Utopia

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SIR THOMAS MORE

Born to Sir John More, an eminent lawyer, and his wife Agnes, Thomas More was raised in London. As a young boy, Thomas received one of the best educations his time offered, at St. Anthony's School, and between 1490 and 1492 he served as a household page for the Archbishop of Canterbury. At the age of nineteen More enrolled at Oxford, where he learned Greek, only to leave in 1499 to study law in London. It was also around this time that, as a deeply serious Catholic, he took up the practices of self-mortification: wearing a hair shirt, using a log for his pillow, whipping himself, etc. At twenty-one More entered Parliament, and soon after was named the Under-Sherriff of London. In 1503, he successfully argued in the House of Commons against King Henry VII's proposal that he receive a subsidy for his daughter Margaret's dowry. This action incurred the King's displeasure, so much so that More considered leaving England and becoming a monk—but instead he stayed in London to advance his political and legal career, and King Henry VII died a few years later. More is reputed to have pleaded only cases he thought just, and to have worked for free on behalf of widows, orphans, and the poor. In 1515, More began composing, in Latin, his *Utopia*, which was not his first literary work but certainly that on which his reputation as a writer is founded. During the reign of Henry VIII, More was knighted in 1521 and became the Lord Chancellor of England in 1529. He used this position to ruthlessly oppose the Protestant Reformation in England, going so far as to torture Protestants and burn them at the stake as heretics. However, around this time Henry VIII himself, in an attempt to produce an heir to the throne, resolved to annul his first marriage to Catherine of Aragon, which was a direct challenge to Catholic doctrine. In 1531, the King required that the English clergy swear allegiance to him, and not the Pope, as the Supreme Head of the Church of England. More, however, remained loyal to the Pope, and opposed the King's divorce from Catherine. He resigned his Chancellorship in 1532, but not before incurring the displeasure of yet another king. In 1535, More was tried for high treason and found guilty. He was executed by decapitation on July 6 of that year, and he died, in his own words, "the King's good servant, but God's first." Both the Catholic Church and the Church of England now honor More as a saint.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

More wrote *Utopia* during the Age of Discovery, when European voyages of exploration were bringing a newfound sense of possibility to Europe and a renewed belief in human progress. The work is playfully reflective of this context, though we might wonder to what extent its ambiguous presentation of Utopia is also a suggestion of the limitations of progress. To give a more specific historical context, More began writing *Utopia* while he was sent as part of an English commission under King Henry VIII to the Netherlands; their mission was to negotiate on behalf of the English wool trade, which had suffered losses after the King of Castile, the future Charles V, imposed high import taxes on English wool. It was during this mission that More met Peter Giles, whom he befriended and includes as a character in *Utopia*. It was also around this time that More was debating with himself whether he should go into the service of Henry VIII as a counselor, and this debate is externalized in Book I of *Utopia*. It is a dark irony that, shortly after the publication of *Utopia*, Martin Luther initiated the Protestant Reformation in 1517, which threw Europe and England in particular into a frenzy of bitter conflict, violence, and warfare.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

More's central model for his *Utopia* is Plato's *Republic*, an extended philosophical dialogue of Greek antiquity in which Plato's character Socrates deduces the structure of the human soul and envisions an ideal republic where society is perfectly organized and the philosopher is king. More borrows conventions and ideas from Plato's work—both Plato's republic and Utopia are centered on collective ownership, for example—while also calling into question the justness and practicality of utopia-building in general. He does this, in part, by framing his account of Utopia within a parody of the travel narrative, a popular Renaissance genre (see our theme on Travel, Discovery, and Place to learn more). More's work also reflects the culture of Renaissance humanism, which valued the humanities, especially the revival of classical literature and rhetoric, as a means of encouraging virtue and civic ethics in society. Many humanists are referenced in *Utopia*—especially More's friend, the great Dutchman Desiderius Erasmus—for their wisdom and eloquence. Finally, *Utopia* has proven deeply influential in English literature, not only as a basis for other early modern utopias, like Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* and Henry Neville's *The Isle of Pines*, but also as a forerunner to the form of the novel itself by way of prose narratives like Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. More's most famous modern descendants include dystopian writers like Aldous Huxley, George Orwell, Alasdair Gray, and Margaret Atwood.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Libellus vere aureus, nec minus salutaris quam festivus, de optimo rei publicae deque nova insula Utopia (A truly golden little book, no less beneficial than entertaining, of a republic's best state and of the new island Utopia)*
- **When Written:** 1515-1516
- **Where Written:** The Netherlands; England
- **When Published:** 1516
- **Literary Period:** Renaissance humanism
- **Genre:** Early "utopian fiction"; philosophical dialogue; satire
- **Setting:** Antwerp; England; the fictional island of Utopia
- **Antagonist:** Bad governance, pride, and idleness
- **Point of View:** First-person limited

EXTRA CREDIT

The Utopian Genre. More's *Utopia* is generally credited with establishing the utopian genre—but what characterizes the works that belong to this genre? The critic J.C. Davis advances an influential account in his *Utopia and the Ideal Society* (1981). He argues that, unlike other ideal world narratives, utopias idealize neither people nor nature; that is, people who appear in utopian works can be good or bad, just like in the real world, and nature can be both fruitful and hostile, just like in the real world. Utopias instead idealize "social attitude and structure," and hold that people can devise political institutions capable of optimally organizing vice and nature in the service of human health and happiness. Whether this is the case, of course, has yet to be seen.

Utopia in the World and in Us. The critic Northrop Frye has two interrelated ideas about how a utopia manifests in the world. He thinks, for one thing, that the idea of "a limited Utopia in a restricted or enclosed space is an empty fantasy." Rather, "Utopia must be a world-wide transformation of the whole social order or it is nothing." How such a transformation might be effected is the subject of Frye's second idea: "The real Utopia," he writes, "is an individual goal, of which the disciplined society is an allegory." It would seem that, for Frye, Utopia will be nothing more than an empty fantasy until we all build utopias in ourselves through education.

PLOT SUMMARY

When *Utopia* opens, the character Thomas More is in the Netherlands, serving as an ambassador sent by King Henry VIII of England to hold negotiations concerning the English wool trade. More then travels to Antwerp, where he takes up residence and befriends an honest, learned citizen of that city named Peter Giles.

More is returning home from church one day when he runs into Giles, who is speaking with an old man called Raphael Hythloday. More, Giles, and Hythloday walk together to More's house, and in his **garden** the three men talk at length. Hythloday, we learn, sailed the world alongside the great historical explorer Amerigo Vespucci, and he even traveled to the New World by way of Asia. Moreover, it was in the New World that he came into contact with the Utopians, an **island** people who live in what Hythloday thinks to be the most perfectly organized commonwealth in the world.

More and Giles are so impressed with Hythloday that they encourage him to go into the service of a prince as his counselor, but Hythloday has his doubts: princes are too interested chivalry and war to heed wisdom, and his fellow counselors would be proud and corrupt.

By way of illustration, Hythloday recounts a dinner he had at Cardinal John Morton's table in England years earlier. There a lawyer praised England for severely punishing its thieves (with the death penalty). Hythloday counters that the punishment is disproportionate to the crime in such a case; moreover, he argues that, instead of killing its thieves, England should change the social conditions that breed thieves in the first place. Specifically, he indicts the pride and greed of aristocrats and landowners as a great cause of idleness among the lower classes. Idleness, he says, causes poverty and misery. Hythloday instead proposes that thieves be forced to labor as punishment, which would spare them their lives and also serve the public good. Everyone at the table disagrees with Hythloday's ideas—that is, until Cardinal Morton approves them, which suggests that the men surrounding the Cardinal are just self-absorbed flatterers.

At the end of this story, More says that he still believes that if Hythloday were to serve as the counselor of a prince, he would greatly benefit his nation. Hythloday disagrees. He imagines helping an empire-building French king like Charles the VIII or Louis the VII wage his wars of conquest: if Hythloday were to suggest that the king cease his wars and focus on domestic matters, what would happen? More concedes that the king would not be grateful for such advice. Hythloday goes on to say that, as a counselor, he would be forced to approve of bad laws and policies or else go mad. He speculates that no nation with private property or money can ever be justly governed.

Hythloday then begins his discourse on Utopia. At More's request, Hythloday describes the island in great detail. The cities are all virtually identical to one another—prosperous, conveniently laid out—but Amaurote is the capital because of its central location. The foundation of Utopian society is this: the citizens of Utopia own nothing individually but share the resources of their nation collectively, from land to housing to bread and wine; also, money does not exist in Utopia (indeed, the Utopians loathe **gold** as a useless metal). Without private property, Hythloday says, people don't cultivate their pride so

much as their nation, which is like a thriving household or family.

The Utopians live together in patriarchal families with no fewer than ten and no more than sixteen members (not counting children). All Utopians work at both farming and at least one other craft, and they work for at least six hours each day. When the Utopians are not working, eating, or sleeping, they are free to use their time as they please. There are few laws in Utopia, and lawyers are banned from the commonwealth for being too cunning in their interpretations of the law. The only offense for which there is a prescribed punishment is adultery: a person who commits adultery once is forced into bondage, and a person who commits the offense twice is sentenced to death.

The Utopians are overseen and encouraged in their work by magistrates known as Philarchs, elected by the people themselves. The Philarchs, as well as their superiors, the Archphilarchs and Prince, often meet to discuss the state of the commonwealth, including any problems among the commoners, though these seldom arise. Policies are in place to protect the Utopians from tyranny, political corruption, and rash decision-making; for example, magistrates who hold consultations about the commonwealth outside of the council or the place of the common election are sentenced to death. However, the magistrates love their people, and are both just and humane. In addition to the magistracy, slavery is perhaps the most distinct social feature in Utopia. Slavery in Utopia is a punishment for those Utopians who have committed "heinous offenses"; the nation also pays cities in other lands for their criminals, but only those already condemned to death, who are then brought back to Utopia to labor in bondage. The Utopians are reluctant to go to war, but when they're forced to do so they hire mercenaries so as to spare their own people bloodshed. The Utopians are cunning in war and "fight dirty," doing everything possible to save life and resolve conflict quickly.

As for moral philosophy, the Utopians' chief area of inquiry is how people can attain to happiness. They are essentially hedonists: people who believe that pleasure is the most important thing in life. The Utopians define virtue as a life organized according to nature. We follow nature by heeding what our reason approves of and disapproves of; reason also guides us in the love of the divine. The Utopians' highest pleasures are the exercise of virtue and conscience. Underlying the Utopians' philosophy are religious ideas. They hold the soul to be immortal and destined by God for happiness; they also believe that good deeds are rewarded, and bad deeds punished, in the afterlife. All over the island, however, and even within a given city, people worship different deities, from the sun to great heroes of the past. Atheism is rebuked but tolerated in Utopia, as are heresies like that which holds the souls of animals to be immortal; only people who condemn other religions and attempt to force others to their opinions are subject to exile or bondage. All people worship in the same churches together, and the priests are elected by secret ballot to provide the community with spiritual guidance.

After Hythloday concludes his discourse on Utopia, More thinks to himself that many Utopian laws and policies are founded on no good reason, even when it comes to the principal foundation of their ordinances (their collective ownership of resources and moneyless economy). However, More doesn't want to offend Hythloday by disagreeing with his claims. Though More cannot agree with Hythloday in everything, he confesses that he wishes for many features of Utopia to be realized in Europe's cities—but he also doesn't dare hope as much, for such a hope would be unrealistic.

CHARACTERS

Thomas More – Thomas More is simultaneously a historical personage, the author of *Utopia*, and a character in it—but the author's resemblance to the character doesn't mean the two are the same. In the work, More visits Antwerp while on a diplomatic mission on behalf of King Henry VIII of England, and there he befriends Peter Giles and Raphael Hythloday; More's record of the discussion he has with these two men in his **garden** makes up the book *Utopia*. More is an intelligent, curious man, dutifully committed to his family and public service, and also is a practical believer in plain speech. He has faith that wise counselors in the service of kings can improve society—a point on which he and Hythloday disagree. After Hythloday concludes his discourse on Utopia, More thinks to himself that many of that commonwealth's laws and policies are not founded on good reason, especially the abolition of private property and money. Nonetheless, he wishes for many features of Utopian society to be realized in Europe's cities, though he doesn't dare hope as much, for such a hope would be unrealistic. That More the historical author should invent Utopia only for More the character to criticize it suggests how deeply ambiguous the text is as a whole.

Raphael Hythloday – Raphael Hythloday is an old, sunburned, long-bearded, wise (and fictional) man from Portugal who meets Thomas More and Peter Giles in Antwerp. Hythloday traveled the world (in the book) alongside the great historical explorer Amerigo Vespucci, and he knows a great deal about many foreign peoples and countries. As such, Hythloday is able to provide More and Giles with a critique of governance in Europe, and more specifically in England, which he finds to be irrationally ruled by pride. Hythloday also tells the two men about the most perfectly governed society he knows of, namely, Utopia, where he lived for five years. As wise as he is, Hythloday is nonetheless pessimistic: he does not believe that reason and wisdom can improve society as it is currently organized, because pride, private interests, and flattery have made it so that good counsel falls on deaf ears in the king's

court. That More the author intends Hythloday to be an ambiguous character—is he a herald of good tidings? a verbose crackpot?—is suggested by his name: "Hythloday" likely means something like "peddler of triflers" or "kindler of nonsense," and yet the traveler also shares his first name with the Biblical angel who helps man understand the ways of God.

Peter Giles – Like More himself, Peter Giles is both a historical personage and a character in *Utopia*. Historically, he was a pupil and friend of the great Dutch humanist Erasmus, and he was appointed Chief Secretary of Antwerp in 1510; in 1515, it was Erasmus himself who introduced Giles to More. In the work, More describes Giles as a citizen of Antwerp, honest, learned, virtuous, kind-hearted, and loving. More finds Giles's conversation both merry and pleasant, and it makes him feel less homesick to have such an entertaining new friend. Moreover, Giles introduces More to Raphael Hythloday. Although Giles doesn't often speak in *Utopia*, he is important as a representative of the culture of Renaissance humanism—so highly esteemed by More— which valued the humanities, especially the revival of classical literature and rhetoric, as a means of encouraging virtue and civic ethics in society.

Cardinal John Morton – Cardinal John Morton is an honorable, prudent, and virtuous old man when he appears in *Utopia*, as well as the Archbishop and Cardinal of Canterbury and the Lord Chancellor of England—just as he was in real life. Both in fact and fiction, Thomas More served as a household page for Morton while still a boy, and he deeply respects his former master. We meet the Cardinal in Book I of *Utopia*, when Raphael Hythloday describes a conversation he had at the Cardinal's table about certain laws and policies in England. Although the Cardinal proves to be eloquent, open-minded, and tolerant of a joke here and there, it becomes apparent that the other men at his table are impudent flatterers. That such a virtuous man tolerates such bad company suggests how quietly private interests can infiltrate human governments.

A Lawyer – One of the men whom Raphael Hythloday speaks with at Cardinal Morton's table, the lawyer praises the severity of English justice: he thinks it a good sign that so many thieves in England are hanged and that so few escape hanging. After Hythloday thoroughly critiques his position, the lawyer attempts to respond in pompous, verbose terms, but the Cardinal worthily silences him. Later, the lawyer just dismisses Hythloday's argument out of hand—and ironically everyone present agrees with him, except for the Cardinal himself. The lawyer represents how pride and prejudice make us deaf to reason and wisdom.

A Joker – One of the men whom Raphael Hythloday speaks with at Cardinal Morton's table, the joker constantly tries to say witty things (as a traditional "fool" would), but he only succeeds once in a while. He jokes that beggars should be forced into monasteries and convents and made into lay brethren and nuns, and he also says that friars are actually vagabonds, or begging drifters. The Cardinal accepts the first proposal in jest, but others at the table uncritically accept it in earnest, which suggests to Hythloday how little such courtiers would value his counsel. In any case, the joker enrages the friar with his last joke, and the Cardinal, seeing no end in sight to the argument, at last sends the joker away.

A Friar – One of the men whom Raphael Hythloday speaks with at Cardinal Morton's table, the friar becomes enraged when he becomes the butt of the joker's mockery. He goes so far as to insinuate that the joker could be excommunicated for his words. The idle, antagonistic, intolerant interaction between the joker and the friar is thus contrasted with the fruitful, neighborly relationships cultivated in Utopia.

Utopus – Utopus is the (fictional) founder of the commonwealth of Utopia. He lived some 1,760 years before Raphael Hythloday delivers his discourse on the **island** nation. Utopus is best known for setting the groundwork of all Utopian law and policy, as well as for ordering the conquered natives of the place and his own soldiers to cut up and dig Utopia away from the mainland to which it was attached—so it was that Utopia came to be born as an island. Utopus also dedicated himself to taking care of the useful, pleasant **gardens** of Utopia when he founded the nation.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

TRAVEL, DISCOVERY, AND PLACE

Thomas More wrote his *Utopia* during the so-called Age of Discovery, when European voyages of exploration, especially by sea, were vastly enriching human knowledge about the globe. With discovery, moreover, came a renewed belief in human progress and perfectibility—both ideas that More muses upon in his work.

Utopia is at once a parody of the then-popular genre of the travel narrative—written by explorers about their exciting adventures abroad—and also a vision of a society organized far more coherently than any our history has yet produced: Utopia. Thus More's fictional narrator, the wise traveller Raphael Hythloday, doesn't entertain us with death-defying adventures littered with sea monsters and hostile natives, as would be typical of the Renaissance travel narrative, but instead educates us by recalling his intellectual adventures among the Utopians, a hard-working, practical, and virtuous people who have organized their society to maximize human health and happiness. After all, monsters like those in popular travel

narratives are easy to find (as More points out), and you don't even have to go abroad to find them: just look at the proud leaders of European societies, who nurse idleness, punish their citizens cruelly, kill for worthless **gold**, and wage bloody, unjust warfare. To find citizens like the Utopians who are ruled by good laws, in contrast, is ironically a much harder thing to do.

As earnest as *Utopia* is about the need for good governance, the work's playful ambiguities nonetheless invite us to question the possibility of such an ideally organized society as Utopia ever arising on earth. The word "utopia" itself, More's coinage, sounds like the Greek *eutopia*, "the good place," but literally means "nowhere." (Most of the invented names in the work are jokes in this vein.) But, we might ask, how did Hythloday travel to a place that is nowhere? And is it possible for people to build a utopia, a nowhere, here on earth? According to Hythloday, the **island** nation is, in fact, located off the coast of the New World, that is, the Americas. Europeans (including Christopher Columbus) optimistically imagined the Americas to be the site of the **Garden** of Eden, the divinely governed Biblical paradise from which humankind fell after disobeying God. The fact that the New World is at once a physical place and, at least in the Renaissance, a supposed mythical paradise, deepens More's ambiguities. Can we, as people afflicted by sin and vice, build a society as happy as the paradise where people lived *before* sin was brought into the world? Complicating the matter even more, finally, is the fact that the capital city of Utopia, Amaurote ("dim city"), is a shadowy but point-for-point copy of More's London, from its geography to the layout of its walls, streets, and houses. Far from being "nowhere" for More's contemporary readers, then, Utopia would have seemed, if only in its superficial particulars, strangely familiar.

The implication of these ambiguities regarding place is that, while Utopia exists nowhere, the potential for a utopia exists everywhere. But to travel there we must, like Hythloday—whom we're told resembles both the great sailor Ulysses and the great philosopher Plato—undertake an arduous intellectual adventure aboard the ship of reason and virtue.

BAD GOVERNANCE, PRIDE, AND IDLENESS

Utopia is divided into two books. The first (composed for the most part after the second) contains a discussion of governance in Europe generally and specifically in England under King Henry VIII, whom Thomas More the man famously served as a counselor and at whose hand More was later executed for treason. Book II contains the description of Utopia's government, laws, and orders. (Following the influential *Utopia* scholar J.H. Hexter, we occasionally refer to Book I as the "Dialogue of Counsel" and to Book II as the "Discourse on Utopia" throughout.) Another way of thinking about this division is that Book I critically presents society as it *is*—organized irrationally by pride, which Hythloday takes to be the ultimate source of all human wrongdoing—whereas Book II presents a vision of society as it *ought to be*. The question remains, however, whether knowing what good governance ideally looks like aids us in actually governing well on earth—or, even more troublingly, whether we can really imagine what good governance looks like in the first place.

More saves this second question for Book II, and first considers what bad governance looks like, as revealed by Hythloday's critique of certain social policies and institutions active in Renaissance Europe. Hythloday begins by arguing against the sentencing of thieves to death as disproportionate to the crime (according to records from the period, some 7,200 thieves were hanged under the reign of Henry VIII alone), and this argument spirals outward to suggest the failings of society in general that make it a breeder of thieves and worse. In Hythloday's account, poor or idle (because untrained) men are forced to become thieves in order to avoid starvation. Those thieves who aren't hanged then usually become soldiers, whom society keeps fighting fit by deploying in needless, vain, and unprofitable wars of conquest. Such men could be well employed as farmers, but landowners at the time and even holy men in the Church are profitably turning farmland into pastures for sheep, such that little land is available for commoners to farm. This in turn leads them into beggary, thievery, and debauchery in taverns and alehouses.

In short, unchecked pride and idleness are the parents of social corruption, and European society, irrationally, puts a stop to neither. This would not be the case, Hythloday claims, if people didn't have the license to pursue their own private interests at the expense of the nation, and also if the government itself wasn't stuffed with unreflective leaders and flatterers who propose nearsighted solutions that serve only to exacerbate the problems they're intended to solve.

PROPERTY, LABOR, AND UTOPIAN SOCIETY

In Book II of *Utopia*, we learn that the principal foundation of Utopian law and policy, as in Plato's ideal republic and some monastic systems, is the abolition of all private property. In other words, the citizens of Utopia own nothing individually but share the resources of their nation collectively, from land to housing to bread and wine. (The Utopians are so committed to this that, to give a more radical example, the doors to their houses are never locked or bolted, so that any citizen can, when they please, freely enter any other citizen's house.) Without private property, Hythloday says, people don't cultivate their pride so much as their nation, which becomes like a great and thriving household.

Hythloday gives several reasons as to why there is no private

property in Utopia. For one thing, he says, in nations founded on property and money—like feudal England, where wealthy landlords profited from peasants' work—it tends to be the case that wealth unjustly falls into the hands of the most useless, wicked, and greedy people. Only these few divide up the wealth among themselves while the rest of the citizens are afflicted by "the heavy and inevitable burden of poverty and wretchedness." In contrast, the equality established in Utopia enables every man, woman, and child to live in plenty. By the same token, everyone in Utopia who is fit to work must earn their keep through labor. Second, "where nothing is private," Hythloday claims, "the common affairs be earnestly looked upon."

One earnestly looks upon the common affairs by rolling up one's sleeves and diligently getting to work, and for no less than six hours a day. There are no idle serving men here, no idle women, no idle priests, no idle landowners, and no idle able-bodied beggars. For one thing, everyone in Utopia is educated in the theory and practice of farming, and all citizens are required to relocate to the country at some point in their lives to work the farms for a period of two years. Such a policy makes it so that Utopians never lack agricultural knowledge, which is especially important in the event of a food shortage, and many hands also make light work. In addition, every Utopian learns his or her own proper craft: clothworking, masonry, metalworking, or carpentry. To keep people diligently at their tasks is almost the only office of the Utopian magistrates known as Syphogrants or Philarchs, who are chosen by the people they live among. But not even these magistrates live idly: though exempt from labor by law, they labor anyway so that "their example [may] provoke others to work."

There are two principal social statuses in Utopia that affect the conditions of one's work. A person is either 1) a freeman, including the average Utopian and members of the magistracy or priesthood; or 2) a bondman, or slave, who works more than freemen and at harder work. Slavery in Utopia is a punishment for those Utopians who have committed "heinous offenses." The nation also pays cities in other lands for their criminals, but only those already condemned to death, who are then brought back to Utopia to labor in bondage. We might be scandalized that slavery should exist in Utopia, but the institution is part and parcel of the Utopians' program of eliminating idleness and waste: instead of hanging a thief, as England would, why not force him to contribute to the public good? Or so runs Hythloday's argument. In Utopia, where universal labor and communal property are seen as crucial aspects of happiness, slavery is simply the practical answer to human error. Of course, this fact then only adds to the ambiguities of just how much of a "utopia" Utopia really is.

THE PUBLIC GOOD, VIRTUE, AND RELIGION

As a character in *Utopia* (not to be confused with the historical figure and author), Thomas More questions Hythloday as to whether or not people will really work at all without the incentive of personal gain (referring to Utopia's lack of private property). Won't people be too confident in other people's industry and so lazily excuse themselves from labor? In response, Hythloday explains how many important features of Utopian society are designed precisely so that everyone cultivates a sense of virtue and works not only willingly but zealously on behalf of the public good. Almost the only task for Utopian magistrates is to keep others diligent in their tasks and to excite others' industry, and there are also positive incentives in place that keep Utopians whistling while they work, so to speak. In exchange for their labor, Utopia provides all of its citizens with housing, as much good food as is reasonable, high-quality medical care, and protection from war. All the time that is not spent at work, sleep, or eating the Utopians may spend as they please, as long they remain "virtuous" and busy. Significantly, Hythloday doesn't even explicitly tell us how idle Utopians are punished (whipping? bondage? exile?), so we might imagine that Utopia is so well designed that the conditions which give rise to idleness simply don't exist there.

Moreover, Utopians are rigorously educated from the time they are children, both in virtue ethics (which develops an individual's character) and in civic ethics (which develops our conduct as citizens working together cooperatively) modeled after the Roman idea of duty. Utopian virtue ethics, derived from Greek philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, has as its goal every citizen taking pleasure in exercising virtue and in doing the right thing, which is the highest pleasure of the mind. More specifically, virtue for the Utopians means desiring and refusing things as reason dictates. Now, this is not to say that Utopians don't enjoy pleasures of the body like drinking wine and listening to music, or less still that they pursue pain for its own sake (compare this with the fact that More the man, for one, was a self-flagellator). We might rather summarize the Utopian position as follows: we can achieve happiness principally through good and honest pleasures, including but not limited to the exercise of virtue, but we should not let lesser pleasures hinder us from obtaining bigger pleasures.

Finally, it must be added that religion binds the Utopians together in service of the public good. Utopians believe in and worship different gods without conflict, but all worship in the same churches, and all agree in this: the chief god they worship is of the very same divine, majestic, and absolutely sovereign nature as everyone else's gods. So long as one's religious opinions do not insult the dignity of humankind, and so long as one is not altogether irreligious, one has religious freedom in Utopia. This is so important to the Utopians because they

ground their entire philosophy upon religion: they hold the soul to be immortal and meant for happiness, and believe that good deeds, especially "busy labors and good exercises," are rewarded in the afterlife, while evil deeds punished. Moreover, the Utopians are convinced that, if one does not have religion, one will necessarily mock the faithful or break the country's laws. Whether or not this is the case, Hythloday makes it clear that virtue and religion as goals in themselves orient Utopians in the service of the public good.

IDEALS AND PRACTICALITY

There is a tension throughout *Utopia* between our ideals and practicality, between wish and reality. Indeed, after listening patiently to Hythloday's description of Utopia, that ideal society, Thomas More the character confesses that, though he wishes for many features of Utopia to be realized in Europe's cities, he doesn't dare hope as much, for such a hope would be unrealistic.

More the character, for his part, is nonetheless *somewhat* optimistic, at least in Book I. There he proposes that that Hythloday enter into the service of a prince as his philosophical counselor, so that his experience and wisdom may help society in some way. When kings listen to philosophers, after all, or when the philosophers are themselves the kings, as in Plato's *Republic*, won't our wish for good governance at last be realized? Hythloday has his doubts, however. In fact, he says darkly that philosophy has no place among kings. The counselors of kings, necessarily working in imperfect institutions among corrupt people, can do no more than make what is "very evil" into merely a lesser evil, and even the good counselor is easily perverted into wrongdoing. It may well be as More himself says: "It is not possible for all things to be well unless all men were good. Which I think will not be yet these good many years."

One of the ironies of *Utopia*, of course, is that the Utopians themselves can be so much more down-to-earth and practical than the philosopher who imagines them. They all wear comfortable, flexible uniforms, distinguished only by gender and marital status, to minimize the number of cloth workers they need. They are skilled inventors and astronomers. In contrast to their European counterparts, the Utopians value iron, which can be used to fashion various tools and instruments, above useless **gold**, which they scorn and chain their slaves with. Also, rather than force their incurable, agonized sick people to suffer drawn-out deaths, the Utopians have legalized euthanasia (or voluntary death), which they see as both humane and, rather bluntly, as practical, "seeing [as an invalid] is not able to do any duty of life." It is especially in warfare that the Utopians are so "practical" as to strike us as conniving or cruel. They hire mercenaries to avoid the bloodshed of Utopian citizens—and they rather relish the prospect of their own mercenaries falling in battle, for this means both the death of vicious, warlike men, and also that the Utopians won't have to pay as much for their services.

Utopia's interest in practicality seeps so deeply into the text as to determine its very style. In a letter to Peter Giles, More's real-life friend who also does double-duty as a character in *Utopia*, More argues that texts plainly and simply written often get closer to the truth—better an iron than a golden tongue.

THE AMBIGUITIES OF UTOPIA

Utopia is so ambiguous a work that one critic calls it "the most slippery of texts: in no other literary work is the question of authorial intention at once more pressing or more unanswerable." As such, we can't take at face value anything we read in the book. Questions the text invites but never resolves include: can a utopia be established on earth, and, if not, why imagine one, especially when philosophy falls on deaf ears in the courts of kings? Moreover, does the Utopia that Raphael Hythloday describes really nurture human happiness, or is it oppressively totalitarian? (The name "Hythloday," it is appropriate to add here, likely means something like "peddler of triflers," "kindler of nonsense," and yet the traveler also shares his first name with Raphael, the angel who helps man understand the ways of God.)

As if to make his own text even slipperier, Thomas More the man led a life dramatically inconsistent with Utopian law and order, in what amounts to an extreme clash between his literary "ideal" and his lived reality. He was a lawyer—but lawyers are banned from Utopia for being too cunning in their interpretations of the law. He was a devout Catholic who, during the Reformation, tortured Protestants and approved of burning them at the stake as heretics—but Utopia is tolerant of all religions (just not the irreligious), and those who "vehemently and fervently" attempt to convert others are banished or enslaved.

There are even internal inconsistencies in the description of Utopia itself, it would seem. One critic, Stephen Greenblatt, argues that, though Utopians are only required to work six hours a day, a close reading reveals that the workday as described in the text would really fill one's day from sunrise to sunset. At the end of Book II, even Thomas More the character says, "Many things came to mind which in the manners and laws of that people seemed to be instituted and founded of no good reason."

What are we to make of this literary house of mirrors, of all these maze-like questions, ambiguities, and inconsistencies? Many readers have simply found *Utopia* to be nothing more, at last, than a grand literary joke, impossible to pin down and so difficult to connect with. But perhaps there is a more fruitful way of engaging with the work. In the first theme we discussed how Utopia is "nowhere," but the potential for a utopia is everywhere. What More's ambiguities direct our attention to

are the great difficulties that await us as we seek to realize that potential; Utopia cannot be built in a day, as it were. These ambiguities also require that we carefully weigh and examine matters for ourselves, that we awaken and listen to our inner philosophers—which is, after all, the first step all of us must take before any of us can begin the journey to utopia.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE GARDEN AND THE ISLAND

The garden and the island are two interrelated symbols in *Utopia*. The former represents human work and desire imposed onto, and in harmony with, the natural world. It also represents the idea of Paradise, where people live in perfection and happiness, just as Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden before disobeying God. In *Utopia* itself, Raphael Hythloday presents his dialogue of counsel and discourse on Utopia while sitting with Thomas More and Peter Giles in More's garden in Antwerp. It is as though these men, through learning, virtue, and philosophical inquiry, have been restored, if only temporarily, to Eden, there to meditate on the ideal society (Utopia, of course, also comes to read as an earthly reflection of the Heavenly Jerusalem, the perfect City of God in Heaven). The Utopians themselves, moreover, follow their founder Utopus in finely caring for their gardens, and this is one of their highest pleasures. They are, More is suggesting, closer to Paradise than their proud, warlike counterparts in Europe. The connection between the garden and Paradise is finally strengthened by the fact that Utopia is located off the coast of the New World, that is, the Americas, which Europeans optimistically imagined to be the site of the Garden of Eden.

While Utopia is perhaps a kind of Paradise, it is also an island, which represents its disconnection from other societies as well as from the violence of human history. Utopia is physically apart from other lands, just as it is spiritually apart from them. In fact, the land Utopia is founded on was once connected to a mainland, but Utopus had a channel fifteen miles wild dug between the two, perhaps because he knew that, otherwise, the Utopians would either be conquered by others or corrupted. Compare this with Hythloday's claim that the good philosopher must be disconnected from the governments of men if he's to preserve his sanity and virtue. By setting his Utopia on an island, More is suggesting that Utopia is, at least for now, too fragile an ideal to be connected to real places inhabited by real people. Utopia will rejoin the mainland only when the world is ready to become a utopia, and the Garden of Eden will grow again only when it can grow everywhere.

GOLD

In *Utopia*, gold represents the goal and prize of human pride and domination. Rich men and women adorn themselves with it to prove their superiority to others; thieves and princes exploit others to get it; nations send men out to fight and die for it. And all this occurs despite the fact that gold is, practically speaking, useless. The Utopians, in contrast to their European counterparts, loathe gold, even though they don't by any means lack it. The Utopians even fetter their slaves with gold to shame them, just as people in other societies symbolically fetter themselves to their own lust for gold. Ultimately More presents gold as a proud, idle metal: nothing useful comes of it, and it can't be made into anything useful. We might think, as the Utopians no doubt do, that any society that considers gold to be valuable is a wicked society indeed. Raphael Hythloday, for one, would agree; he thinks that the principle condition which gives rise to gold-lust is the institution of private property, which in his account turns people into ravenous getters and debauched spenders. The Utopians, however, have killed pride and idleness by abolishing private property. When everyone has what they need, materially and spiritually, they have no need of vain superfluities like gold.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Oxford University Press edition of *Three Early Modern Utopias* published in 2009.

Book 1 Quotes

❝ Nothing is more easy to be found than barking *Scyllas*, ravening *Calaenos*, and *Laestrygons*, devourers of people, and suchlike great and incredible monsters. But to find citizens ruled by good and wholesome laws, that is an exceeding rare and hard thing.

Related Characters: Thomas More (speaker), Raphael Hythloday

Related Themes:

Page Number: 14

Explanation and Analysis

More (the character, as opposed to the author) is speaking with Raphael Hythloday, a traveler who seeks wisdom, and can be read as a mixture of Plato and Ulysses. More asks Hythloday about the places he has been, the people who

inhabited them, and how those people governedthemselves. More prides himself on not asking Hythloday about whether or not he encounteredany monsters.

In pointing this out, the text parodies the genre of travel narration, which usually relies on bombastic adventures and terrible beasts for entertainment value.Here, More (the author) pokes fun at people who read about the world for entertainment rather than for insights into how they can better their societies and themselves. He is also making an ironic jab at the princes and aristocracies of Europe: they are the monsters so easy to find, those that cannibalize their own societies.

> Provision should have been made [in England], so that no man should be driven to this extreme necessity, first to steal and then to die.

Related Characters: Raphael Hythloday (speaker), A Lawyer

Related Themes:

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Hythloday recalls a conversation he had with a cunning lawyer about justice. Their conversation centers on the example of the thief, who, in Europe, is hanged for his crimes. Hythloday argues that this punishment is extreme and inappropriatefor the crime. Indeed, Hylthloday thinks that the crime of stealing is motivated by "extreme necessity" as opposed to a base desire to do bad things. As such, the thief who steals to keep themselves or their family alive is more a victim than a criminal - their society has failed them by leaving them unable to earn a living, and then it fails them twice over when it executes them for acting on their only available chance at survival.

This scene can be read as a sort of “parable” in which the various characters exemplify what Hythloday sees as the wrongs of European society. The lawyer and Hythloday have two conflicting ideas of justice. The lawyer thinks that justice is the law being effectively enforced, while Hythloday thinks that justice is the organization of a society such that people don’t have any need to break the law in the first place. The lawyer’s view, in contrast to Hythloday’s, seems merciless, inhumane, and ultimately ineffective.

> Let not so many be brought up in idleness; let husbandry and tillage be restored; let clothworking be renewed, that there may be honest labours for this idle sort to pass their time in profitably, which hitherto either poverty hath caused to be thieves, or else now be either vagabonds or idle serving men, and shortly will be thieves.

Related Characters: Raphael Hythloday (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

Hythloday and the lawyer continue their discussion of justice. Hythloday has been expanding on the many social ills in England that create thievesout of men who could be dependable and responsiblecitizensif the society were better structured.

Here, Hythloday makes an argument that idleness is one of the most dangerous symptoms of a poorly functioning society, as well as an open door to further criminal and anti-social behavior. A thief, after all, must have been "brought up in idleness," or else they would know a trade and be able to provide for themselves.

Hythloday calls for a renewal of essential trades: taking care of animals, working the land, and weaving. These, he argues, will give idle men, who currently pass their time as "vagabonds or idle serving-men" something profitable to do with their time that benefits them as well as their society.

> It is against the dignity of a king to have rule over beggars, but rather over rich and wealthy men.

Related Characters: Raphael Hythloday (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

Hythloday is considering the possibility of being a counselor to a king, as his guests have suggested that he would excelat. Hythloday begins to imagine what his fellow counselorswould advise a king to do, and makes arguments against their hypothetical advice.

Here, Hythloday is arguing against the idea that poverty makes men too weak to behave badly or rebel, and so it can be considered in a king's best interest to keep his subjects

poor. However, Hythloday points out that all great revolutions begin in dissatisfaction. If a person has nothing to lose, they are much more likely to be desperate and violent. He goes to point out that it is pathetic and below their "dignity" for a king to "rule over beggars." This kind of rule is better suited to a jailer.

Irrational princes who do everything they can to control their people will ironically bring about revolutions in their realm.

❝ This school philosophy is not unpleasant among friends in familiar communication, but in the council of kings, where great matters be debated and reasoned with great authority, these things have no place.

Related Characters: Thomas More (speaker), Raphael Hythloday

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 41

Explanation and Analysis

"School philosophy" is used here to refer to academic philosophy divorced from the context of real life. Here, More and Hylthoday agree that school philosophy is pleasant and educational when friends are discussing issues, but that the use of it is notpractical in Europe as it is. The "council of kings" is too much concerned with the real-life contexts of the country and people under their rule, and as such, school philosophy would strike them as frivolous and naive.

However, the two men leave open the possibility that in a better world, where people are open-minded and interested in the public good, school philosophy does have a place in governance.

❝ It is not possible for all things to be well unless all men were good.

Related Characters: Thomas More (speaker)

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 42

Explanation and Analysis

Here, More continues to consider the question of "school philosophy." He argues that philosophy must have a place in governance - but that it must "know its place and not digress." The end of this kind of philosophy would be to turn the "very bad" into the "merely bad." More then says that "It is not possible for all things to be well unless all men are good," a statement that is complicated by the fact that More feels that most men are bad, and as such, it will be a while yet before all men can be "good." We might imagine that More includes himself among the ranks of men who need to become good before a utopia can be realized.

More also points out that school philosophy need not be presented in an overly systematic way. It can be made entertaining—just as Utopia presents philosophical ideas in the entertaining form of the travel narrative. If the world can't be perfect, at least it can be better than it is.

Book 2: Discourse on Utopia Quotes

❝ Utopus...even at his first arriving and entering upon the land [which was to become Utopia], forthwith obtaining the victory [over the natives], caused fifteen miles space of uplandish ground, where the sea had no passage, to be cut and digged up. And so brought the sea round about the land.

Related Characters: Raphael Hythloday (speaker), Utopus

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

In Book II, Hythloday speaks in detail about Utopia, beginning with its geography. Although Utopia is currently an island, it was not always so.

In fact, the founder of Utopia, Utopus, arrived and conquered the native people of the land and put them to work digging up the land surrounding Utopia to create an island. This story about how Utopia was founded and created is very telling - the fact that Utopia is an island is especially revealing of Utopia's disconnect from the rest of the world, and of the difficulties of ever arriving at Utopia.

It might be surprising to learn that Utopus formed his ideal society only after conquering another people—although this may be metaphorical, meaning that our hearts must submit to the utopian spirit before we can build a utopia, in a way it seems disingenuous to found a free, just society on the subjugation of others. (Like, arguably, America and some European nations.)

Utopus presumably formed the island of Utopia to protect his ideal society from external corruptions. This purposeful disconnection makes it easier for a utopia to develop, but it also renders it unrelatable to the outside world and divorced from many of the historical troubles that real societies must deal with.

Book 2: Of Their Towns, Particularly of Amaurote Quotes

❝ As for their [the Utopians'] cities, whoso knoweth one of them knoweth them all, they be all so like one to another as far forth as the nature of the place permitteth.

Related Characters: Raphael Hythloday (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

All of the cities in Utopia are almost identical to one another - if you've been to one, then you know them all.

This uniformity among the cities reflects the values and virtues of the citizens of Utopia. Being alike to one another is of utmost importance - just like their cities are identical, so everyone who lives in every city believes in the same values, and acts according to the same civic plan. It is clear that the citizens of Utopia and Hythloday consider this uniformity a recipe for a calm, just, and efficient country.

There is no allowance for diversity or variety in Utopia, however, which is unsettling. But Hytholday does not seem to be disturbed by this lack - he essentially argues that peace and prosperity for all is more important than creativity and individuality.

❝ Every house hath two doors… These doors be made with two leaves never locked nor bolted, so easy to be opened, that they will follow the least drawing of a finger, and shut again alone. Whoso will may go in, for there is nothing within the houses that is private or any man's own.

Related Characters: Raphael Hythloday (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

In Utopian society, there is no private property. Instead, everything is communal, including the houses. In this passage, we learn that every house has two doors which are easy to open, and, most importantly, are never locked. As the passage goes on to say, there is no point in locking your doors when you do not own anything inside of the house.

This detail is borrowed from Plato's *Republic*, and reflectstheUtopians' absolute commitment to collective ownership of all resources. The foundation of their society, and its main divergence from all European societies, is the abolition of private property. Hythloday argues that this lack of possessiveness among the Utopians leads to their general trust and neighborliness.

❝ They set great store by their gardens. In them they have vineyards, all manner of fruit, herbs, and flowers, so pleasant, so well furnished, and so finely kept, that I never saw thing more fruitful nor better trimmed in any place.

Related Characters: Raphael Hythloday (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

The garden is an important symbol in Utopia, representing human work and desire imposed onto, and in harmony with, the natural world. The people of Utopia are hard workers, and they clearly put a great deal of effort into their gardens, keeping them "well furnished" and "trimmed." This symbolizes the Utopian's simultaneous mastery over and respect for the natural world.

In caring for their gardens so attentively, the Utopians follow the traditions of their country's founder, Utopus, who dedicated himself to gardening.

The focus on the importance of the garden in Utopian society also suggests Paradise, where people live in perfection and happiness, just like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The Utopians are, More is suggesting, closer to Paradise than their proud, warlike counterparts in Europe. The connection between the garden and Paradise is finally strengthened by the fact that Utopia is located off the coast of the New World, that is, the Americas, which Europeans optimistically imagined to be the site of the

Garden of Eden.

Book 2: Of Their Trades, and Manner of Life Quotes

Husbandry is a science common to them all [the Utopians] in general, both men and women, where they be all expert and cunning. In this they be all instructed even from their youth, partly in their schools with traditions and precepts, and partly in the country nigh the city, brought up, as it were in playing, not only beholding the use of it, but by occasion of exercising their bodies practising it also.

Related Characters: Raphael Hythloday (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 56

Explanation and Analysis

Equality in labor is necessary for an equal society, and many hands make light work. As such, all Utopians learn how to farm and tend to animals, in addition to their individual trades. This ensures that everyone in the society has work to fall back on. Additionally, in the case of an emergency like a famine, theoretical and practical knowledge of husbandry would come in handy.

Learning to farm is not only necessary, but it alsohas an enjoyable, social component - Utopian children are "brought up" farming "as it were in playing," and in addition to the obvious practicality of the lessons, they treat it like wholesome "exercise."

Now consider with yourself of these few that do work [in countries other than Utopia], how few be occupied in necessary works. For where money beareth all the swing, there many vain and superfluous occupations must needs be used, to serve only for riotous superfluity and unhonest pleasure.

Related Characters: Raphael Hythloday (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 59

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Hythloday draws More's attention to societies outside of Utopia, where not everycitizen works, and those that do work tend not to do "necessary work," like farming.

This is because these other societies are obsessed with money, which creates a market for superfluous and false pleasures as opposed to necessary, hearty products.

Because the Utopians have abolished private property, they (supposedly) have no interest in luxury goods, and therefore they have no need for occupations other than those that serve essential functions.

As such, everyone shares the minimal amount of work, and, because everyone works, nobody is forced to work more than anyone else. Note that this does not imply the absence of beauty or art in Utopia—their houses and churches are gorgeous, and they love music—but there seems to be no "art for art's sake," as such things are meant primarily as a distracting pleasure, not a way of life valuable in itself.

Book 2: Of Their Traffic Quotes

They [the Utopians] begin every dinner and supper of reading something that pertaineth to good manners and virtue. But it is short, because no man shall be grieved therewith.

Related Characters: Raphael Hythloday (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Hythloday tells More that all Utopian citizens eat together in large dining halls, as opposed to eating alone in their homes. This is because they appreciate and enjoy their community - a people that live in interchangeable cities tend to act as a group. Before they eat, they listen to a reading of some virtuous text.

The fact that these texts are always very briefis a revealing moment of good humor and practicality—the people of Utopia, practical as they are, understand that it's hard to focus when one is hungry. They also enrich the necessity of eating with unnecessary, harmless pleasures, squeezing as much enjoyment as they can out of their free time.

Gold and silver, whereof money is made, they [the Utopians] do so use as none of them doth more esteem it than the very nature of the thing deserveth. And then who doth not plainly see how far it is under iron, as without the which men can no better live than without fire and water?

Related Characters: Raphael Hythloday (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 70

Explanation and Analysis

In these lines, we learn about one of the most striking details of Utopian society: their disdain for gold and other precious metals and gems that European society so cherishes. Hythloday explains that their disdain is born out of practicality: you cannot do much with gold and silver other than make coins and jewelry. Both metals are seen as being infinitely inferior to "iron," which is as essential as "fire and water" to the Utopians.

The Utopians are attracted to gold, much like Europeans, but they fight their attraction by making only loathsome things out of the metal: chamber pots, fetters for slaves, and jewelry meant to shame wrong-doers. Similarly, Utopians gives precious stones and jewels to their children to play withso that the children will come to think of these things as immature and embarrassing when they are grown. These efforts on the part of the Utopians reveal that they have the same instinctual interest in gold and preciousstones, but unlike the Europeans who give into that instinct, the Utopians fight it in the name of a healthy society.

> They [the Utopians] 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.

Related Characters: Raphael Hythloday (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 74

Explanation and Analysis

The Utopians are well-aware of the status that gold holds in other areas of the world, and they are confounded and disturbed by the fact that a man's life is considered less valuable than gold by many people in other countries. It is imminentlypractical, as well as humane, for the Utopians to value human life over gold.

Utopians are also disturbed by the fact that, in many societies, money seems to be a stand-in for virtue and intelligence. In Europe, an idiot will be well-respected if he is rich. This is a perversion of the Utopians' most cherished values of hard work and self-improvement. Instead of working hard and enriching their society, rich men and women are free to be idle and live off the work of others. Thus, introducing gold and money into a society is a poisonous practice as it enables people to avoid work and public service.

> The chief and principal question [for the Utopians] is in what thing, be it one or more, the felicity of man consisteth. But in this point they seem almost too much given and inclined to the opinion of them which defend pleasure, wherein they determine either all or the chiefest part of man's felicity to rest.

Related Characters: Raphael Hythloday (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 76

Explanation and Analysis

Hythloday has been discussing the Utopian position on philosophy. Although they were ignorant of many of the most famous philosophers due to their isolation, the Utopians still managed to come to a lot of the same conclusions.

The main philosophical question that the Utopians are engaged with, however, is in what "the felicity of man consisteth," or, how best to be happy. Boiled down, the Utopians are hedonists: they believe that pleasure is the most important thing in life.

Hythloday's account of Utopian philosophy is notoriously confused. He gently disapproves of the Utopians' love of pleasure in this passage, yet we later learn that their chief pleasures are of the mind—exercising virtue and good conscience. Hythloday seems too bookish and dry to truly relish intellectual activity as a form of pleasure.

> They [the Utopians] embrace chiefly the pleasures of the mind, for them they count the chiefest and most principal of all. The chief part of them they think doth come of the exercise of virtue and conscience of good life.

Related Characters: Raphael Hythloday (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 83

Explanation and Analysis

Although the Utopians value pleasure above all things, we might be surprised to learn how they define life's greatest pleasures. They feel that the pleasures of the mind are the greatest to be had: virtue, education, and acting in good conscience.

They also feel that a personcan become numb to these true pleasures if they are inundated with "false pleasures," which include the ownership of luxury items, gambling, and hunting. This list of false pleasures is meant as a critique of European society, which wrongly considers ownership of these frivolous objects and engagement in harmful practices to be signs of "the good life."

Book 2: Of Their Slaves, and of Their Marriages Quotes

But if the disease [of a Utopian] be not only incurable, but also full of continual pain and anguish, then the priests and the magistrates exhort the man...that he will determine with himself no longer to cherish that pestilent and painful disease...but rather...either dispatch himself out of that painful life, as out of a prison or a rack of torment, or else suffer himself willingly to be rid out of it by other.

Related Characters: Raphael Hythloday (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 88

Explanation and Analysis

Here, we learn that the Utopian health care system makes allowances for assisted suicide, or euthanasia, in the cases of people suffering from"pestilent and painful" terminal diseases. This is one of the most intriguingmoments in the text, especially in light of the ambiguities it raises about More's own opinions on Utopia.

The Utopians' conception of the public good is not one of ruthless productivity and efficiency—rather, it is one of general welfare and happiness. Nowhere is this clearer than in the Utopians' health care system, which is centered on availability and excellence of care as well as compassion. Note that the Catholic Church, of which the man Thomas More was a part, strictly prohibits euthanasia as a crime against God's gift of life. The question arises then (here, as elsewhere): to what extent does the author of Utopia really approve of Utopian policy?

Now and then it chanceth whereas the man and the woman [in a marriage] cannot well agree between themselves, both of them finding other, with whom they hope to live more quietly and merrily, that they by the full consent of them both be divorced asunder and married again to other.

Related Characters: Raphael Hythloday (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 91

Explanation and Analysis

The Utopian laws concerning marriage and sex are among their most conservative, save for their divorce laws, which are surprisinglylenient, and, as we will see, offer another moment of authorial ambiguity.

The Utopians strictly punish premarital sex, and they also insist that a man sees his future wife naked beforehe marries her, under the disturbing logic that one would not buy a horse without having inspected itthoroughly. While these laws are conservative, and, in the second case, sexist and dehumanizing, the Utopian opinion on divorce is surprisinglyopen. Although it is not common in Utopian society, divorce is allowed and respected, which enables Utopians to find partners that they can live with "more quietly and merrily."

Utopia's policies concerning divorce are much more liberal than those of More's England at the time. Indeed, More himself infuriated King Henry VIII when he refused to condone the King's divorce—a moral stance that ultimately led to More being executed. It is surprisingand intriguing that the author of Utopia, a land in which divorce is legal, lost his life defending the eternal sanctity of marriage.

Book 2: Of Their Military Discipline Quotes

War or battle as a thing very beastly, and yet to no kind of beasts in so much use as to man, they [the Utopians] do detest and abhor. And contrary to the custom almost of all other nations they count nothing so much against glory as glory gotten in war.

Related Characters: Raphael Hythloday (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 97

Explanation and Analysis

Here, Hythloday explains that Utopians "detest and abhor" warfare, and consider it subhuman - it is a beastlyactivity, and not even wild beasts go to war, after all. To this end, when the Utopians do go to war (and they are prepared to fight - they practice military drills daily, out of practicality) they do not do so to become richer. And, if they do gain by going to war, then they consider their "glories" to be more disgraceful than glorifying.

The reasons that the Utopians will go to war include: settling trade disputes, avenging wrongs, and delivering people from tyranny. Although these motivations sound reasonable, it is strange that Utopians, who value human life more than gold, would kill people over trade disputes. Stranger still that they would not consider the potential fallout of "delivering" an oppressed people.

❝ Their [the Utopians'] chief and principal purpose in war is to obtain that thing, which if they had before obtained, they would not have moved battle. But if that be not possible, they take so cruel vengeance of them which be in the fault, that ever after they be afeard to do the like.

Related Characters: Raphael Hythloday (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 98

Explanation and Analysis

The Utopians love health and respect human life, so it makes good sense that they would rather satisfy their objectives through intelligence than through blood. When the Utopians do decide to go to battle, they do not do so to gain spoils or conquer other countries. Instead, they are focused, practical, and controlled - they keep in mind the single object that motivated them to fight in the first place.

To this end, Utopians prefer to "fight dirty," that is, to make use of propaganda and rewards for defectors. These tactics are meant to minimize bloodshed. However, as we see in these lines, sometimes the Utopians are called upon to take "cruel vengeance" on their enemies in an effort to stop further fighting.

This another moment of ambiguity - history forces us to question whether being cruel to one's enemies is really an effective policy for deterring future conflict, or whether it only stirs up more anger and strife.

Book 2: Of the Religions of the Utopians Quotes

❝ Though they [the Utopians] be in divers opinions, yet in this point they agree all together with the wisest sort in believing that there is one chief and principal God, the maker and ruler of the world... For every one of them, whatsoever that is which he taketh for the chief God, thinketh it to be the very same nature to whose only divine might and majesty the sum and sovereignty of all things by the consent of all people is attributed and given.

Related Characters: Raphael Hythloday (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 107

Explanation and Analysis

Religion is the last topic that Hylthloday covers during his and More's discussion on Utopia, and it is one of the most intriguing and ambiguousof the sections. We remember that More, the man, actively fought against religious freedom in his time, and even supported the torture of Protestants.

Utopian society is marked by radical freedom of religion - different citizens are free to worship whichever god they choose without fear of persecution.

This diversity of religious thought is united by a few central tenents, outlined in this passage. They believe that God is eternal, incomprehensible, and inexplicable, dispersed throughout the world as power and virtue. He is the creator of all things and the end of all things.All Utopians, despite diverging opinions on the form God takes, nonetheless agree that there is one chief and principal Supreme Being, the maker and ruler of the world, and this Being they call Mithras (a Persian god, worshipped in Rome as the god of the sun).

However, the deeper suggestion here is that the Utopians understand all gods to be images of one common truth. (Unsurprisingly, given More's Catholic convictions, this truth sounds like what's endorsed by Catholic theology.) The Utopians apparently find the majority's idea of God most compelling, however, for they are adopting it of their own free will.

He [Utopus] made a decree that it should be lawful for every man to favour and follow what religion he would, and that he might do the best he could to bring other to his opinion, so that he did it peaceably, gently, quietly, and soberly, without hasty and contentious rebuking and inveighing against other.

Related Characters: Raphael Hythloday (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 109

Explanation and Analysis

Hythloday continues to outline the religiousfreedom that marks Utopian society. Not only are all religions allowed, and none discriminated against, but the Utopians also are against violent proselytizing (attempting to convert someone to your religion). Here, we learn that Utopians are free to try and convince one another to convert to a different religion so long as they are respectful and "gentle" in their efforts.

The moment that the conversation turns angry and "contentious," the aggressive party will be punished with exile or bondage. This harsh treatment is, like all things in Utopia, based in practicality. After all, religious tolerance was instituted by Utopus himself when he observed how religious disagreement caused strife among the natives of the island—and was what enabled his conquest of them in the first place. Maintainingthat peace requires that no one be bullied into changing their beliefs.

Thomas More, the man, was a devout Catholic who, during the Reformation, tortured Protestants and approved of burning them at the stake as heretics. It is darkly ironic, then, that his utopian vision should be one in which people who condemn other religions are subject to exile or bondage.

Book 2: Conclusion Quotes

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 commonwealth.

Related Characters: Raphael Hythloday (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 121

Explanation and Analysis

In the concluding section of the text, Hythloday begins explicitlycomparing Utopia to European society. Here, he claims that Utopia is the best commonwealth in the world, and also the only one worthy of the name "commonwealth," as all things are equal in Utopia.

He then goes on to consider other "flourish[ing]" commonwealths, which he feels are ironically named - after all, they are really just conspiracies "of rich men" who exploit the poor "under the name and title of commonwealth."

The main difference between these sham commonwealths and Utopia is private property and the use of money. By getting rid of money, Hythloday argues, Utopians have pulled up evil by its root. Hythloday relates this to Christ's teachings against private property, which he says that European societies are too prideful to follow.

As I cannot agree and consent to all things that he [Hythloday] said...so must I needs confess and grant that many things be in the Utopian weal-public which in our cities I may rather wish for than hope after.

Related Characters: Thomas More (speaker), Raphael Hythloday

Related Themes:

Page Number: 123

Explanation and Analysis

At the very end of the text, More invites Hythloday in for dinner and says that they will discuss and evaluate Utopian society at a later time. Here, More tells us that he does not agree with all of Hythloday's points, but that he does wish for many Utopian features to be realized in European society. This can only be a "wish," however, as More feels that it is deeply unrealistic to hope that these changes will be put into effect.

More's response to Hythloday's account of Utopia is never presented to us, and so all our questions are left unanswered. This ending adds to the sense of the work as a "joke" or a playful satire, but perhaps the suggestion is also that we as readers are responsible for conducting that dialogue among ourselves. The text requires that we reason for ourselves about Utopia, and what system of governing might be best for an ideal society. This is, after all, the first step we all must take before any utopia can become a

reality.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

BOOK 1

Thomas More the character sets the stage for *Utopia* by recounting how he was sent by King Henry VIII of England as an ambassador to the Netherlands, along with several other excellent men. Their mission is to negotiate with a Flemish commission organized by Charles, the King of Castile, concerning the English wool trade. The commissions meet once or twice without arriving at any full agreement. Consequently, the Flemish travel to Brussels for further instructions from their prince, during which time More travels to Antwerp.

More frames Utopia *with an account of a mission that Thomas More, the historical figure, really did undertake, thus adding a sense of reality to the fictional elements of his work. He wants us at once to believe in, and to interrogate the reality of, his discourse on Utopia. That the English mission concerns the wool trade gives a historical context for Hythloday's critique of the wool trade to come.*

While living in Antwerp, More befriends an honest, learned citizen of that city: Peter Giles. More finds Giles's conversation both merry and pleasant, and it makes More feel less homesick to have such an entertaining new friend, even though he's been away from his wife and children for four months at this point.

More's friendship with Giles serves as a model in the text for how people in society should relate to one another, a kind of ideal community in miniature. That More misses his wife reminds us, however, of the practical human needs that impinge on such ideals.

One day, while returning to his house in Antwerp after a church service, More runs into Giles, who is speaking with an old, sunburned, long-bearded, and cloaked stranger from Portugal; this man is named Raphael Hythloday. More takes him to be a mariner. Giles exclaims that he was just about to escort Hythloday to More's lodgings for a meeting, because the old man is well-traveled and knows much about the world, especially foreign peoples and countries. However, Hythloday turns out to be not so much a mariner (though he did travel with Amerigo Vespucci) as a person in quest of knowledge, like the Greek hero Ulysses and the philosopher Plato.

Hythloday is pure invention, but his having sailed with a historical figure, Amerigo Vespucci, lends credibility to his stories. Hythloday's strange appearance suggests how his experiences abroad have transformed him into something of a sage or prophet. He resembles Odysseus in that he has been everywhere in his quest for knowledge, and he resembles Plato in the sense that he not only has broad practical knowledge but also has high theoretical knowledge about the world.

More, Giles, and Hythloday go to More's house and sit in the **garden** where Hythloday tells of his travels. During one voyage, he says, he received Vespucci's permission to stay behind and explore the East for himself. After many days spent crossing scorching deserts and wilderness, Hythloday and his companions came upon well-governed people, cities, and towns. Ships gladly welcomed Hythloday and his companions aboard, and they were consequently able to visit many nearby countries. Hythloday even introduced some sailors to the use of the lodestone, a magnet used in navigation. More, however, suggests that sailors have so much confidence in the lodestone that they become reckless and expose themselves to danger.

In the Biblical tradition, a paradisiacal garden is imagined as surrounding the City of God in Heaven, and it is therefore a fitting location for three virtuous people to contemplate the perfect cities of Utopia. Hythloday's travels took him to the New World, the Americas, by way of sub-equatorial Asia. The lodestone is a cautionary image for the book as a whole: just as the lodestone can help people navigate the sea, so can Utopia *help us navigate the difficulties of governing well; but to become too confident in such a guide is also to court disaster.*

More and Giles are especially curious about how the peoples Hythloday encountered are governed, and they ask him many questions on this point. More is also quick to point out that they don't ask Hythloday any questions about monsters, because monsters, like Scylla from Homer's *Odyssey* and cannibals, are easy to find, whereas people ruled by good and wholesome laws are not. Of all the societies Hythloday presents, however, More is "determined to rehearse only that he told us…of the Utopians" (from the Greek meaning "nowhere").

More the author parodies the genre of the travel narrative throughout his work. Here he pokes fun at people who read about the world for entertainment rather than for insights into how they can better their societies and themselves. He is also making an ironic jab at the princes and aristocracies of Europe: they *are the monsters so easy to find, those that cannibalize their own societies.*

Peter Giles is so impressed by Hythloday that he strongly encourages him to go into the service of a prince as his counselor, for the prince, the nation, and Hythloday's own friends and family would benefit from Hythloday's profound learning and wisdom. Hythloday counters that he has done enough for his friends and family as it is, having long ago given them most of his belongings. As such, he would not "give [himself] in bondage unto kings" on their account. Peter says he does not mean bondage at all; Hythloday could become very wealthy by serving in a king's court. Hythloday, again, has a counter: wealth stands in opposition to his own principles and nature. He values the liberty to follow his own thoughts and pleasures too much to serve a prince.

Hythloday's character is entangled in ambiguities. If his learning and wisdom can't be put into his nation's service, just how valuable is it really? We might also wonder whether it's a touch hypocritical that Hythloday later praises the family-like communities of Utopia while he himself says here that he's done enough for his own family; the Utopians would probably be displeased by such an attitude. More captures such ambiguities nicely in Hythloday's name: "Hythloday" likely means something like "kindler of nonsense," and yet "Raphael" is the Biblical angel who helps mankind understand the ways of God.

More, for his part, encourages Hythloday to go into a prince's service not for wealth but to contribute to the public good. Hythloday responds, first, that he does not possess the ability to fill a prince's head with truth and virtue, because princes are more interested in chivalry, war, and conquest than good governance. Second, counselors prefer the ideas they themselves invent to all others, and therefore attempt to fault the ideas of their peers, no matter how good, which means that their best decrees "'lie unexecuted.'"

Whereas Peter Giles suggests that Hythloday serve a prince out of self-interest, More suggests that he serve a prince out of self-sacrifice. But Hythloday suggests that the whole system of governance in Europe is so corrupt, and that people are so proud, that such self-sacrifice would be in vain anyway. It would be a waste to serve a king, to Hythloday's mind.

More asks Hythloday if he's been to England. Hythloday says he has, and he stayed there for four or five months, shortly after a Cornish rebellion—which was motivated by overtaxation—was bloodily put down in 1497. Hythloday spent much of his time in England in the company of Cardinal John Morton, whom More served as a page in boyhood and whom Hythloday describes as upright, reverent, gentle, wise, and eloquent—an excellent administrator of policy and law.

The circumstances of Hythloday's visit to England are significant: the Cornish rebellion signifies the bloody, wasteful effects of bad governance in general. It is ironic that such atrocities occur in countries governed by people as good as Cardinal Morton—but Hythloday later suggests that even good people working in corrupt systems can't help but fail to do good.

One day, while sitting at Cardinal Morton's table, Hythloday fell into discussion with a cunning lawyer concerning English law. The lawyer praises the rigorous justice executed upon felons and especially thieves at that time, for many were hanged for their crimes and few escaped punishment. Hythloday disagrees: death is "'too extreme and cruel a punishment for theft,'" he says. He also argues that people who resort to thievery are forced into it by having no other way of getting their living. Instead of executing thieves, he says, England should make it so that the thieves can live by honest work instead.

This scene begins a sort of "parable" in which the various characters at Morton's table exemplify what Hythloday sees as the wrongs of European society. The lawyer and Hythloday have two conflicting ideas of justice. The lawyer thinks that justice is the law being effectively enforced, while Hythloday thinks that justice is the organization of a society such that people don't have any need to break the law in the first place. The lawyer's view, in contrast to Hythloday's, seems merciless, inhumane, and ultimately ineffective.

Hythloday claims, moreover, that he's not just referring to people who can't work because they've been maimed and lamed by fighting on behalf of their nation in the wars. He is referring to people who can't work for more commonplace reasons. First, Hythloday says, there are a great number of idle gentlemen who live by exploitatively raising their tenants' rent and who hire serving men to proudly show off the wealth of their estates. But these serving men never learn any craft, and they become as idle as their lords.

Hythloday's critique is directed at the feudal structure of English society, where the rich who own property live extravagantly by the sweat of their workers' brows. Earlier in feudal England, landlords maintained private armies, but by More's time this practice had largely diminished into the maintenance of serving men more for the sake of social prestige than for warfare.

Hythloday continues: once these serving men's lords die, or once they themselves fall ill and are thrust out to get their living independently, serving men have no choice but to "'manfully play the thieves,'" lest they starve. What choice do they have? After being thrust out, the men wear their clothes threadbare and become sickly, which makes it unlikely that another master will take them into service. Moreover, farmers dare not put them to work either, knowing that such men do not have the temperament or discipline to do hard work for small wages.

Many humanists like More and Erasmus (More's friend) argued against feudalism as irrational, exploitative, and unchristian. Hythloday mounts just such an argument here. Notice that it is the pride and rapacious self-satisfaction of the landlords which breeds idleness among the lower classes of society—Hythloday will later indict pride specifically as the root of all evil. The Utopians, in contrast to the English, train everyone in useful crafts.

The lawyer responds that England should cherish these pampered, out-of-work serving men, for they are stouter and more courageous than craftsmen and farmers tend to be, and they make up the whole strength of the English army as such. Hythloday agrees that, when such out-of-work serving men don't become thieves, they do tend to become soldiers, but he finds it troubling that England must cherish its thieves for war's sake.

The lawyer cannot or will not imagine society organized in any other way than it presently is, and so he praises the army for solving the problem of idleness (although he doesn't respond at all to Hythloday's point that England hangs so many thieves because it breeds so many thieves). The more imaginative Hythloday understands the army to be an even greater evil than the problem it supposedly solves.

Moreover, Hythloday observes that in all nations, but especially in France, having a standing army in peacetime is bad policy. Nations don't like sending unpracticed soldiers into battle, and so they provide practice by seeking out unnecessary wars. Standing armies of mercenaries or slaves also have a history of turning against the countries that support them. Finally, as France's military record in wars with England would suggest, practiced soldiers don't even have an advantage over unpracticed ones. Hythloday thinks that men who have a craft tend to be stouter and sturdier than gentlemen's serving men who are softened by idleness anyway.

The course of Hythloday's argument suggests that a few social arrangements, like landlords keeping serving men, cause a huge host of widespread evils to arise. The tolerance of pride corrupts English society absolutely. His argument also suggests how the lawyer's reflex patriotism is ironically connected to his nation's deficiencies, for the lawyer praises the English army even though standing armies, it would seem, pose more dangers to a country than they deter.

Hythloday introduces a second cause of thievery in England. For the sake of reaping huge profits in the wool trade, noblemen, gentlemen, and even churchmen tear down houses and towns to pasture their sheep on what could otherwise be farmland, thereby making it impossible for people to live on and work the land. The farmers who are cheated or oppressed out of their land often get nothing for it, or for their household stuff. After wandering the country and spending all they have, they inevitably turn to theft, having no other way to get their living, and then they are hanged. Those who beg instead are often imprisoned; in any case, they can't contribute to the public good either.

In a self-interested effort to maximize their own profits, noblemen, gentlemen, and churchmen harm the society of which they're part, which is especially egregious of the churchmen, for their predatory actions directly cut against Christian teachings. Keep in mind that More the character is in the Netherlands to promote the English wool trade, which colors Hythloday's critique here with ambiguity: if More the man buys into what Hythloday is saying, it would seem that he values public service over his own principles.

The decay of farming causes yet other problems, in Hythloday's account: food shortages and a spike in the price of wool, which makes it so that poor people can no longer afford to buy wool and make cloth from it. This problem was further exacerbated, Hythloday recalls, by the death of many English sheep due to an epidemic of sheep rot, which only made wool harder to get. This, again, results in people being forced out of work into idleness, and only a few greedy people profit. Hythloday also foresees similar problems arising when "utter covetousness" leads noblemen and gentlemen to exploit the cattle industry as they've already done with the sheep industry.

Hythloday is methodical in making his case: after showing how the English wool trade causes idleness even in the best of times, he now shows how disastrous the wool trade can be in times of emergency. He also suggests that the rapacity of the upper classes is boundless, when he foresees the exploitation of the cattle industry. His point is that small evils, when tolerated, grow into very big evils. Perhaps he values Utopian society so highly because it tolerates no pride or self-interest.

Making matters even worse, according to Hythloday, is the fact that beggary and poverty are often accompanied by debauched drinking, decadent excess, the soliciting of prostitutes, and gambling among those not reduced to poverty, like serving men, craftsmen, and farmers. Hythloday calls for a law that will force the people who despoiled farmland to restore it, and he calls for an end to idleness. Until these problems are solved, he says, justice will be mere show and not profitable, and children will be brought up in sin. A society should not make thieves and then punish them cruelly, Hythloday concludes.

Legal and economic conditions have more than just legal or economic consequences: bad laws and policies also lead, perhaps most significantly, to the degeneracy of a society, to wasteful entertainment and vicious character. Notice that Hythloday does not blame individuals for the state of England; he blames the organization of society as a whole. In this sense, we are all responsible for our neighbors' actions.

The lawyer tediously claims he will answer Hythloday, promising to rehearse each of his points in order and then counter all of Hythloday's arguments. However, Cardinal Morton cuts him off: he doesn't want to listen to such verbosity, and would rather the lawyer save his answer for later.

The lawyer's tedious opening suggests that his own arguments come not from wisdom like Hythloday's, but from pride: he likes to hear himself talk. But we must also wonder whether Cardinal Morton found Hythloday's speech to be too long.

Instead, Cardinal Morton asks Hythloday how he thinks thieves should be punished, if not by death. Hythloday responds that a man's life is worth more than money, that cruel laws disproportionate to the crime they're punishing should not be tolerated, and that man's law ought not to go against God's commandment against killing insofar as this is possible, lest man usurp God's power. Not even Moses's sharp law punished theft with death, Hythloday points out. Moreover, thieves who know they'll be hanged for thieving and murder alike are more likely to kill their witnesses, such that the death penalty for theft perversely incentivizes murder.

Instead of directly answering the Cardinal's question, Hythloday begins by critiquing the death penalty in general. He gives moral, legal, religious, and rational arguments for his position, and even plays on anti-Semitism by favorably comparing the laws of Moses to English law (the insinuation is that Christians should be more merciful than Jews). An irony underlying these arguments is that More the man would go on to approve the deaths of many Protestants as punishment for heresy in the years to come.

Hythloday then turns to how thieves should be punished. He points out that the Romans punished thieves and other criminals by forcing them to serve the public good in stone quarries and mines. Hythloday says that the (fictional) people called the Polylerites (from the Greek meaning "nonsensical people"), whose fertile land is ringed in by mountains, punish thieves by forcing them to pay restitution to the victims of their crimes, and also by forcing them to become common laborers, or serving men. These laborers, humanely treated, are not imprisoned or bound unless they refuse to work, in which case they are also whipped.

Hythloday sees the death penalty, fundamentally, as a waste of human potential. He would rather make offenders useful, as slaves. We might find this cold or scandalous, but it is part and parcel of his program of eliminating idleness and waste. Note that the Polylerites are not altogether humane: they are willing to resort to bodily punishment. We might wonder whether a society that can bring itself to treat people like animals is altogether admirable, no matter how "efficient" it might be.

Furthermore, Hythloday says, the serving men among the Polylerites are distinguished from other citizens by the common color of their clothes and the fact that the tip of one of their ears is cut off. For them to receive money or weapons is death, for the receiver and giver alike; for a serving man to throw away his distinct clothes or to run away is likewise death. For a free man to counsel a serving man to run away is bondage; for a serving man to do so, death. Those who reveal the plots of a runaway receive freedom or money, depending on whether they're serving men or freemen, respectively. It is always better for a runaway to repent and turn back than to "go forward in their evil purpose." Serving men can also achieve freedom through hard work and patience.

Hythloday brings up the Polylerites as an example of people who have done away with the death penalty, but it soon becomes clear that they just "displace it, rendering it less visible," in the words of one critic. It may be More the author's point here that well-intentioned, idealistic principles—let's abolish the death penalty—cannot be practically institutionalized; we must always compromise our principles if society is to function. Still, the Polylerites do seem more humane than the English, despite their inconsistencies.

Hythloday concludes that the Polylerites' treatment of thieves is much more humane than England's. He thinks that society can be so organized that even bad people can't help but to do good. The lawyer at once counters that, were England to do as the Polylerites do, the nation would fall into danger; he says no more, but everyone present agrees with him except Cardinal Morton. The Cardinal says proof is needed to decide either way, but he is sympathetic to Hythloday's proposal and adds that forcing even vagabonds into labor might benefit society. Everyone at the table then praises what Hythloday had said; the highest praise, however, is reserved for the Cardinal's novel point about vagabonds.

The lawyer responds to Hythloday's nuanced argument with out-of-hand dismissal. Even though he gives no reasoning, everyone ironically agrees with him at once. This suggests that Hythloday is right in thinking that counselors think about arguments self-interestedly, not rationally. When Cardinal Morton announces his sympathy to Hythloday's case, however, all present contradict what they said moments ago to praise him—mere flattery indeed. An idea is praised not for its merit but for its maker.

Hythloday then tells More and Giles about a joker at Cardinal Morton's table who tried to say witty things as a professional fool might, but more often than not his jokes were so belabored and out of sync with the conversation that people ended up laughing at him more than at his jokes. Once in a while, however, the joker did succeed in saying something very witty and reasonable indeed.

The joker makes jokes for the sake of drawing attention to himself, not for the sake of forming good law and policy. However, his playful spirit seems preferable, in More's eyes, to the deceptions of other counselors, for playfulness at least yields reason occasionally, and does little harm. If Utopia *is one big literary hoax, perhaps its value is similar to the joker's.*

One person at Cardinal Morton's table says that, thanks to the proposals of Hythloday and the Cardinal, both thieves and vagabonds are taken care of in England—all that remains is to make provisions for the sick and old who have fallen into beggary. The joker proposes that beggars be forced into monasteries and convents and made into lay brethren and nuns. The Cardinal smiles at this joke, but others at the table uncritically accept the proposal in earnest. A usually very serious friar jests that, now that the joker has made provisions for beggars, he must make provisions for friars, too. The joker retorts that the Cardinal's provision for vagabonds (putting them to work) applies to friars as well, for friars "'be the veriest vagabonds that be,'" in the joker's words.

It is a dark irony that even so good a leader as Cardinal Morton should have for his tablemates not only flatterers but people so insensitive to the merit of ideas, so eager to please their betters, that they accept jokes for earnest proposals. Or is the joker's proposal not so silly as it seems? One critic argues that the joker is here making a virtuous Christian proposal, and that it is only because society is so corrupt that his proposal appears to be a joke. Then again, perhaps More the author is suggesting that our desire for mere entertainment, like the joker's jokes, debases intellectual exchange.

The joker's mockery of friars is too much for the friar to bear, and he is enraged. He chides, scolds, and curses the joker. The joker scoffs very entertainingly and advises the friar to follow the scripture in being patient. The friar maintains that he is angry but that he is not sinning. Cardinal Morton calms the friar and tells him not to debase his intelligence by arguing with a fool. The friar praises the Cardinal's wisdom, but nonetheless insinuates that the joker could be excommunicated for his mockery. The Cardinal, seeing that the argument will not end, sends the fool away, changes the subject, and soon after dismisses all his company. Hythloday says that this story suggests how little courtiers would value his counsel.

The friar's anger is a symptom of his pride: he takes even a well-meaning joke as an insult. Moreover, his reference to scripture rings hollow as soon as he insinuates that the joker could be excommunicated, or kicked out of the Church, for his mockery. Ironically, in Utopia, it is the friar who would run the risk of exile for causing trouble on religious grounds. In any case, as so often happens, a trivial quarrel puts an end to intellectual exchange here. Hythloday's ideals would fall on deaf ears in such an environment.

Hythloday pardons himself for telling Thomas More and Peter Giles such a long tale. He says he did so only because it seemed as though his companions wanted to hear it all. He points out that all present at Cardinal Morton's table that day disagreed with his views on punishment until the Cardinal approved them, which suggests that those men are impudent flatterers, even to the point of accepting smiled-on jokes for earnest proposals.

Earlier, Cardinal More silenced the lawyer for verbosity; ironically, however, it is Hythloday who talks almost non-stop in Utopia, *even to the point of apologizing for it. As much as Hythloday is More's mouthpiece, he is also a target of satire. He is overly systematic in his arguments and he stifles true dialogue—both things humanists like More fought against.*

More thanks Hythloday for his tale, which was especially pleasant for him because he served Cardinal Morton in his boyhood. More confesses that he hasn't changed his mind on one point, however: he believes that if Hythloday serves as the counselor of a prince, he will greatly benefit his nation, which is nothing more than a good man's duty. Only when philosophers are kings or the counselors of kings will society become perfect, as Plato says.

More the man really did serve in Cardinal Morton's household. By interspersing fact in his fiction, he is teasing us: the possible and the ideal are so close and yet so far, as is Utopia from our world. Hythloday's story about his night at Cardinal Morton's does not persuade More that good counselors are always ineffective—after all, how could Hythloday expect to effect change in policy immediately over a casual conversation?

Hythloday does not agree with More. He says that, unless kings themselves study philosophy seriously, they will not listen to the counsel of philosophers. He imagines helping an empire-building French king like Charles the VIII or Louis the VII wage his wars of conquest. All his fellow counselors would propose cunning ways of winning battles, forging alliances, holding old territory, and gaining new territory. And if he, Hythloday, were to suggest that the king cease his wars of conquest and focus on domestic matters, what would happen?

Hythloday thinks that, unless leaders study philosophy, they won't be open to reason concerning what goals a good commonwealth should set for itself. Instead they will do what comes naturally, from pride and greed: they will go to war to take what isn't theirs. Such a prince can't be reasoned with, Hythloday fears, and a good counselor's ideals will never be realized.

Hythloday even has an example in mind for his hypothetical French king to follow, which he learned from a (fictional) people called the Achorians (Greek for "those who live in a place that does not exist"), neighbors of the Utopians. The Achorian king conquered a new kingdom, but had a harder time keeping it than he did in getting it because of rebellion. The Achorians lost money and blood in battle, and in peace many were so corrupted by their warlike ways that they had developed "wicked manners" and criminal tendencies. The Achorians forced their king to choose one kingdom to govern, because in governing both he was merely half a king. So it was that he contented himself with his old kingdom.

The story about the Achorians is like Utopia *in miniature: both are cautionary models for good governance. However, Hythloday is confident, as is More, that the hypothetical French king would dismiss the story and continue to pursue his warlike ways. This invites the following question: If kings won't listen to reason and follow good models anyway, why compose a book like* Utopia *in the first place? Won't it just fall on deaf ears? Hythloday and More the character might think that it will, but More the author perhaps thinks otherwise.*

Hythloday returns to his earlier question: how would the hypothetical French king receive his counsel, that he should cease his wars of conquest and not meddle with other kingdoms? More concedes the king would not be grateful for such advice.

Hythloday suggests that bad leaders only want to be told what affirms their beliefs and prejudices. This is consistent with his fear that people heed only their own thoughts.

Hythloday then imagines what cunning, vicious things his fellow counselors might advise the king to do: inflate the currency; pretend to go to war to raise money; renew old, outdated laws to collect fines; impose fines for certain practices and sell licenses to exempt people from the fines; etc. All the counselors agree on one thing: as the rich Roman Crassus says, a prince who must maintain an army can never have enough **gold**, and a prince can never do an injustice, because all men are his already. Poverty, such counselors say, makes people too poor to behave badly or rebel. And how would the king receive Hythloday's counsel then, if Hythloday advised that he should care more about the wealth of his people than about his own wealth? A shepherd's duty, Hythloday says, is to feed his sheep rather than himself.

The counselors Hythloday imagines are all intelligent, shrewd people, but when they aren't guided by reason and virtue their intelligence only leads to exploitation and evil. Against the teachings of Christ, who holds that all people are equal as God's children, the counselors affirm that "might makes right." Hythloday, by contrast, thinks of a leader not as the owner of, but as the nurturer of, his or her people. Christ, it should be added, is often imagined as the "good shepherd."

Hythloday goes on to say that poverty is not the mother of peace so much as it is of conflict, arguing, and fighting, as the behavior of beggars would suggest. After all, people who are not content are also those most desirous for change, and people who have nothing to lose are likelier to resort to violence. Besides, it is beneath the dignity of a king to rule over beggars—this would be fitter work for a mere jailer. A king who cannot rule except by harming his subjects is not fit to rule at all; he would do better to renounce bad pleasures and pride.

The counselors Hythloday imagines think that poor people will be too weak to cause trouble in society. Hythloday gives counterexamples here to suggest otherwise: all revolutions begin in dissatisfaction, he says. Irrational princes who do everything they can to control their people will ironically bring about revolutions in their realm.

Hythloday introduces a law of the (fictional) people called the Macarians (from the Greek meaning "happy people"). The Macarians do not permit their king to have more than a thousand pounds of **gold** or silver in his treasury, and by this measure they make sure that he enriches his country and not himself. A thousand pound of gold or silver is enough to support the king in putting down a rebellion, but not enough to encourage him to steal from his subjects.

Hythloday's critique of private property as a motivator of wrongdoing foreshadows the fact that Utopian society has abolished private property altogether. When people have no outlet for selfishness, they serve the public good as a matter of course, to Hythloday's mind. More's jokes also continue here, as he further satirizes the "travel narrative" with more invented peoples whose very names give away their non-existence—and undercut the way Hythloday idealizes them.

Hythloday concludes, at last, that his counsel could only fall on deaf ears in a king's court, and Thomas More now agrees with him. More says that "school philosophy" is not profitable or palatable to people who have already made up their minds, even if it's "not unpleasant" among friends. Hythloday agrees that school philosophy has no place in the consultations of princes.

The ideals generated by "school philosophy" (as More defines academic philosophy divorced from the context of real life) are not practical in Europe as it is, Hythloday and More agree. However, the two men leave open the possibility that in a better world, where people are open-minded and interested in the public good, school philosophy does have a place in governance.

More does say, however, that philosophy does have a part to play in governance, although it must know its place and cannot digress. He means that philosophy which is craftily and wittily poured into the unreceptive ears of its audience to turn the "very bad" into the "merely bad"—if not the good. Not until all men are good, More says, can all be well—and some men will be bad a while yet.

More points out that school philosophy need not be presented in an overly systematic way. It can be made entertaining—just as Utopia *presents philosophical ideas in the entertaining form of the travel narrative. If the world can't be perfect, at least it can be better than it is.*

Hythloday responds that playing such a crafty counselor would just make him as bad as everyone else. If he wants to speak truly, he must resort to "school philosophy," and he does not know whether the philosopher can speak a falsehood and still be a philosopher. Hythloday does not want to play along with evil and wink at that which Christ forbids; he does not want ethics to be bent to accommodate vice. If he disagrees with a king's counselors, no one will listen to him; and if he agrees with them, he will only help to further their madness and allow bad counsels and decrees to pass as good. He will either be denounced as a traitor, be corrupted himself, or be held accountable for the evils of others.

In some ways, Utopia *is a way of presenting philosophical ideals in such a way as to avoid the pitfalls Hythloday points out here. The book, unlike a human counselor, cannot be corrupted, nor can it be punished for what it does or does not counsel. The idea that a good book should have as its ideal audience the receptive prince is common in Renaissance writings.*

Hythloday speculates that no nation with private property or money can ever be justly governed. This reminds him of the Utopians, who have very few laws and share all resources collectively, but whose society is so well organized that everyone thrives. Just as Plato foresees in his *Republic*, because the Utopians have abolished private property, everyone is equal. No wicked, ravenous rich people prey on the poor, and no magistrates can be bought with bribes or gifts. Until private property is abolished in a society, Hythloday says, any kind of "cure" will just cause sickness somewhere else in a nation's political body.

As More the character suggests later, Hythloday never gives an argument for his claim that private property necessarily corrupts society—he only demonstrates that it can *do so. Can't people own property in private and yet also be dedicated to the public good? Hythloday's call for the abolition of private property ironically makes the realization of a utopia on earth even more distant, because it entails so radical and impractical a change.*

More questions Hythloday as to whether or not people will really work at all without the incentive of personal gain—won't they be too confident in other people's industry and so lazily excuse themselves from labor? Hythloday is not surprised by this question, but says that, had More lived in Utopia as he had for more than five years, More would grant that no people are as well-ordered as the Utopians themselves.

Characteristically, Hythloday does not directly answer More's question: you have to see Utopia to believe it, he essentially says. In what is a challenging paradox, however, we have to suspend our disbelief in Utopia before we can see it at all—and even then, as its name suggests, it is still "nowhere."

Peter Giles says it's hard for him to believe that this is so, given that the people in Europe are just as witty as others and that their nations are even more ancient and experienced in governance than the Utopians'. Hythloday responds that there were cities in Utopia before there were people in the Netherlands. He also says that, while Europeans may surpass the Utopians in wit, the Utopians are superior in study and work ethic.

To help us suspend our disbelief in a perfect commonwealth, More the author invents an elaborate historical backstory for his island. Hythloday believes that wit can be used for good and evil, and that more often than not it is used for evil. Learning and hard work, in contrast, he associates with the good.

To demonstrate the Utopians' excellence, Hythloday tells a story. According to the Utopian chronicles, some 1,200 years ago certain Romans and Egyptians washed up on Utopian shores after their ship was destroyed in a storm. The Utopians then studiously and profitably mastered all the crafts and sciences these people could transmit. Hythloday doubts that Europeans could adopt Utopian know-how as readily. This is why, he says, Utopia is governed so much more wisely than Europe, though the Europeans are not inferior in intelligence or resources to the Utopians.

As useful as they are, the crafts and sciences of the Greeks and Romans certainly didn't enable those peoples to perfect the organization of their societies. Indeed, Hythloday's story suggests that we have not yet perfected the only science that really matters: the science of governing well and enabling as many people to thrive in happiness as possible. This science, however, is also the hardest to adopt.

Thomas More asks Hythloday to describe the **island** of Utopia in great detail, from its geography to its cities to its people to its customs to its laws. Hythloday gladly agrees, but says that the telling will require leisure. The men consequently agree to go into More's house for dinner, after which they return to the **garden** and sit. Hythloday thinks in silence for a while, then proceeds to tell More and Peter Giles all about Utopia.

More's household is a microcosm of the good community: it is a place of friendship, plentiful food, harmonious cohabitation with nature (as symbolized by the garden), and serious but friendly philosophical discussion. In no other environment are the conditions of Utopia so present—or so far from the ears of kings and counselors.

BOOK 2: DISCOURSE ON UTOPIA

Hythloday begins his discourse on the **island** of Utopia by describing its geography. The island itself is about 200 miles broad and 500 miles long, in roughly the shape of a crescent. Between its corners the sea calmly runs in, which profitably provides ships with access to every part of the land. However, the corners of the island are rocky and dangerous for ships to access. This means the Utopians need only one military post for defense, strategically located upon a great rock in the sea. The Utopians themselves would struggle to sail to their island were it not for certain landmarks on the shore. The coasts of Utopia are so naturally protected that a few defenders can drive back armies.

Utopia's geography is, from one perspective, a metaphor for Utopian society itself. It is difficult to access unless you already know the way, but once you're there, it is easy to defend. In other words, it is difficult to establish a utopia, but once a utopia has been established, it won't be readily lost or corrupted. But if you need to know the way to Utopia before you can arrive there, is it even really possible to arrive at all?

Utopia was not always an **island**, Hythloday says, nor was it always called Utopia. Its first name was Abraxa, perhaps meaning "Holy Name," "without breeches," or "waterless." Utopus, the conqueror of the place and the founder of Utopia itself, civilized the natives of Abraxa and had them, along with his own soldiers, cut up and dig away the fifteen miles of ground that connected Utopia to the mainland. Many hands on the project made light work, and so Utopia was born as an island.

It is perhaps surprising to learn that Utopus formed his ideal society only after conquering another people—although this may be metaphorical, meaning that our hearts must submit to the utopian spirit before we can build a utopia. Utopus presumably formed the island of Utopia to protect his ideal society from external corruptions. This purposeful disconnection makes it easier for a utopia to develop, but it also renders it unrelatable to the outside world, and divorced from many of the historical troubles that real societies must deal with.

There are fifty-four large and fair cities in Utopia, each with a jurisdiction of at least twenty miles, all alike in language, customs, institutions, and laws. They are all built to be as identical as possible. The closest cities are miles away from one another, but each is within a day's walk from the next. The centermost city, Amaurote ("dim city"), is on account of its position taken for the capital. Every year, three old, wise, and experienced men come from every city to Amaurote to debate "the common matters of the land." No city desires to expand, because the Utopians consider themselves not so much owners as the good husbands of their land.

The fact that all cities in Utopia are virtually identical suggests that uniformity is required in a commonwealth for the public good to be served. Amaurote is also a shadowy copy of More's London. Far from being "nowhere" for More's contemporary readers, Utopia would have seemed strangely familiar. Unlike the Europeans who turn farmable land to pasture, the Utopians don't exploit but cultivate their land. This idea is central to many of Hythloday's arguments, despite More's connection to the wool trade.

In the countryside are houses, farms, and farm implements. Here the Utopians live together in families of at least forty people, along with two bondmen, or slaves. A wise man and woman govern over each household, and every group of thirty families is governed by a magistrate called a Philarch (from the Greek meaning "head of the group" or "loving ruler").

Farm labor is the cornerstone of Utopian society. It reflects the people's rigorous work ethic, their down-to-earth practicality, and their harmonious relationship with the natural world. As the family is the nucleus of Utopian society, so too does Utopia resemble one big family.

Every year, each family sends twenty Utopians who have been working the farms for the past two years to the cities, and twenty fresh workers are sent from the cities to take their place, to be taught country work by people who have already been there for a year. This system ensures that the Utopians always have expertise in farming, which protects against food shortages caused by ignorance. This system also prevents people from becoming overworked, although many Utopians enjoy farming so much that they choose to stay beyond their required two years.

The Utopians highly value equality: there are no idle landlords here as in Europe, for here everyone farms. Notice that the island of Utopia is not imagined to be some perfect pastoral world devoid of natural disasters; the Utopians just prepare for natural disasters, like food shortages, more rigorously and thoroughly than their European counterparts do.

The duties of people in the countryside include plowing and tilling the ground, breeding cattle, and chopping wood, which they carry to the city both by land or water, whatever is most convenient. The Utopians also breed many, many chickens, and in a strange way: instead of letting the hens sit on and incubate their eggs, the Utopians keep the eggs in "a certain equal heat." This makes it so that, when the chicks hatch, they consider the people who feed them to be their mothers, and even follow them around. The Utopians raise horses only to train their youths in riding and combat. Oxen, in contrast, do all of the plowing and drawing, because they can endure more labor and pain than horses, and because they are healthier, cheaper, and good to eat.

Unlike later utopias, More's does not rely on fantastic technological progress. The people in Utopia do all the work an English peasant would be expected to do, only in healthier, more communal conditions. The Utopians, who value compassion, do not raise their farm animals in grisly, miserable captivity, but rather treat them with respect, even as a mother would treat her child. The horse is historically an animal of the aristocracy and of warfare; this perhaps explains the Utopians' preference for the more practical, useful ox.

The Utopians sow corn only for bread, and they drink either wine, cider, or water. They know exactly how much food each city needs, yet they cultivate a surplus of corn and cattle to give to their neighbors. When the people in the country need something not found among them, they fetch it from town for free. The Utopians all gather in town once a month on the holy day. During the harvest, the Philarchs tell the city magistrates how many laborers need to be sent to them out of the city, and these are readily dispatched so that the harvest work takes little more than one good day.

The Utopians are a people of good, honest, pleasure, and so they don't abstain altogether from alcoholic beverages like wine. Although physically isolated from the outside world, they are connected to it in the form of generosity. They are constitutionally incapable of waste, and so any surplus is always put to good use. An important principle in Utopia is that, when everyone works, the work goes quickly.

BOOK 2: OF THEIR TOWNS, PARTICULARLY OF AMAUROTE

The cities of Utopia are almost identical, Hythloday says: if you know one, you know them all. Amaurote seems to be the worthiest of them, however, because the council house, a capitol of sorts, is located there. Arranged almost in a square, this city stands on a hill that runs for two miles down to the river of Anyder (from the Greek meaning "without water"); the city has a length a little greater than two miles. The Anyder has for its source a little spring eighty miles above Amaurote, and sixty miles beyond the city the river drains into the ocean. The water of the Anyder ebbs and flows every six hours, so that it is fresh and mostly salty in turns.

The uniformity of cities in Utopia reflects the civic virtue cultivated among the people. As their cities are the same, so are their values and beliefs (and Hythloday seems to make no room for the idea that variety and diversity could be good things in themselves). That the capital of Utopia is centrally located further reflects the Utopian commitment to equality and efficiency. Similar to Amaurote, London is situated on a hill and runs down to a river, the Thames. More the author is suggesting that Utopia is, in a spiritual sense, right under our feet—Amaurote is a "shadowy" potential version of London itself.

Another, smaller river, fenced in by the Utopians at its source to protect it from invaders, also runs through Amaurote, conveyed by brick channels. Where that water cannot reach, the Utopians use cisterns to gather rainwater. High, thick stone walls, loaded with defensive turrets and bulwarks, surround the city. Around three sides of Amaurote, furthermore, is a deep, broad, dry ditch full of bushes and thorns. On the fourth side the river itself acts like a ditch.

The Utopians wisely derive as much usefulness as they can out of their natural environment, but they never shy away from doing hard work. Given that Utopia is so hard to reach, and that it is so generous with its neighbors, we might wonder why its cities are so strongly fortified. Better safe than sorry, perhaps.

The streets of Amaurote are conveniently wide—some twenty feet wide—and well sheltered from wind. Gorgeous houses line them in gapless rows. In the back of every house is a **garden**. Each house has a front door to the street and a back door to the garden. These doors are never locked or bolted, so that any citizen can, when they please, freely enter any other citizen's house. Every ten years the Utopians randomly change houses.

As we would expect, Utopia's cities are rationally and practically designed, not built helter-skelter like many European cities. More the author borrows the detail of the unlocked doors from Plato's Republic. *This idea reflects the Utopians' absolute commitment to collective ownership of all resources.*

The Utopians care for their **gardens** meticulously, and they grow vineyards, various fruits, herbs, and flowers. They do so out of pleasure and also in friendly competition with their neighbors. There is nothing so useful and pleasant as these gardens in Utopia, which is perhaps why Utopus dedicated himself to taking care of them when he founded the nation. This great founder laid out the city in its current configuration, but he left its beautification to future generations.

In Utopia, *the garden is a symbol for human work and desire imposed onto, and in harmony with, the natural world. The Utopians live in a world much more similar to the Biblical Paradise, the Garden of Eden, than do their European counterparts. Note Utopus's focus on practical matters like city layout over beautification—there seems to be no room for art for art's sake in Utopia.*

Indeed, chronicles have been written since the **island**'s founding 1,760 years ago, and these show that the houses in Utopia were at first low and homely like poor shepherds' houses, made of mud and straw. But now the houses are gorgeous, with three stories, built of stone, plastering, or brick. The roofs are made of cheap, fireproof plaster that also resists violent weather well. Glass and linen cloth dipped in oil or amber keep the wind out of the windows.

Utopia was not always ideal in its form. Rome was not built in a day, as the saying goes, and neither was Utopia. Realizing the ideal takes time, but before the ideal can be realized it must be shared. The Utopians are a people of pleasure, and part of that means creating not only a functional but also a beautiful environment (so long as that beauty is also functional, and doesn't cause any inequality in the society).

BOOK 2: OF THEIR MAGISTRATES

As has been said, Hythloday continues, every group of thirty families or farms in Utopia annually elects an officer to represent them; this officer or magistrate is called a Philarch (formerly known as a Syphogrant, perhaps from the Greek meaning "wise old ruler of the pigsty"). In turn, every ten Philarchs is under a magistrate called the Archphilarch (formerly known as the Tranibore).

Unlike monarchs and magistrates in More's Europe, the magistrates in Utopia are elected by the people, for the people. This is a democratic institutionalization of the Utopian ideals of equality and civic virtue. In a notable contrast, leaders in Plato's Republic *are* not *elected by the people.*

Concerning the election of the chief magistrate of the city (whom we'll call the Prince, even though he is not a monarch), all the Philarchs, who number 200, first swear to choose the best candidate; then they secretly vote for one of the four candidates whose names are put forward by the people in each quarter of the city, one name per quarter. The Prince governs for a lifetime unless he is deposed on suspicion of tyranny. (We later learn that the Utopians also call the Prince "Barzanes," of unknown derivation, and "Ademus," from the Greek meaning "without people"). The Archphilarchs are chosen annually, but are rarely changed out. All other magistrates serve terms of one year.

Although swearing to choose the best candidate may seem like a mere formality, it is part of the Utopians' commitment to advancing the commonwealth's interests over their own individual interests. No prejudice or nepotism or personal enmity should have a place in electing government officials. That the Archphilarchs are rarely changed out suggests how consistently Utopia produces learned people of excellence, and how happy the people are with their representatives.

Every three days the Archphilarchs meet with the Prince to discuss the state of the commonwealth, including any problems among the people, though these seldom arise. The Archphilarchs bring with them two Philarchs, a new couple every day. Nothing can be confirmed and ratified in the commonwealth unless it has been debated for three days in the council. Magistrates who hold consultations about the commonwealth outside of the council or the place of the common election are sentenced to death. This prevents magistrates from conspiring together to bring about tyranny.

The Utopians' policies concerning their magistrates are designed to distribute information, influence, and experience equally among the Philarchs, as well as to ensure that the people's voice is heard throughout the decision-making process. We might think that the death penalty is disproportionate to the crime of merely consulting about the commonwealth privately, but this also shows just how vital transparency and equality are to the Utopians.

Matters of great importance must be disclosed to the Philarchs, who then consult with their families. Sometimes such matters are brought before the council of the whole **island**. Another custom of the council is to not debate a matter on the day it is proposed, but to wait till the next meeting. This prevents magistrates from developing rash prejudices, and gives them time to think before speaking.

The Utopians are supremely democratic: decision-makers must *meet with the public concerning important matters (this is not even the case in a democracy like the United States). However, we might wonder if decisions can be made in a timely fashion within such a system, and it's hard to imagine it working in a nation of any great size.*

BOOK 2: OF THEIR TRADES, AND MANNER OF LIFE

Hythloday now discusses the work done in Utopia. As has been said, everyone develops expertise, both theoretical and practical, in farming. In addition, every Utopian learns his or her own proper craft, be it clothworking, masonry, metalworking, or carpentry. (The Utopians have no need for any other occupations.) Hythloday includes a brief digression here about apparel: the Utopians all wear attractive, comfortable, flexible garments of the same fashion, distinguished only by gender and marital status, to minimize the number of workmen they need.

Equality in labor creates plenty, and so all Utopians are trained to labor. Moreover, because the Utopians have abolished private property, they (supposedly) have no interest in luxury goods, and therefore they have no need for occupations other than those that serve essential functions. Note that this does not imply the absence of beauty or art in Utopia—their houses and churches are gorgeous, and they love music—but there seems to be no "art for art's sake," and such things are meant primarily as a distracting pleasure, not a way of life valuable in itself.

All citizens, men and women, must learn a craft. The women, being less physically strong, tend to work with cloth. The men take up "the more laboursome" crafts, and each is usually brought up in his father's craft. But people are free to learn the craft they find most appealing, and they can even to learn a second craft after the first if they so desire. When someone has learned two crafts, they can do whichever they please unless the city has more need of one than the other.

Although the Utopians value uniformity, they are also accommodating of individual aptitude and preference. People are not treated like ants in Utopia, but are free to work at the craft they prefer. That being said, they must *work, and the needs of the community always override individual preference.*

Keeping people diligently at their tasks is almost the only office of the Philarchs. So that people do not exhaust themselves working like beasts, they are only required to work six hours every twenty-four-hour day, three before lunch and three after, until dinner. Utopians go to bed around eight o' clock in the evening and sleep for eight hours.

The Philarchs are like the parents of the families they govern over. Although Hythloday claims the Utopians only work six hours a day, the critic Stephen Greenblatt argues that this figure is a gross underestimation given all the work Utopians must do.

All the time that is not spent at work, sleep, or eating the Utopians may spend as they please. They can attend the daily lectures open to the educated and general public alike, listen to music and dance, or play virtuous games (no gambling, naturally, in Utopia), including a chess-like game and a didactic game (of More's invention) where vices fight with virtues.

The Utopians work only as much as is necessary, and this gives them time to rest and savor life. However, their leisure activities are no more idle than their daily labor. The Utopians give their free time to pleasurably bettering their minds and character.

Even though the Utopians work only six hours a day, they complete all the work necessary for a healthy, happy life. This is because there are no idle serving men here, no idle women, no idle priests, no idle landowners, and no idle able-bodied beggars. Also, because there is no money in Utopia, people don't work at vain and superfluous occupations, and they don't waste their money on bad, dishonest pleasures. If everyone in society worked hard and productively, Hythloday says, no one would be overworked.

Hythloday contrasts the ideal, yet also strictly down-to-earth work ethic of the Utopians with European idleness and wastefulness—things made possible by money and private property. The Utopians work less, as a whole, because all *of them work.*

In Utopia, only 500 people are exempt from labor, including the Philarchs. But not even these magistrates live idly: they labor anyway so that "their example [may] provoke others to work." Furthermore, those whom the people have excused from labor to learn can be plucked back to the company of the workers if they prove unsatisfactory. Many craftsmen, for their part, become so learned in their spare time that they are promoted to the company of the "learned" (educated). All ambassadors and magistrates are chosen out of the learned class.

A running motif in Utopia *is the idea that Utopians not only have to work but also want to work, as the Philarchs do, because they enjoy exercising virtue by serving the public good. Contrast this with Hythloday's Europeans, who work only for selfish reasons. Although Utopia is a pleasure-driven society, the people especially embrace pleasures of the mind, such that even the average Utopian is learned.*

The Utopians avoid excessive building costs by continually repairing their buildings instead of letting them fall into decay and replacing them. They also lessen the charge of clothing by wearing durable leather while they work and wool cloaks while they travel, all of one color. They use coarse linen because it is less expensive such linen also lasts longer than, say, fine and dainty silk.

The Utopians work hard and *smart, doing a little inexpensive work periodically rather than living in idleness till their infrastructure requires major, expensive repair or even replacement. They always value things in proportion to their usefulness and practicality.*

Because the Utopians don't need to work as much as people elsewhere, many can come together to repair broken highways as needed. Also, the magistrates do not make the people work when it's unnecessary; as such, they will, whenever appropriate, announce fewer hours in work. This makes it possible for the Utopians to improve their minds freely, and this is their principle happiness.

The Utopians do not do work for the sake of doing work—they do only what is necessary, because this ultimately promotes happiness.

BOOK 2: OF THEIR TRAFFIC

Hythloday now turns to how Utopians interact with one another. Cities consist of families, mostly made up of blood relatives. Wives leave their own families to live with their husbands, but men stay in the families they're born into, governed by the oldest capable man. No family may have fewer than ten members or more than sixteen (not counting their children), and no city may have more than 6,000 families in it.

Families in Utopia are patriarchal, that is, ruled by men. Hythloday gives no reason as to why this might be so (he later suggests that women have more rights and privileges in Utopia, at least, than they did in Renaissance Europe.) It seems almost totalitarian that the Utopian state can for all intents and purposes regulate people's procreation so as to satisfy quotas for family size—and yet this is probably necessary to maintain the island's society.

If a family becomes too large, its excess members are moved into smaller families, and if a city becomes too large, its excess members are moved into smaller cities. If the population of the **island** itself becomes too large, the excess members relocate to a nearby land where there is much waste and they found a town, assimilating the natives there if possible, but driving them out and warring with them if not. The Utopians maintain that the most just cause of war is to liberate ground that people would otherwise idly occupy. If a city in Utopia proper becomes too small, members of these Utopian towns abroad are moved into it.

For the sake of uniform family size, the Utopian state is willing to separate beloved relatives from one another, which might strike us as both inhumane and bad for morale in the commonwealth. And if the Utopians don't care that they're ripped from their loved ones, this might reflect just as badly on the commonwealth. Also disturbing is the fact that the Utopians can justify warfare on the grounds of whether or not they think other people are wasting land. Even practicality and efficiency can become tyrannical when enforced upon others.

Now for the interactions of the Utopians. The oldest capable man rules the family. Wives care for their husbands, and children for their parents. Each city is divided into equal quarters, and at the center of each is a marketplace. From here the fathers of the families fetch what their households require for free. No one in Utopia asks for more than they need; fear of lack and pride are the causes of greed, but neither exists in Utopia.

The patriarchal structure of the Utopian family might trouble us, but in More's Europe it would be par for the course. The centrality of the markets reflects the Utopian commitment to equality. Again Hythloday suggests that the conditions of Utopian society itself, and not any laws, promote the communal spirit.

Around the markets are places to get food: herbs, fruit, bread, fish, the meat of four-legged animals, and fowl. Animals are killed, cleaned, and butchered outside of town by bondmen (slaves), because free citizens are not allowed to do so. The Utopians believe that mercy decays in people who regularly kill. Also, nothing filthy or unclean is brought into the city, and this prevents pestilence and disease. Along every street are great halls for meeting and eating. The Philarchs live in these, along with the thirty families appointed to them. The stewards of every hall come into the food markets to fetch however much meat is necessary.

As admirable as the Utopians' sense of mercy and compassion is, it seems inconsistent with the fact that they should kill animals at all. Why not vegetarianism? Troubling also is the fact that they force bondmen to kill animals, even though bondmen are those in society whose sense of mercy is presumably most deficient—how can these offenders be rehabilitated if they're forced to do gruesome, desensitizing work?

Around each city there are four big, well-supplied, diligently attended hospitals, so big they can comfortably accommodate any number of patients without the risk of spreading disease. The physicians are intelligent and skilled. No person is forced to go to the hospital, but in the case of illness most people prefer the hospital to their own beds.

Like the cities themselves, Utopian hospitals are rationally and practically designed. The Utopians especially value health because, without it, one cannot serve the public good.

After the sick receive the food their physicians have prescribed, the best food in the city is divided up, first among the magistrates, priests, ambassadors, and (the very rare) strangers, then among the rest of the citizens. No one is prohibited from fetching more food out of the market and bringing it to his own house. People can dine at home instead of in the halls, but no one willingly does, because it is a point of small honesty to dine among one's fellow citizens, and also because the food in the halls is better than what one could prepare at home.

It is a sign of the Utopians' (enforced) compassion that they give the best of their food to the sick, and it is a sign of individual liberty that Utopians can fetch from the markets as much food as they need. Utopia trusts its citizens to consume goods ethically. The fact that the food in the public dining halls is better than what can be prepared in private homes further speaks to the power of the communal spirit in Utopia.

In the halls, the hardest, most drudging labor is done by bondmen. Women from every family prepare and serve the meals. Men sit against the wall opposite women at the table (four people to a table), which makes it easy for women to rise, as often happens when they're pregnant, and go to the nursery.

In general, the Utopians spare their citizens the worst work, assigning it instead to slaves, mercenaries, and the like. The Utopians are so practical that even their seating arrangements serve a practical purpose (though we might think women are so often pregnant because of the quota on family size).

The nurses sit in a parlor with the babies they're nursing, and they're provided with fire, clean water, and cradles. Every mother nurses her own child unless she is prevented by sickness. In such a case, the wives of the Philarchs quickly provide a nurse. Children under the age of five also sit with the nurses at meals. All the other children under the age of marriage, boys and girls, serve at the tables or, if they're not strong enough to serve, stand silently by. These children eat what's given to them. There are no other formalities at mealtime among the Utopians.

There are holes and gaps in Hythloday's account of Utopia. How are the nurses, for example, chosen and trained? Hythloday doesn't tell us. It is, moreover, one of his characteristic gestures to downplay how strict Utopian society is, as when he says there are no other formalities at mealtime—as if he hasn't already enumerated a great number of strict formalities and rules.

The Philarch and his wife sit—with two of the eldest next to them, or the priest and his wife—at the center of the high table so that everyone in the hall can see them. The young sit interspersed among their elders at meals rather than off by themselves so that they cannot behave and speak viciously, and elders do not talk tediously but encourage young people to prove their wit and virtuous disposition in conversation.

The Utopians value education in civic virtue so highly as to make it a part of daily routine. But is it possible for young people to be subjected to such intense scrutiny without feeling resentment or even paranoia? Don't even children need privacy to socialize among themselves? Apparently not, at least in the world of Utopia.

The Utopians begin every meal with a reading of something good, virtuous, and short. Lunch is short, but dinner is long, and no dinner passes without music being played. Incense, spices, and perfumes are burned during meals, and sweet ointments and waters are sprinkled about. The Utopians believe that no pleasure should be forbidden if no harm comes of it. In the country, in contrast, people who dwell far from their neighbors do eat in their own houses.

It is a sign of the Utopians' practicality that they only read short texts before meals—they understand that it's hard to focus when one is hungry. They also enrich the necessity of eating with unnecessary, harmless pleasures, squeezing as much enjoyment as they can out of their free time.

BOOK 2: OF THE TRAVELLING OF THE UTOPIANS

If Utopians desire to travel to other cities, the Philarchs or Archphilarchs grant them license. People don't travel alone, but rather in companies, and they must carry a letter testifying that they have permission to be abroad and that also prescribes the date of their return. Travelers are provided with a wagon driven by a bondman, but, unless they have women in their company, they usually do without it. Travelers are taken care of by their fellow Utopians wherever they go, though if they stay in a place for more than a day they are expected to work.

The Utopians have so many regulations in place concerning travel, presumably, so that people will not be able to shirk their labor by drifting from place to place. But if the Utopians value the public good as highly as we've been led to believe, and deeply enjoy their lives, why would any be tempted to shirk their labor in the first place? We might also think that people should have the freedom to travel alone.

People who travel without permission are taken for runaways and returned home with a stern warning and sharp punishment. Those who commit such an offense again are punished with bondage. A man can walk about in the country if given permission by the head of his family and his wife. However, the man will not be fed until he does his work. Under this condition, a man can also go wherever he wishes in his own city. After all, there are no wicked taverns or alehouses or brothels for him to go to, and every Utopian keeps an eye on every other.

In his discussion of marriage in Utopia, Hythloday says the only crime for which there is a fixed punishment is adultery—yet there is an inconsistency in his story, for here he says that there's also a fixed punishment for running away, namely, bondage. If Utopians are constantly keeping an eye on each other, we might wonder if theirs is a culture of suspicion and paranoia—both feelings that would threaten social unity and general morale.

Everyone in Utopia has what he or she needs because all people there are equal partners. When the three old, wise, and experienced men come from every city to Amaurote each year, they report the quantity of resources their cities have, and cities with an abundance of goods give freely to those with a lack. The whole **island** is like a family or household in this way. When every city in Utopia is well supplied, the Utopians take their surplus into foreign countries. One seventh of the surplus is given freely to the poor abroad, and the rest is sold at a reasonable, low price. By this means, the Utopians bring back both **gold** and silver as well as those resources they lack, which is virtually only iron.

More's Utopia is subject to natural laws (as suggested by the island's lack of iron) and disaster. But, while we always hear about what Utopia does with its surplus, we never learn what happens to the ideal of equality in emergency situations, that is, when there are not enough resources to go around. How can everyone be equal then? In any case, the Utopians never waste, but would rather give surplus to those who need it most, even non-Utopians. We later learn that Utopia uses its gold and silver mostly to finance warfare—taking advantage of how other nations value these "useless" metals.

When selling goods, the Utopians accept both ready money and credit. They do not accept promises of payment from private individuals, but require the promises of whole cities. When the day of repayment arrives, a given city will collect all the debt privately owed to the Utopians and put it into the city's commons until their Utopian creditors demand it. But most of what is owed to them the Utopians never ask for, preferring not to take it from those whom it profits. They require their debt only when lending to another people or in times of war, for the hiring of mercenaries.

Although the Utopians don't use money domestically, they are practical enough to acquire money for their dealings with commonwealths abroad. However, because they spend money almost only in times of war, and because they avoid war at all costs, it would be a waste for them to collect all of the money owed to them, hence their generosity (which has the added bonus of creating goodwill between Utopia and its neighbors).

The Utopians value **gold** and silver far less than iron, because iron is useful and essential for life. People only value gold and silver out of folly, Hythloday says, because it is rare. To prevent people from hoarding gold or becoming attached to it, the Utopians use the stuff to build chamber pots (receptacles for human waste) and other things that serve low purposes, like fetters for their bondmen and jewelry which offenders are forced to wear for shame. Moreover, the Utopians give their children pearls and precious stones, but only so that they outgrow them as our children outgrow and become embarrassed of their toys.

The Utopians love the useful and scorn the useless, hence their opposed attitudes to iron and gold. However, it would seem that even the Utopians find gold inherently attractive—otherwise, they wouldn't need to associate the metal with dirtiness, slavery, and immaturity in order to scorn it. This is all to say that the Utopians are not born with wiser attitudes about gold, say, than their European counterparts; they just develop wiser attitudes through the rules of their society.

Hythloday proceeds to tell a funny story about three ambassadors of the Anemolians (from the Greek meaning "windy people") who came to Amaurote on a mission. They noticed the Utopians wore no fine clothes or jewelry and assumed that they must lack those things. In order to impress the Utopians, then, the three ambassadors, accompanied by a hundred servants, dressed in gorgeous silks and dazzling **gold** jewelry and precious stones—only for the Utopians to mistake the ambassadors' servants for lords and the gaudily dressed ambassadors for slaves! After a day or two, the ambassadors hid away their gold and finery in shame.

This story demonstrates how effective practicality and humility are in putting pride to shame. Wealth only holds power over us when we ourselves empower it to do so—but the Utopians see power only in study and labor. Hythloday's deeper suggestion here is that the ambassadors really are slaves—and pride and greed are their masters.

The Utopians wonder why anyone would be enamored of **gold** when they have the stars to gaze upon. They think it absurd that in many parts of the world gold is valued more highly than people, and that an idiot can command respect by virtue of mere wealth. The Utopians especially detest that people practically worship rich people whom they know will never give them so much as a farthing, a single cent.

If Utopians think gold is inherently unimpressive compared to the stars, say, why do they have to teach their children to scorn such a treasure? There seems to be an inconsistency here. It is characteristically Utopian, however, to pragmatically value people over gold.

The Utopians develop their opinions through socialization and education. Although few citizens—only the wittiest and most apt—are exempt from labor so that they can dedicate themselves to learning, every Utopian child is given an education in their rich, pleasant native language. Even most men and women bestow their spare hours on learning. The Utopians were not familiar with many famous philosophers until Hythloday introduced them, but they already knew much of what the famous philosophers teach concerning music, logic, arithmetic, and geometry. The Utopians also know much about astronomy, but they do not use the positions of the stars and planets to divine the future as many in Europe do.

Unlike in Renaissance Europe, all children in Utopia are educated, which promotes both unity in the commonwealth and individual happiness. Their educational system must be effective, for Utopians would rather continue their educations than do almost anything else. The four arts the Utopians study make up what was in Renaissance Europe called the "quadrivium," a program of study designed to prepare one for philosophy and theology. These subjects, in turn, make up the foundation of Utopian life.

As for moral philosophy, the Utopians' chief area of inquiry is how people can attain to happiness. They are, in broad terms, hedonists: people who believe that pleasure is the most important thing in life. To build their philosophy, the Utopians draw on religious ideas: they hold the soul to be immortal and destined by God for happiness, and they believe that good deeds are rewarded, and bad deeds punished, in the afterlife.

Hythloday's account of Utopian philosophy is notoriously confused. He gently disapproves of the Utopians' love of pleasure, yet we later learn that their chief pleasures are of the mind—exercising virtue and good conscience. Hythloday seems too bookish and dry to truly relish intellectual activity as a form of pleasure.

If these religious principles were disproved, the Utopians would affirm nonetheless that pleasure is to be obtained by all possible means, legal or illegal, so long as lesser pleasures don't hinder us from obtaining bigger pleasures. The Utopians believe that people should not willfully submit themselves to pain, and that happiness only comes from good and honest pleasure, like virtue.

The Utopians' love of pleasure is grounded in, but independent of, their religious principles. This means that the foundation of Utopian virtue could survive any debunking of religious dogma. The Utopians pragmatically avoid pain, but it's important to remember that More the man inflicted pain on himself as a self-flagellator—whipping himself to atone for sins.

The Utopians define virtue as a life organized according to nature, which drives us on to seek pleasure wherever we can. We follow nature by heeding what our reason approves and disapproves of; reason also guides us in the love of the divine. Finally, because every person is part of society in nature, it is only natural that in his pursuit of pleasure he does not harm his fellows. We should honor our promises and obey good laws. A life of pleasure can either be evil—in which case we should help no one pursue it—or it can be good, in which case we should help others and ourselves to it. Self-sacrifice is an act of humanity and gentleness, and it always brings benefits, a good conscience, and God's graces.

By "nature," the Utopians seem to mean something like "human nature," for reason is a distinctively human faculty (at least according to the Platonic and Aristotelian theories More is working with here). The Utopian theory of pleasure also precludes acting out of greed, because, insofar as we are social animals, our pursuit of pleasure should be socially conducted. This emphasis on the public good is also evident in the value the Utopians place on self-sacrifice.

The Utopians define pleasure as anything that naturally delights either the body or mind; after all, the senses and reason itself desire pleasure. The Utopians avoid, however, those things that other people only imagine to be pleasurable despite nature, because once the mind is possessed by false pleasure it can no longer delight in the true. Among false pleasures the Utopians count gaudy clothes; vain and unprofitable honors like those which come with dominating other men; riches and precious stones, which people merely hoard; gambling; and hunting, which to the Utopians is vile butchery.

It is important to note that many of the things we think of as pleasurable—like nice clothes, money, and gambling—the Utopians don't find pleasurable at all. People take pleasure in these things, Hythloday says, only by unnaturally perverting their ideas of pleasure. This leaves the crucial question of how our ideas of pleasure can come to be "perverted" in the first place—but Hythloday doesn't address this issue.

Among "true" pleasures, the Utopians recognize two kinds: those of body and those of mind. There are two kinds of bodily pleasure. The first is the pleasure we feel when we satisfy our bodies' physical requirements, as when we eat and drink when we're hungry and thirsty, relieve our bowels, or scratch an itch. Related to this is the pleasure we feel when we listen to music, as this affects our senses. The second kind of bodily pleasure is that which comes from good health, which is the foundation and ground of all other pleasures. The Utopians "chiefest and most principle of all" pleasures, however, are those of the mind, especially the exercise of virtue and conscience.

Although the Utopians' chief pleasure comes from exercising virtue and conscience, Hythloday gives us only a cloudy picture of what this looks like in practice. Also lacking from Hythloday's picture of mental pleasure is a discussion of arts other than music—it seems that there is no room for the "artist" as an occupation, but only for art as distracting, virtuous pleasure. Art is, in contrast, a major topic for Plato in his Republic*—and it's also worth noting that in Plato's ideal city, poets were banned.*

Hythloday comments now that the Utopians are the most excellent people in the world, and that their commonwealth is the most flourishing. The Utopians are healthy, active, nimble, and strong. Though their soil and air are not of the highest quality, the Utopians manage their resources so well that they thrive. The people are gentle, happy, witty, delighting in quietness, and able to endure great labor as required. They aren't especially fond of bodily labor, but they never grow tired of studying and exercising their minds.

It is ironic that Hythloday begins his discussion of Utopian hedonism on a note of disapproval, only to conclude that the Utopians are the most excellent people in the world. We might appreciate the fact that, though Utopian society has labor as its cornerstone, the Utopians are the first to acknowledge that there's so much more to life than mere work.

When Hythloday exposed the Utopians to Greek literature and philosophy (he didn't think they would care much for Latin writings, except for historians and poets), they earnestly asked him to teach them the language. The Utopians learned with marvelous quickness, and in three years had mastered Greek; indeed, Hythloday suspects that the Utopians must have originated in Greece. In addition, Hythloday gave the Utopians most of Plato's works, most of Aristotle's, some Greek grammars and histories, the poetry of Homer and Euripides, and more. They would also now have Theophrastus's book about plants in its entirety had a marmoset (a kind of monkey) not ripped some pages out while Hythloday was sailing aboard a ship during his fourth voyage.

Hythloday's speculation that the Utopians originated in Greece is something of a joke on More the author's part. After all, so much of More's creation borrows heavily from Greek culture and thought, as in Utopia's democratic elements and virtue ethics. We must keep in mind, also, that humanists like More idealized the cultures of Ancient Greece and Rome. The story about the monkey parodies the sea monsters that inevitably appear in Renaissance travel narratives—the scariest thing for Hythloday is losing pages of his precious books.

The Utopians especially value the medical writings of the Greek physician Galen. Although they need less medical attention than any other people, the Utopians delight in exploring the mysteries of nature. They are ingenious inventors of things that are to the advantage and enrichment of human life. They owe to Hythloday and his fellow travelers the crafts of printing and of making paper, by which they've multiplied their books into many thousands of copies.

The Utopians use the craft of printing to make copies of their books and democratically spread knowledge. Just as important is what they don't *use printing for. In More's time, the printing press was often used to mass-produce vitriolic political and religious treatises. Utopian unity prevents such abuses there.*

The Utopians are very welcoming of guests. They love to hear about the laws, policies, and manners of other lands. That being said, few merchants come to Utopia because the only thing the Utopians buy, really, is iron. The Utopians also think it more prudent to go into foreign lands to trade themselves, rather than have merchants come, because this gives them better knowledge of their surroundings and keeps them proficient and knowledgeable in sailing.

The Utopians very practically learn as much about the world abroad whenever the opportunity presents itself. This gives them ideas to implement at home, and it also prepares them to deal politically with other commonwealths.

BOOK 2: OF THEIR SLAVES, AND OF THEIR MARRIAGES

Slavery in Utopia, Hythloday explains, is a punishment for those Utopians who have committed "heinous offenses." Utopia also pays cities in other lands for their criminals, but only those already condemned to death: these prisoners are then brought back to Utopia to labor in bondage. Poor (free) laborers from other countries sometimes volunteer to become bondmen in Utopia, but these are treated "almost as gently as [Utopia's] own free citizens" and are at liberty to depart at any time, though they seldom do. The Utopians do not make prisoners of war into bondmen, except those captured in battle. Slaves who are originally from Utopia are forced to work the hardest, because they fell into crime despite being brought up in such a virtuous and excellent commonwealth.

Utopia pragmatically turns crime, death, and misery into productivity—or so runs Hythloday's account. For our part, we might wonder whether a society that relies on slave labor can be anything but morally corrupt, deep down. Bondage may be more humane than the death penalty, but that doesn't mean that it is *humane, much less that it should feature in a supposedly perfect society.*

The Utopians care for their sick very affectionately, providing both the proper diet and medical attention. The people comfort those with incurable diseases by visiting and helping them. For people who have diseases that are not only incurable but also cause continual pain, the priests and magistrates urge them to consider euthanasia, or voluntary death (by starvation, for example). This is because such invalids cannot do the duty of life and are a burden to themselves and others. However, the Utopians don't force anyone to die against their will. People who kill themselves before the priests and council have allowed it are considered unworthy to be buried or burned; their bodies are thrown into "some stinking marsh" or other.

The Utopians' conception of the public good is not one of ruthless productivity and efficiency—rather, it is one of general welfare and happiness. Nowhere is this clearer than in the Utopians' health care system, which is centered on availability and excellence of care as well as compassion. Note that the Catholic Church, of which the man Thomas More was a part, strictly prohibits euthanasia as a crime against God's gift of life. Again, the question arises: to what extent does the author of Utopia *really approve of Utopian policy?*

A woman must be eighteen years old or older to get married in Utopia; a man must be at least twenty-two. If it is proven that a man or woman has had sex before their marriage, he or she is sharply punished, and both partners to the act are forbidden from marriage unless pardoned by the Prince. The heads of the family in which such offenses occur risk infamy for being negligent in their duties. The Utopians punish free love so strictly because they fear that if they don't, few people will get married.

The Utopians are so severe in punishing adulterers because ruptured marriages disrupt the peace and operations of the commonwealth. That being said, Hythloday never gives a reason as to why the Utopians believe that marriage is the ideal relation between man and woman. It might not be ideal of pleasure, but it is at least a system that society and the government and regulate.

The Utopians have one custom that Hythloday finds foolish: they show prospective husbands and wives their potential spouses before marriage. Who would buy a horse, they argue, without inspecting it thoroughly? The Utopians understand that not all men and women are so enlightened as to be pleased only by their spouse's virtue, but also by their physical appearance. This practice prevents spouses from being alienated from each other later if they discover a previously hidden "deformity."

Hythloday proves himself either more moral or more irrationally prudish than the Utopians in disapproving of their pragmatic premarital customs. Still, the comparison of selecting a mate to buying a horse does seem inarguably dehumanizing.

Matrimony is never broken in Utopia except by death, adultery, or intolerable behavior on the part of one of the spouses; in the latter case, the council may license a person to divorce their present spouse and wed another. However, the spouse who misbehaved lives in infamy, and is forbidden from remarrying. If a husband and wife can't get along, and they find others they can get along with better (and agree to do so), the council can also grant them a divorce, although this is rarely done, to discourage people from seeking easy ways out of marriage.

Not being able to marry after committing adultery might seem like a punishment that is disproportionate to the crime—after all, sex is natural, promotes pleasure, and no reason is given for why having multiple partners should be considered a punishable offense. Nonetheless, Utopia's policies concerning divorce are much more liberal than those of More's England. Indeed, More himself infuriated King Henry VIII when he refused to condone the King's divorce—a moral stance that ultimately led to More being executed.

People who commit adultery are punished with bondage, and if both offenders were married, their former spouses can get married to each other (if they want), or else to whomever they desire. If a person still wishes to be married to the partner who cheated on them, they are allowed, but on the condition that they must follow their partner into labor and drudgery. Often the Prince is so moved by the adulterer's repentance and their spouse's fidelity that he grants the adulterer their freedom. If someone commits adultery twice, they are sentenced to death.

To the modern sensibility, it is perhaps shocking that adulterers are sentenced to the same punishment as murderers. Softening the blow, however, is the Prince's mercy in granting adulterers their freedom. Still, the Utopians seem skeptical that adulterers can be rehabilitated. Why else would they prohibit them from remarrying, or go so far as to put them to death? All this suggests a view of sexuality and romantic love that seems utterly foreign to modern ideas.

For all other crimes, there is no prescribed sentence in the law. The council judges each offender on a case-by-case basis. Husbands chastise their wives, and parents chastise their children, unless they've done something so heinous that the example of public punishment would encourage better behavior in others. The most common punishment for heinous crimes is slavery, which causes the offender grief while also profiting the commonwealth. If a bondman rebels, however, they are killed like a desperate wild beast. People who are patient in bondage and who repent of their crimes live in hope of having their punishment mitigated or lifted. People who intend to commit adultery or any other crime are subject to the same punishments as those who actually commit them. In Utopia, the intent is considered as evil as the act.

To its credit, Utopian justice treats offenders in most instances as individual people, not as cases to be processed by a mechanical, inhumane system. Note, however, that punishment is not designed to rehabilitate offenders or make them more virtuous, but rather to cause them grief, which is perhaps not so admirable. As in every other feature of Utopian society, hard work guarantees society's sympathy. We might wonder how Utopians discover whether or not someone has had criminal thoughts—and should thinking about committing a crime really merit the same punishment as actually committing it? At the same time, this reflects a certain idea expressed by Jesus in the Bible—that lusting after a woman is the same as actually committing adultery with her.

The Utopians take especial pleasure in fools (by which the author means either witty and intelligent professional clowns, or, in what is the likelier case here, the mentally disabled). It is deeply shameful to hurt one of these fools in Utopia, but the Utopians believe that it profits the fools themselves to be objects of pleasure. To mock a person for a deformity or missing limb is also a deeply shameful act, for the Utopians think that it's unwise to mock someone for what they cannot change.

Utopia cares for all of its citizens, which reflects a general respect for human life that transcends ruthless practicality (although ruthless practicality certainly governs many aspects of their society). They hold people accountable only for what they can control, and they don't exploit anyone, much less those who are vulnerable.

The Utopians think it's good to take pleasure in natural beauty, but they condemn as vain and prideful those who prefer women in make-up. Honesty and humility are what a good Utopian husband really values in his wife.

Make-up is a sign of pride to the Utopians, and so is as useless as gold is to them. Husbands more practically value those qualities which make for a happy marriage.

The Utopians punish sin, as we have seen, but they also reward virtue. Sculptures of good men, especially great benefactors, are set up in the marketplaces to remind people of their good acts and to encourage virtue. Those who desire honors inordinately, however, can be sure that they will never be honored in Utopia.

Utopian society does not just discourage bad behavior, for this would lower morale. They also incentivize good behavior by honoring the ideal. That being said, the Utopians know that those who do good only for honor tend not to be "good" at all, but merely vain.

Utopians live together lovingly. Their magistrates are neither proud nor severe, but are like good fathers whom the citizens honor willingly. The Prince is not distinguished by gaudy clothes, but only by a sheaf of corn he carries; likewise, the bishop carries a candle.

Leadership in Utopia is not a cause for pride; even the Prince is but a humble servant of the people. Note the recurring motif of patriarchal rule.

There are few laws in Utopia, no more than a well-organized society requires. The Utopians disapprove of other nations' innumerable books of convoluted laws more than anything else, because they believe that a citizen should be able to read and understand all the laws to which he or she is bound. Lawyers are banned from Utopia for being too cunning in their interpretations of the law; every person represents him- or herself in legal matters, which brings truth to light sooner in the mind of a wise judge. The Utopians favor the plainest interpretation of a law as being the most just.

Complicated laws arise when societies are elaborately stratified into social classes and when people have the license to pursue bad luxuries and false pleasures. The simplicity of Utopia's structure is reflected in the simplicity of its laws. The practical Utopians appreciate plain readings of law as opposed to cunning misreadings designed to serve private interests. Ironically, Thomas More the author was himself a lawyer.

Because the Utopians are so virtuous, neighboring countries (many of which the Utopians have liberated from tyranny) invite Utopians to serve as their magistrates. People who are so invited are allowed to go and serve, some for a year, some for five years, and they are welcomed home with honor and praise.

Hythloday begins Utopia *by arguing that good counselors can't do good in the service of princes. The Utopians must disagree, however—why else would Utopians go abroad to provide counsel to foreign governments?*

That being said, the Utopians do not make political alliances with other nations, because such alliances are so often broken as part of deceitful stratagems, as is the case in Europe. Also, the idea of alliances presupposes natural enmity between nations, which the Utopians reject. They think no one is an enemy who has not done them injury, and that people are naturally allied to one another in love and goodwill, which are stronger than mere words can ever be.

While Utopia first and foremost takes care of its own citizens, we have also seen that the Utopian concept of the "public good" often extends to the people of the world at large. This is both ideal in promoting universal friendship, and also practical—people you treat well are less likely to do you harm.

BOOK 2: OF THEIR MILITARY DISCIPLINE

The Utopians hate war, battle, and the glory gotten in war—after all, not even wild beasts fight. Nonetheless, the men and women of Utopia daily practice the discipline of war in case the need arises. The Utopians fight only to defend themselves, to protect their friends from invaders, or to deliver a people from tyranny. They also go to war sometimes on behalf of friends for the sake of avenging past injuries, but only if those injuries are fresh and their enemy refuses to make restitution. Finally, the Utopians go to war if their friends' merchants have been cheated trading abroad due to a failure of justice.

The Utopians are practical enough to know that people are likely to prey on the unprepared, hence their military drills. But how do they know that "delivering" a people from tyranny will not just lead to more evils? It is perhaps inconsistent of the Utopians, who value people more than money, to kill over trade disputes. Moreover, no rationale is given for this.

While the Utopians go to war on behalf of their friends in matters of money, when they themselves are so cheated by a nation they avenge themselves only by refusing to trade with that nation until restitution is made. This is because they take the loss of their friends' privately held money more heavily than the loss of their own, as their citizens do not feel the loss. However, if Utopians are killed abroad and the offenders are not handed over to Utopia, the Utopians declare war. Offenders in such a case are punished with death or bondage.

It is admirable that the Utopians are so loyal to their friends as to fight on their behalf. But if the Utopians have in fact designed the perfect society, why would they be complicit in helping other nations maintain their imperfect systems? Perhaps it is just impractical to expect that utopian excellence should be established in other commonwealths.

The Utopians are ashamed to achieve victory with bloodshed, and would rather win through wit, craft, and deceit. They commemorate a bloodless victory by setting up a pillar of stone in the place where they vanquished their enemy. They believe that bodily strength is for beasts; reason is for human beings. The Utopians avoid war whenever possible, but, when they must fight, they are especially cruel to those who have offended them, in order to deter future conflict.

The Utopians love health and respect human life, so it makes good sense that they would rather satisfy their objectives through intelligence than through blood. But history forces us to question whether being cruel to one's enemies is really an effective policy for deterring future conflict, or whether it only stirs up more anger and strife.

Unlike many of their European counterparts, Utopians fight "dirty" in war: they distribute pamphlets among their enemy's population, promising substantial rewards of **gold** and land to anyone who kills or captures their enemy's prince and other proclaimed adversaries—alive is worth twice as much as dead. These proclaimed adversaries may also turn themselves in to the Utopians, claim the reward, and be assured of their lives. Such policy throws Utopia's enemies into suspicion of one another, and it also saves innocent lives.

The Utopians' objective is to end war as quickly and bloodlessly as possible, hence their use of tactics that a chivalric, warlike prince might consider dishonorable (the irony, of course, is that waging war in the first place is a far more "dishonorable" thing, no matter how many rules one follows in killing others). The Utopians do not prolong bloodshed for the sake of hollow glory. Note that the Utopians would rather have their prisoners alive than dead—this is because the dead are useless, whereas the living can serve the public good as slaves.

Utopia holds its citizens so dear that they aren't deployed in war unless the need arises. Instead, the Utopians store up **gold**, silver, and debt abroad for virtually one purpose alone: to avoid war altogether, or to hire mercenaries to fight on their behalf. They usually hire the Zapoletes (from the Greek meaning "those who will sell anything"). The Zapoletes are a savage, wild people (modeled after the notorious Swiss mercenaries of Thomas More's time) who live by hunting, stealing, and fighting. The Utopians command the loyalty of the Zapoletes by paying them more than any other nation, although so many of these mercenaries die in battle that the Utopians end up paying relatively little. Moreover, the Utopians don't care if the wicked Zapoletes die; they think it would be better if such people were washed from the world.

At the beginning of Utopia, *the lawyer defends idleness as contributing to the strength of the English army. The Utopians would respond that a standing army has no place in a commonwealth that values its citizens and peace. Instead, the Utopians pragmatically hire mercenaries, both to spare their people the horrors of war, as well as to make sure that Utopian operations are not interrupted. This section also shows the Utopians at their most disturbingly practical: they prefer to hire the Zapoletes, who value gold more than their own lives, because (according to them) the world is better off without such people, and because the dead need not be paid. The idea of "washing away" an entire people has further implications of genocide and "ethnic cleansing."*

Other than mercenaries, the Utopians use their friends' soldiers and, only as a last result, their own citizens, governed by one virtuous Utopian with two officers appointed under him who take his place if he is killed. The Utopians don't force citizens to go to war; their army consists only of willing volunteers, because a coward is dangerous to his fellows. In case of invasion, cowards are put among brave men in shops or are assigned to defend the walls. Extreme necessity often turns cowardice to bravery.

Just as the Utopians don't force the incurably ill to die, so too they don't force cowards into warfare. The common principle is that people only excel when they're fully invested in what they're doing. In warfare, moreover, it is impractical to have a coward in the ranks, for he endangers good soldiers with his weakness.

Women can accompany their husbands to battle, where they offer praise. A man fights among his kinfolk, because then he is more ready to support them and they him. It is seen as shameful for a husband to survive his wife in war, or for a son to survive his father, and so Utopian soldiers often fight all the more courageously, with great slaughter and bloodshed, even though they would rather avoid war altogether. The fact that a Utopian soldier's family is taken care of no matter what also makes him more courageous in battle. The Utopians neither throw their lives away in war nor resort to cowardice to save themselves.

The family is the core unit of Utopian society, and this is especially true on the battlefield. This is because people are spurred on to courage when surrounded by those they love, both to protect their loved ones and to avoid shame. (More derives this argument from Plato's Symposium.*) Utopians need not fear death, because all Utopians are equally cared for no matter what. In this way, communal values are self-supporting.*

In battle, the Utopians select a band of fit young men who are tasked with the assassination of their enemy's captain, which they accomplish through cunning and open strength. In their assault on this captain, wearied men are replaced by fresh ones, and the Utopians rarely fail to kill or (preferably) capture their target. Moreover, the Utopians never send all of their forces to pursue a retreating enemy. When forced to retreat themselves, the Utopians excel in staging cunning ambushes, which often turn the tide of battle. Utopians fortify their camp with a deep, broad trench, made not by bondmen but by the soldiers themselves.

A chivalric prince would consider the targeting of captains in war highly dishonorable, but the Utopians want nothing to do with battlefield honor, only minimal bloodshed and swift peace. Even though the Utopians have built an ideal society, they can still lose battles, it would seem..

The Utopians wear strong, flexible armor they can swim in, and they fight with arrows, shot by footmen and horsemen alike. In hand-to-hand combat they use poleaxes, which are deadly by point and blade alike. The Utopians are ingenious inventors of war machines.

The flexibility of the Utopians' army reflects the practicality of their society in general, as does their preference for the poleaxe, which can be used to thrust or cut, unlike a spear or sword, which generally does one or the other, not both.

The Utopians honor their truces even if provoked. They do not steal from their enemies or destroy their land and crops. They do not hurt unarmed men, except for spies. They defend all cities surrendered to them and destroy none. If there are those among the enemy who insisted on defending a city, the Utopians punish them with death. Other soldiers captured in battle are punished with bondage. Anyone who counseled that a city be surrendered to the Utopians is rewarded with the condemned men's goods; the rest of those goods are distributed to those who aided the Utopians. The Utopians take no booty for themselves, and the conquered nation pays for the costs of the war in money and land.

Consistent with their principle of promoting peace and wasting nothing, the Utopians lay waste to nothing that comes into their possession over the course of warfare. We might think it rather severe, however, to punish patriots who urge the defense of their own cities, or to punish enemy combatants. Do such people really have control in such matters, and can they really be held accountable? The Utopians neither gain nor lose anything from warfare, but come out where they were before the conflict began.

BOOK 2: OF THE RELIGIONS OF THE UTOPIANS

Hythloday turns now to his last topic: the religions in Utopia. All over the **island**, and even within a given city, people worship different deities, from the sun to great heroes of the past. However, most Utopians, and the wisest, believe that God is eternal, incomprehensible, and inexplicable, dispersed throughout the world as power and virtue. He is the creator of all things and the end of all things. All Utopians, despite diverging opinions on the form God takes, nonetheless agree that there is one chief and principal Supreme Being, the maker and ruler of the world, and this Being they call Mithras (a Persian god, worshipped in Rome as the god of the sun). Utopians are more and more turning away from superstitions and joining the majority in their beliefs.

One of the most distinctive features of Utopian society is its religious freedom (something Thomas More the man actively repressed). However, the deeper suggestion here is that the Utopians understand all gods to be images of one common truth. (Unsurprisingly, given More's Catholic convictions, this truth sounds like what's endorsed by Catholic theology.) The Utopians apparently find the majority's idea of God most compelling, however, for they are adopting it of their own free will.

When Hythloday and his companions introduced Christ's doctrine, laws, and miracles to the Utopians, a surprising number were inclined to receive it. This may have been due to divine influence, but also to the fact that Christ advocated collective ownership of resources, as is practiced in monasteries and convents. Many Utopians received baptism while Hythloday was there and wanted a priest to perform other Christian sacraments.

This passage in Utopia *reads almost like Christian propaganda—the best people in the world immediately open their hears to what Thomas More believes to be the best religion in the world. However, Christ is an important touchstone for* Utopia*'s vision of a society without property or class, and for the devout More to present Christianity as anything less than correct would be unthinkable.*

The Utopians are tolerant of all religions, but they do not permit people to condemn other religions. In Hythloday's presence, one newly baptized Utopian began to condemn as wicked and devilish all religions but Christianity; he was promptly exiled for sedition and for raising up dissent among the people. Religious tolerance was instituted by Utopus himself when he observed how religious disagreement caused strife among the natives of the **island**—and was what enabled his conquest of them in the first place. For the sake of peace, he established a law protecting religious freedom. People may attempt to convert others to their religious opinions with gentle speech, but not with violence and hurtful words. The punishment is exile or bondage.

Thomas More the man was a devout Catholic who, during the Reformation, tortured Protestants and approved of burning them at the stake as heretics. It is darkly ironic, then, that his utopian vision should be one in which people who condemn other religions are subject to exile or bondage. One reason the Utopians honor religious freedom is practical: religious disagreement causes strife in a commonwealth, which leaves them vulnerable to invaders.

Utopus reasoned that religious freedom promotes not only peace, but that it is part of God's will. God must desire diverse forms of worship and honor, as he inspires different people with different religions. Moreover, even if there were only one true religion, its truth would eventually convert everyone without violence or force anyway. If people could speak intolerantly of other religions, however, it is quite likely they would defame this one true religion, just as weeds overgrow corn.

Even if More the man agreed with Utopus's line of reasoning here in principle, in practice he could not or would not pursue it. This is one of the most powerful of the many ambiguities regarding Utopia *that are necessary to understand when reading the text.*

Utopus did decree some limits on faith: no religion should declare that a man's soul perishes with his body, or that the world is governed by chance. The Utopians believe, rather, that good deeds are rewarded, and bad deeds punished, in the afterlife. The irreligious, or atheists, in Utopia are not punished, except in being excluded from all honors and offices, as well as being generally despised. This is because the Utopians are convinced that, if one does not have religion, one will necessarily mock the faithful or break the country's laws. Atheists cannot argue their views among the general public, but they are encouraged to argue with priests, in the hopes that they will see the madness of their irreligious ways.

Utopus seems to affirm the immortality of the soul and providence, among other things, not because he knows these to be true, but, more pragmatically, because people who believe such things conduct themselves more virtuously. Or so he thinks, anyway. Only atheism brings with it negative consequences in Utopia, although we might contest the Utopians' belief that atheists are necessarily more antisocial than anyone else. Recall Hythloday's claim, after all, that the Utopians' virtue ethics could survive a lack of religious grounding.

Contrary to the atheists, there are heretics in Utopia who believe that the souls of animals are immortal, but these people are allowed to speak their minds and they share all the liberties other Utopians do. However, all religious Utopians believe that human souls especially are predestined for great happiness in the afterlife.

The Utopians do not permit mankind's dignity to suffer, but they do not mind if the dignity of other animals is inflated. No reason is given for the Utopians' belief in an afterlife other than as a practical incentive for good conduct and a high ideal.

Consequently, while the Utopians lament sickness, they do not lament death—that is, unless someone dies unwillingly. They take unwilling death as a bad sign that a soul fears punishment in the afterlife. Someone who dies an unwilling death is buried, but people who die willing, happy deaths are celebrated, praised, and cremated. The dead person's virtue and good deeds are remembered to encourage virtue in others, and the dead are thought to be invisibly present among the living, which gives the living courage.

Because the Utopians believe in an afterlife, they do not fear death (at least in theory). An unwilling death, however, suggests that someone either has unfinished business on earth, or that they do not authentically believe in an afterlife, both of which would trouble the Utopians. The dead pragmatically serve as good examples and sources of spiritual courage for the living—even death can be used for practical purposes in Utopia.

The Utopians despise and mock people who try to predict the future, like soothsayers. However, they do believe in supernatural miracles, which they consider to be the works of God; indeed, miracles are said to be common occurrences in Utopia. In times of great need, Utopians hopefully and confidently pray for divine aid, which is often granted to them.

Because God and His providence are unknowable, it is vain to attempt to foresee future events. Miracles are a commonplace reality in Utopia—perhaps More the author is suggesting that the Utopians truly deserve miracles as rewards for their excellence.

The Utopians believe that the contemplation of nature is a form of praising God, although some among them forego learning altogether in order to dedicate themselves solely to work and to God, for they think that happiness comes of "busy labours and good exercises." Such people, known as Buthrescas (from the Greek meaning "very religious"), do hard, unpleasant work willingly.

Given how work-oriented Utopian society it is, it is not surprising that some think the best way to praise God is to rigorously labor in service of the public good.

There are two sects of these religiously hardworking Buthrescas. The members of one abstain from carnal pleasures like sex and eating meat; the members of the other work just as hard but do not abstain from such pleasures, thinking that procreation is a public good and meat is a potent fuel for labor. Members of the first sect are considered holier in Utopia, while members of the second are considered wiser.

The only Utopians who seem altogether unpractical are the holier among the Buthrescas, who give up many pleasures to serve God—yet even they are of great service to the commonwealth. Note that, unlike many European churchmen who abstained from labor, holy people work in Utopia harder than anyone.

There are very few priests in Utopia—thirteen per city, one for each temple—but they are of exceeding holiness. The people elect their priests by secret ballot. Over the priests of each city is set a bishop, and together these religious officials oversee all divine matters and orders of religions; they are also judges and masters of conduct in Utopia. It is shameful to be rebuked by a priest for immoral living. The priests differ from the secular magistrates in that they only offer advice and counsel, whereas magistrates punish bad conduct. The only exception to this is that priests can excommunicate immoral Utopians and bar them from religious occasions. Religious values are instilled in Utopians from childhood.

Just like the Utopian magistrates, the priests are elected to their office and given nothing except what their own virtue and holiness merit. Whereas the Philarchs make sure people are doing their work, the priests make sure that people are living virtuously. Perhaps the priests do not punish bad conduct because their sphere of activity is the human soul, which cannot be truly punished by any other than divine agency. Earlier in Utopia *we read of a friar who threatened to excommunicate a joker—Utopian priests, we might imagine, would do no such thing.*

Both men and women can become priests in Utopia (although the women elected tend to be old or widows). Male priests take for their wives the foremost women in the country. If a priest commits an offence, their judgment is left to God and to themselves; but priests are so virtuous that few fall to wickedness, and their position is not one of power so much as one of honor, anyway. Utopian priests are also deeply respected abroad; Hythloday recalls how in battle the priests protect enemy combatants from being slaughtered when the Utopians get the upper hand. When the Utopian army retreats, the priests intercept their pursuers and often succeed in making peace.

In Renaissance Europe, only men could be priests—the Utopians, in admitting women to the priesthood, are ahead of their time. The Utopians are so rigorous in their election of public officials that they rarely have occasion to regret their decisions. In addition to promoting virtue in Utopia, the priests serve the practical function of saving lives on the battlefield. This is a case where military pragmatism and ideal holiness come together to benefit the Utopians and others alike.

The Utopian holy days fall on the first and last day of each month and year. The first days are called Cynemernes (from the Greek meaning "dog day," associated perhaps with the Greek goddess Hecate), and the last are called Trapemernes (from the Greek meaning "changing day"). The Utopians worship in large, gorgeous churches which are intentionally kept somewhat dark so that people focus more earnestly upon religion and devotion. Even though Utopians hold diverse religious opinions, they all worship in the same churches, where what is common to all of them is taught. No image of God is displayed so that people are free to conceive of God as they will. Private ceremonies and practices may be freely held at home.

The Utopians promote religious unity by holding worship in the same churches for all—this creates a more communal environment for worship and, consequently, a more unified society. The Utopians understand the divine to exist on a plane that transcends our own, hence their dimming of the churches. After all, a transcendent god cannot be at all perceived by the senses of sight, hearing, or smell (although in the real world, these things certainly help).

The Utopians worship on Trapemernes days after fasting to give thanks to God; they worship on Cynemernes days to pray for fortune and success in the coming days. Before worshipping on Trapemernes, wives confess their offenses to their husbands, and children confess to their parents. People in quarrels reconcile, because Utopians fear worshipping with a troubled conscience. In the churches, men sit on the right side, women on the left, and in such a way that elders can observe their conduct. The young sit interspersed with their elders for the same reason.

The practice of confessing one's sins as the Utopians do is distinctive of Catholicism—More the author seems to be insinuating rather propagandistically that Utopian religion is more essentially Catholic than anything else. The separation of the sexes during Utopian worship is presumably meant to neutralize any sexual feelings people may have, making it so they can more purely focus on God.

The Utopians sacrifice no living animals, nor do they think God delights in blood and slaughter—especially because he has given life to animals so that people can live. Incense and candles are burned and prayers are said, not for the pleasure of God, but because such practices harmlessly please and inspire the Utopians. People worship in white clothing, and the priests wear vestments of many colors, not precious but fashioned well with symbolically meaningful feathers interwoven into them.

In keeping with their compassion and respect for life, the Utopians do not sacrifice any animals, which is both impractically wasteful and disrespectful to God as the source of life. Even in religious worship, the Utopians enjoy sensuous pleasures (More seems to have the Catholic practice of releasing incense during worship in mind here).

When a priest enters to begin worship, the people bow down as though God himself had entered. They rise at the priest's signal and sing praises to God, accompanied by foreign musical instruments. The Utopians' music is better than the Europeans' because it perfectly marries meaning and sound. In their prayers, the Utopians acknowledge God to be their maker and the principal cause of all goodness, and they thank him, especially for the benefits he's showered on their commonwealth. They also pray to join God in the afterlife at his pleasure.

Again, although Utopia is a society of religious freedom, its form of worship seems decidedly Catholic, both in form and content. Thomas More the author is ironically never more divisive in Utopia, *perhaps, than in this section on religion.*

BOOK 2: CONCLUSION

Hythloday says that he has described as truly as possible the form and order of Utopia, which he thinks is not only the best commonwealth in the world but also the only one worthy of the name "commonwealth," for nothing is private there. Unlike nations founded on the institution of private property, Utopia provides equally and abundantly for all its citizens. There is no justice when a banker or usurer can sit idly and live richly while common laborers live in poverty and misery, as is the case in Europe.

Hythloday concludes by summarizing Utopia's merits and comparing its collective economy favorably to the property-based economies of European commonwealths. He emphasizes his overarching argument that private property gives rise to both pride and idleness, and that together these spawn poverty and misery.

Indeed, Hythloday sees in most nations a conspiracy by which rich people exploit and oppress the poor. By getting rid of money, the Utopians pull wickedness up by the root and eliminate poverty, too. If it were not for Pride, Hythloday thinks that Europeans would have followed Christ's teachings and abolished private property long ago as well. The Utopians have devised such a prosperous, virtuous, and peaceful way of life that their commonwealth will endure while empires fall around it.

Hythloday connects his argument about private property and pride to Christian teachings, specifically by condemning the institution of private property as unchristian. The image of falling empires is an allusion to the "bad" empires of the Bible: Egypt, Babylon, and Rome. Despite its Christianity, Europe more resembles these, Hythloday suggests, than it does Utopia.

Thus ends Hythloday's tale. Thomas More thinks to himself that many Utopian laws and policies are founded on no good reason, even when it comes to the principal foundation of their ordinances—that is, their collective ownership of resources and moneyless economy. However, Hythloday seems weary from his discourse, and More doesn't want to offend him by disagreeing with his claims (Hythloday said earlier, after all, that we contradict others' ideas only because we didn't come up with them ourselves).

More's disagreement with Hythloday's major findings is a source of much ambiguity in Utopia, *and further adds to the "slipperiness" of the work. This brief reaction of More to Hythloday leaves us with more questions than answers. Does More the author agree with More the character? Is he presenting Hythloday and Utopia as ideals, or as symbols of nonsense, or something in between? Does he agree with the society of Utopia (which he himself created, after all) that abolishing private property is inherently good? Does he just consider it hugely impractical and an unrealistic ideal for Europe, or does he think Utopia to be founded on "no good reason" altogether?*

Consequently, More praises the Utopians and leads Hythloday back into the house for dinner, saying that they will examine and evaluate the Utopians' laws and policies at another time, which More hopes to God will come to pass. For now, More cannot agree with Hythloday in everything; however, he confesses that, though he wishes for many features of Utopia to be realized in Europe's cities, he doesn't dare hope as much, for such a hope would be unrealistic.

More's response to Hythloday's account of Utopia is never presented to us, and so all our questions are left unanswered. This ending adds to the sense of the work as a "joke" or a playful satire, but perhaps the suggestion is also that we as readers are responsible for conducting that dialogue among ourselves. The text requires that we reason for ourselves about Utopia, and what system of governing might be best for an ideal society. This is, after all, the first step we all must take before any utopia can become a reality.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Wilson, Joshua. "*Utopia*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 9 May 2016. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Wilson, Joshua. "*Utopia*." LitCharts LLC, May 9, 2016. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/utopia.

To cite any of the quotes from *Utopia* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

More, Sir Thomas. Utopia. Oxford University Press. 2009.

CHICAGO MANUAL

More, Sir Thomas. Utopia. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2009.