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THOMAS MORE

Utopia

EDITED BY

GEORGE M. LOGAN

AND

ROBERT M. ADAMS

Revised Edition

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For Cathy

Preface

This revised edition of the Cambridge Texts *Utopia* (originally published in 1989) was undertaken primarily to incorporate the extensive changes to the Robert M. Adams translation of *Utopia* that were made for the 1995 Latin–English edition that I prepared with the late Professor Adams and, after failing health forced him to withdraw from the project, with Clarence H. Miller. Especially since the latter edition is now standard for most purposes, it seemed desirable to incorporate the reworked translation into the Cambridge Texts edition. I have also revised the introductory materials in the light of scholarship published since the first edition went to press, and have incorporated a few of the expansions to these materials, and to the commentary, that I made for the 1995 edition. All these materials were, in the 1989 edition, written by me, with the exception of the 'Note on the translation', which was (apart from its final paragraph) by Adams. Since the translation itself was also his – and still is, overwhelmingly, despite the revisions subsequently made to it – I have left the note unchanged.

The Adams translation began life in the Norton Critical Edition of *Utopia* that Adams published in 1975 (second edition 1992). I remain grateful to the late, deeply lamented John Benedict, Vice President and Editor of W. W. Norton and Company, who secured the blessing of that estimable firm on the incorporation of a revised version of the translation in the Cambridge Texts edition. For that edition, Adams also made new translations of some of the ancillary letters and poems that buttress the text of *Utopia* in the four early editions of the work.

The many revisions of 1995 were almost all made for the sake of greater accuracy.[1] Adams, who was a wonderful stylist, was sometimes inclined to sacrifice accuracy to grace; nor did he claim to be a Neo-Latin scholar. Many of the new renderings were suggested by Father Germain Marc'hadour, the paterfamilias of the international community of More students and admirers, who, with his usual generosity, at my request gave the 1989 edition a meticulous going-over; many other changes were suggested by Professor Miller, whose help and friendship, to 1995 and after, I cannot adequately acknowledge, any more than I can convey the depth of my admiration for his scholarship.

I also remain grateful, as I was in 1989, to Richard Tuck and Quentin Skinner for their valuable comments on the first version of the introductory materials; Skinner also vetted the 1995 introductory materials. His own published work is responsible for much of what I know about the context of *Utopia* in the history of political thought; and he has, on various occasions dating back twenty years, given me comments on my work that have been invaluable both professionally and personally. Elizabeth McCutcheon's review of the 1995 edition was responsible for the first of the five changes I have made to the translation this time around; and I owe this exemplary scholar and friend far more than that. In general, my greatest reward for working on More has been the profit and pleasure of his company and that of the More scholars whom I have been privileged to know.

I am also grateful to Richard Fisher, the Press's Director for Humanities and Social Sciences, with whom I have worked comfortably since the late 1980s, and whose backing made this revised edition possible. And once again I want to express my thanks to Ruth Sharman and Virginia Catmur, who served as the Press's very capable editors for, respectively, the 1989 and 1995 editions.

Finally, I want to acknowledge my associates and friends at Massey College (in the University of Toronto), the academic utopia where, during an idyllic year as Senior Resident, I completed work on this revision.

G. M. L.

[1] For the same reason, I have made five additional small changes for the present edition, which thus includes a translation identical to that of the 1995 edition except in the following places: p. 12: 'man-eating' to 'people-eating' (*populivoros*); p. 19: 'cattle' to 'animals' (cf. 'other kinds of livestock' two lines earlier); p. 25: 'tripped over themselves to get on his side' to 'sided with him' (*pedibus in eius ibant sententiam* – a common classical idiom); p. 104: 'completely useless to' to 'not especially necessary for' (*non . . . magnopere necessarium*), restoring More's litotes; p. 113 (middle): deleted extraneous comma after 'rule'.

Textual practices

(1) *Documentation.* The paraphernalia of documentation have been kept to a minimum. Publication data for some standard works are given in 'Suggestions for further reading': in the footnotes, these works are cited only by author and title. With the exceptions noted in 'Suggestions for further reading', all citations of classical works are to the editions of the Loeb Classical Library. Neither editors' names nor publication data are given for these editions. References to the Bible are to the King James Version – except for the Apocrypha, where references are to the Vulgate.

(2) *Abbreviations. CW* = Yale *Complete Works of St Thomas More*; *CWE* = Toronto *Collected Works of Erasmus*.

(3) *Names.* Names of historical figures of More's era are spelled as in *Contemporaries of Erasmus: A Biographical Register of the Renaissance and Reformation*. The sole exception is Pieter Gillis, for whom we use the familiar anglicised form Peter Giles.

(4) *Modernisation.* Whenever sixteenth-century English is quoted, spelling (and sometimes punctuation) is silently modernised.

(5) *Gendered language.* Where More uses nouns or pronouns that, in classical Latin, encompass not just males but human beings of either sex (for example, *homo*, *puer* and *nemo*), the translation employs similarly inclusive English equivalents. We have also avoided gendered pronouns in passages where the Latin does not positively *forbid* our doing so and where More may plausibly be thought not to have intended to restrict his reference to males. But *Utopia* – like all other Renaissance works, and despite the fact that one of its notable features is the nearly equal treatment that the

Utopian republic accords to women and men in education, work and military training and service – is the product of a culture in which intellectual and political life were generally regarded as almost exclusively male domains; and the truth is that we have probably translated into gender-neutral language some passages where More had in mind only males.

Introduction

I

The word 'utopia' entered the world with the publication of More's little book in December 1516. More coined it by fusing the Greek adverb *ou* – 'not' – with the noun *topos* – 'place' – and giving the resulting compound a Latin ending. Within the book's fiction, 'Noplace' is a newly discovered island somewhere in the New World. The meaning that 'utopia' has come to have as a common noun – a perfect society, or a literary account of one – seems authorised by the full title of the book, which is (translating from the Latin), 'On the Best State of a Commonwealth and on the New Island of Utopia'. The same Hellenist readers who recognised the etymology of 'Utopia' would also find this meaning suggested by the fact that the word puns on another Greek compound, *eutopia* – 'happy' or 'fortunate' place.

When we begin to read the book itself, though, the plausible supposition that *Utopia* is a utopia is rapidly undermined. First, the explorer whose account of the new island the book purports to record turns out to be named 'Hythloday' – another Greek compound, signifying 'nonsense peddler'. Second, the introductory, scene-setting pages are followed not by an account of Utopia but by a lengthy debate on the question of whether it is worthwhile for Hythloday to enter practical politics by joining a king's council. Within this debate is another, recounted by Hythloday, on the problem of theft in More's England. Apart from a comic postlude to the latter one, these two debates seem deadly serious, and they are powerfully written: but what are they doing in a book on the ideal commonwealth? And when, at the beginning of the second part (or 'Book') of *Utopia*, we

at last reach Hythloday's account of the new island, it is still not clear that we've reached eutopia.

The commonwealth of Utopia turns out to be a highly attractive place in some ways, but a highly unattractive one in others. No one goes hungry there, no one is homeless. The commonwealth is strikingly egalitarian. On the other hand, personal freedom is restricted in ways large and small. The authorities maintain the population of households, cities and the country as a whole at optimal levels by transferring people between households, between cities and between Utopia and its colonies; and even those citizens who are not uprooted in this fashion must exchange houses by lot every ten years (though all the houses are essentially the same). There is no opportunity to pass even one's leisure hours in unsanctioned activities: there are no locks on doors; 'no wine-bars, or ale-houses, or brothels; no chances for corruption; no hiding places; no spots for secret meetings' (p. 59). A citizen must get permission from the local magistrates to travel, and from spouse and father even to go for a walk in the country. In general, if Utopia anticipates the welfare democracies of our own time in many respects, the elaborate constraints imposed on its inhabitants also frequently put us in mind of modern totalitarian regimes. More's own society was rigidly hierarchical and highly regulated, so Utopia may not have seemed as restrictive to him as it does to us. Still, it is difficult to believe that he would have regarded as ideal all the features of Utopia that we find unattractive. Moreover, every Utopian proper noun embodies the same kind of learned joke as 'Utopia' and 'Hythloday'; and a few, at least, of the Utopian exploits and customs we are told about are hard to take seriously. Finally, at the end of the book More partly dissociates himself – or at least the dramatic character who goes by his name – from Utopia, saying that many of its laws and customs struck him as absurd, though there are many others that he would 'wish rather than expect' to see in Europe.

These observations suggest three fundamental questions about *Utopia*. First, why did More invent a flawed commonwealth? It is easy to understand why a writer would want to create a fictional account of an ideal commonwealth, or a satire of a bad one. But what is the point of inventing a commonwealth that is partly good and partly bad? Second, what do the debates of Book I have to do with the account of Utopia in Book II, and with the subject of the best condition of the commonwealth? Third, how are we to understand the fact that More represents himself as disapproving of much of what Hythloday says – and that, by peppering the book with jokes, he even seems to deny its seriousness?

Utopia is endlessly enigmatic, and we as editors don't (and shouldn't) pretend to have definitive answers to these questions, or to many others that the book prompts. We are, though, convinced that answers to the key questions – and, still more, a comprehensive interpretation of the book – need to take into account certain fundamental facts about *Utopia* and its background, and that it is our role to provide the necessary starting points for interpretation, by setting the book in its contexts in More's life and times, and in the history of political thought. In this process, the 'Introduction' provides the broad outlines, and the footnotes to the translation fill in details; in turn, these materials, together with 'Suggestions for further reading', point the reader to texts on which a fuller and deeper understanding of *Utopia* depends.

II

More was born in London on 7 February 1478, or possibly 1477.[1] His father, John More, evidently hoped his eldest son would follow him into the legal profession. Thomas spent a few years at St Anthony's School, learning the fundamentals of Latin grammar and composition. At the age of about twelve, he was placed as a page in the household of Henry VII's Lord Chancellor, John Morton. (Morton was also Archbishop of Canterbury and, from 1493, a cardinal.) This placement was ideally suited to exposing More to the ways of public life, and to securing him a powerful patron. After two years at Morton's, the boy was sent to Oxford, presumably to sharpen the skills in rhetoric and logic that would be important to a legal career. He was then, at about sixteen, brought back to London to begin legal training in the Inns of Court.

During his years as a law student, however, More came increasingly under the influence of a group of literary scholars, central figures of the emerging tradition of Renaissance humanism in England. As modern studies have made clear, the term 'humanism', when applied to the Renaissance, is best used not to designate a particular philosophical position – for no single position is shared by all those Renaissance figures whom we are accustomed to regard as humanists – but to designate a particular scholarly orientation. 'Humanism' is a nineteenth-century coinage; but 'humanist' (like its cognates in other European languages) is found in the Renaissance itself, where it derived, first as Italian university-student

[1] See Richard Marius, *Thomas More*, p. 7; Peter Ackroyd, *The Life of Thomas More*, p. 4.

slang, from *studia humanitatis*, a Ciceronian phrase that came to designate a family of disciplines comprising grammar, rhetoric, history, poetry and moral philosophy.[2] In the Renaissance as in the Middle Ages, Latin was the normal language of learning. Beginning in the fourteenth century, humanists like Petrarch attempted to revive the classical form of that language; by the early fifteenth century, they had undertaken a parallel attempt for classical Greek. More studied Latin composition with the grammarian John Holt, and Greek with the first Englishman to teach it, William Grocyn. He also fell strongly under the influence of John Colet. Like Grocyn, Colet had studied in Italy, the centre of humanist learning. After his return to England in 1496, he gave several series of lectures at Oxford on the epistles of St Paul, lectures that constituted the earliest English application of some of the exegetical and historiographical techniques of Italian humanism; later he became Dean of St Paul's Cathedral, and founded there the first of the humanist grammar schools in England. And in 1499, More made the acquaintance of the great Dutch humanist Erasmus, who in that year first visited England.

Indeed, at this period More seems to have been as intent on the pursuit of literary scholarship as of the law. He may also seriously have considered becoming a priest. According to a biographical sketch of More that Erasmus wrote in 1519, for a time 'he applied his whole mind to the pursuit of piety, with vigils and fasts and prayer and similar exercises preparing himself for the priesthood' (*CWE*, VII, 21). In fact More seems to have tested his vocation not merely for the priesthood – a calling that, as Morton's example shows, need not have precluded a career in law (and politics) – but also for a life of religious withdrawal. The biography by his son-in-law William Roper says that at about this time More lived for four years with the Carthusians, the strictest of the monastic orders.[3]

Eventually More made his choices. By early 1505, he had closed the door to the priesthood and monasticism by marrying Joan Colt, the daughter of a wealthy landowner;[4] nor is there any sign, in the years following his marriage, that he thought of abandoning the law. Given the necessity

[2] See especially Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic, and Humanist Strains* (New York, 1961), pp. 8–23.

[3] *The Life of Sir Thomas More*, p. 198. Roper says that More 'gave himself to devotion and prayer in the Charterhouse of London, religiously living there without vow about four years'. The biography by his great-grandson Cresacre More, however, says he dwelt 'near' the Charterhouse: *The Life of Sir Thomas More*, ed. Joseph Hunter (London, 1828), p. 25.

[4] On her first name, usually given as 'Jane', see Germain Marc'hadour, 'More's first wife . . . Jane? or Joan?', *Moreana*, 29, no. 109 (1992), 3–22.

of supporting a growing family – Joan bore him four children before her death in 1511, at twenty-three; shortly afterward, More married a middle-aged widow, Alice Middleton – he could in any case scarcely have afforded to entertain such thoughts.

In the decade following his first marriage, More rose rapidly in his profession. Roper says that he was a member of the Parliament of 1504, and he almost certainly represented the City of London in that of 1510. In the same year, he began to act as a city judge, having been appointed an undersheriff of London. Increasingly he won assignments that drew on his literary and rhetorical as well as his legal skills. In March 1518, he entered Henry VIII's council.[5] His duties in this role spanned a broad range of activities, but his main employment, before he became Lord Chancellor in 1529, was as secretary to the king. He also served frequently as the king's orator. And when Henry decided to write against Martin Luther (in 1520), More acted as his literary adviser and editor.

In the earlier part of his professional life, More also managed to carry out a substantial amount of independent scholarship and writing. It is striking how precisely his works of this period conform to the five associated disciplines of the *studia humanitatis*.[6] As grammarian (in the Renaissance understanding of the term), he translated (into Latin) Greek poems, and four short prose works of the Greek ironist Lucian. As rhetorician, he wrote a declamation in reply to Lucian's *Tyrannicide*. (The declamation was a standard rhetorical exercise, a speech on a paradoxical or otherwise ingenious topic, often involving the impersonation of some historical or mythical figure.) Erasmus reports a lost dialogue, evidently in the spirit of a declamation, defending the community of wives advocated in Plato's *Republic*. Several of More's longer, polemical letters of these years belong to the rhetorical genre of invective. As poet, he wrote, in addition to a few English poems, a large number of Latin epigrams. As historian, he practised the humanist genre of historical biography, in Latin and English versions of his unfinished *History of King Richard III* (a splendid, sardonic work that became the main source of Shakespeare's play) and in his translation of a biography of the fifteenth-century Italian philosopher Pico della Mirandola. As moral and political philosopher, he wrote *Utopia*. The publication of *Utopia* came near the end of this phase of More's literary career. Apart from four lengthy open letters in defence of Erasmus and

[5] See J. A. Guy, *Thomas More*, pp. 52–3.
[6] See P. O. Kristeller, 'Thomas More as a Renaissance Humanist', *Moreana*, no. 65–6 (1980), 5–22.

humanist learning, for several years after 1516 he wrote little other than what was required of him in his profession; and when he resumed writing books in the 1520s – works opposing the Lutheran 'heresy', and a series of devotional works – they no longer fitted the humanist categories.

III

Utopia was conceived in the summer of 1515. In May of that year, More left England for Flanders, as a member of a royal trade commission. The negotiations conducted by this commission and its Flemish counterpart at Bruges were stalled and recessed by 21 July, but More did not return to England until 25 October. In the three months from late July to late October, he enjoyed a rare period of leisure; it was during this period that *Utopia* began to take shape.

At some point in the summer More visited Antwerp, where he met Peter Giles, to whom Erasmus had recommended him. Giles was a man after More's own heart. A classical scholar and an intimate of Erasmus and his circle, he was also a man of practical affairs, city clerk of Antwerp and as such deeply involved in the business of that cosmopolitan shipping and commercial centre. Book I of *Utopia* opens with a brief account of the trade mission, which leads into an account of More's acquaintance with Giles. At this point, the book glides from fact into fiction. More says he encountered Giles after Mass one day, when Giles introduced him to Raphael Hythloday, with whom they proceeded to have the conversation that is recorded in *Utopia*. This fictional conversation is presumably a transformation and expansion of actual conversations between More and Giles.[7] Be that as it may, More's visit to Antwerp served to crystallise and fuse a range of concerns most of which had (on the evidence of his earlier writings) been in his mind for years.

We have no direct information as to when More began writing. In the biographical sketch referred to above, Erasmus reported that his friend wrote the second book of *Utopia* 'earlier, when at leisure; at a later opportunity he added the first in the heat of the moment' (*CWE*, VII, 24). As J. H. Hexter argues, if More wrote Book II first, it seems probable that he initially regarded it as a complete work; presumably this version of *Utopia*

[7] Giles seems to hint as much in the commendatory letter he wrote for the first edition of *Utopia:* see p. 120.

was well in hand by the time he returned to England.[8] Back in London, though, he found reason to add the dialogue of Book I.

Hexter points out that the first version of *Utopia* must have included not only the account of Utopia that now occupies all of Book II except its last few pages but also an introduction something like the opening of the present Book I. Otherwise it would not be clear who is speaking in the monologue on Utopia, and under what circumstances. The second phase of composition is likely to have begun, then, not with the narrative account of the embassy to Bruges and the diversion to Antwerp but with the dialogue that now follows this introductory section. Indeed the precise point where More, as Hexter says, 'opened a seam' in the first version of *Utopia* to insert the dialogue can be identified with some confidence (see below, p. 12n.). After writing the dialogue, More must also have revised the conclusion of the work as a whole. In the final paragraph of Book II, as Hexter points out, the narrator recalls that Hythloday 'had reproached certain people who were afraid they might not appear knowing enough unless they found something to criticise in the ideas of others'. But Hythloday's censures occur in the dialogue of Book I (p. 14), so that this allusion to them must have been written after the dialogue.

The fact that *Utopia* was composed in this odd sequence surely has implications for its interpretation. As with many other facts about the book, though, this one cuts two ways. On the one hand, it may suggest that More split open a complete, unified book to insert a dialogue which, though interesting in itself, doesn't really belong with the original material – that *Utopia* is really *two* books. Or it may suggest that More had second thoughts about the account of Utopia and saw a need to insert a new section which would be in effect an introduction to it. In any event, the dialogue affects our view of Utopia. For one thing, it gives us a much sharper sense of Hythloday, who is both our only source of information about the island commonwealth and its foremost enthusiast.

IV

More's book benefited greatly both from his experience in law and politics and from his humanist learning. Though the social problems *Utopia* addresses are perennial, the particular formulations of them, and the data

[8] See *More's 'Utopia': The Biography of an Idea*, pp. 15–30; *CW*, IV (*Utopia*), xv–xxiii.

of recent and contemporary English and European life that the book deploys, reflect More's personal and professional experience. But the intellectual paradigms that he brings to bear on the understanding of these problems, and the form and style of his book, derive primarily from his literary humanism.

The most obvious relation between *Utopia* and More's humanist learning is that with the central Greek works of political philosophy. The first part of the book's title – *On the Best State of a Commonwealth* – identifies it as belonging to the oldest genre of political writing, the discourse on the ideal commonwealth initiated by Plato's *Republic* and *Laws* and continued in Aristotle's *Politics* (and subsequently in many other works). Plato's and Aristotle's discussions of the ideal commonwealth are, however, purely argumentative, whereas the Utopian part of More's book consists of Hythloday's fictional travelogue. The decision to present his imaginary society in the form of a long speech by a fictional personage is responsible both for much of the book's interest and for much of its enigmatic quality. Fictions are attractive, but in their very nature they are not apt to resolve into unambiguous meanings.[9]

For the debate of Book I, the primary formal models are the dialogues of Plato – and, perhaps even more, those of Cicero. Like *Utopia*, and unlike the Platonic exemplars, Cicero's dialogues consist mainly of long speeches punctuated by brief interruptions, and are more concerned with expounding alternative positions than with reaching definite and prescriptive conclusions. There are also precedents for the main *topic* of More's debate, in humanist as well as classical literature. Arguing about whether Hythloday should join a king's council is a way of getting at the general, and very frequently discussed, problem of 'counsel': the problem of ensuring that rulers receive – and take – appropriate advice. As Quentin Skinner observes, this problem could be approached either from the point of view of the ruler, in which case the focus is on 'the importance of choosing good councillors and learning to distinguish between true and false friends', or from the point of view of the prospective councillor, when the focus is on the question of whether a scholar should commit himself

[9] More's decision to present Utopia as a fiction has also been responsible for much of his book's literary influence: the genre of the utopia, which *Utopia* initiated, differs from the philosophical discourse on the ideal commonwealth precisely in that it offers a fictionalised account of the eutopia as if it already existed. In the second of the two letters on *Utopia* that More addressed to Giles, he commented obliquely on the advantage of this way of proceeding. See p. 109.

to practical politics.[10] Viewed in the second perspective, it is an aspect of the ancient question of the relative merits of the active and contemplative lives.[11] Since, as Skinner says, 'humanists tended to see themselves essentially as political advisers', counsel was the political topic that most intrigued them. More himself had special reason to be intrigued: he had been edging closer to full-time royal service. Joining Henry's council (which, as noted above, More eventually did, in 1518) would be a step toward which his career as lawyer and diplomat led naturally; and yet contemplating this step may have prompted some anxiety in a man who was also imbued with the ideals of scholarly and religious detachment.[12]

Though the topic of counsel is commonplace, More's treatment of it is distinctive. This is also the case with his treatment (in the debate-within-a-debate referred to earlier) of the problem of theft, which expands into a general analysis of the condition of England. More's handling of these matters differs from that of most other social or political writers of the period in what we may call its systemic or holistic approach. As Hexter puts it, More sees 'in depth, in perspective, and in mutual relation problems which his contemporaries saw in the flat and as a disjointed series' (*CW*, IV, ci). He understands that the problem of counsel cannot be solved by sending a few wise men to court, because, in the existing structure of society, most of the people they would encounter there – including especially the rulers – are motivated by blinkered self-interest. Similarly, the problem of theft cannot be solved by punishing thieves, because theft stems primarily from poverty, which is in turn the product of a number of social factors. The polity as a whole is a complex network of reciprocally affecting parts.

The social analysis of Book I is also distinguished by its passionate intensity, its pervasive moral outrage at the status quo. The treatment of the problem of theft constitutes a scathing indictment of a system of 'justice' in which the poor are 'driven to the awful necessity of stealing and then dying for it' (p. 16). The root cause of this situation lies in the pride, sloth

[10] *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, I, 216–17.

[11] Influential – and durably interesting – treatments of this issue are found in Plato (*Republic* VI.496C–497B and Epistle VII) and Seneca ('On Leisure' and 'On Tranquillity of Mind', in *Moral Essays*), who make the case for non-involvement, and in one of Plutarch's *Moral Essays*, 'That a Philosopher Ought to Converse Especially with Men in Power'. Cicero sees merit in both courses (*On Moral Obligation* I.xx.69–xxi.72, xliii.153–xliv.156).

[12] The most authoritative account of More's entry into royal service is that in Guy, *Thomas More*, pp. 46–58.

and greed of the upper classes. Noblemen live idly off others' labour, and also 'drag around with them a great train of idle servants', who, when they are later dismissed, know no honest way of making a living. The practice of enclosure (fencing common land as pasturage for sheep) deprives farm labourers of their livelihood and sets them to wander and beg – or to steal and be hanged.

Though it is Hythloday who delivers this indictment, one can hardly doubt that it embodies More's own views; and in fact More represents himself as concurring in Hythloday's analysis (p. 27). In the debate on counsel, however, More portrays Hythloday and himself as taking opposite positions, with Hythloday opposing involvement and More favouring it. Both positions are powerfully argued, and they are never bridged: in the closing pages of Book I, the disputants simply drop the topic and go on to another – the desirability of abolishing private property – about which they also never reach agreement.

These facts suggest an additional aspect of the relation between *Utopia* and its author's character and experience, one that helps to explain More's apparent dissociation of himself from Utopia: that the personality and views of his two main characters project his own persistent dividedness of mind. That 'More' closely resembles the author is clear. Yet it is equally clear that this cautious, practical lawyer and family man is More without his passion and vision – a More who could not have written *Utopia*, nor ever have chosen martyrdom. The most obvious literary models for Hythloday are the stern experts on comparative politics of Plato's political dialogues. In the book's generic economy, Hythloday corresponds to the austere Stranger of the *Statesman* or the Old Athenian of the *Laws*, whose detachment from practical affairs enables them to see and speak the truth. But this is as much as to say that Hythloday is to some extent More's fantasy – partly wistful, partly critical – of what he himself might have been, had he made different choices a decade earlier; even as 'More' is his mildly deprecating representation of the practical man he had become.[13]

More's dividedness of mind is also related, via his humanist learning, to the seriocomic mode of *Utopia*. Here the key author is Lucian, four

[13] Hythloday also recalls Erasmus (who, though he wrote about politics, kept himself clear of practical involvement with it) and, more strikingly, the fifteenth-century Florentine philosopher Pico della Mirandola, who was to More a particularly intriguing exemplar of contemplative withdrawal from worldly business. On More and Pico, see Dominic Baker-Smith, *More's 'Utopia'*, pp. 15–21.

of whose works, as we noted above, More had translated. (These were published in 1506, together with some additional translations by Erasmus.)

A Syrian sophist of the second century AD, Lucian was one of the last writers of classical Greek. In a series of dialogues and other short prose pieces, he played a key part in the development of a tradition of making serious points under the guise of jokes, other examples of which are *The Golden Ass* of Apuleius, numerous mock orations and festive treatises (like those listed as precedents in Erasmus' preface to *The Praise of Folly*), and works of later writers such as Rabelais and Swift. This tradition is sometimes characterised by the Latin phrase *serio ludere* – 'to play seriously'.[14]

As More says in his preface to the translations of Lucian, this kind of writing satisfies the Horatian injunction that literature should combine delight with instruction (*CW*, III, Part I, 3); in his second letter to Giles, he indicates that it was such considerations that led him to choose a seriocomic mode for *Utopia* (p. 109). But More was also attracted to the tradition of *serio ludere* for a deeper reason. The divided, complex mind, capable of seeing more than one side of a question and reluctant to make a definite commitment to any single position, has a proclivity for ironic discourse; and *serio ludere* – in which the play can serve to qualify or undercut any statement – is one of the great vehicles of irony. The first major humanist work in the Lucianic tradition is *The Praise of Folly* (written in More's house in 1509). This is a declamation of bewilderingly complex irony, in which Erasmus has Folly (supposed to be a goddess) praise folly – thus setting up a verbal hall of mirrors. The situation in *Utopia* is equally complex: a 'nonsense peddler' condemns Europe and praises Noplace; and his views – many of which are clearly not nonsense – are reported by a character who bears the author's name, and who dissociates himself from most of them.

V

Turning now to the question of the relation between the two books of *Utopia*, it is evident, first, that an analysis of the evils of the existing society forms an appropriate prelude to a discussion of a possibly better one; and that the juxtaposition of Europe and Utopia throws sharply

[14] See, for example, Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, rev. edn (New York, 1968), esp. pp. 236–7, and Rosalie L. Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* (Princeton, 1966).

into relief what is distinctive about each. The resulting comparisons are the burden of the peroration of Book II, in which Hythloday eloquently sums up what we have seen about Europe and Utopia, and makes, very powerfully, the contrasts that are begging to be made. But Book I also prepares us for Book II in another way, which becomes apparent if we consider the structure of Hythloday's arguments in Book I.

The discussion of theft opens with the question of why this problem persists, despite the continual execution of thieves – 'with as many as twenty at a time being hanged on a single gallows' (p. 15). Hythloday's response begins with, and is organised by, the contention that executing thieves is neither moral nor practical: 'The penalty is too harsh in itself, yet it isn't an effective deterrent. Simple theft is not so great a crime that it ought to cost a man his head, yet no punishment however severe can restrain those from robbery who have no other way to make a living.' Correspondingly, Hythloday argues that the milder punishment he recommends is both just and expedient.

As More's contemporaries would have recognised, this strategy of argument originates in rhetorical theory. Rhetoric (like logic) provided lists of subject-matter categories, called 'topics', of proven utility in constructing arguments. Since the subject of Hythloday's remarks is the advisability or inadvisability of particular policies, his speeches belong to the 'deliberative' genre, the oratory of persuasion and dissuasion. (Deliberative is one of the three great *genera* of classical rhetoric, along with the demonstrative genre – the oratory of praise or blame – and the judicial.) The central topics of deliberative oratory are *honestas* and *utilitas* – honour and expediency.[15] The deliberative orator normally argues that a particular course of action is advisable on the ground that it is honourable, or on the ground that it is expedient – or argues that it is *in*advisable, as being either dishonourable or inexpedient. Naturally, the strongest case is made when it can be shown that considerations of honour and expediency point in the same direction.

This turns out to be the nature of Hythloday's argument not only on the problem of theft but on all the questions he addresses. To 'More' and Giles he argues that joining a king's council would be neither honourable nor useful, since kings employ councillors only to tell them how best to accomplish dishonourable and destructive ends. In the two narratives of imaginary privy council meetings that he uses as examples (pp. 28–34),

[15] See, for example, Cicero, *On Invention* II.li.156–8; Quintilian, *The Education of the Orator* III.viii.1–3, 22–5.

he portrays himself as arguing that the supposedly expedient courses recommended by the other councillors are both immoral and self-defeating. When 'More', at the climax of the debate on counsel (pp. 34–7), argues for an 'indirect', temporising approach, in which the councillor, knowing that he cannot turn all to good, will at least try to make things as little bad as possible, Hythloday responds that such a strategy is neither practical nor consistent with Christian morality. Indeed, we get the strong impression that he would say that the moral and the expedient *never* truly conflict, that correct analysis will always show that a dishonourable course is also impractical. This position links him with the Stoics, for whom the identity of the moral and the expedient is a key doctrine.[16]

Evidently the question of the relation of the moral and the expedient interested More deeply, as it did other humanists. The claim that the two are identical was a standard theme of early humanist political thought, which is permeated by Stoicism; but in the fifteenth century some Italian humanists began to assert that *honestas* is *not* always the same as *utilitas*. In 1513, Machiavelli produced, in *The Prince*, the most famous of all statements of this position. More could not have known Machiavelli's book (it wasn't published until 1532), but he certainly knew the tradition of thought that it crystallised.

It is also evident that the question of the relation of *honestas* and *utilitas* is linked with the subject of the best condition of the commonwealth. If the moral and the expedient – the practical – are ultimately identical, then it is theoretically possible to design a viable commonwealth that would always act morally. But if the moral and the expedient cannot be fully reconciled, then this ideal could never be achieved, even in theory.

That More recognised the importance of this issue to the theory of the ideal commonwealth seems clear from what follows the exchange about the indirect approach to counsel. The question of the validity of this approach is never resolved – surely because More was of two minds about it. In his *fiction*, though, the question is left unresolved because it is sidetracked by Hythloday's sudden confession that he thinks the abolition of private property offers the only route to social justice. 'More' disputes this claim, not on the ground that communism is unjust, but on the basis

[16] Doubtless the most widely read account of this Stoic doctrine was that in Book III of Cicero's *On Moral Obligation*. Cicero – who is, along with Seneca, the only Roman in whom the graecophile Hythloday finds any philosophic merit (see p. 10) – gained a place in the history of philosophy not by original thought but, as in this instance, by popularising the ideas of various schools.

of arguments (derived from Aristotle's critique of the *Republic*) that it is impractical. The commonwealth cannot be stable, prosperous and happy without private property and the inequality that goes with it. Hythloday counters that More would think differently if he had seen Utopia: for that commonwealth embodies the equality that More thinks impractical, and yet it is uniquely happy and well-governed, with institutions that are both 'wise and sacred' (p. 37).

This, then, is the context that More provided for the account of Utopia: a dispute about the degree of compatibility of the moral and the expedient in political life, and, in particular, on the question of whether the ideal of equality is compatible with stability and prosperity. This context suggests that the account of Utopia may be – whatever *else* it may be – an attempt to answer this fundamental question about the best condition of the commonwealth: is it possible, even theoretically, for a commonwealth to be both moral and expedient?[17]

VI

If Book I of *Utopia* is affiliated with deliberative oratory, Book II has an equally clear connection with the demonstrative or epideictic genre, the oratory of praise or blame. Whatever More's readers (or More himself) might think of Utopia, for Hythloday it is 'that commonwealth which I consider not only the best but indeed the only one that can rightfully claim that name' (p. 103). Praise of a city or state was a recognised subgenre of demonstrative oratory, and a perusal of the discussions of this subgenre in classical textbooks of rhetoric suggests that these discussions may have contributed something to both the substance and the organization of Hythloday's long speech.[18]

[17] We may note in passing that these considerations suggest a solution to the much-discussed problem of why More made Utopia non-Christian. More and all his contemporaries – including Machiavelli – believed that moral, and Christian, behaviour is advisable on religious grounds. One of the liveliest questions in early sixteenth-century political thought, though, is that raised in Book I of *Utopia*: how far, in political life, is this kind of behaviour advisable on purely prudential grounds? More realised that this question could be answered by seeing what a society pursuing perfect expediency through purely rational calculations would be like.

[18] See Quintilian III.vii.26–7. There is another important treatment of the subgenre in the treatise on epideictic oratory by the Greek rhetorician Menander. His treatise (without translation) can be found in *Rhetores Graeci*, ed. Christianus Walz, 9 vols. (Osnabrück, 1968; originally published 1832–6), IX, 127–330; for a summary, see Theodore C. Burgess, 'Epideictic literature', *University of Chicago Studies in Classical Philology*, 3 (1902), 109–12.

If the selection and order of topics in the account of Utopia to some extent reflect the dicta of rhetorical theory, though, the structure of the commonwealth itself certainly derives from *political* theory. First, More took many of the institutional arrangements of Utopia from the discussions of the ideal commonwealth by Plato and Aristotle, and from idealised accounts of historical polities and their lawgivers by such authors as Tacitus and, especially, Plutarch. These appropriations range from small (but often striking) items such as the Utopians' custom of having wives stand 'shoulder to shoulder' (p. 90) with their husbands in battle, which seems to have been inspired or authorised by a passage in Plato's *Republic*, to fundamental features of Utopian life such as the restrictions on property and privacy, the institution of the common tables, and the heavy use, in the inculcation of desirable behaviour, of what we should call positive and negative reinforcement.

Second, the structure into which the borrowed institutions were fitted appears to have been constructed by applying the method for designing an ideal commonwealth devised by Plato and Aristotle. In this method, creating such a commonwealth is not simply a matter of piling together all the desirable features one can think of. On the contrary, the design premise is the principle of *autarkeia*, self-sufficiency: the best commonwealth will be one that includes everything that is necessary to the happiness of its citizens, and nothing else. Starting from this economical premise, Plato developed, and Aristotle refined, a four-step procedure for constructing an ideal commonwealth.[19] First, one must determine what constitutes the happiest life for the individual. This is the central question of ethical theory, and, as Aristotle explains at the beginning of Book VII of the *Politics*, its answer constitutes the starting point of political theory. Second, from these conclusions about the most desirable life, the theorist derives the communal goals whose attainment will result in the happiness of the citizens. Third, it is necessary to form a sort of checklist of the physical and institutional components that the commonwealth must include: a certain size of population will be required, and a certain kind and extent of territory; certain occupational functions will have to be performed; and so on. Finally, the theorist determines the particular form that each of these components should be given in order to assure that, collectively, they will constitute the best commonwealth. For More, most of these forms are (as we have noted) appropriated from Plato's and Aristotle's

[19] See Plato, *Republic* II.369B–372E; Aristotle, *Politics* VII.i–viii.

discussions of the ideal commonwealth and from idealised accounts of actual commonwealths.

Though there are many other useful things to say about Book II of *Utopia*, it seems beyond dispute, and fundamental, that the book presents the results of a best-commonwealth exercise conducted according to the Greek rules. This fact is obscured by More's decision to present his results in the form of a speech in praise of a supposedly existing commonwealth – the decision, as it were, to invent the genre of the utopia instead of writing a work of political theory in one of the standard forms. This decision entailed suppressing or disguising the various components of the dialectical substructure of his model. But once we recognise that Book II of *Utopia* constitutes a best-commonwealth exercise, some mystifying aspects of the work begin to make sense. In particular, this recognition tells us how to take the lengthy account of Utopian moral philosophy (pp. 64–74); and it can suggest an answer to one of the key questions we posed in starting out: why did More labour to invent a *flawed* commonwealth?

The passage on moral philosophy is in fact the cornerstone of the Utopian edifice: it constitutes the first step of the best-commonwealth exercise, the determination of the happiest life for the individual. The Utopians (who take it for granted that self-interest is the basic fact about human nature) maintain that pleasure is the goal of life, but they find that the most pleasurable life is the life of virtue. This is also the conclusion of Plato and Aristotle, but for them the virtuous life is that of contemplative leisure, made possible by the labour of slaves and artisans whose happiness is not a goal of the commonwealth. By contrast, the Utopians conclude that individual felicity is incompatible with special privilege, and think that the foremost pleasure 'arises from practice of the virtues and consciousness of a good life' (p. 73). Thus, though the Utopians are not Christians and their arguments consider only self-interest, they conclude that the best life for the individual is one lived in accordance with the moral norms of Christianity. Moreover, parallels between their arguments and passages in others of More's works confirm that he thought these arguments valid – though many readers have found them convoluted and strained.

But even if we grant that, for each individual, morality is always expedient, is this also true for the commonwealth as a whole? For the most part, Utopia supports this view. If, as the Utopians conclude, one's happiness is incompatible with spoiling the happiness of others, then it follows that the institutions of the commonwealth, whose goal is to maximise the happiness of its citizens, must be structured so as to implement the

Golden Rule. Indeed, the institutions and policies of Utopia (many deriving as they do from previous treatments of the ideal commonwealth) are on the whole much preferable to those of European nations and are in many respects completely consistent with Christian standards, as those are interpreted in the writings of More and his associates.

Yet some Utopian practices appear to be incompatible with these standards, and to be justifiable only in terms of expediency. To take the most disturbing examples, there is, first, the severe restriction of personal freedom. In Book I, Hythloday criticises repressive policies on the ground that 'it's an incompetent monarch who knows no other way to reform his people than by depriving them of all life's benefits' (p. 33), and this attitude harmonises with many passages in the writings of More's humanist circle. The Utopians themselves believe that 'no kind of pleasure is forbidden, provided harm does not come of it' (p. 58). To be sure, More was not a man to countenance laxity in himself or in others, and he regarded some activities as harmful that, to most of us nowadays, seem quite innocuous. But the numerous proscriptions and rigid controls hedged round life in Utopia include some that do not appear capable of being explained in this fashion. Is taking an unsanctioned walk in the country (pp. 58–9) really such a pernicious act?

Then there are the troubling aspects of Utopian foreign policy. For the most part, the Utopians are generous toward their neighbours. They distribute their surplus commodities among them 'at moderate prices', and they are always happy to provide them with skilful and honest administrators (pp. 59, 83). They detest war, and, whenever it cannot be avoided, go to great lengths to minimise its destructiveness. Yet it turns out that they will go to war for a good many reasons – including to obtain territory for colonisation, whenever the Utopian population exceeds the optimum number. Furthermore, some of their military tactics are of very dubious morality. They offer rewards for the assassination of enemy leaders. They employ mercenaries to do as much of their fighting as possible – and the mercenaries they prefer are the savage Zapoletes (pp. 88–9), whose use is hard to reconcile with the aim of minimising war's destructiveness. Moreover, despite their compassion for the common citizens of enemy nations, the Utopians enslave the prisoners taken in wars in which they have employed their own forces.[20]

[20] Robert P. Adams shows that many of the 'antichivalric' Utopian military practices are consonant with Stoic and Erasmian humanist ideas (*The Better Part of Valor*, pp. 152–4). But this argument cannot account for the particular practices mentioned here.

The explanation of these discrepancies between Utopian practices and More's own ideals would seem to lie in his recognition of the fact that even in the best commonwealth there will always be conflicts between valid goals – a problem that occurs but rarely to theorists of the ideal commonwealth or writers of utopias. More's awareness of the conflict of goals is first apparent in the section on moral philosophy. Utopian ethics is a strange fusion of Stoicism and Epicureanism. One feature of Epicureanism that struck More is the so-called 'hedonic calculus', Epicurus' rule that, in choosing among pleasures, one should always choose a greater pleasure over a lesser, and should reject any pleasure that will eventually result in pain: this rule occurs three times, in one formulation or another, in the passage on moral philosophy. It seems clear that More thought similar principles should be applied to resolving conflicts between goals at the collective, political level; and it is possible to understand most of the unattractive features of Utopia in terms of such principles.

More was evidently impressed by the Aristotelian objections to egalitarianism that he has 'More' voice at the end of Book I. If Utopia does not manifest the chaos that 'More' had claimed would be inevitable in a communist society, this is presumably because of the elaborate system of restraints that More has built into it. Apparently he believed that too much freedom would threaten the stability and security of the commonwealth – which, in the nature of things, has to be the political goal of highest priority.

The same line of explanation can be applied to the disturbing Utopian practices in foreign policy. It is impossible to believe that More approved of all these practices; yet apparently he thought them necessary. The internal arrangements of Utopia or any other commonwealth will not really matter unless the commonwealth can be made externally secure; and as long as other commonwealths are not utopian, it is hard to see how to secure it without indulging in some practices that are expedient but certainly not moral.

Despite its abundant wit, *Utopia* is in fact a rather melancholy book. More evidently shared with St Augustine (whose *City of God* he had expounded in a series of lectures about 1501) the conviction that no human society could be wholly attractive; and he knew, too, that even the attractive arrangements that are theoretically possible are in practice difficult to achieve. Is there any reason not to take at face value the final judgement of 'More' that Utopia includes 'very many features that in our own societies I would wish rather than expect to see'? Yet 'More' also insists, in the

debate on the 'indirect approach' to counsel, that things can be made at least a little less bad, by working tactfully on rulers and their councillors. Here as in other ways history has generally borne him out. In the centuries since he wrote, many of the reforms proposed in *Utopia* have been effected in various countries – though not always by peaceful means (any more than was the case in Utopia, where they were imposed by a foreign conqueror (p. 42)), and not always resulting in clear net improvements.

Note on the translation

A translation of *Utopia* has to be based on one of the first four editions – the only ones in which More or his direct agents had a hand. (There is no manuscript of the work.) These editions were published at Louvain (1516), Paris (1517) and Basel (March and November 1518). Like other recent editors, we have concluded that the Basel editions most nearly and fully represent More's intent, both for his text itself and for its appendages (contributions by other humanists) and format. The second of these Basel editions is a close resetting of the first, with nothing, in our judgement, to suggest that its changes from the earlier version have authorial sanction. We have therefore based the translation on the edition of March 1518, occasionally corrected by better readings in the other three early editions, and here and there emended by editorial judgement – our own or that of our predecessors.

Utopia is not cast in artificial or ornate literary language, as More's age understood it. Though More occasionally uses rare words, on the whole his Latin is simple, conversational, everyday prose such as a lawyer, a diplomat or a humanist scholar might employ about the normal occasions and business of daily existence. It is far from Ciceronian; it is seldom deliberately mannered. But it is quite unlike modern English in several important ways. The sentences are longer and less tightly knit in patterns of subordination. The main idea of a sentence may be hidden in an ablative absolute, or hung out at a considerable distance in space and syntax. Because it is a highly inflected language, Latin can scatter the ingredients of a sentence about more loosely than English does, in the assurance that a reader will be able to assemble them within his or her own mind. An English sentence is expected to do more of the reader's work. At the