

## “More’s Reflections on Complicity with Evil” ? Questions and Discussion with Dr. Joseph Koterski, S.J.

**Gerard Wegemer:** What do you make of Morton’s actions at the end of the English version of *Richard III*? As a clergyman, is it legitimate action to lead someone on by flattery?

**Koterski:** Thank you. It is a wonderful question, and I think it is very, very right for More to be raising that question with regard to a person of such eminence, and whom he so respected from certain respects, as Cardinal Morton. But nonetheless, it is not permissible to lead someone on by flattery in that way. Again, I think that More had to be constantly alert of the fact that sometimes even the people that you like, the people who you sometimes admire, sometimes can fall astray of these things. And so, what I see in More is just a tremendous honesty—that he can point out, even about someone who was his own patron at such a young age, and whom in the *Utopia* he would make a very sympathetic character in attempting to have that put in the mouth of Hythloday when he’s reciting the whole matter of the dinner that goes on and the ways in which Cardinal Morton managed to do so many good things, that there are parts here where even Morton is very deeply troubled. And it’s the deep respect in which an Aristotle and an Aquinas and this longstanding realist tradition in ethics would say that, in justice, we have never to be respecters of persons, so it’s never going to be a case of, Because a person we like does it, therefore it’s OK, or Because a person we admire does it, it must in fact somehow be acceptable. But in fact, it *needs* our deep moral scrutiny, and More, I think, needed to have even a deep moral scrutiny of Cardinal Morton.

**Elizabeth McCutcheon:** That speech has always puzzled me, because there is an element of self-protection in it as well—in the Buckingham speech at the end of the English section. Because, clearly Morton is worried that his speech may be reported to the king, and so he expresses it in such a way that he ties it into Buckingham: The king has all these great qualities, and he thinks that the only person who would be better would be you, Buckingham. If Buckingham repeats that speech, Buckingham

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indicts himself, so it’s a kind of checkmate situation, if you see what I mean. And there’s a rhetorical term for that which I can’t remember—something about, You’ve turned the cat in the pan, or something like that.

**Koterski:** Checkmate is a good image.

**McCutcheon:** Yes, it’s a checkmate kind of thing, but it’s a *weird* thing, because Morton is leading him on, yet Morton is self-protecting. Buckingham has been sort of edging in that direction, and there’s an odd duplicity that’s going on there, with self-protection on both parts. It’s really unnerving, but a wonderful speech, a wonderful scene.

**Koterski:** Thank you.

**Clarence Miller:** Even in the *Utopia*, Morton is compromising—legitimately there, and we don’t know why here. When he takes up the proposal that had been made and modifies it—about how you treat thieves.

**Koterski:** It could be. I didn’t see that one as compromising Morton so much as I took him to be engaged in dinner conversation, and we’re trying to elicit from the other players how this is going to play out.

**Miller:** No, no: It’s not a question of moral action on his part. But it is an ideal which has been presented, and which he then modifies and brings down to earth.

**Koterski:** Thank you very much.