religion and to our shared ability for empathy.⁴⁷ This call for change is inherently transnational and aimed for a wide audience.

The transnational idea seems difficult to grasp from More's perspective. The Utopians have managed to build a peaceful society, but how can that alone affect the rest of the world? One suggestion is that the Utopians believe that not all humans are capable of accepting their social structure. We can note that Utopians, for example, do not try to reform or change their mercenaries, the Zapoletes. The latter are simply described as hard and violent, fit only for war.⁴⁸ Thus, More does not consider how the Utopian social structure could be implemented in other societies. Dunant proposes a form for international collaboration, where states impose self-limitations on their own power in order to gain other benefits, such as protection of their own wounded.

Differences between More and Dunant in their social critique

Another point of comparison between More and Dunant is the framework for how they think about social issues. What is perhaps more interesting with More's general thinking is that his analysis traces the cause of much social suffering to the wrongful pursuit of false pleasure,

⁴² See More, p. 201.

⁴³ Dunant, p. 66.

⁴⁴ See Dunant, p. 106.

⁴⁵ See More, especially the chapter on Military practices, pp. 201-218.

⁴⁶ Hopgood, p. 101.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ See More, p. 209.

especially the pride of wealth.⁴⁹ According to More's text, the Utopians hold their material possessions in common, which in turn makes it possible to avoid both pride and greed. Hertzler interprets the motive behind this idea as follows:

More has in mind the abolition of class distinction and the equality of all citizens, before the law; consequently the abolition of private property and the establishment of common possession is the surest way of bringing about equality of claim and the abolition of crime.⁵⁰

Egalitarianism is the foundation for Utopians, and the benefits that More sees in this mode of life are stability, friendship, learning and meaning. He stresses that it is the Utopian's enemies that suffer from pride in wealth and the cunning Utopians make use of this when they buy their victories in war.

But how does More's description of Utopia function as a comparison for today's society? A general point is that More strongly argued against any conceived connection between morality and wealth, a connection that was as commonly drawn in his time as it is in ours. More also made a forceful case for education of all citizens. The Utopians sees education as lifelong endeavour.⁵¹ The strength of this idea is acknowledged in our time, especially in the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.⁵² Article 26 of the declaration states that everyone has a right to an education; Dunant, on the other hand, does not talk about pride or greed, nor does he propose a radical change in society. That is simply not the subject of his writing. But he did talk about the importance of solidarity and voluntary actions.⁵³ These are social virtues that can be seen as methodic of checks and balances on unrestricted greed.

The above shows a final difference between these two writers: Dunant's frame of thinking accepts a capitalistic framework, and we should not forget that he was both a businessman and humanitarian. More is the more radical thinker who seriously criticises the main drive in what was to become a capitalistic ethos. He challenges the idea that we can be good enough if we combine our accumulated riches with some solidarity with the needy. It is the pride which comes from greed that is the main problem, and the main target, of his utopia.

Relating the two authors to the current world of humanitarian action

This section briefly undertakes the task of comparing the work of More and Dunant with contemporary humanitarian issues. One cannot forget that there is a significant gap between their time and ours. One way of assessing their work's relevance and realism is by comparing their ideas with some current practices in what is called the 'humanitarian space', especially in

⁴⁹ See More, pp. 167-171.

⁵⁰ Hertzler, pp. 134-125.

⁵¹ See *ibid.*, pp.181-185.

⁵² See General Assembly, resolution 217 A, 'A Universal Declaration of Human Rights' (10 December 1948). <[http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/217\(III\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/217(III))>. [Accessed 24 April 2017].

⁵³ See Dunant, p. 124.

regards to the legal framework for this space.⁵⁴ If the ideas have become practice, they must to some degree have been realistic.

With regards to ideas in More's Utopia, we can note that the moral qualities the Utopians show in their treatment of enemy populations have become fixed in international law, such as the Geneva convention that forbids violence against non-combatants.⁵⁵ Could More himself have imagined that states could enter into legally-binding conventions to reduce the use of weapons and to curtail the powers of each state? Probably not, which perhaps shows that More's utopian text is not a text about nowhere, but rather turns out to be a text about here and now.

Turning to Dunant, one finds that his ideas had a significant impact in his own time. As previously mentioned, Dunant's work was the foundation for the Red Cross movement for national relief societies; it is relevant to consider the deeper goal of this whole organisational effort. One of the most important interpreters of the moral ideals of the Red Cross, Jean Pictet, described it in the following way: 'The founders of the Red Cross, Henry Dunant in particular, considered at the very beginning that the ultimate objective of the work they set in motion and the Convention they inspired was none other than that of universal peace'.⁵⁶ According to Pictet, Dunant's work had one final objective: universal peace.

The concrete and practical proposals in *A Memory for Solferino* should be understood in view of peace as the ultimate goal. This makes Dunant far more ambitious than the limited proposals in his book would suggest. However, this picture is not as clear as Pictet made it out to be. It was only later in his life that Dunant became a vocal advocate of pacifism, and that position is therefore not present in the original text. This pacifism was a challenge for the Red Cross movement since the Red Cross had not endorsed abolition of war as an official policy goal.⁵⁷ As Hutchinson points out, the Red Cross had tried to distance itself from such ideas: 'For decades, the Red Cross had studiously avoided contact with the pacifists'.⁵⁸ On the other hand, like More, Dunant conducts a social criticism that both accepts some inescapable parts of the human condition and simultaneously tries to undermine this same inescapability. More did not accept living under a repressive English government, but suggested that a government can be more concerned with the well-being of the citizens; Dunant saw a world at war and argued that we can at least care more for the victims.

Both More and Dunant have been remarkably successful in making some of their ideas real. Today, it is not acceptable for states to leave wounded soldiers without any organised

⁵⁴ This term is used in numerous ways. Thürer suggests that 'humanitarian space' is where humanitarian organisations act according to the ethical principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence, and follow international humanitarian law. This is a space separate from both states and other antagonistic parties. See Thürer, pp. 55-59.

⁵⁵ International Committee of the Red Cross, 'Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War', Geneva Convention IV (12 August 1949). <<https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/380>>. [Accessed 24 April 2017].

⁵⁶ Jean Pictet, *The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross: Commentary* (Geneva: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 1979), p. 18.

⁵⁷ Pictet's analysis of the Red Cross's current relation to pacifism is nuanced. He argues that the movement is part of efforts to bring about peace but also that there are constraints. Since the Red Cross seeks to reduce suffering for all parties in armed conflicts it is imperative to avoid taking strong political stances, including a stance against all wars. See Pictet, pp 18-21.

⁵⁸ Hutchinson, p.193.

assistance, an idea argued by Dunant, and it is not controversial to claim that every human should have an education, an idea defended by More. These sentiments have found their institutional place in the form of international declarations and conventions. Compared to More, Dunant makes more concrete suggestions as to how social change can be brought about. He also ends his work by noting how important the idea of progress is in his time. Dunant's own proposals for helping wounded soldiers are meant to be an extension of the same trend.⁵⁹

The above provide reasons to claim that from his own perspective, Dunant's ideas are close to the modern utopian tradition where the ideal is not only a point of comparison but something we should realise. His proposals for social change pushed the boundaries of political possibilities which are also in line with a realistic utopia. Despite the fact that he did not make use of the utopian format, we should understand the text as part of a grander vision in which states curb their own power in order to prevent conflicts and reduce suffering in war. We can see Dunant's vision at work in international law:

In the legal field, prevention calls for the work of developing international humanitarian law. As we know, the ICRC has been concerned since the beginning with promoting and perfecting the rules protecting the victims of conflicts and it was the architect of the Geneva Conventions. Lastly, it is prevention which determines the role of the Red Cross in favour of peace.⁶⁰

It is therefore fitting to consider Dunant's writing realistically utopian in content but not in form. And that is fitting, whether or not he believed that war could or should eventually be totally abolished.

Conclusion

I have argued that there are both clear similarities and clear differences between Dunant and More. Their respective treatment of the human condition is both realistic and visionary. They argue for social change that transcends the categories of realism and utopia but still makes both of these categories fruitful. Dunant, in particular, is an example of a realistic utopian thinker who expanded what was politically possible during the middle of the twentieth century. Both have provided us with literary and moral resources from which to continue challenging the status quo.

⁵⁹ See Dunant, p. 127.

⁶⁰ Pictet, p. 15.

List of Works Cited

- Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by J.A.K Thomson (London: Penguin Books, 2004)
- Barnett, Michael, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011)
- , and Thomas G. Weiss, 'Humanitarianism: A Brief History of the Present', in *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics*, ed. by Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), pp. 1-48
- Corey, David D., and J. Daryl Charles, *The Just War Tradition: An Introduction* (Wilmington, NC: ISI Books, 2012)
- Curtright, Travis, *The One Thomas More* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2013)
- Dunant, Henry, *A Memory of Solferino* (Geneva: International Committee of the Red Cross, 1959)
- General Assembly, resolution 217 A, 'A Universal Declaration of Human Rights' (10 December 1948). <[http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/217\(III\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/217(III))>
- Hansot, Elisabeth, *Perfection and Progress: Two Modes of Utopian Thought* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1974)
- Hertzler, Joyce Oramel, *The History of Utopian Thought* (London: Forgotten Books, 2015)
- Hopgood, Stephen, 'Saying "No" to Wal-Mart? Money and Morality in Professional Humanitarianism', in *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics*, ed. by Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), pp. 98-123
- Hutchinson, John F., *Champions of Charity: War and the Rise of the Red Cross* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996)
- International Committee of the Red Cross, 'Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded in Armies in the Field' (Geneva, 22 August 1864). <<https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Treaty.xsp?documentId=477CEA122D7B7B3DC12563CD002D6603&action=openDocument>>
- International Committee of the Red Cross, 'Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War', Geneva Convention IV (12 August 1949). <<https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/ihl/INTRO/380>>
- More, Thomas, *Utopia*, in *More: Utopia. Latin Text and English Translation*, ed. by George M. Logan et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)
- Nozick, Robert, *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1974)
- Pictet, Jean, *The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross: Commentary* (Geneva: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 1979)
- Plato, *The Republic*, trans. by Desmond Lee (London: Penguin Books, 2003)
- Rawls, John, *The Law of Peoples* (London: Harvard University Press, 1999)
- Thürer, Daniel, 'Dunant's pyramid: thoughts on the "humanitarian space"', *International Review of the Red Cross*, 89(865) (2007), 47-61