

UTOPIA

by Thomas More



THE AUTHOR

Thomas More (1478-1535) was born in London, the son of a prominent jurist. After serving in the household of John Morton, the Archbishop of Canterbury, he attended Oxford University, where for the first time he encountered the new ideas associated with the Renaissance. He went on to study law and found employment in a law office. Soon, however, his Renaissance education created conflict with his devout Catholicism and he began to question whether the two were compatible. In 1497 he met the Dutch humanist Erasmus, and the two became fast friends. More's confusion continued, however, and from 1499-1503 he lived in the London Charterhouse, not as a monk, but as a man seeking his true calling in life. His spiritual advisor convinced him that his place was as a Christian in the world, so he left the cloister and entered Parliament in 1504, eventually rising to Speaker of the House of Commons in 1523. He became a prominent lawyer, sought for every great case, and eventually gained the attention of the king, the young Henry VIII, who tried without success to persuade him to come to court. Henry nonetheless began increasingly to seek out More for personal advice and frequently visited him at his home in Chelsea. In 1529, More reluctantly accepted the appointment as Lord Chancellor of England. When Henry broke with the Catholic Church, however, More faced a moral dilemma, which became worse when the king sought to divorce Catherine of Aragon and marry Anne Boleyn. More's refusal to sign the Act of Supremacy and consent to the divorce led to his arrest for treason and his execution in the Tower of London in 1535. He was canonized by Pope Pius XI in 1935.

More's private life was filled with the love of learning. He married twice, first in 1505 to a woman who bore him four children but died six years later, and again in 1511, out of the conviction that his young children needed a mother to care for them. His first marriage was very happy, but the second was troubled by the unsuitability of the partners; Alice had little education and shared few of More's interests, so that his daughter Margaret became his true soulmate. He was a prolific writer, mostly on legal subjects. His most enduring work is *Utopia* (1516), though his *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* (1534), written during his imprisonment in the Tower, perhaps reveals more of his heart. *Utopia*, originally written in Latin and translated into English in 1551, is couched in the form of a dialogue with the fictitious Raphael Hythloday. The first book, actually written after Book II, consists largely of social and political criticism, while the second (1515) describes an imaginary island off the coast of the New World. The name of his island is from the Latin for "nowhere," and has passed into the English language as a description of any ideal society. As with

any such work of literature, what More pictures as the ideal says much about his values, but also much about the strengths, weaknesses, and preoccupations of the society in which he lived.

SUMMARY

BOOK I

More, writing in the first person, describes himself as an ambassador to Flanders on behalf of Henry VIII to represent the king in a dispute with King Charles of Castile (later Holy Roman Emperor Charles V). He travels first to Bruges and then to Antwerp, where he meets Peter Giles, a learned and virtuous young man. Giles introduces him to an aged world traveler named Raphael Hythloday who is knowledgeable in Greek, Latin, and philosophy. Hythloday was born in Portugal and had sailed to the New World with Amerigo Vespucci. On the latter's last voyage, Hythloday had asked to be left behind, engaging in many travels. In his travels he had found that the regions of the world near the Equator were hot, parched, and populated by dangerous beasts and wild men. Farther south, however, pleasant and well-ordered societies existed in moderate climates. From here he easily found passage home, especially when he shared with the mariners the secret of the lodestone – the magnet that enabled navigation on the open sea without peril. More and Giles question Hythloday about his voyages, showing interest largely in the systems of government of the well-ordered societies; they profess to have no interest in monsters or other such phenomena, but note that even the follies of foreign governments can serve to illumine the problems faced by the states of Europe. They find the practices of the Utopians particularly interesting, but More promises to relate those at a later time.

Having heard Hythloday's narrative, Giles tells him that a man of such wisdom should be an advisor to kings, but the old man insists that he will be bound to no man, not even his relatives, since he had distributed his inheritance to them before departing on his voyages. He sees both wealth and power as forms of slavery and therefore desires neither, valuing freedom above all. When More tells him that he could easily become a king's counselor, he replies that such men are usually too wise (or at least think themselves so) to listen to others, and they themselves are ignored by the king's favorites.

When Hythloday mentions that he has observed this in England, the others are surprised that he has visited their home country. During a stay of four or five months he had become acquainted with Archbishop of Canterbury John Morton, whom he considered a paragon of virtue. One day at the Archbishop's residence he had a conversation with a man who praised the English legal system by which so many thieves were apprehended and hanged. Hythloday argued that the punishment was too severe for thieves, nor did it deter men who had no other means of support from stealing. The other guest replied that plenty of jobs were available, but Hythloday argued that soldiers returning from the wars maimed and halt could not take up the jobs they had held before, and thus were reduced to thievery. The same was true of servants dismissed by their masters for illness or because they were no longer needed. Hythloday then argues that France is even worse because it maintains a standing army during peacetime, leaving the bore and unoccupied soldiers to plunder the countryside more effectively than any enemy army could do. These, like returning English soldiers and other thieves, should be trained in some useful craft suiting their capacities.

Another cause of stealing is said to be peculiar to the English – that of consuming all useful land for the benefit of highly profitable herds of sheep, thus rendering the former inhabitants who

were forced to sell their lands homeless and without means of support. This also made food more expensive because farmland was now given over to grazing. God, however, stepped in and judged the greedy nobles by plaguing the herds with murrain of which many sheep died, though the profits of the sellers remained high because of their monopoly. The same occurred with other kinds of livestock as well. The result was an impoverished population oppressed by the wealthy and forced to turn to theft, for which they were summarily hanged.

Another contributor to poverty and thus to a life of stealing is dissipation. Those who live idle lives, waste money on fancy clothing, gorge themselves on food and drink, and frequent taverns and houses of ill repute soon exhaust their resources and turn to theft. These should be outlawed and replaced with thrift and honest labor. Moreover, the young should not be suffered to engage in behavior for which they will be punished when they reach maturity. When the lawyer who first glorified England's practices began to respond, however, the Archbishop cut him off and asked Hythloday to defend his insistence that stealing should not be a capital offense.

He responds by arguing that all the goods in the world are not worth more than a single man's life, and therefore a man should never be executed for stealing property. Furthermore, the fact that killing and stealing are punished alike by death indicates that the two offenses are equivalent, which they clearly are not. If even God's law teaches that theft is not punishable by death, why should the statutes of England say otherwise? Besides, if theft and murder are punished equally, will not the thief who is interrupted in the course of his crime be tempted to kill the witness in order to escape punishment more effectively?

As an alternative, Hythloday first mentions the Romans, who sentenced thieves to life at hard labor, then describes approvingly the practice of the Polylerites, who lived under Persian rule. They required thieves to make restitution, not the state, but to the one whose goods had been stolen, and condemned them to labor for the good of the commonwealth, but otherwise to live as free men. Those who refuse are imprisoned each night and treated as servants of the state during the day, wearing special clothing that sets them apart from free men. When the state is unable to provide sufficient labor for such men, they are hired out to private individuals at a wage somewhat lower than what is common, and thus they are able to earn what is needed for restitution. Lazy workers, however, are punished by flogging to teach them diligence. Serving-men are also forbidden to touch money (their income going into the general fund); any who would give or receive money from them are subject to death, along with the serving-man. They also may not touch weapons, nor may they leave the precinct in which they are condemned to serve on pain of death. The ultimate goal of this policy is rehabilitation and the elimination of crime from society. Hythloday's experience among them showed that such men became trusted guides, since they would suffer death if they were found with money or weapons in their possession or if they attempted to flee their own district. In fact, any attempt at rebellion on the part of the serving-men would be foiled by the prohibition against traveling to other precincts or talking to serving-men from elsewhere; they couldn't even generate a rebellion in their own precinct because of the fact that any serving-man who reported a planned revolt would immediately earn his freedom by doing so.

The lawyer insists that such a system would lead to societal chaos if applied in England. The Archbishop, however, believes that the approach might be tried on a contingency basis, with the king commuting the sentences of those condemned to death and implementing Hythloday's suggestion;

if it didn't work, they could simply be executed later. He proposes that vagabonds be given the same treatment, since English law had done little to solve the problem of vagabondage.

At this point a jester who was listening to the conversation asked what should be done to keep the elderly, sick, and disabled out of poverty, now that thieves and vagabonds had been accounted for. They often become beggars and weary honest men whom they accost along the road. His solution is to force them to become monks and nuns. The Archbishop takes the jest as intended, but a friar among the company asks what is to be done to provide for mendicant friars? The jester responds that they are already accounted for in his system, since they are the worst vagabonds of all. Needless to say, the friar does not appreciate his joke and flies into a rage, for which the jester rebukes him by quoting Scripture. When the Archbishop tries to calm him down, the friar replies with the example of Elisha and the scoffers who were eaten by bears. The Archbishop, realizing that no resolution of the dispute is possible, sends the jester out of the room.

More expresses appreciation for Hythloday's tale and again insists that he would make a fine adviser to kings, citing in support Plato's belief that philosophers would make the best kings and that kings should study philosophy. Hythloday, however, replies that kings always reject the advice of philosophers unless they themselves submit to the discipline. He asks his hearers to suppose that the king of France calls his counselors together and asks for advice on how to conquer his neighbors. Each adviser proposes a different strategy. What response, asks Hythloday, would he receive if he proposed that the king should be content with his own domains and not try to expand his kingdom at all?

He then describes the policy of the Anchorians, inhabitants of an island near Utopia. The king of the place had laid claim to the throne of a nearby island and had succeeded in conquering it, but found that ruling it created more trouble than would have been the case had he left it alone, since the inhabitants were constantly rebelling against him and enemies frequently tried to take the island for their own. This led to almost constant warfare, costing much in men and treasure. Even in times of peace, the soldiers, accustomed to violence, ravaged their own land. The king is finally convinced to give up the newly-acquired kingdom and be satisfied with his own. More admits that the policy of peace and contentment is best, but acknowledges that such advice would not be received well in the halls of power.

Hythloday then moves on to economic questions and supposes that a king has called his advisers in order to find ways of filling his treasury. Proposals include manipulating the currency, collecting taxes for a war and then not fighting it, levying fines for the violation of ancient laws long forgotten, selling licenses for engaging in necessary pursuits, or twisting the law to benefit the crown. Kings, after all, must maintain large standing armies, and their actions must be presumed to be just. Furthermore, the more the king takes from his people, the more they will be dependent on him and thus less likely to rebel. What response would Hythloday be likely to get if he advised the king that his security depended more on the wealth of his people than the content of the royal treasury?

The example Hythloday gives to support his claim is the society of the Macarians, another nation near Utopia. The king of the place takes an oath never to have more than a thousand pounds in his treasury. This is sufficient to enable the king to prevent rebellions at home and invasions from abroad, but too little to encourage him to impoverish his own people. The provision would also lead to happiness and prosperity among the people, both because they would be able to keep the wealth they earned and because any excess coming to the king must be immediately spent to relieve the

needs of those in want. More again acknowledges that few kings would welcome such advice, but insists that the failure of rulers to be open to new ideas is no reason to give up on improving society. Instead, the wise man will use wit and subtlety to bring about small changes where large ones are not yet possible. After all, society cannot be good until all men are good, which is highly unlikely.

Hythloday also argues that his ideas would seem out of place because English society is based on the right of private property, which is not recognized among the Utopians. He sees this as the root of all evil and despairs of remedying the problem because the belief in private property is so deeply ingrained. After all, if the teachings of Christ were ever taken really seriously in a Christian society, would not this look even stranger than the practice of the Utopians? Instead, preachers twist the teachings of Christ in such a way as to confirm men in their evil ways.

Hythloday is convinced that private property leads to wealth being controlled by evil men, or at least being concentrated in the hands of a few to the detriment of the many. The Utopians, however, hold all things in common, and thus all are wealthy. Furthermore, very few laws are needed, since the vast majority of most nations' laws regulate matters of property. Property also leads to the division between rich and poor in society, with neither group contributing greatly to the common good since the rich seek to keep all they have for themselves and the poor depend on the state to support them and add nothing.

More responds that commonality of property cannot lead to the wealth of all because it would take away any motivation to work. Hythloday counters by saying that his experience of five years living among the Utopians demonstrated quite the opposite of More's fears. Giles, however, has trouble believing that the Utopians exceed the excellence of European societies that are much more ancient than theirs. But according to Hythloday, the Utopian society is more ancient than that of Europe was able to benefit some twelve hundred years earlier by a shipwreck on their island that marooned Romans and Egyptians who then shared their knowledge with the islanders. None, however, have ever come from Utopia to Europe. At this point, More begs Hythloday to describe in detail the society of the Utopians, which he happily undertakes to do.

BOOK II

The island of Utopia is shaped like a crescent moon, two hundred miles wide at its widest, having a circumference of five hundred miles, with the points of the crescent separated by eleven miles, thus creating a calm bay and a protected harbor. The entrance to the bay is protected by a large rock between the two points, which is topped by a well-defended fortress. Underwater shoals known only to the inhabitants further protect the island from invasion by its enemies, and in fact prevent almost all visitors of any kind. Meanwhile, harbors on the outside of the island are protected by stout fences and tall trees, making them easy to defend.

The island is named after King Utopus, who conquered it 1760 years earlier and brought to it the benefits of civilization. He started by digging out an isthmus connecting the island to the mainland, effectively isolating it from its neighbors. He then built fifty-four cities, evenly distributed at twenty-four mile intervals throughout the island and all sharing the same basic design. Each city annually sends three wise elders to the capital city of Amaurote to discuss matters common to all. In the district surrounding each town is found households and farms, each containing at least forty people along with two bondmen and ruled by an older man and his wife. Every group of thirty farms

or households is ruled by a Philarch. Each year, a few of the farmers and householders change places so that all will become skilled at various kinds of labor. The farms and cities supply one another's needs without cost, including the needs for laborers from the cities to assist on the farms at harvest time.

Amaurote, the capital, is a walled city slightly more than two miles square built into the side of a hill near a great river. Wide streets are lined with spacious houses with gardens in the back. The doors of the houses are never locked since everything belongs to everybody, and houses are reassigned every ten years by lot.

The island is ruled by a prince who is elected for life by the Philarchs (also called Syphogrants), who themselves are chosen for one-year terms, though the chief Philarchs (Tranibores) often are reelected by their people. All matters of general import are discussed by the prince with the Tranibores, accompanied by representatives of the Syphogrants; it is against the law to discuss political matters outside the council chambers, which prevents secret plots among the people's representatives. On the most important matters, all the Syphogrants must vote. Furthermore, no matters may be brought to a vote on the day they are introduced, but time must elapse in order to prevent precipitate and foolish decisions.

Everyone on Utopia learns the fundamentals of farming, and each also masters a specific trade from among a limited number of options – cloth manufacture, masonry, blacksmithing, or carpentry. Construction work is rarely needed because people take such good care of their homes, and when major repairs are needed to public roads or buildings, all pitch in and complete the job very quickly. No other occupations are required on the island. Clothing is uniform, simple, and suited to all occasions and temperatures, so that the people do not become slaves of fashion, nor are they divided by social class, though men and women are differently garbed. Trades are taught to children by their parents, and if a child desires a different occupation, he is placed in a family where he can learn it. The Syphogrants ensure that people work diligently, also making certain they have sufficient rest; each day includes six hours of labor, eight of sleep, with the rest for leisure. This leisure time is occupied in attending lectures to improve their minds, pursuing their occupations for pleasure, game-playing, enjoying music, and other beneficial expenditures of time; gambling and other such vices are unknown among them. One might object that six hours of work is hardly enough to meet the needs of the community, but Hythloday reminds his listeners that in England, more people are idle than those who work; he enumerates women, clergy, nobles, beggars, and other economically unproductive citizens; furthermore, most of those who are employed are engaged in tasks that provide no benefit to the society. Fewer than five hundred adults are exempt from labor, including the Syphogrants, most of whom work anyway to set a good example, the elderly and infirm, and a select few who by reason of their gifts are set apart for study; from these are chosen priests, ambassadors, Tranibores, and the Prince.

The society on Utopia is organized by extended families. The oldest male governs the clan, and women enter the family of their husbands when they marry. To keep the population stable, no clan may have fewer than ten or more than sixteen children of the age of fourteen at any time. This balance is maintained by moving children from overpopulated clans to those who experience a shortage. People are similarly shifted from city to city to maintain balance, and if need be new cities are planted in open areas to accommodate excess population. Should the city that controls the waste ground refuse to yield it up, this then becomes the only just pretext for war. Each city is divided into

quarter, with each quarter containing a marketplace into which each family brings the fruits of its labor. The head of each clan may then come to the marketplace and take whatever his family needs without payment or exchange. This poses no problem because of the great abundance of goods the land and people produce; after all, why would anyone take more than he and his family need when a perpetual abundance is ensured? Since both covetousness and pride are unknown among the Utopians, such problems do not exist.

Preparation of food, including the butchering of animals, is entrusted to slaves so that freemen learn to live in an environment of kindness and gentleness rather than one of killing, even of animals. The first portion of food is always taken to the hospitals, four of which are located in each city. These are large and commodious so that the sick may be well cared for and to avoid transmission of their diseases. The rest of the food is brought to the central hall of each quarter, where the entire quarter gathers to eat. People are free to take food home if necessary, but most prefer to eat communally and avoid any taint of dishonesty. In the hall the women prepare the food and the bondmen serve it. Children either go to the nursery or else help to serve the meal and stand by silently while it is eaten. Men and women sit separately, with ages intermixed so that the young might learn from their elders. Food is served to the elders, who then apportion it to the young on either side. Each meal begins with a profitable reading, which then becomes the subject of dinner conversation. The meal is made enjoyable by the playing of music and the burning of incense. In the countryside, people eat in their own homes, but they lack nothing because food is distributed to all proportionately.

Any who desire to travel to another city need the permission of their Syphogrants and are sent out in a company with letters of introduction, a wagon, and a bondman to drive it. They need no provisions, but receive hospitality throughout their journey. Any who travel without papers are severely punished; if someone does so twice, he becomes a bondman. Travel within the city precincts is permitted, but only if one accomplishes his allotted work for the day. This system makes it impossible for people to shirk work, thus rendering the society highly productive. Also, because Utopia has no taverns, those who might wish to be idle could find no place to do so. The productivity of the society allows goods to be exchanged freely from places of abundance to those of need so that each city has sufficient stores to last for two years should an emergency arise. Any excess beyond that is taken abroad, where it is either distributed to the poor other lands or sold at a reasonable price. The result is that Utopia possesses an enormous store of gold and silver in addition to the many things the island produces. They are so rich that they rarely demand payment of debt from other nations unless it is required to assist the needy elsewhere or to wage war.

The attitude of the Utopians to the metals of the earth reveals their priorities. Iron is highly valued because of its great utility, while gold and silver, having few useful properties, are despised, being used for chamber-pots and chains by which bondmen are secured. As a result, no one is tempted to steal something of so little repute, and if some foreign power should rob the Utopians of their precious metals, no one would really miss them. Similarly, pearls and diamonds are easily gathered and are used to adorn babies, who soon cast them aside like other childhood toys.

Hythloday then describes a visit from the ambassadors of the Anemolians. They knew little of Utopia, and thus thought the inhabitants poor and ignorant and hoped to dazzle them with their brilliant apparel and gold ornaments. They were quite surprised, of course, when the Utopians treated them as ignorant and impoverished, since they came among them adorned like slaves and

young children. In fact, the citizens of Utopia thought the ambassadors were slaves and their servants were the ambassadors. In time, the ambassadors set aside their finery as they learned more about the people they had come to visit.

The ideas of the Utopians are formed through their education. Though a select few are designated to devote their lives to learning, men and women alike receive a sound education from childhood and continue learning during their leisure hours throughout life. Thus, despite never having been exposed to the great philosophers of the ancient world, the citizens of the island have derived the same principles by means of their own study. In fact, the only way in which the learning of Europe exceeds that of the Utopians is in the realm of “rules of restrictions, amplifications, and suppositions” to which children are subject. They excel in science, studying the stars and devising instruments to observe them without being drawn into the follies of astrology and obtaining knowledge of meteorology sufficient to allow them to predict the weather.

Other topics of philosophy are commonly discussed among them, including the relationship of soul and body, the nature of goodness and virtue, and the source of true happiness. They depend on their religion to comprehend these matters. The guiding principles of that religion include the immortality of the soul and retribution in the afterlife such that people receive rewards for their good deeds and punishment for their evil ones. They further reason that greater pleasures are more valuable than lesser ones, and that pleasure is greatest that produces no evil in its wake. Virtuous living involves following the course of nature, which is itself determined by human reason and leads to seeking felicity both for oneself and for others. Above all, one should never seek one’s own pleasures in a way that would deprive others of such an opportunity.

False pleasures they studiously avoid, not only those that are blatantly immoral, but also those associated with possessions, pride, and social status. Do real gems give more pleasure than indistinguishable counterfeit ones apart from pride of ownership? Does gold give any pleasure at all if it remains buried so none can see it? Does anyone really gain worthwhile pleasure from gambling, hunting, or hawking? After all, throwing dice repeatedly is surely boring, and who can derive happiness from seeing a weak animal torn to pieces by a stronger one? The ugliness of this pursuit explains why the Utopians assign their bondmen to serve as butchers.

True pleasures of both mind and body are to be diligently sought, however. Pleasures of the soul include intelligence, contemplation, and remembrance of past joys, while pleasures of the body involve both the satisfaction of physical needs such as food and drink and the relief that comes from expelling the results of overindulgence in the same or scratching an itch, along with subtler sensory pleasures such as those associated with music. Bodily pleasures also include rest and good health, without which other pleasures can never be properly enjoyed. Denying the flesh in search of higher virtue, however, is to be shunned as utter foolishness.

Hythloday tells his companions that he actually introduced the Greek language to the inhabitants of Utopia; when he told them of the beauties of its literature, they begged him to teach it to them, and he spent three years doing so. They learned it so readily that he is convinced that their own language must have been derived from that of the Greeks in the distant past. When he left for home, he gave them a large collection of Greek texts that he had brought with him aboard his ship. He also taught them printing and paper-making.

The citizens of Utopia do keep slaves, but people may only be kept in bondage if they are captives taken in war by the Utopian themselves, those rescued from death sentences in other

nations, those who by reason of serious offenses are sentenced to bondage by the Utopian courts, or the occasional impoverished foreigner who voluntarily chooses bondage in Utopia over freedom in his own land. Most fall into the second category and can be obtained very cheaply from foreign lands. Those condemned by Utopian courts are treated the most harshly as deserving of greater punishment because they have offended against a virtuous state.

As far as the sick are concerned, they care for them tenderly, but if someone has an incurable disease and is in constant pain, the physicians, with the consent of the priests, recommend suicide or euthanasia. No approbation is associated with those who make such a choice, which is seen as noble and wise, but those who take their own lives without prior examination by physicians and the consent of priests are scorned and cast unburied into a swamp.

With regard to marriage, the Utopians do not allow a woman to wed before the age of eighteen or a man until he is twenty-two. Any who engage in premarital sex are banned from marrying for life, and those in whose house such offenses occur are held in reproach by the entire society. On the other hand, sober elderly men and women supervise a ritual where couples wishing to marry view one another naked so no possibility of unexpected deformity exists that might sour the marriage. They consider this important because the Utopians are monogamous and wed for life except in cases of adultery or “intolerable waywardness,” in which cases divorce is permitted. After such a divorce the innocent partner may remarry, but the guilty party is prohibited from doing so. Divorces are also permitted when a couple wishes to part by mutual consent, but this requires counseling and is very rarely allowed by the council because of the bad example it sets and the extent to which it undermines the seriousness of the marital bond. Homewreckers who sleep with married persons are punished with bondage, and on the second offense with death. For most other offenses, however, punishment is carried out within the family, with husbands punishing their wives and parents their children unless the offense is so serious that the public involvement of the council is called for, in which case the usual punishment is bondage; again, second offenses are punished with death.

The Utopians also take pleasure in those who are mentally handicapped, considering that laughter at their antics provides their only source of pleasure, though none would dare to abuse such a person. Those with physical deformities are never to be mocked because they cannot help their conditions. On the other hand, their portraits honor virtue rather than physical beauty because the latter is so fleeting. Public squares are decorated, not with pictures of beautiful women, but with those of men who have been benefactors of the society and are held up as examples to all.

Magistrates are not tyrants and do not dress in distinctive garb. They are honored as fathers rather than being feared as judges. Their laws are few and easy to understand, and they permit no lawyers in their island paradise; each person pleads his own case before the judges when circumstances require it. The integrity of the magistrates is so great that other nations send their judges to be trained by the Utopians and observe their practices. They do not, however, enter into alliances with other nations for any reason because they believe that all should be treated justly without the need for formal treaties. Thus they are friends to all and enemies of none.

Hythloday then moves on to describe the view of war held among the Utopians. They hate war and find no glory in it, but spend a great deal of time training for it in case it should be necessary. To their minds, war is only justified to defend themselves or their friends against invasion, to take vengeance on those who have done their friends wrong, either militarily or economically, or to deliver those who are living under oppression. In fact, they seek to redress

economic injury done to their friends more readily than they do their own, since the Utopians care little for money on their own account. If someone takes the life of a Utopian, however, the culprit is to be turned over for the administration of justice, and if this is not done, war is declared. Furthermore, the aim of war is to redress whatever grievance caused it in the first place, meaning that warfare is always pursued for strictly limited ends. If redress is impossible, however, the war is pursued to the extent that the enemy is deterred from committing future offenses.

Even in matters of war, the Utopians value victories won with guile rather than bloodshed. In order to reduce the damage done by war, the Utopians offer large rewards to the citizens of the enemy country for killing or turning over those directly responsible for the offense in question; even the offenders are offered rewards and a complete pardon if they turn themselves in. They seek to foment internal rebellions or instigate neighboring nations to go to war against their enemies by offering financial aid, and on occasion hire fierce mercenaries. These mercenaries change sides whenever they are offered more money, but they are faithful to the Utopians because they pay more than any other nation. The fact that most of them die in battle is no cause for concern because the Utopians thus rid the world of a vicious and brutal race and save money at the same time. By all of these means the Utopians seek to minimize the loss of life among their own people.

The Utopians use no military conscription, but fill their army with volunteers, though in case of invasion those who fail to volunteer are pressed into service, either aboard ship or on the walls in defense of the cities. Women and children accompany men into battle and stand near them, so that the men will fight bravely to the death to defend their families; the women also sometimes fight, and the children learn courage by observing their parents. Only rarely will a man return from battle without his wife, or a woman without her husband; this is considered shameful. Often a band of young men will take upon themselves the pursuit of the captain of the opposing army, and having killed or captured him, they allow the rest of the soldiers to escape rather than chasing them down and exterminating them. In the course of pursuing victory, the Utopian soldiers never burn the enemy's land or destroy his crops, nor do they make war upon unarmed civilians, except for spies. They do not burn or plunder captured cities, but kill any commanders and put into bondage any soldiers who resist. The goods of the city are divided among those who counseled surrender and any who helped the Utopians in their conquest; under no circumstances do they keep any plunder for themselves. The costs of the war are paid by the conquered nation in the form of tribute.

Utopia is a land of many religions. Some worship celestial bodies, others men of the past, but most worship a benevolent, all-wise Power whom all, whether polytheists or monotheists, call Mithra. When Hythloday and his companions told them of Christ, they recognized in Him the god they already worshiped, being particularly impressed by the fact that He told His followers to share all things in common. Many were baptized into Christianity, though, lacking clergy, other sacraments could not be performed. No Utopians speak against or criticize one another's religions; in fact, one convert to Christianity was sent into exile when he hotly began seeking to persuade others and condemning all other religions as false. Reasoning about religion is acceptable, but heated argument or condemnation of others is not. King Utopus forbid religious strife, not because he was a relativist, but because he believed that the true religion would emerge victorious without the need for violence or constraint. The only beliefs that he absolutely forbid were a denial of life after death, with its attendant retribution for good and evil deeds, or a rejection of divine providence. Those who believe such things are not punished or forced to change their opinions, but are forbidden

from disseminating them and banned from public office or any other position of influence in society. Their belief in immortality leads them to celebrate the deaths of good men, who are then cremated, which gives their souls freedom to roam the earth, visit their friends and eavesdrop on their conversations, which has the additional benefit of discouraging secret dishonesty among the living. On the other hand, the Utopians despise all practitioners of the occult arts.

The citizens of Utopia are much given to good works, which they believe lead to felicity in the afterlife. Some pursue these works of charity while at the same time foregoing marriage and abstaining from meat, while others marry, believing it their duty to train up children in righteousness, and eat meat, which they argue gives them strength to do their work. The general opinion is that the former are holier, but the latter wiser. Each city is furnished with thirteen priests, who are trained by the bishop and elected by the people. Women may be priests, though this is relatively rare, but only those who are old and wise. Male priests may marry, but must choose respected women as their wives. Priests are not subject to the courts, but are left to the judgment of God should they commit offenses. They also accompany the army to war, praying for peace and secondly for victory, but doing all they can to minimize the loss of life and prevent senseless slaughter. Because of this, they are honored by men of all nations.

Utopians recognize the first and last days of each month in the lunar calendar as holy. Churches are magnificent and large, but poorly lighted in order to encourage meditation and avoid distractions. The churches are generally quiet to encourage contemplation for all; the only words spoken aloud are those that are generally received by those of all faiths. No image of God appears so that each can imagine God according to his own beliefs, and religious rituals offend none; this is accomplished by requiring that any unique religious practices be conducted at home rather than in the church. Invocations of the Deity use only the generic name Mithra rather than calling on any one god in particular. Before coming to worship, wives confess their sins to husbands and children to parents so they may worship with clear consciences. Families sit together in church with the men separated from the women, thus allowing the eldest to observe the behavior of their younger relations in order to instruct them more perfectly. They wear white garments to church and burn sweet incense there, but never engage in animal sacrifices. Priestly garments are colorful but not costly, and are so beautiful that churchgoers fall down in awe before them. Worship involves singing praises accompanied by instruments, which songs are made more beautiful by the careful attention given to matching the tune to the words. Once worship is ended, the people enjoy feasting, recreation, and feats of chivalry.

Hythloday concludes his discourse by challenging his listeners to name one nation known to them that can come close to matching the Utopians in the realm of social justice. He then lists the manifold injustices present in all societies known to man and traces those problems back to one source – the existence of private property, rooted in the twin evils of Money and Pride. More closes by stating that he does not agree with everything Hythloday has said, but that the old man is too tired after his long dissertation to respond to further arguments at this time. They then proceed to go in to dinner.

The book then closes with an appendix containing a purported letter from Peter Giles to Charles I of Spain (later Holy Roman Emperor Charles V) commending More's work and encouraging the king to promote the book everywhere. This is followed by three poems allegedly translated from the Utopian tongue, all of which praise More highly. The appendix also includes

disclaimers explaining why the author is unable to provide the precise location of Utopia (one of the servants coughed when Hythloday was giving it) and why he cannot supply a copy of the Utopian alphabet.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Thomas More – The author serves as the narrator of the story despite the fact that the conversations and the central location are fictitious. More actually did serve as an ambassador to the Netherlands on behalf of Henry VIII when the book was written.
- Peter Giles – More meets him in Antwerp and he introduces the narrator to Raphael Hythloday. Unlike his friend Hythloday, Giles was a real person and good friend of More.
- Raphael Hythloday – A Portuguese world traveler who had been to the New World with Amerigo Vespucci and knew much of the island of Utopia, his discourses make up much of the book.
- John Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury – Also a cardinal, he hosts the dinner at which Hythloday holds forth on his theories about a just society. He is an historical figure in whose household More served as a boy.
- Lawyer – He is present at the dinner and attempts to prove that English society is superior to all others.
- Jester – He mocks Hythloday's views of crime and punishment by taking them to what he sees as their logical conclusion while also ridiculing the other guests; eventually the Archbishop asks him to leave.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“But to find citizens ruled by good and wholesome laws, that is an exceeding rare and hard thing.” (More, Book I, p.18)

“Great and horrible punishments be appointed for thieves, whereas much rather provision should have been made that there were some means whereby they might get their living, so that no man should be driven to this extreme necessity, first to steal and then to die.” (Hythloday, Book I, p.23)

“I should rise up and boldly affirm that all these counsels be to the king dishonour and reproach, whose honour and safety is more and rather supported and upholden by the wealth and riches of his people than by his own treasures.” (Hythloday, Book I, p.44)

“You must not forsake the ship in a tempest because you cannot rule and keep down the winds.” (More, Book I, p.48)

“It is not possible for all things to be well unless all men were good, which I think will not be yet for a good many years.” (More, Book I, p.48)

“For why should anything be denied unto him, seeing there is abundance of all things, and that it is not to be feared lest any man will ask more than he needeth? For why should it be thought that that man would ask more than enough which is sure never to lack?” (Hythloday, Book II, p.71)

“They marvel also that gold, which of its own nature is a thing so unprofitable, is now among all people in so high estimation, that man himself, by whom, yea, and for the use of whom, it is so much set by, is in much less estimation than the gold itself.” (Hythloday, Book II, p.81)

“They pronounce no man to be so foolish which would not do all his diligence and endeavour to obtain pleasure by right or wrong, only avoiding this inconvenience, that the less pleasure should not be a let or hindrance to the bigger, or that he labored not for that pleasure which would bring after it displeasure, grief, and sorrow.” (Hythloday, Book II, p.84)

“Therefore even very nature (say they) prescribeth to us a joyful life, that is to say, pleasure, as the end of all our operations. And they define virtue to be life ordered according to the prescript of nature.” (Hythloday, Book II, p.85)

“That offense [premarital sex] is so sharply punished because they perceive that unless they be diligently kept from the liberty of this vice, few will join together in the love of marriage, wherein all the life must be led with one, and also all the griefs and displeasures coming therewith patiently be taken and borne.” (Hythloday, Book II, p.99)

“For you may be sure that [one who denies reward and punishment in the afterlife] will study either with craft privily to mock, or else violently to break, the common laws of his country, in whom remaineth no further fear than of the laws nor no further hope than of the body.” (Hythloday, Book II, p.121)

“What can be more rich than to live joyfully and merrily, without all grief and pensiveness, not caring for his own living, nor vexed or troubled with his wife’s importunate complaints, nor dreading poverty to his son, nor sorrowing for his daughter’s dowry?” (Hythloday, Book II, p.131)

“When I consider and weigh in my mind all these commonwealths which nowadays anywhere do flourish, so God help me, I can perceive nothing but a certain conspiracy of rich men procuring their own commodities under the name and title of the commonwealth.” (Hythloday, Book II, p.132)

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. Compare and contrast the society described in Thomas More's *Utopia* to the Happy Valley in Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas*. To what extent does Johnson criticize the very kind of society advocated by More? Whose arguments do you find more compelling? Why?
2. Compare and contrast the pictures of Thomas More presented in his *Utopia* and Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons*. To what extent does the playwright give an accurate picture of More's ideas and beliefs, and to what extent does he impose twentieth-century values on a sixteenth-century figure?
3. Compare and contrast the society described in Thomas More's *Utopia* to the land of the Houyhnhnms in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. What aspects of English life do both men criticize? What solutions do they propose? Whose arguments do you find more compelling? Why?
4. In both Thomas More's *Utopia* and B.F. Skinner's *Walden Two*, the work day is a short one – six hours in the former and four hours in the latter. Compare and contrast the ways the authors justify such a schedule. Are their explanations credible? Could such a program of labor sustain a large community, or even a small one? Why or why not?
5. Compare and contrast the views of biological family ties in Thomas More's *Utopia* and B.F. Skinner's *Walden Two*. What are the implications of the ways in which both authors take family ties somewhat lightly? From a biblical perspective, what is wrong with these pictures? What would be the likely consequences if they were actually implemented?
6. Compare and contrast the society described in Thomas More's *Utopia* to that found in B.F. Skinner's *Walden Two*. What aspects of society do both men criticize? What solutions do they propose? Whose arguments do you find more compelling? Why?
7. Thomas More's *Utopia* appeared three years after the initial composition of Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince*. To what extent is the view of monarchy found in More's work a critique of the teachings contained in Machiavelli's manuscript? Consider especially the debate on the subject of monarchy found in Book I of More's tome.
8. The dialogue was a very popular form of teaching and writing in the classical age. Thomas More, who was well-read in the classics, derived much from works such as Plato's *Republic* in composing his *Utopia*. To what extent does More's famous treatise benefit from Plato's work stylistically? Do the two writers make use of the dialogue format in the same ways? Which part of More's work most closely resembles the style of Plato's book?

9. In Thomas More's *Utopia*, the Prince is chosen from among a small number of scholars set aside to pursue study rather than engaging in labor. In Plato's *Republic*, the rulers are philosopher-kings. Compare and contrast the qualifications for rule laid out in the two books. How would you evaluate these qualifications? Are such plans realistic or even wise? Are the most highly-educated necessarily the wisest, and therefore the most qualified to rule? Why or why not?
10. Compare and contrast the views of marriage, the family, and reproduction portrayed in Thomas More's *Utopia* and Plato's *Republic*. To what extent was More influenced by the great Greek philosopher, with whose work he was obviously familiar, and to what extent did he deviate from Plato's vision? Be sure to use specifics from both works in building and supporting your arguments.
11. Thomas More's *Utopia* coined the word that has come down to us as the name for an ideal society, but he was not the first to write a book describing one. That honor probably rests with Plato's *Republic*, to which More occasionally alludes in his work. Choose three aspects of the societies described in the two books and compare and contrast them. In which society would you prefer to live? Why?
12. Compare and contrast the view of precious metals and gems portrayed in Thomas More's *Utopia* and the description of Eldorado in Voltaire's *Candide*. What dangers do the two authors see in the value given to gold and diamonds and how do they propose to minimize that value? What benefits do they think would accrue from such an altered mindset? In your answer, also consider the role played by gold and precious gems in the description of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21.
13. Compare and contrast the solutions to poverty proposed by Thomas More in *Utopia* and George Bernard Shaw in *Major Barbara*. Both advocate forms of socialism, yet their approaches differ, particularly in terms of their views of money and property. How do the changes in England in the almost four hundred years between the two books explain those differences?
14. Judge O'Hagan, a nineteenth-century Irish jurist, criticized the utopian theorists of his day, such as socialists and communists, for their penchant for putting their theories into practice in actual societies. He said, "Underlying these proposals there is always one radical fallacy, namely, that they not only invent ideal institutions for mankind, but invent an ideal mankind for their institutions." Why is this a significant problem, and how does Thomas More's *Utopia* manage to avoid its dangers? What concrete evidence can you give to show that More never intended his society to become a social or political experiment?
15. Evaluate the moral principles advocated in Book II of Thomas More's *Utopia*. To what extent they anticipate the exaltation of human reason characteristic of the Enlightenment? What are the flaws of such a system of morality?

16. To what extent do the moral principles in Book II of Thomas More's *Utopia* anticipate nineteenth-century Utilitarianism? Does More's ideal society share the weaknesses of that ethical system? Why or why not? Give specific examples from the book to support your conclusions.
17. Thomas More, in Book II of *Utopia*, advocates euthanasia. Evaluate his arguments in favor of the practice, being sure to include biblical principles in doing so. To what extent do these same arguments appear today among those favoring putting those in irremediable pain out of their misery? How have contemporary experiences with the practice shown More's description to be naïve at best?
18. Discuss the version of the Just War Theory propounded by Thomas More in Book II of his *Utopia*. Does his approach correspond with the teachings of Scripture? What about his justification for his views? Be sure to use specific biblical passages in evaluating More's position.
19. Evaluate the view of religious toleration presented in Book II of Thomas More's *Utopia*. In your evaluation consider what his view says about the nature of truth and indeed the existence of God.
20. In Thomas More's *Utopia*, he advocates religious toleration. In fact, he says that the first king of Utopia had been able to conquer the island because of religious divisions among the people. How do the views expressed here relate to the author's personal experience? Keep in mind that the book was written a year *before* the outbreak of the Protestant Reformation.
21. Thomas More lived two hundred years before Deism came to prominence. To what extent does the religion favored by Raphael Hythloday in Book II of More's *Utopia* resemble Deism? Could he be called a forerunner of that religious movement? Why or why not? Be sure to cite specifics from the book in support of our argument.
22. In Book II of Thomas More's *Utopia*, Raphael Hythloday, describing the religion of the Utopians, says that those who deny the existence of reward and punishment in the afterlife "will study either with craft privily to mock, or else violently to break, the common laws of his country, in whom remaineth no further fear than of the laws nor no further hope than of the body." Evaluate this statement. Is belief in heaven and hell essential to maintaining moral order in society? Why or why not? Is this sufficient justification for the belief? Be sure to use Scripture in your analysis of the quotation.
23. At the end of Thomas More's *Utopia*, he discusses the religious beliefs and practices of his fictitious ideal community. Use this description to evaluate the author's understanding of Christianity. Consider especially his treatment of matters concerning God, religious authority, worship, and salvation. Be sure to use Scripture in your critique.

24. In examining the ideal society described by Thomas More in his *Utopia*, would you conclude that the author is a socialist or communist? If not, why not? If so, compare his brand of collectivism to that practiced by socialists and communists in the modern era.
25. The structure of Thomas More's *Utopia* is that of a first-person narrative relating another first-person narrative. What is the purpose of this structure? Is it to distance the author from the ideas being expressed or to lend greater verisimilitude to the narrative? Support your conclusion with specifics from the book.
26. In Thomas More's *Utopia*, who is the mouthpiece of the author, Raphael Hythloday or the character identified as Thomas More? Why do you think so? Support your conclusion with specifics from the book.
27. In Thomas More's *Utopia*, does the author approve of every aspect of life on his imaginary island? What indication does the book give that such may not be the case? Cite specific evidence to support your conclusion.
28. To what extent is the blueprint for an ideal society given in Thomas More's *Utopia* practicable? Consider both the underlying assumptions of the work and the specific aspects of Utopian society that you may consider impossible to implement. Does the title for the book chosen by the author in any way substantiate your conclusion?
29. Thomas More was a lawyer, but in his book *Utopia* he insists that all lawyers were banished from the island. What explains this seeming contradiction? What aspects of the law did More intend to criticize? Be sure to use specifics from the book to support your arguments.
30. In what ways does Thomas More's *Utopia* criticize the Catholic Church of his day? Is his criticism directed more toward abuses in the Church or toward the Church itself? Does it in any way anticipate the Protestant Reformation, which began only a year after the book was published?
31. The political criticism found in Thomas More's *Utopia* is obviously directed toward the rulers of his day. Use your knowledge of leading European monarchs such as Charles V of Spain, Francis I of France, and Henry VIII of England to point out specific practices and policies of the day that serve as targets of More's satire.
32. The humanism of the Renaissance emphasized human endeavors without rejecting the teachings of the Christian faith. To what extent is this way of looking at life reflected in Thomas More's *Utopia*? Indicate specific ways in which the book may be considered an exemplar of Renaissance humanism.

33. What would you argue are the three chief values championed in Thomas More's *Utopia*? Defend your choices with specific examples and quotations from the book. Are these values biblical? Does More apply them in the same way Scripture does? Why or why not?
34. Discuss the feasibility of the society described by Raphael Hythloday in Thomas More's *Utopia*. Could such a society ever exist in the form in which it is described? Why or why not? What barriers might prevent such a society from ever succeeding? Consider both practical considerations and assumptions about human nature and relationships.
35. Book II of Thomas More's *Utopia* was written before Book I. Why do you think the author decided to include the discussions found in the first book rather than simply having Hythloday describe the ideal society? Support your arguments with specifics from both parts of the book.
36. Thomas More lost his life because he opposed royal policy – the assumption of authority over the English church by Henry VIII and his subsequent divorce of Catherine of Aragon and marriage to Anne Boleyn – yet his *Utopia* is full of criticism of kings and national politics. What techniques does he use in the book to couch his criticism in such a way as to avoid the attention of the censors and the headsman's axe? Use specific examples to support your analysis.
37. Thomas More was canonized by the Catholic Church in 1935. In your opinion, does he deserve the title of Saint Thomas More? Support your conclusion with specifics from his best-known work, *Utopia*. If you do not believe his writings indicate that he deserves sainthood, why do you think he attained to such an exalted rank?
38. Many have seen connections between Thomas More's *Utopia* and modern socialist and communist societies. One gap in More's narrative is that he gives little indication of how his imaginary island developed the society for which he praises them so highly. How did modern societies that follow key parts of his program, notably the absence of private property, bring it about? Would More have approved of their methods? Why or why not?
39. The names in Thomas More's *Utopia* have meanings that are often discernible only through knowledge of classical languages. Raphael Hythloday, for instance, is named after an angel (though not one mentioned in Scripture) and his last name, derived from Greek, means something like "an expert in nonsense." What is the significance of the name More gives to his central character? Consider both the role he plays in the story and the tone the author wishes to establish for his readers.
40. In Thomas More's *Utopia*, what aspects of Utopian society would you consider immoral? Why? Choose three different characteristics of life in Utopia and critique them from a biblical perspective.

41. Evaluate the ending of Thomas More's *Utopia*. More leaves the reader hanging by having his namesake insist that he likes some of what he has heard but disagrees with other aspects of Hythloday's tale. Why might he have done this? Didn't he write the book to describe a perfect society? Discuss possible reasons for this ambiguity, which has puzzled readers and critics for the last five hundred years.
42. Discuss the unstated assumptions without which the ideal society could not function in Thomas More's *Utopia*. What qualities of the people of Utopia does More assume to be true? How realistic are these assumptions? How necessary are they to the functioning of Utopian society? Be sure to consider both matters of human nature and geographical and economic conditions on the island.
43. Some critics of Thomas More's *Utopia* have argued that it is in fact a *dystopian* fantasy – one that pictures a society with the intent of criticizing it. More's objection to Raphael Hythloday's description of Utopian society at the end of the book is thus taken seriously by such critics, who view Hythloday's words as More's ironic effort to lampoon such a commonwealth. To what extent is such a reading of the book credible? What evidence can you find that either supports or refutes this view?
44. In Book I of Thomas More's *Utopia*, the character bearing the author's name says, "It is not possible for all things to be well unless all men were good, which I think will not be yet for a good many years." To what extent do these words serve as a critique of the book in which they are found? Does this suggest that More believed that the Utopia he described would forever literally be "Nowhere"?
45. In Book II of Thomas More's *Utopia*, Raphael Hythloday speaks of the dangers of premarital sex in the following words: "That offense [premarital sex] is so sharply punished because they perceive that unless they be diligently kept from the liberty of this vice, few will join together in the love of marriage, wherein all the life must be led with one, and also all the griefs and displeasures coming therewith patiently be taken and borne." To what extent have these words proved prophetic in our contemporary culture? Why is the biblical argument against the practice more powerful than the essentially pragmatic argument presented by More's explorer?
46. Compare and contrast the criticisms of the organized church found in Desiderius Erasmus' *Praise of Folly* and Thomas More's *Utopia*. What ideas do the two friends have in common? Are there any significant issues over which they differ? Whose criticism do you think is more valid or more powerful? Why? Support your conclusions with specifics from both books.

47. Compare and contrast the Christianity pictured in Charles M. Sheldon's *In His Steps* with the role of religion in society described in Thomas More's *Utopia*. How, according to the two authors, should religion influence society? What must that religion be like in order to have a salutary influence? Evaluate the two pictures of the role of religion in society according to Scripture.