

CAMBRIDGE
TEXTS
IN THE
HISTORY
OF
POLITICAL
THOUGHT

More

Utopia

EDITED BY

THE DISCOURSE OF RAPHAEL HYTHLODAY
ON THE BEST STATE OF A COMMONWEALTH,
BOOK TWO: AS RECOUNTED BY THOMAS MORE,
CITIZEN AND SHERIFF OF LONDON

Site and shape of
Utopia the new
island

Being naturally
safe, the entry is
defended by a
single fort

The trick of
shifting
landmarks

The island of Utopia is two hundred miles across in the middle part where it is widest, and nowhere much narrower than this except towards the two ends, where it gradually tapers. These ends, curved round as if completing a circle five hundred miles in circumference, make the island crescent-shaped, like a new moon.¹ Between the horns of the crescent, which are about eleven miles apart, the sea enters and spreads into a broad bay. Being sheltered from the wind by the surrounding land, the bay is not rough, but placid and smooth instead, like a big lake. Thus, nearly the whole inner coast is one great harbour, across which ships pass in every direction, to the great advantage of the people. What with shallows on one side, and rocks on the other, entrance into the bay is very dangerous. Near mid-channel, there is one rock that rises above the water, and so presents no danger in itself; a tower has been built on top of it, and a garrison is kept there. Since the other rocks lie under the water, they are very dangerous to navigation. The channels are known only to their pilots; and even they themselves could not enter safely if they did not direct their course by some landmarks on the coast. Should these landmarks be shifted about, the Utopians could lure to destruction an enemy fleet coming against them, however big it was.

¹ Utopia is similar to England in size, though not at all in shape. For a detailed account of its geography, and the inconsistencies thereof, see Brian R. Goodey, 'Mapping "Utopia": A Comment on the Geography of Sir Thomas More', *The Geographical Review*, 60 (1970), 15–30.

The main topics and the order of Hythloday's account may owe something to Aristotle's treatment of the ideal commonwealth in *Politics* vii–viii. Aristotle's discussion of the optimal 'human material' and territory for a polis is followed by a checklist of the six 'services' that must be provided for: food; arts and crafts; arms; 'a certain supply of property, alike for domestic use and for military purposes'; public worship; and a deliberative and judicial system (vii.iv–viii).

On the outer side of the island, occasional harbours are to be found; but the coast is rugged by nature, and so well fortified that a few defenders could beat off the attack of a strong force. They say (and the appearance of the place confirms this) that their land was not always an island. But Utopus, who conquered the country and gave it his name (for it had previously been called Abraxa),² and who brought its rude, uncouth inhabitants to such a high level of culture and humanity that they now excel in that regard almost every other people, also changed its geography. After subduing the natives, at his first landing, he promptly cut a channel fifteen miles wide where their land joined the continent, and thus caused the sea to flow around the country. He put not only the natives to work at this task, but all his own soldiers too, so that the vanquished would not think the labour a disgrace.⁴ With the work divided among so many hands, the project was finished quickly, and the neighbouring peoples, who at first had laughed at his folly, were struck with wonder and terror at his success.

There are fifty-four cities⁵ on the island, all spacious and magnificent, identical in language, customs, institutions and laws. So

Utopia named for
King Utopus

This was a bigger
job than digging
across the
Isthmus³

Many hands make
light work

The towns of
Utopia

² The Greek Gnostic Basilides (second century) postulated 365 heavens, and gave the name 'Abraxas' to the highest of them. The Greek letters that constitute the term have numerical equivalents summing to 365, but what 'Abraxas' actually means nobody knows.

³ The Isthmus of Corinth joins the Peloponnesian peninsula to the rest of Greece. The failure of various attempts to excavate a canal across it made this difficult task proverbial.

⁴ This is the first of several passages in *Utopia* stressing the dignity of labour. Frank and Fritzie Manuel observe that 'More's rehabilitation of the idea of physical labor was a milestone in the history of utopian thought, and was incorporated into all socialist systems' (*Utopian Thought in the Western World*, p. 127). The principal sources of this attitude are Christian; in particular, the monastic orders constituted a paradigm of a society in which all are workers. Monasticism is the one European institution that the Utopians are said to admire (p. 96). By contrast, in classical political theory and practice manual labour was normally assigned to members of the lower orders (including especially slaves), and to women.

⁵ Although the primary reference here is to the cities themselves, the word More uses – *civitas* – is the Latin equivalent of the Greek *polis*, 'city-state'. In fact each of the fifty-four Utopian *civitates* is, like the Greek *polis*, constituted of a central city and its surrounding countryside. Though federated, they also resemble the Greek city-states in functioning as largely independent political units. Throughout Book II, the concentration on the *civitas* is the most striking indication of More's debt to Greek political theory. In number, the Utopian cities match the number of counties in England and Wales – given as fifty-three in William Harrison's 1587 *Description of England* (ed. Georges Edelen (Ithaca, 1968), p. 86) – plus London.

*Likeness breeds
concord
A middling
distance between
towns*

far as the location permits, all of them are built on the same plan and have the same appearance. The nearest are at least twenty-four miles apart, and the farthest are not so remote that a man cannot go on foot from one to the other in a day.

*Distribution of
land*

Once a year each city sends three of its old and experienced citizens to Amaurot⁶ to consider affairs of common interest to the island. Amaurot lies at the navel of the land, so to speak, and convenient to every other district, so it acts as a capital. Every city has enough ground assigned to it so that at least twelve miles of farm land are available in every direction, though where the cities are farther apart, their territories are more extensive. No city wants to enlarge its boundaries, for the inhabitants consider themselves good cultivators rather than landlords. At proper intervals all over the countryside they have built houses and furnished them with farm equipment. These houses are inhabited by citizens who come to the country by turns to occupy them. No rural household has fewer than forty men and women in it, besides two slaves bound to the land. A master and mistress, serious and mature persons, are in charge of each household, and over every thirty households is placed a single phylarch.⁸ Each year twenty persons from each rural household move back to the city after completing a two-year stint in the country. In their place, twenty others are sent out from town, to learn farm work from those who have already been in the country for a year, and who are better skilled in farming. They, in turn, will teach those who come the following year. If all were equally untrained in farm work and new to it, they might harm the crops out of ignorance. This custom of alternating farm workers is solemnly established so that no one will have to perform such heavy labour for more than two years; but many of them who take a natural pleasure in farm life are allowed to stay longer.

Farmers' jobs

*A notable way of
hatching eggs*

The farm workers till the soil, feed the animals, hew wood and take their produce to the city by land or water, as is convenient. They breed an enormous number of chickens by a most marvellous method. Men, not hens, hatch the eggs by keeping them in a warm

⁶ From *amauroton*, 'made dark or dim'.

⁷ Although Utopia exists in the present, the glosses repeatedly refer to it as if it belonged to the distant past, like classical Greece and Rome.

⁸ Greek *phylarchos*, 'head of a tribe'.

place at an even temperature.⁹ As soon as they come out of the shell, the chicks recognise the men, follow them around, and are devoted to them instead of to their real mothers.

They raise very few horses, and these full of mettle, which they keep only to exercise the young men in the art of horsemanship. For the heavy work of ploughing and hauling they use oxen, which they agree are inferior to horses over the short haul, but which can hold out longer under heavy burdens, are less subject to disease (as they suppose), and besides can be kept with less cost and trouble. Moreover, when oxen are too old for work, they can be used for meat.

Grain they use only to make bread.¹⁰ They drink wine made of grapes, apple or pear cider, or simple water, which they sometimes mix with honey or liquorice, of which they have plenty. Although they know very well, down to the last detail, how much food each city and its surrounding district will consume, they produce much more grain and cattle than they need for themselves, and share the surplus with their neighbours. Whatever goods the folk in the country need which cannot be produced there, they request of the town magistrates, and since there is nothing to be paid or exchanged, they get what they want at once without any haggling. They generally go to town once a month in any case, to observe the holy days. When harvest time approaches, the phylarchs in the country notify the town magistrates how many hands will be needed. Crews of harvesters come just when they're wanted, and in about one day of good weather they can get in the whole crop.

THEIR CITIES, ESPECIALLY AMAUROT

If you know one of their cities, you know them all, for they're exactly alike, except where geography itself makes a difference. So I'll describe one of them, and no matter which. But what one rather than Amaurot, the most worthy of all? – since its eminence is acknowledged by the other cities that send representatives to the annual meeting there; besides which, I know it best because I lived there for five full years.

Well, then, Amaurot lies up against a gently sloping hill; the town

⁹ Though artificial incubation is mentioned in Pliny's *Natural History* (x.lxxvi.154), it was not practised in More's time.

¹⁰ I.e., they don't, like the English, use it to make beer and ale.

Uses of the horse

Uses of oxen

Food and drink

Planned planting

*The value of
collective labour*

*Description of
Amaurot, first city
of Utopia*

is almost square in shape. From a little below the crest of the hill, it runs down about two miles to the river Anyder,¹¹ and then spreads out along the river bank for a somewhat greater distance. The Anyder rises from a small spring eighty miles above Amaurot, but other streams flow into it, two of them being pretty big, so that as it runs by Amaurot the river has grown to a width of about half a mile. It continues to grow even larger until at last, sixty miles farther along, it is lost in the ocean. In all this stretch between the sea and the city, and also for some miles above the city, the river is tidal, ebbing and flowing every six hours with a swift current. When the tide comes in, it fills the whole Anyder with salt water for about thirty miles, driving the fresh water back. Even above that, for several miles farther, the water is brackish; but a little higher up, as it runs past the city, the water is always fresh, and when the tide ebbs, the river runs fresh and clean nearly all the way to the sea.

The two banks of the river at Amaurot are linked by a bridge, built not on wooden piles but on massive stone arches. It is placed at the upper end of the city farthest removed from the sea, so that ships can sail along the entire length of the city quays without obstruction.¹² There is also another stream, not particularly large but very gentle and pleasant, that rises out of the hill, flows down through the centre of town, and into the Anyder.¹³ The inhabitants have walled around the source of this river, which is a spring somewhat outside the city, and joined it to the town proper, so that if they should be attacked, the enemy would not be able to cut off and divert the stream, or poison it. Water from the stream is carried by tile piping into various sections of the lower town. Where the terrain makes this impractical, they collect rain water in cisterns, which serve just as well.

The town is surrounded by a thick, high wall, with many towers and battlements. On three sides it is also surrounded by a dry ditch, broad and deep and filled with thorn hedges; on its fourth side the river itself serves as a moat. The streets are conveniently laid out for use by vehicles and for protection from the wind. Their buildings

¹¹ From *anydros*, 'waterless'. The description of the Anyder and the situation of Amaurot correspond in detail to the Thames and London, except that the Thames rises about twice as far above London as the Anyder above Amaurot.

¹² This is an improvement on the situation of London Bridge, which was in the lower part of town.

¹³ Except in pleasantness, this second stream resembles London's Fleet.

The river Anyder

Just like the Thames in England

Here too London is just like Amaurot

A source of drinking water

City walls

Streets, of what sort

are by no means paltry; the unbroken rows of houses facing one another across the streets through each ward make a fine sight. The streets are twenty feet wide.¹⁴ Large gardens, which extend the full length of the street behind each row of houses, form the centre of the blocks.

Every house has a front door to the street and a back door to the garden. The doors, which are made with two leaves, open easily and swing shut automatically – and so there is nothing private or exclusive.¹⁵ Every ten years they exchange the houses themselves by lot. The Utopians are very fond of these gardens of theirs.¹⁶ They raise vines, fruits, herbs and flowers, so thrifty and flourishing that I have never seen any gardens more productive or elegant than theirs. They keep interested in gardening, partly because they delight in it, and also because of the competition between different neighbourhoods, which challenge one another to produce the best gardens. Certainly you will find nothing else in the whole city more useful or more pleasant to the citizens. And from that fact it appears that the city's founder must have made gardens the primary object of his consideration.

They say that in the beginning the whole city was planned by King Utopus himself, but that he left to posterity matters of adornment and improvement such as could not be perfected in one man's lifetime. Their records began 1,760 years ago¹⁸ with the conquest of

¹⁴ Lavish, by sixteenth-century standards. Goodey observes that the structure of Amaurot is reminiscent of Roman urban planning: 'Twenty feet was the average width of Roman city streets, which, again like Amaurotum, were bordered by fairly high-density housing blocks that surrounded large courtyards used for recreation. As in Amaurotum, the rectangular block pattern was the most evident feature of the Roman urban plan. In the Roman city this pattern was broken only by the insertion of major public buildings, again a feature of the Utopian city' ('Mapping "Utopia"', p. 29).

¹⁵ Cf. Plato, *Republic* v.416D: the Guardians 'shall have no private property beyond the barest essentials . . . none of them shall possess a dwelling-house or other property to which all have not the right of entry.'

¹⁶ Apart from its obvious practical advantages, the Utopians' fondness for gardens may hint at the connection of their way of life with Epicureanism. Early in life, Epicurus retired to a house and garden given him by his disciples; and his school was called the Garden.

¹⁷ In the *Georgics* (iv.116–48).

¹⁸ Counting from 1576, this takes us back to 244 BC, when Agis IV became King of Sparta: he was put to death for proposing egalitarian reforms. See Plutarch's 'Agis'; and R. J. Schoeck, 'More, Plutarch, and King Agis: Spartan History and the Meaning of *Utopia*', *Philological Quarterly*, 35 (1956), 366–75; rpt *Essential Articles for the Study of Thomas More*.

Buildings

Gardens next to the houses

This smacks of Plato's community

Virgil also wrote in praise of gardens¹⁷

the island, were diligently compiled, and are carefully preserved in writing. From these records it appears that the first houses were low, like cabins or peasant huts, built slapdash out of any sort of lumber, with mud-plastered walls and steep roofs, ridged and thatched with straw. But now their houses are all three storeys high and handsomely constructed; the fronts are faced with stone, stucco, or brick, over rubble construction.¹⁹ The roofs are flat and are covered with a kind of plaster that is cheap but fireproof, and more weather-resistant even than lead.²⁰ Glass (of which they have a good supply) is used in windows to keep out the weather; and they also use thin linen cloth treated with clear oil or gum so that it lets in more light and keeps out more wind.

*Windows of glass
or oiled linen*

THEIR OFFICIALS

Once a year, every group of thirty households elects an official, called the syphogrant in their ancient language,²¹ but now known as the phylarch. Over every group of ten syphogrants with their households there is another official, once called the tranibor but

*In the Utopian
tongue 'tranibor'
means 'chief
official'*

¹⁹ The housing of modern Amaurot is considerably more impressive than that of early sixteenth-century London, where dwellings were normally of timber and of at most two storeys.

²⁰ The Utopians' roof-covering may be the plaster of Paris spoken of in Harrison's *Description of England*, which was made of 'fine alabaster burned, . . . whereof in some places we have great plenty and that very profitable against the rage of fire' (p. 196). Glass windows were uncommon in England. Oiled linen, sheets of horn, and lattices of wicker or wood were used instead.

²¹ 'Syphogrant' appears to be constructed from Greek *sophos* ('wise') – or perhaps *syphos* ('of the sty') – plus *gerontes* ('old men'). For 'tranibor', the obvious etymology is *traneis* or *tranos* ('clear', 'plain', 'distinct') plus *boros* ('devouring', 'gluttonous'). Although Hythloday says that these terms have been displaced by the more unambiguously respectful 'phylarch' and 'protophylarch' (translated as 'head phylarch'), in the remainder of his account he invariably uses the 'older' terms. 'Phylarch' occurs twice before this passage, but never again; 'protophylarch' occurs only this once.

The Utopian form of government is republican: syphogrants are elected by the households, and the syphogrants of each city elect – and can remove – the prince (below), as well as the class of scholars, from which all high officials are chosen (p. 53). On the revival of classical republican sentiment in the Renaissance, see Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, rev. one-vol. edn (Princeton, 1966); J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, 1975); and Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*.

now known as the head phylarch. All the syphogrants, two hundred in number,²² are brought together to elect the prince. They take an oath to choose the man they think best qualified; and then by secret ballot they elect the prince from among four men nominated by the people of the four sections of the city.²³ The prince holds office for life, unless he is suspected of aiming at a tyranny. Though the tranibors are elected annually, they are not changed for light or casual reasons. All their other officials hold office for a single year only.

*A notable way of
electing officials*

*Tyranny hateful to
the well-ordered
commonwealth*

The tranibors meet to consult with the prince every other day, more often if necessary: they discuss affairs of state and settle disputes between private parties (if there are any, and there are very few), acting as quickly as possible. The tranibors always invite two syphogrants to the senate chamber, different ones every day. There is a rule that no decision can be made on a matter of public business unless it has been discussed in the senate on three separate days. It is a capital offence to join in reaching private decisions on public business.²⁴ The purpose of these rules, they say, is to prevent prince and tranibors from conspiring together to alter the government and enslave the people. Therefore all matters which are considered important are first laid before the assembly of syphogrants. They talk the matter over with the households they represent, debate it with one another, then report their recommendation to the senate. Sometimes a question is brought before the general council of the whole island.

*A quick ending to
disputes, which
now are endlessly
and deliberately
prolonged*

*No abrupt
decisions*

The senate also has a standing rule never to debate a matter on the same day that it is first introduced; all new business is deferred to the next meeting. This they do so that a man will not blurt out the first thought that occurs to him, and then devote all his energies to defending his own prestige, instead of impartially considering the common interest. They know that some men have such a perverse and preposterous sense of shame that they would rather jeopardise the general welfare than admit to having been heedless and short-

*Would that the
same rules
prevailed in our
modern councils*

*This is the old
saying, 'Do your
thinking
overnight'*

²² Because there are 6,000 families in each city (p. 55), with thirty families per syphogrant.

²³ While each city has a prince, there is no prince over the whole island, so that when the national council meets at Amaurot (p. 44) there's nobody for it to advise – no executive.

²⁴ The remainder of the paragraph suggests that the purpose of this rule – which our translation, like More's Latin, leaves ambiguous – is to discourage conspiracies rather than to inhibit all private discussion of politics.

sighted. They should have had enough foresight at the beginning to speak with prudence rather than haste.

THEIR OCCUPATIONS

Agriculture is everyone's business, though now we put it off on a despised few

Farming is the one job at which everyone works, men and women alike, with no exception.²⁵ They are trained in it from childhood, partly in the schools, where they learn theory, partly through field trips to nearby farms, which make something like a game of practical instruction. On these trips they not only watch the work being done, but frequently pitch in and get a workout by doing the jobs themselves.

Trades taught to satisfy need, not greed

Besides farm work (which, as I said, everybody performs), each person is taught a particular trade of his own, such as wool-working, linen-making, masonry, metal-work, or carpentry. There is no other craft that is practised by any considerable number of them.²⁶ Their clothing – which is the same everywhere throughout the island, and has always been the same, except for the distinction between the sexes and between married and unmarried persons – which is by no means unattractive, does not hinder bodily movement and serves for warm as well as cold weather – this clothing, I say, each family makes for itself.

A uniform dress code

No citizen without a trade

Every person (and this includes women as well as men) learns one of the trades I mentioned. As the weaker sex, women practise the lighter crafts, such as working in wool or linen; the heavier jobs are assigned to the men. Ordinarily, the son is trained to his father's craft, for which most feel a natural inclination. But if anyone is attracted to another occupation, he is transferred by adoption into a family practising the trade he prefers. When anyone makes such a change, both his father and the authorities take care that he is assigned to a grave and responsible householder. After a man has mastered one trade, if he wants to learn another, he gets the same

Everyone to learn the trade for which his nature fits him

²⁵ Agriculture gets the same heavy emphasis in *Utopia* as it did in sixteenth-century Europe, where most of the populace had to work at providing a subsistence. A great deal of this work was hard, monotonous and unappealing – and thus required careful apportioning in an egalitarian society.

²⁶ One would have thought that considerable numbers would also have been employed making such things as pottery, harness, bread and books, or in mining or the merchant marine. Presumably all professionals – doctors, for example – are drawn from the class of scholars (p. 53).

permission. When he has learned both, he pursues the one he likes better, unless the city needs one more than the other.²⁷

The chief and almost the only business of the syphogrants is to manage matters so that no one sits around in idleness, and to make sure that everyone works hard at his trade. But no one has to exhaust himself with endless toil from early morning to late at night, as if he were a beast of burden. Such wretchedness, really worse than slavery, is the common lot of workmen almost everywhere except in Utopia.²⁸ Of the day's twenty-four hours, the Utopians devote only six to work. They work three hours before noon, when they go to lunch. After lunch, they rest for a couple of hours, then go to work for another three hours. Then they have supper, and about eight o'clock (counting the first hour after noon as one) they go to bed, and sleep eight hours.

The idle are expelled from society

Workmen not to be overtaken

The other hours of the day, when they are not working, eating, or sleeping, are left to each man's individual discretion, provided he does not waste his free time in roistering or sloth but uses it properly in some occupation that pleases him. Generally these periods are devoted to intellectual activity. For they have an established custom of giving public lectures before daybreak;²⁹ attendance at these lectures is required only of those who have been specially chosen to devote themselves to learning, but a great many other people of all kinds, both men and women,³⁰ choose voluntarily to attend. Depending on their interests, some go to one lecture, some to another. But if anyone would rather devote his spare time to his trade, as many do who don't care for the intellectual life, this is not discouraged; in fact, such persons are commended as specially useful to the commonwealth.

The study of letters

²⁷ The fact that all Utopians have at least two occupations (agriculture and one of the crafts), and in some cases three, brings them into implicit conflict with Plato, who strongly insists that in a well-ordered commonwealth each individual would have one and only one profession (*Republic* II.370A-C; *Laws* VIII.846D-E).

²⁸ In England, for example, an 'Act concerning Artificers & Labourers', 1514-15, made exorbitant demands upon the time of workmen: daybreak to nightfall from mid-September to mid-March; before 5 am to between 7 and 8 pm from mid-March to mid-September (*The Statutes of the Realm*, III (London, 1822), 124-6).

²⁹ In the universities of More's time, lectures normally began between 5 and 7 am.

³⁰ Humanists were pioneers in forwarding the education of women. Celibate Erasmus was greatly impressed by the erudite daughters of his married fellow humanists, including Margaret More. See 'The Abbot and the Learned Lady' in Erasmus' *Colloquies*.

Diversion after supper

But now gambling is the sport of kings

Their games are useful too

After supper, they devote an hour to recreation, in their gardens when the weather is fine, or during winter weather in the common halls where they have their meals. There they either play music or amuse themselves with conversation. They know nothing about gambling with dice or other such foolish and ruinous games. They do play two games not unlike our own chess. One is a battle of numbers, in which one number captures another. The other is a game in which the vices fight a battle against the virtues. The game is ingeniously set up to show how the vices oppose one another, yet readily combine against the virtues; then, what vices oppose what virtues, how they try to assault them openly or undermine them indirectly; how the virtues can break the strength of the vices or elude their plots; and finally, by what means one side or the other gains the victory.

Kinds of idlers

Noblemen's bodyguards

A very shrewd observation

But in all this, you may get a wrong impression if we don't go back and consider one point more carefully. Because they allot only six hours to work, you might think the necessities of life would be in scant supply. This is far from the case. Their working hours are ample to provide not only enough but more than enough of the necessities and even the conveniences of life. You will easily appreciate this if you consider how large a part of the population in other countries exists without doing any work at all. In the first place, hardly any of the women, who are a full half of the population, work;³¹ or, if they do, then as a rule their husbands lie snoring in bed. Then there is a great lazy gang of priests and so-called religious men. Add to them all the rich, especially the landlords, who are commonly called gentlemen and nobility. Include with them their retainers, that mob of swaggering bullies. Finally, reckon in with these the sturdy and lusty beggars who go about feigning some disease as an excuse for their idleness. You will certainly find that the things which satisfy our needs are produced by far fewer hands than you had supposed.

And now consider how few of those who do work are doing really essential things. For where money is the measure of everything,

³¹ A strange statement, in view of the fact that women had the same, or heavier, domestic duties in the sixteenth century as in the twentieth. In Utopia, they are responsible for some at least of these duties – cooking, childcare – in addition to practising a craft and taking their turn at farm work. Small problems, such as who does the laundry, who cleans the house, who tends the garden, are solved by the simple expedient of not mentioning them.

many vain, superfluous trades are bound to be carried on simply to satisfy luxury and licentiousness. Suppose the multitude of those who now work were limited to a few trades and set to producing just those commodities that nature really requires.³² They would be bound to produce so much that prices would drop and the workmen would be unable to make a living. But suppose again that all the workers in useless trades were put to useful ones, and that the whole crowd of idlers (each of whom guzzles as much as any two of the workmen who create what they consume) were assigned to productive tasks – well, you can easily see how little time each man would have to spend working, in order to produce all the goods that human needs and conveniences call for – yes, and human pleasure too, as long as it's true and natural pleasure.

The experience of Utopia makes this perfectly apparent. In each city and its surrounding countryside barely five hundred of those men and women whose age and strength make them fit for work are exempted from it.³³ Among these are the syphogrants, who by law are free not to work; yet they don't take advantage of the privilege, preferring to set a good example to their fellow citizens. Some others are permanently exempted from work so that they may devote themselves to study, but only on the recommendation of the priests³⁴ and through a secret vote of the syphogrants. If any of these scholars disappoints their hopes, he becomes a workman again. On the other hand, it happens from time to time that a craftsman devotes his leisure so earnestly to study, and makes such progress as a result, that he is relieved of manual labour and promoted to the order of learned men. From this class of scholars are chosen ambassadors, priests, tranibors and the prince himself, who used to be called Barzanes, but in their modern tongue is known as Ademos.³⁵ Since almost all

Not even officials dodge work

Only the learned hold public office

³² The notion that a well-ordered commonwealth would not countenance trades other than those that supply legitimate human needs is traceable to Plato (*Republic* II.372D–373D). Plutarch says that Lycurgus, the lawgiver of Sparta, 'banished the unnecessary and superfluous arts' (*Lycurgus* IX.3).

³³ Two hundred of these are syphogrants; presumably the prince, the twenty tranibors and the thirteen priests (p. 101) are also exempt. The rest must be scholars, and the ambassadors drawn from their ranks.

³⁴ The priests are in charge of the education of children (p. 102).

³⁵ 'Barzanes': probably Hebrew *bar*, 'son of', plus *Zanos*, Doric poetic form of the genitive of Zeus. A potent Chaldean magician named Mithrobarzanes figures in Lucian's 'Menippus', which More had translated. 'Ademos': Greek α -privative plus *demus*, 'people': hence 'Peopleless.'

the rest of the populace is neither idle nor engaged in useless trades, it is easy to see why they produce so much in such a short working day.

Apart from all this, in several of the necessary crafts their way of life requires less total labour than does that of people elsewhere. In other countries, building and repairing houses demands the constant labour of many men, because what a father has built, his thriftless heir lets fall into ruin; and then his successor has to reconstruct, at great expense, what could easily have been kept up at a very small charge. Again, when a man has built a splendid house at vast cost, someone else may think he has better taste, let the first house fall to ruin, and then build another one somewhere else for just as much money. But among the Utopians, where everything has been well-ordered and the commonwealth properly established, building a new home on a new site is a rare event. They are not only quick to repair deterioration, but foresighted in preventing it. The result is that their buildings last for a very long time with minimum repairs; and the carpenters and masons sometimes have so little to do that they are set to squaring timber and cutting stone for prompt use in case of future need.

Consider, too, how little labour their clothing requires. Their work clothes are loose garments made of leather or pelts, which last as long as seven years. When they go out in public, they cover these rough work clothes with a cloak. Throughout the entire island, they all wear cloaks of the same colour, which is that of natural wool.³⁶ As a result, they not only need less wool than people in other countries, but what they do need is less expensive. They use linen cloth most because it requires least labour. They like linen cloth to be white and wool cloth to be clean; but they do not value fineness of texture. Elsewhere a man may not be satisfied with four or five woollen cloaks of different colours and as many silk shirts – or if he's a bit of a fop, even ten of each are not enough. But a Utopian is content with a single cloak, and generally wears it for two years. There is no

³⁶ More's letter to Erasmus of c. 4 December 1516 – in which he reports a daydream of being King of Utopia – identifies this garment as a Franciscan cowl (*Selected Letters*, p. 85). The Carthusians, with whom More lived for some years (Introduction, p. xiv), wore garments of undyed wool. The biographical sketch of More that Erasmus included in a letter to Ulrich von Hutten says that 'Simple clothes please ... [More] best, and he never wears silk or scarlet or a gold chain, except when it is not open to him to lay it aside' (*CWE*, vii, 18).

reason why he should want any more garments, for if he had them, he would not be better protected against the cold, nor would he appear in any way better dressed.

When there is an abundance of everything as a result of everyone working at useful trades and nobody consuming to excess, they sometimes assemble great numbers of people to work on the roads, if any need repairs. And when there is no need even for this sort of public work, then the officials very often proclaim a shorter work day, since they never force their citizens to perform useless labour. The chief aim of their constitution is that, as far as public needs permit, all citizens should be free to withdraw as much time as possible from the service of the body and devote themselves to the freedom and culture of the mind. For that, they think, is the real happiness of life.

SOCIAL AND BUSINESS RELATIONS

Now I must explain the social relations of these folk, how the citizens behave towards one another, and how they distribute goods within the society.

Each city, then, consists of households, the households consisting generally of blood-relations. When the women grow up and are married, they move into their husbands' households. On the other hand, male children and their offspring remain in the family, and are subject to the oldest member, unless his mind has started to fail, in which case the next oldest takes his place. To keep the cities from becoming too sparse or too crowded, they have decreed that there shall be six thousand households in each (exclusive of the surrounding countryside), with each household containing between ten and sixteen adults. They do not, of course, try to regulate the number of minor children in a family.³⁷ The limit on adults is easily observed by transferring individuals from a household with too many into a household with not enough. Likewise if a city has too

The number of citizens

³⁷ If an average household includes thirteen adults, then there are approximately 78,000 adults per city. Those on two-year tours of agricultural duty may or may not be included. Allowing for children and slaves, the population of each Utopian city must be in excess of 100,000, making them larger than all but the greatest European cities of the time.

The closest parallel to the Utopian arrangements is found in Plato's *Laws* (v. 740A–741A), where the ideal figure of 5,040 households for the polis is maintained by relocating children, manipulating the birthrate and establishing colonies.

many people, the extra persons serve to make up the shortage of population in other cities. And if the population throughout the entire island exceeds the quota, they enrol citizens out of every city and plant a colony under their own laws on the mainland near them, wherever the natives have plenty of unoccupied and uncultivated land. Those natives who want to live with the Utopians are taken in. When such a merger occurs the two peoples gradually and easily blend together, sharing the same way of life and customs, much to the advantage of both. For by their policies the Utopians make the land yield an abundance for all, though previously it had seemed too barren and paltry even to support the natives. But those who refuse to live under their laws the Utopians drive out of the land they claim for themselves; and on those who resist them, they declare war. The Utopians say it's perfectly justifiable to make war on people who leave their land idle and waste yet forbid the use and possession of it to others who, by the law of nature, ought to be supported from it.

If for any reason the population of one city shrinks so sharply that it cannot be made up without draining others, the numbers are restored by bringing people back from the colonies. This has happened only twice, they say, in their whole history, both times in consequence of a frightful plague. They would rather let their colonies perish entirely than allow any of the cities on their island to get too small.

But to return to their manner of living. The oldest of every household, as I said, is the ruler. Wives act as helpers to their husbands, children to their parents, and generally the younger to their elders. Every city is divided into four equal districts, and in the middle of each district is a market for all kinds of commodities. Whatever each household produces is brought here and stored in warehouses, each kind of goods in its own place. Here the head of every household looks for what he or his family needs and carries off what he wants without any sort of payment or compensation. Why should anything be refused him? There is plenty of everything, and no reason to fear that anyone will claim more than he needs. Why would anyone be suspected of asking for more than is needed, when everyone knows there will never be any shortage? Fear of want, no doubt, makes every living creature greedy and avaricious, and man, besides, develops these qualities out of pride, which glories in putting down

Thus they
eliminate crowds
of idle servants

The sources of
greed

others by a superfluous display of possessions. But this sort of vice has no place whatever in the Utopian way of life.

Next to the marketplace of which I just spoke are the food markets, where people bring all sorts of vegetables, fruit and bread. Fish, meat and poultry are also brought there from designated places outside the city, where running water can carry away all the blood and refuse. Bondsmen do the slaughtering and cleaning in these places: citizens are not allowed to do such work.³⁸ The Utopians feel that slaughtering our fellow creatures gradually destroys the sense of compassion, the finest sentiment of which our human nature is capable. Besides, they don't allow anything dirty or filthy to be brought into the city lest the air become tainted by putrefaction and thus infectious.³⁹

Filth and garbage
spread disease in
cities

By butchering
beasts we learn to
slaughter men

Every ward has its own spacious halls, equally distant from one another, and each known by a special name. In these halls live the syphogrants. Thirty families are assigned to each hall – fifteen from each side of it – to take their meals in common.⁴⁰ The stewards of all the halls meet at a fixed time in the market and get food according to the number of persons for whom each is responsible.

In distributing food, first consideration goes to the sick, who are cared for in public hospitals. Every city has four of these, built at the city limits slightly outside the walls, and spacious enough to appear like little towns. The hospitals are large for two reasons: so that the sick, however numerous they may be, will not be packed closely and uncomfortably together, and also so that those with contagious diseases, such as might pass from one to the other, may be isolated. The hospitals are well ordered and supplied with everything needed to cure the patients, who are nursed with tender and watchful care. Highly skilled physicians are in constant attendance. Consequently, though nobody is sent there against his will, there is hardly

Caring for the sick

³⁸ The bondsmen (Latin *famuli*), who are mentioned only here, should perhaps be distinguished from the slaves (Latin *servi*) who are referred to several times. But on p. 73 Hythloday notes that the Utopians have assigned hunting 'to their butchers, who, as I said before, are all slaves' (*servi*).

³⁹ In the cramped cities of the time, this rule was necessary (though not, of course, because filth makes the air infectious). Even in modern times, slaughterhouses are still generally located in the outskirts.

⁴⁰ According to Plutarch, Lycurgus instituted the common messes of Sparta as part of his plan 'to attack luxury . . . and remove the thirst for wealth' ('Lycurgus' x). For similar reasons the institution was incorporated into the ideal commonwealths of Plato and Aristotle (*Republic* III.416E; *Politics* VII.x.10).

anyone in the city who would not rather be treated for an illness at the hospital than at home.

When the hospital steward has received the food prescribed for the sick by their doctors, the best of the remainder is fairly divided among the halls according to the number in each, except that special regard is paid to the prince, the high priest and the tranibors, as well as to ambassadors and foreigners, if there are any. In fact, foreigners are very few; but when they do come, they have certain furnished houses assigned to them. At the hours of lunch and supper, a brazen trumpet summons the entire syphogranty to assemble in their hall, except for those who are bedridden in the hospitals or at home. After the halls have been served with their quotas of food, nothing prevents an individual from carrying home something extra for himself from the marketplace. They realise that no one would do this without good reason. For while it is not forbidden to eat at home, no man does it willingly because it is not thought proper; and besides, a man would be stupid to work at preparing a worse meal at home when he had a sumptuous one near at hand in the hall.

In the syphogrant's hall, slaves do all the particularly dirty and heavy chores. But planning the meal, as well as preparing and cooking the food, is carried out by the women alone, with each family taking its turn. Depending on the number, they sit down at three or more tables. The men sit with their backs to the wall, the women on the outside, so that if a woman has a sudden qualm or pain, such as occasionally happens during pregnancy, she may get up without disturbing the others, and go off to the nurses.

A separate dining room is assigned to the nurses and infants, with a plentiful supply of cradles, clean water and a warm fire. Thus the nurses may lay the infants down, change them and let them play before the fire. Each child is nursed by its own mother, unless death or illness prevents. When that happens, the wife of the syphogrant quickly finds a suitable nurse. The problem is not difficult: any woman who can volunteers gladly for the job, since everyone applauds her kindness, and the child itself regards its new nurse as its natural mother.

Children under the age of five sit together in the nursery. All other minors, both boys and girls up to the age of marriage, either wait on table, or, if not old and strong enough for that, stand by in

*Meals in common,
mixing all groups*

*Note how freedom
is granted
everywhere, lest
people act under
compulsion*

*Women prepare
the meals*

*Honour and praise
incite people to act
properly*

Raising the young

absolute silence. They eat whatever is handed to them by those sitting at the table, and have no other set time for their meals.

At the middle of the first table in the highest part of the dining hall sits the syphogrant with his wife. This is the place of greatest honour, and from this table, which is placed crosswise of the hall, the whole gathering can be seen. Two of the eldest sit with them – for the seating is always by groups of four. But if there is a church in the district, the priest and his wife sit with the syphogrant so as to preside. On both sides of them sit younger people, next to them older people again, and so through the hall: thus those of about the same age sit together, yet are mingled with others of a different age. The reason for this, as they explain it, is that the dignity of the aged, and the respect due to them, may restrain the younger people from improper freedom of words or gestures, since nothing said or done at table can pass unnoticed by the old, who are present on every side.

Dishes of food are not served down the tables in order from top to bottom, but all the old persons, who are seated in conspicuous places, are served first with the best food, and then equal shares are given to the rest. The old people, as they feel inclined, give their neighbours a share of those delicacies which were not plentiful enough to be served to everyone. Thus due respect is paid to seniority, yet the principle of equality is preserved.

They begin every lunch and supper with some reading on a moral topic, but keep it brief lest it become a bore. Taking that as an occasion, the elders introduce topics of conversation,⁴¹ which they try not to make gloomy or dull. They never monopolise the conversation with long monologues, but are ready to hear what the young men say. In fact, they deliberately draw them out, in order to discover the natural temper and quality of each one's mind, as revealed in the freedom of mealtime talk.

Their lunches are light, their suppers rather more elaborate, because lunch is followed by work, supper by rest and a night's sleep, which they think particularly helpful to good digestion. No evening meal passes without music, and the dessert course is never scanted; during the meal, they burn incense and scatter perfume, omitting nothing which will make the occasion festive. For they are

⁴¹ Humanists were fond of this ancient social custom – which, as the gloss implies, lingered longest in the monasteries. Stapleton says it was the practice at More's table (*The Life and Illustrious Martyrdom of Sir Thomas More*, p. 89).

*Priest before
prince. But now
even bishops act as
servants to royalty
Young mixed with
old*

*Respect for the
elderly*

*Not even monks do
this now
Table talk*

*Modern doctors
think ill of this
practice*

*Music at
mealtimes*

*Innocent pleasures
are not to be
rejected.*

much inclined to think that no kind of pleasure is forbidden, provided harm does not come of it.

This is the pattern of life in the city; but in the country, where they are farther removed from neighbours, they all eat in their own homes. No family lacks for food since, after all, whatever city-dwellers eat comes originally from those in the country.

THE TRAVELS OF THE UTOPIANS

Anyone who wants to visit friends in another city, or simply to see the place itself, can easily obtain permission from his syphogrant and tranibor, unless for some special reason he is needed at home. They travel together in groups, taking a letter from the prince granting leave to travel and fixing a day of return. They are given a wagon and a public slave to drive the oxen and look after them, but unless women are in the company they dispense with the wagon as an unnecessary bother. Wherever they go, though they take nothing with them, they never lack for anything because they are at home everywhere. If they stay more than a day in one place, each man practises his trade there, and is kindly received by the local artisans.

Anyone who takes upon himself to leave his district without permission, and is caught without the prince's letter, is treated with contempt, brought back as a runaway, and severely punished. If he is bold enough to try it a second time, he is made a slave. Anyone who wants to stroll about and explore the extent of his own district is not prevented, provided he first obtains his father's permission and his wife's consent. But wherever he goes in the countryside, he gets no food until he has completed either a morning's or an afternoon's stint of work.⁴² On these terms he may go where he pleases within his own district, yet be just as useful to the community as if he were at home.

*Osacred society,
worthy of
imitation,
especially by
Christians!*

So you see there is no chance to loaf or kill time, no pretext for evading work; there are no wine-bars, or ale-houses, or brothels; no chances for corruption; no hiding places; no spots for secret meetings. Because they live in the full view of all, they are bound to be either working at their usual trades or enjoying their leisure in a re-

⁴² The Utopians in this rule agree with St Paul: II Thessalonians 3:10.

spectable way. Such customs must necessarily result in plenty of life's good things, and since they share everything equally, it follows that no one can ever be reduced to poverty or forced to beg.

*Equality for all
results in enough
for each*

In the annual gathering at Amaurot (to which, as I said before, three representatives come from each city), they survey the island to find out where there are shortages and surpluses, and promptly satisfy one district's shortage with another's surplus. These are outright gifts; those who give get nothing in return from those who receive. Though they give freely to one city, they get freely from another to which they gave nothing; and thus the whole island is like a single family.⁴³

*The commonwealth
is nothing but a
kind of extended
family*

After they have accumulated enough for themselves – and this they consider to be a full two-years' store, because next year's crop is always uncertain – then they export their surpluses to other countries. They sell abroad great quantities of grain, honey, wool, flax, timber, scarlet and purple dyestuffs, hides, wax, tallow and leather, as well as livestock. One seventh of their cargo they give freely to the poor of the importing country, and the rest they sell at moderate prices. In exchange they receive, not only such goods as they lack at home (in fact, about the only important thing they lack is iron), but immense quantities of silver and gold. They have been carrying on trade for a long time now, and have accumulated a greater supply of the precious metals than you would believe possible. As a result, they now care very little whether they sell for cash or on credit, and most payments to them actually take the form of promissory notes. However, in all such transactions, they never trust individuals but insist that the foreign city become officially responsible. When the day of payment comes, the city collects the money from private debtors, puts it into the treasury, and enjoys the use of it till the Utopians claim payment. Most of it, in fact, is never claimed. The Utopians think it is hardly right to take what they don't need away from people who do need it. But if they want to lend the money to some other nation, then they call it in – as they do also when they must wage war. This is the only reason that they keep such an immense treasure at

*Utopian business
dealings*

*Never do they fail
to be mindful of
the community*

*How money can be
useful*

⁴³ According to Plutarch, Lycurgus, returning from a journey just after harvest, and seeing 'the heaps of grain standing parallel and equal to one another, . . . said to them that were by: "All Laconia looks like a family estate newly divided among many brothers"' (Lycurgus' VIII.4).

Better to avoid war
by bribery or guile
than to wage it
with great
bloodshed

home, as a protection against extreme peril or sudden emergency. They use it above all to hire, at extravagant rates of pay, foreign mercenaries, whom they would much rather risk in battle than their own citizens. They know very well that for large enough sums of money many of the enemy's soldiers themselves can be bought off or set at odds with one another, either openly or secretly.

O crafty fellow!

For these reasons, therefore, they have accumulated a vast treasure, but they do not keep it like a treasure. I'm really quite ashamed to tell you how they do keep it, because you probably won't believe me; I would not have believed it myself if someone else had simply told me about it, but I was there and saw it with my own eyes. As a general rule, the more different anything is from what people are used to, the harder it is to accept. But considering that all their other customs are so unlike ours, a sensible man will perhaps not be surprised that they treat gold and silver quite differently from the way we do. After all, they never do use money amongst themselves, but keep it only for a contingency that may or may not actually arise. So in the meanwhile they take care that no one shall value gold and silver, of which money is made, beyond what the metals themselves deserve. Anyone can see, for example, that iron is far superior to either; men could not live without iron, by heaven, any more than without fire or water. But gold and silver have, by nature, no function with which we cannot easily dispense. Human folly has made them precious because they are rare. But in fact nature, like a most indulgent mother, has placed her best gifts out in the open, like air, water and the earth itself; vain and unprofitable things she has hidden away in remote places.

As far as utility
goes, gold is
inferior to iron

If in Utopia gold and silver were kept locked up in some tower, smart fools among the common people might concoct a story that the prince and senate were out to cheat ordinary folk and get some advantage for themselves. Of course, the gold and silver might be put into beautiful plate-ware and such rich handiwork, but then in case of necessity the people would not want to give up articles on which they had begun to fix their hearts – only to melt them down for soldiers' pay. To avoid these problems they thought of a plan which conforms with their institutions as clearly as it contrasts with our own. Unless one has actually seen it working, their plan may seem incredible, because we prize gold so highly and are so careful about guarding it. With them it's just the other way. While they eat

from earthenware dishes and drink from glass cups, finely made but inexpensive, their chamber pots and all their humblest vessels, for use in common halls and even in private homes, are made of gold and silver.⁴⁴ The chains and heavy fetters of slaves are also made of these metals. Finally, criminals who are to bear the mark of some disgraceful act are forced to wear golden rings in their ears and on their fingers, golden chains around their necks, even gold crowns on their heads. Thus they hold up gold and silver to scorn in every conceivable way. As a result, if they had to part with their entire supply of these metals, which other people give up with as much agony as if they were being disembowelled, the Utopians would feel it no more than the loss of a penny.

O magnificent
scorn for gold!

Gold the mark of
infamy

They pick up pearls by the seashore, diamonds and garnets from certain cliffs, but never go out of set purpose to look for them.⁴⁵ If they happen to find some, they polish them and give them to the children, who feel proud and pleased with such gaudy decorations when they are small. But after, when they grow a bit older and notice that only babies like such toys, they lay them aside. Their parents don't have to say anything, they simply put these trifles away out of a shamefaced sense that they're no longer suitable, just as our children, when they grow up, put away their marbles, rattles and dolls.

Gems the
playthings of
children

Different customs, different feelings: I never saw the adage better illustrated than in the case of the Anemolian⁴⁶ ambassadors, who came to Amaurot while I was there. Because they came to discuss important business, the senate had assembled ahead of time, three citizens from each city. The ambassadors from nearby nations, who had visited Utopia before and knew the local customs, realised that fine clothing was not much respected in that land, silk was despised, and gold a badge of contempt; therefore they always came in the very

A neat tale

⁴⁴ More may have got this idea from accounts of primitive societies. Tacitus reports of the ancient Germans that 'One may see among them silver vessels . . . treated as of no more value than earthenware' (*Germany* 5). Vespucci notes the Indians' indifference to gold and gems (*Four Voyages*, p. 98), as does the explorer Pietro Martire d'Anghiera (1457–1526), who tells of a tribe that 'used kitchen and other common utensils made of gold' (*On the New World [De Orbe Novo]*, trans. Francis A. MacNutt, 2 vols. (New York and London, 1912), I, 221).

⁴⁵ Similarly, Tacitus reports of the ancient Britons that though their sea produces pearls, 'they are gathered only when thrown up on shore' (*Agricola* 12).

⁴⁶ From *anemolios*, 'windy'.

plainest of their clothes. But the Anemolians, who lived farther off and had had fewer dealings with the Utopians, had heard only that they all dressed alike and very simply; so they took for granted that their hosts had nothing to wear that they didn't put on. Being themselves rather more proud than wise, they decided to dress as splendidly as the very gods, and dazzle the eyes of the poor Utopians with their gaudy garb.

Consequently the three ambassadors made a grand entry with a suite of a hundred attendants, all in clothing of many colours, and most in silk. Being noblemen at home, the ambassadors were arrayed in cloth of gold, with heavy gold chains round their necks, gold jewels at their ears and on their fingers, and sparkling strings of pearls and gems on their caps. In fact, they were decked out in all the articles which in Utopia are used to punish slaves, shame wrongdoers, or pacify infants. It was a sight to see how they strutted when they compared their finery with the dress of the Utopians who had poured out into the street to see them pass. But it was just as funny to see how wide they fell of the mark, and how far they were from getting the consideration they expected. Except for a very few Utopians who for some special reason had visited foreign countries, all the onlookers considered this splendid pomp a mark of disgrace. They therefore bowed to the humblest servants as lords, and took the ambassadors, because of their golden chains, to be slaves, passing them by without any reverence at all. You might have seen children, who had themselves thrown away their pearls and gems, nudge their mothers when they saw the ambassadors' jewelled caps, and say, 'Look at that big lout, mother, who's still wearing pearls and jewels as if he were a little kid!' But the mother, in all seriousness, would answer, 'Quiet, son, I think he is one of the ambassadors' fools.'

The rascal!

Others found fault with the golden chains as useless because they were so flimsy any slave could break them, and so loose that he could easily shake them off and run away whenever he wanted.

But after the ambassadors had spent a couple of days among the Utopians, they learned of the immense amounts of gold which were as thoroughly despised there as they were prized at home. They saw too that more gold and silver went into making chains and fetters for a single runaway slave than into costuming all three of them. Somewhat crestfallen, then, they put away all the finery in which they had strutted so arrogantly; but they saw the wisdom of doing so after they

had talked with the Utopians enough to learn their customs and opinions.⁴⁷

The Utopians marvel that any mortal can take pleasure in the weak sparkle of a little gem or bright pebble when he has a star, or the sun itself, to look at. They are amazed at the madness of any man who considers himself a nobler fellow because he wears clothing of specially fine wool. No matter how delicate the thread, they say, a sheep wore it once, and still was nothing but a sheep.⁴⁸ They are surprised that gold, a useless commodity in itself, is everywhere valued so highly that man himself, who for his own purposes conferred this value on it, is far less valuable. They do not understand why a dunderhead with no more brains than a post, and who is about as lewd as he is foolish, should command a great many wise and good people, simply because he happens to have a big pile of gold. Yet if this booby should lose his money to the lowest rascal in his household (as can happen by chance or through some legal trick – for the law can produce reversals as violent as luck itself), he would promptly become one of the fellow's scullions, as if he were personally attached to the coin, and a mere appendage to it. Even more than this, the Utopians are appalled at those people who practically worship a rich man, though they neither owe him anything nor are under his thumb in any way. What impresses them is simply the fact that the man is rich. Yet all the while they know he is so mean and grasping that as long as he lives not a single tiny penny out of that great mound of money will ever come their way.

These and the like attitudes the Utopians have picked up partly from their upbringing, since the institutions of their community are completely opposed to such folly, partly from instruction and the reading of good books. For though not many people in each city are

*'Weak' because
the gems are fake,
or their glitter is
feeble and scanty*

*How true and how
apt!*

*How much wiser
are the Utopians
than the ruck of
Christians*

⁴⁷ The story of the Anemolian ambassadors owes something to Lucian's 'The Wisdom of Nigrinus', in which a visiting millionaire makes a fool of himself by stalking around Athens in a purple robe: 'with his crowd of attendants and his gay clothes and jewelry, ... [he] expected to be looked up to as a happy man. But they thought the creature unfortunate, and undertook to educate him ... His gay clothes and his purple gown they stripped from him very neatly by making fun of his flowery colours, saying "Spring already?" "How did that peacock get here?" "Perhaps it's his mother's" and the like' (sect. 13).

⁴⁸ The source is Lucian's 'Demonax' (sect. 41). More repeated the idea years later in *A Treatise upon the Passion of Christ* (1534) (CW, xiii, 8).

excused from labour and assigned to scholarship full time (these are persons who from childhood have given evidence of excellent character, unusual intelligence and devotion to learning), every child gets an introduction to good literature, and throughout their lives many people, men and women alike, spend their free time in reading.

Training and studies of the Utopians

They study all the branches of learning in their native tongue, which is not deficient in terminology or unpleasant in sound, and adapts itself as well as any to the expression of thought. That entire area of the world uses just about the same language, though elsewhere it is more corrupt, depending on the district.

Music, dialectic and mathematics

Before we came there the Utopians had never so much as heard about a single one of those philosophers⁴⁹ whose names are so celebrated in our part of the world. Yet in music, dialectic, arithmetic and geometry⁵⁰ they have found out just about the same things as our great men of the past. But while they equal the ancients in almost all other subjects, they are far from matching the inventions of our modern logicians.⁵¹ In fact they have not discovered even one of those elaborate rules about restrictions, amplifications and suppositions which our own schoolboys study in the *Small Logicals*. They are so far from being able to speculate on 'second intentions'⁵² that not one of them was able to conceive of 'man-in-general', though I pointed straight at him with my finger, and he is, as you well know,

The passage seems a bit satiric

⁴⁹ As the following sentence indicates, 'philosophers' is used here in the old, broad sense that includes those learned in the physical and mathematical sciences as well as students of metaphysics and moral philosophy.

⁵⁰ Music, arithmetic and geometry, together with astronomy (below), constitute the advanced division – the *quadrivium* – of the traditional Seven Liberal Arts. Dialectic joins with grammar and rhetoric to constitute the elementary division – the *trivium*. Grammar and rhetoric would be encompassed in the Utopians' study of 'good literature'.

⁵¹ I.e., the scholastic philosophers. The *Small Logicals* (below) is probably the *Parva logica* of Peter of Spain (d. 1277), though more than one textbook bore this name. In his long open letter to the theologian and philologist Maarten van Dorp, More complains that 'a type of nonsense, worse than that of the sophists, has gradually displaced [genuine] dialectics'. The *Small Logicals*, 'so called, I suppose, because it has very little logic in it, is worth while looking at, with its suppositions, as they are called, its amplifications, restrictions, and appellations, and passages in which occur little rules, not only silly, but even false' (*Selected Letters*, pp. 20–1).

⁵² 'First intentions' are the direct apprehensions of things; 'second intentions' are purely abstract conceptions, derived from considering the relations of first intentions.

bigger than any giant, maybe even a colossus.⁵³ On the other hand, they have learned to plot expertly the courses of the stars and the movements of the heavenly bodies. To this end they have devised a number of different instruments by which they compute with the greatest exactness the course of the sun, the moon and the other stars that are visible in their area of the sky. As for the friendly and hostile influences of the planets and that whole deceitful business of divination by the stars, they have never so much as dreamed of it. From long experience in observation, they are able to forecast rains, winds and other changes in the weather. But as to the causes of the weather, of the tides in the sea and its saltiness, and the origins and nature of the heavens and the earth, they have various opinions. Generally they treat of these matters as our ancient philosophers did, but they also disagree with one another, as the ancients did, nor do they have any generally accepted theory of their own.

The study of the stars

Yet these astrologers are revered by Christians to this very day

Physics the most uncertain study of all

In matters of moral philosophy, they carry on the same arguments as we do. They inquire into the nature of the good, distinguishing goods of the mind from goods of the body and external gifts.⁵⁴ They ask whether the name of 'good' can be applied to all three, or whether it refers only to goods of the mind.⁵⁵ They discuss virtue and pleasure, but their chief concern is human happiness, and whether it consists of one thing or many.⁵⁶ They seem rather too much inclined to the view that all or the most important part of

Ethics

Higher and lower goods

Supreme goods

⁵³ The Utopians' blindness to 'man-in-general' (i.e., man as a 'universal') makes them just opposite to the scholastic philosophers mocked by Erasmus' Folly, who 'on occasion do not see the ditch or the stone lying across their path, because many of them are blear-eyed or absent-minded; yet they proclaim that they perceive ideas, universals, forms without matter, primary substances, quiddities, and eccities' (*The Praise of Folly*, p. 77).

⁵⁴ This threefold classification of goods appears in Plato (*Laws* III.697B, v.743E), but is especially associated with Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics* I.viii.2, *Politics* VII.1.3–4) and Aristotelian tradition. Of course the Utopians have never heard of Plato, Aristotle, or any other European philosopher, and one point of the account of Utopian philosophy is that natural reason will lead earnest, ingenious thinkers to the same set of problems and positions at any time and place. The other, main point is to argue that the moral norms derivable from reason are consistent with those of Christianity.

⁵⁵ The first position is especially that of the Aristotelians, the second that of the Stoics.

⁵⁶ The topics of virtue and pleasure are linked especially in discussions – like Cicero's *On the Supreme Good and Evil* – of the relative merits of Stoic and Epicurean ethics. The idea that happiness is the end of life is axiomatic in all the major philosophical schools.

The Utopians consider honest pleasure the measure of happiness

First principles of philosophy to be sought in religion

Utopian theology

The immortality of the soul, on which nowadays no small number even of Christians have their doubts

human happiness consists of pleasure.⁵⁷ And what is more surprising, they seek support for this comfortable opinion from their religion, which is serious and strict, indeed, almost stern and forbidding. For they never discuss happiness without joining to their philosophic rationalism certain principles of religion. Without these religious principles, they think that reason is bound to prove weak and defective in its efforts to investigate true happiness.

The religious principles they invoke are of this nature: that the soul of man is immortal, and by God's goodness born for happiness; and that after this life, rewards are appointed for our virtues and good deeds, punishments for our sins. Though these are indeed religious beliefs, they think that reason leads men to believe and accept them.⁵⁸ And they add unhesitatingly that if these beliefs were rejected, no one would be so stupid as not to feel that he should seek pleasure, regardless of right and wrong. His only care would be to keep a lesser pleasure from standing in the way of a greater one, and

⁵⁷ I.e., the Utopians are inclined to the Epicurean position. The remark launches a long passage that constitutes, as Edward L. Surtz points out (*The Praise of Pleasure*, pp. 9–11), a praise of pleasure reminiscent of Erasmus' praise of folly. The praise of pleasure, and of Epicurus, had an important precedent in Lorenzo Valla's *On the True and the False Good* (1444–9), which in its original version (1431) was called *On Pleasure*. Valla's work furthered the gradual humanist rehabilitation of Epicurus that began with Petrarch and Boccaccio and in which (after Valla) Ficino, Pico and Erasmus played a part: these writers argued that, contrary to popular opinion, Epicurus did not mean by 'pleasure' mere sensuality. See, in addition to Surtz, D. C. Allen, 'The Rehabilitation of Epicurus and His Theory of Pleasure in the Early Renaissance' (*Studies in Philology*, 41 (1944), 1–15); Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, rev. edn (New York, 1968), pp. 48–71; and George M. Logan, *The Meaning of More's 'Utopia'*, pp. 144–7, 154–63. Vespucci's observation about the Indians may also be relevant: 'Since their life is so entirely given over to pleasure, I should style it Epicurean' (*Four Voyages*, p. 97; see also *New World*, p. 6).

⁵⁸ Thomistic theology supports this view. As Surtz observes, Aquinas maintains that 'man, without supernatural grace, can come to the knowledge . . . of moral and religious truths, such as the existence and perfections of God, the immortality and spirituality of the soul, the duties of man toward his Creator, and the punishments and rewards of the future life' ('Interpretations of *Utopia*', *Catholic Historical Review*, 38 (1952), 163). In *A Dialogue Concerning Heresies* (1529), More says that 'all the whole number of the old philosophers . . . found out by nature and reason that there was a god either maker or governor or both of all this whole engine of the world' (*CW*, vi, 73).

Since Epicurus maintained the indifference of the gods and the mortality of the soul, these principles sharply distinguish Utopian philosophy from classical Epicureanism, and lead the Utopians to a view of the good life similar to the Christian view.

to avoid pleasures that are inevitably followed by pain.⁵⁹ Without religious principles, a man would have to be actually crazy to pursue harsh and painful virtue, give up the pleasures of life, and suffer pain from which he can expect no advantage. For if there is no reward after death, a man has no compensation for having passed his entire existence without pleasure, that is, miserably.⁶⁰

To be sure, the Utopians think happiness is found, not in every kind of pleasure, but only in good and honest pleasure. Virtue itself, they say, draws our nature to pleasure of this sort, as to the supreme good. There is an opposed school which declares that virtue is itself happiness.⁶¹

They define virtue as living according to nature; and God, they say, created us to that end. When a man obeys the dictates of reason in choosing one thing and avoiding another, he is following nature.⁶² Now the first rule of reason is to love and venerate the Divine Majesty to whom men owe their existence and every happiness of which they are capable. The second rule of nature is to lead a life as free of anxiety and as full of joy as possible, and to help all one's fellow men towards that end. The most hard-faced eulogist of virtue and the grimmest enemy of pleasure, while they invite us to toil and sleepless nights and mortification, still admonish us to

Not every pleasure is desirable, neither is pain to be sought, except for the sake of virtue

This is like Stoic doctrine

⁵⁹ This is the first of three citations of Epicurus' rules for choosing between competing pleasures (see Introduction, p. xxvii). The rules find perhaps their most influential statement in Cicero's dialogue *On the Supreme Good and Evil*, where the Epicurean Torquatus explains that 'The wise man always holds . . . to this principle of selection: he rejects pleasures to secure other greater pleasures, or else he endures pains to avoid worse pains' (I.x.33; cf. I.x.36). Another formulation occurs in a letter of Epicurus quoted by Diogenes Laertius: 'since pleasure is our first and native good, for that reason we do not choose every pleasure whatsoever, but oftentimes pass over many pleasures when a greater annoyance ensues from them' (*Lives of Eminent Philosophers* x.129). The Utopians accept these rules of selection, but recognise that their application leads to quite different conclusions about the good life depending on whether religious principles are factored into the individual's calculations.

⁶⁰ The Utopians, that is, reject the claim that purely rational and mundane considerations provide sufficient sanction for moral behaviour.

⁶¹ This second position is that of the Stoics, who declared that virtue is happiness, whether it leads to pleasure or not – indeed, that a man who is enduring great misery may derive happiness from his knowledge of his own virtuous behaviour. As the following marginal gloss points out, the Utopians' definition of virtue is also Stoic. See, for example, Cicero's *On the Supreme Good and Evil* III.ix.31.

⁶² Throughout the ensuing discussion, 'reason' has the sense of 'right reason' – the faculty that, according to a conception passed on by the Stoics to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, enables men to distinguish right and wrong with instinctive clarity; that is, to apprehend the natural law.

relieve the poverty and misfortune of others as best we can. It is especially praiseworthy, they tell us, when we provide for the comfort and welfare of our fellow creatures. Nothing is more humane (and humanity is the virtue most proper to human beings) than to relieve the misery of others, assuage their griefs, and by removing all sadness from their lives, to restore them to enjoyment, that is, pleasure. Well, if this is the case, why doesn't nature equally invite us to do the same thing for ourselves? Either a joyful life (that is, one of pleasure) is a good thing, or it isn't. If it isn't, then you should not help anyone to it – indeed, you ought to take it away from everyone you can, as harmful and deadly to them. But if such a life is good, and if we are supposed, indeed obliged, to help others to it, why not first of all ourselves, to whom we owe no less charity than to anyone else? When nature prompts us to be kind to our neighbours, she does not mean that we should be cruel and merciless to ourselves. Thus, they say, nature herself prescribes for us a joyous life, in other words, pleasure, as the goal of our actions; and living according to her rules is to be defined as virtue. And as nature bids men to make one another's lives cheerful, as far as they can, so she repeatedly warns you not to seek your own advantage in ways that cause misfortune to others. And this is right; for no man is placed so far above the rest that he is nature's sole concern; she cherishes alike all those living beings to whom she has granted the same form.

But now some people cultivate pain as if it were the essence of religion, rather than incidental to performance of a pious duty or the result of natural necessity – and thus to be borne, not pursued

Contracts and laws

Consequently, the Utopians say that men should abide not only by private agreements but by those public laws which control the distribution of vital goods, such as are the very substance of pleasure. Any such laws, when properly promulgated by a good king, or ratified by a people free of force and fraud, should be observed; and so long as they are observed, to pursue your own interests is prudence; to pursue the public interest as well is piety; but to pursue your own pleasure by depriving others of theirs is injustice. On the other hand, deliberately to decrease your own pleasure to augment that of others is a work of humanity and benevolence, which never fails to reward the doer over and above his sacrifice. You may be repaid for your kindness, and in any case you are conscious of having done a good deed. Your mind draws more joy from recalling the gratitude and good will of those whom you have benefited than your body would have drawn pleasure from the things you forfeited. Finally, they believe (as religion easily persuades a well-disposed

Mutual assistance

mind to believe) that God will recompense us for surrendering a brief and transitory pleasure here with immense and never-ending joy in heaven. And so they conclude, after carefully considering and weighing the matter, that all our actions and the virtues exercised within them look towards pleasure and happiness as their final end.⁶³

By pleasure they understand every state or movement of body or mind in which man finds delight according to nature.⁶⁴ 'According to nature' they say, and with good reason. By simply following his senses and his right reason a man may discover what is pleasant by nature: it is a delight that does not injure others, does not preclude a greater pleasure, and is not followed by pain. But a pleasure which is against nature, and which men call 'delightful' only by the emptiest of fictions (as if one could change the real nature of things just by changing their names), does not really make for happiness; in fact, they say it precludes happiness. And the reason is that men whose minds are filled with false ideas of pleasure have no room left for true and genuine delight. For there are a great many things which have no genuine sweetness in them, but are actually bitter – yet which, through the perverse enticements of evil lusts, are considered very great pleasures, and even the supreme goals of life.

What is pleasure?

False pleasures

Among the pursuers of this false pleasure, the Utopians include those whom I mentioned before, the people who think themselves finer folk because they wear finer clothes. These people are twice mistaken: first in supposing their clothes better than anyone else's, and then in thinking themselves better because of their clothes. As far as a coat's usefulness goes, why is fine woollen thread better than thick? Yet they act as if they were set apart by nature herself, rather than their own fantasies; they strut about and put on airs. Because they have a fancy suit, they think themselves entitled to honours they would never have expected if they were plainly dressed, and grow indignant if someone passes them by without showing special respect.

Mistaken pride in fancy dress

Isn't it the same kind of absurdity to be pleased by empty, cere-

⁶³ This is Epicurus' view, as reported by Diogenes Laertius: 'we choose the virtues too on account of pleasure and not for their own sake' (x.138).

⁶⁴ Both Plato (*Philebus* 36C–52B) and Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics* I.viii.ii, vii.v.i) acknowledge the importance to the good life of physical as well as mental pleasures, and distinguish between true pleasures – which are 'pleasant by nature' – and false ones. The ensuing discussion relies heavily on these passages.

Foolish titles monial honours? What true or natural pleasure can you get from someone's bent knee or bared head? Will the creaks in your own knees be eased thereby, or the madness in your head? The phantom of false pleasure is illustrated by other men who run mad with delight over their own blue blood, flatter themselves on their nobility, and gloat over all their rich ancestors (the only sort of nobility worth claiming these days), and all their ancient family estates. Even if they don't have the shred of an estate themselves, or if they've squandered every penny of their inheritance, they don't consider themselves a bit less noble.⁶⁵

The silliest pleasures of all: gemstones In the same class the Utopians put those people I described before, who are mad for jewellery and gems, and think themselves divinely happy if they find a good specimen, especially of the sort that happens to be fashionable in their country at the time – for stones vary in value from one market to another. The collector will not make an offer for the stone till it's taken out of its setting, and even then he will not buy unless the dealer guarantees and gives security that it is a true and genuine stone. What he fears is that his eyes will be deceived by a counterfeit. But if you consider the matter, why should a counterfeit give any less pleasure, when your eyes cannot distinguish it from a genuine gem? Both should be of equal value to you, as they would be, in reality, to a blind man.⁶⁶

Popular opinion gives gems their value or takes it away Speaking of false pleasure, what about those who pile up money, not for any real purpose, but just to sit and look at it? Is that a true pleasure, or aren't they simply cheated by a show of pleasure? Or what of those with the opposite vice, who hide away money they will never use and perhaps never even see again? In their anxiety to hold on to their money, they actually lose it. For what else happens when you deprive yourself, and perhaps other people too, of a chance to use your money by burying it in the ground? And yet, when you've hidden your treasure away, you exult over it as if, your mind now at ease, you could jump for joy. Suppose someone stole it, and you died ten years later, knowing nothing of the theft. During all those

A strange fancy, and much to the point

⁶⁵ This passage – like the catalogue of false pleasures as a whole – is close in substance and tone to *The Praise of Folly*. Folly comments on 'those who, while differing in no respect from the meanest tinker, flatter themselves beyond measure with the empty title of nobility' (p. 59).

⁶⁶ Erasmus' Folly tells how More 'gave his young wife some imitation jewels as a present, persuading her – for he is a plausible joker – that they were not only genuine and natural but also of unique and inestimable value' (*The Praise of Folly*, p. 64).

ten years, what did it matter to you whether the money was stolen or not? In either case, it was equally useless to you.

To these false and foolish pleasures they add gambling, which they have heard about, though they've never tried it, as well as hunting and hawking. What pleasure can there be, they wonder, in throwing dice on a table? If there were any pleasure in the action, wouldn't doing it over and over again quickly make one tired of it? What pleasure can there be in listening to the barking and yelping of dogs – isn't that rather a disgusting noise? Is there any more real pleasure when a dog chases a rabbit than when a dog chases a dog? If what you like is fast running, there's plenty of that in both cases; they're just about the same. But if what you really want is slaughter, if you want to see a living creature torn apart under your eyes, then the whole thing is wrong. You ought to feel nothing but pity when you see the hare fleeing from the hound, the weak creature tormented by the stronger, the fearful and timid beast brutalised by the savage one, the harmless hare killed by the cruel hound. The Utopians, who regard this whole activity of hunting as unworthy of free men, have accordingly assigned it to their butchers, who, as I said before, are all slaves. In their eyes, hunting is the lowest thing even butchers can do. In the slaughterhouse, their work is more useful and honest, since there they kill animals only out of necessity; whereas the hunter seeks nothing but his own pleasure from killing and mutilating some poor little creature. Taking such relish in the sight of death, even if only of beasts, reveals, in the opinion of the Utopians, a cruel disposition. Or if he isn't cruel to start with, the hunter eventually becomes so through the constant practice of such brutal pleasures.⁶⁷

Common opinion considers these activities, and countless others like them, to be pleasures; but the Utopians say flatly they have nothing at all to do with real pleasure, since there's nothing naturally pleasant about them. They often please the senses, and in this they are like pleasure, but that does not alter their basic nature. The enjoyment doesn't arise from the experience itself, but from the

⁶⁷ So Folly mocks those who 'feel an ineffable pleasure in their souls whenever they hear the raucous blast of the horns and the yelping of the hounds', and who 'with their butchering and eating of beasts . . . accomplish nothing at all unless it be to degenerate into beasts themselves' (*The Praise of Folly*, pp. 53, 54). By contrast, hunting is praised as good exercise and good practice for war by Plato (*Laws* VII. 823B–824B) and other classical and later writers, including many of More's and Erasmus' fellow humanists.

Dicing

Hunting

Yet today this is the chosen art of our court-divinities

Morbid tastes of pregnant women

perverse mind of the individual, as a result of which he mistakes the bitter for the sweet, just as pregnant women whose taste has been distorted sometimes think pitch and tallow taste better than honey. A man's taste may be similarly depraved, by disease or by custom, but that doesn't change the nature of pleasure or of anything else.

Varieties of true pleasure

They distinguish several classes of true pleasure, some being pleasures of the mind and others pleasures of the body. Those of the mind are knowledge and the delight that arises from contemplating the truth, also the gratification of looking back on a well-spent life and the unquestioning hope of happiness to come.

Bodily pleasures

Pleasures of the body they also divide into two classes. The first is that which fills the senses with immediate delight. Sometimes this happens when organs that have been weakened by natural heat are restored with food and drink; sometimes it happens when we eliminate some excess in the body, as when we move our bowels, generate children, or relieve an itch somewhere by rubbing or scratching it. Now and then pleasure arises, not from restoring a deficiency or discharging an excess, but from something that excites our senses with a hidden but unmistakable force, and attracts them to itself. Such is the power of music.

The second kind of bodily pleasure they describe as nothing but the calm and harmonious state of the body, its state of health when undisturbed by any disorder. Health itself, when not oppressed by pain, gives pleasure, without any external excitement at all. Even though it appeals less directly to the senses than the gross gratifications of eating and drinking, many consider this to be the greatest pleasure of all. Most of the Utopians regard this as the foundation of all the other pleasures, since by itself alone it can make life peaceful and desirable, whereas without it there is no possibility of any other pleasure. Mere absence of pain, without positive health, they regard as insensibility, not pleasure.

To enjoy anything, one should be in good health

Some⁶⁸ have maintained that a stable and tranquil state of health is not really a pleasure, on the ground that the presence of health cannot be felt except in contrast to its opposite. The Utopians (who have arguments of this sort, just as we do) long ago rejected this opinion. They nearly all agree that health is crucial to pleasure. Since pain is inherent in disease, they argue, and pain is the bitter

⁶⁸ E.g., Plato, *Republic* IX.583C-E.

enemy of pleasure just as disease is the enemy of health, then pleasure must be inherent in quiet good health. Whether pain is the disease itself or just an accompanying effect makes, they say, no real difference. Similarly, whether health is itself a pleasure or simply the cause of pleasure (as fire is the cause of heat), the fact remains that those who have permanent health must also have pleasure.

When we eat, they say, what happens is that health, which was starting to fade, takes food as its ally in the fight against hunger. While our health gains strength, the simple process of returning vigour gives us pleasure and refreshment. If our health feels delight in the struggle, will it not rejoice when the victory has been won? When at last it is restored to its original strength, which was its aim all through the conflict, will it at once become insensible and fail to recognise and embrace its own good? The idea that health cannot be felt they consider completely wrong. What man, when he's awake, can fail to feel that he's in good health – except one who isn't? Is any man so torpid and dull that he won't admit health is delightfully agreeable to him? And what is delight except pleasure under another name?

Among the various pleasures, then, they seek mostly those of the mind, and prize them most highly. The foremost mental pleasures, they believe, arise from practice of the virtues and consciousness of a good life.⁶⁹ Among pleasures of the body, they give first place to health. As for eating, drinking and other delights of that sort, they consider them desirable, but only for the sake of health. They are not pleasant in themselves, but only as ways to withstand the insidious attacks of sickness. A wise man would rather escape sickness altogether than have a good cure for it; he would rather prevent pain than find a palliative. And so it would be better not to need this kind of pleasure at all than to be assuaged by it.

Anyone who thinks happiness consists of this sort of pleasure must confess that his ideal life would be one spent in an endless round of hunger, thirst and itching, followed by eating, drinking,

⁶⁹ The formulation is from Cicero, who in *On Old Age* maintains that 'the most suitable defences of old age are the principles and practice of the virtues, which, if cultivated in every period of life, bring forth wonderful fruits at the close of a long and busy career, not only because they never fail you even at the very end of life . . . but also because it is most delightful to have the consciousness of a life well spent and the memory of many deeds worthily performed' (III.9).

scratching and rubbing. Who can fail to see that such an existence is not only disgusting but miserable? These pleasures are certainly the lowest of all, as they are the most adulterate – for they never occur except in connection with the pains that are their contraries.⁷⁰ Hunger, for example, is linked to the pleasure of eating, and by no equal law, since the pain is sharper and lasts longer; it precedes the pleasure, and ends only when the pleasure ends with it. So the Utopians think pleasures of this sort should not be highly rated, except as they are necessary to life. Yet they enjoy these pleasures too, and acknowledge gratefully the kindness of Mother Nature, who coaxes her children with allurements and cajolery to do what in any case they must do from harsh necessity. How wretched life would be if the daily diseases of hunger and thirst had to be overcome by bitter potions and drugs, like some other diseases that afflict us less often!

Beauty, strength and agility, as special and pleasant gifts of nature, they joyfully accept. The pleasures of sound, sight and smell they also accept as the special seasonings of life, recognising that nature intended them to be the particular province of man. No other kind of animal contemplates with delight the shape and loveliness of the universe, or enjoys odours (except in the way of searching for food), or distinguishes harmonious from dissonant sounds. But in all their pleasures, the Utopians observe this rule, that the lesser shall not interfere with the greater, and that no pleasure shall carry pain with it as a consequence. If a pleasure is false, they think it will inevitably lead to pain.

Moreover, they think it is crazy for a man to despise beauty of form, to impair his own strength, to grind his vitality down to torpor, to exhaust his body with fasts, to ruin his health and to scorn all other natural delights, unless by so doing he can better serve the welfare of others or the public advantage. Then indeed he may expect a greater reward from God. But otherwise such a man does no one any good. He gains, perhaps, the empty and shadowy reputation of virtue; and no doubt he hardens himself against fantastic adversities which may never occur. But such a person the Utopians

⁷⁰ The idea that the restorative pleasures are contaminated by being mixed with the opposite pains comes directly from the *Philebus* (46C–D), as does the notion of a life given over to itching and scratching (46D, 47B; cf. *Gorgias* 494B–D).

consider absolutely crazy – cruel to himself, as well as most ungrateful to nature – as if, to avoid being in her debt, he were to reject all her gifts.

This is the way they think about virtue and pleasure. Human reason, they think, can attain to no surer conclusions than these, unless a revelation from heaven should inspire men with holier notions. In all this, I have no time now to consider whether they are right or wrong, and don't feel obliged to do so. I have undertaken only to describe their principles, not to defend them. But of this I am sure, that whatever you think of their ideas, there is not a more excellent people or a more flourishing commonwealth anywhere in the whole world.

In body they are nimble and lively, and stronger than you would expect from their stature, though they're by no means tiny. Their soil is not very fertile, nor their climate of the best, but they protect themselves against the weather by temperate living, and improve their soil by industry, so that nowhere do grain and cattle flourish more plentifully, nowhere are men more vigorous or liable to fewer diseases. They do all the things that farmers usually do to improve poor soil by hard work and technical knowledge, but in addition they may even transplant a forest from one district to another. They do this, not so much for the sake of better growth, but to make transport easier, by having wood closer to the sea, the rivers, or the cities themselves. For grain is easier than wood to carry by land over a long distance.

The people in general are easy-going, cheerful, clever, and like their leisure. When they must, they can stand heavy labour, but otherwise they are not very fond of it. In intellectual pursuits they are tireless. When they heard from us about the literature and learning of the Greeks (for we thought that, except for the historians and poets, there was nothing in Latin that they would enjoy), it was wonderful to behold how eagerly they sought to be instructed in Greek. We therefore began to study a little of it with them, at first more to avoid seeming lazy than out of any expectation they would profit by it. But after a short trial, their diligence convinced us that our efforts would not be wasted. They picked up the forms of letters so easily, pronounced the language so aptly, memorised it so quickly, and began to recite so accurately, that it seemed like a miracle. Most of our pupils were established scholars, of course, picked for their

Note this and note it well

The happiness of the Utopians, and a description of them

The usefulness of the Greek tongue

Their wonderful aptitude for learning

But now clods and
dullards are
taught letters,
while the best
minds are
corrupted by
pleasures

unusual ability and mature minds; and they studied with us, not just of their own free will, but at the command of the senate. Thus in less than three years they had perfect control of the language, and could read the best Greek authors fluently, unless the text was corrupt. I have a feeling they picked up Greek more easily because it was somewhat related to their own tongue. Though their language resembles Persian in most respects, I suspect them of deriving from Greece because, in the names of cities and in official titles, they retain quite a few vestiges of the Greek tongue.

Before leaving on the fourth voyage I placed on board, instead of merchandise, a good-sized packet of books; for I had resolved not to return at all rather than come home soon. Thus they received from me most of Plato's works and many of Aristotle's, as well as Theophrastus' book *On Plants*,⁷¹ though the latter, I'm sorry to say, was somewhat mutilated. During the voyage I carelessly left it lying around, a monkey got hold of it and from sheer mischief ripped a few pages here and there. Of the grammarians they have only Lascaris, for I did not take Theodorus with me, nor any dictionary except that of Hesychius; and they have Dioscorides.⁷² They are very fond of Plutarch's writings, and delighted with the witty persiflage of Lucian.⁷³ Among the poets they have Aristophanes, Homer and Euripides, together with Sophocles in the small Aldine edition.⁷⁴ Of the historians they possess Thucydides and Herodotus, as well as Herodian.⁷⁵

As for medical books, a comrade of mine named Tricius Apinatus⁷⁶ brought with him some small treatises by Hippocrates, and

⁷¹ Theophrastus was a pupil of Aristotle. His views were still current in the Renaissance.

⁷² Constantinus Lascaris and Theodorus Gaza wrote Renaissance grammars of Greek. The Greek dictionary of Hesychius (fifth century AD?) was first printed in 1514. Dioscorides (first century AD) wrote a treatise on drugs and herbs (not properly a dictionary), which was printed in 1499.

⁷³ Plutarch's writings' presumably includes the *Moral Essays* as well as the *Parallel Lives* of eminent Greeks and Romans. For Lucian, see Introduction, p. xx-xxi.

⁷⁴ The first modern edition of Sophocles was that of Aldus Manutius in 1502. The house of Aldus, where Erasmus lived and worked for a while, was distinguished both for its list of Greek and Latin works and for its contributions to the art of book design.

⁷⁵ Thucydides and Herodotus are the great historians of classical Greece. Herodian (c. 175-250 AD) wrote a history of the Roman emperors of the second and third centuries.

⁷⁶ A learned joke based on a passage in the *Epigrams* of Martial. Martial says of one set of his poems that *Sunt apinae tricaeque*: 'They're trifles and toys' (xiv.i).

that summary of Galen known as *Microtechné*.⁷⁷ They were delighted to have these books because they consider medicine one of the finest and most useful parts of knowledge, even though there's hardly a country in the world that needs doctors less. They think when they thus explore the secrets of nature they are gratifying not only themselves but the author and maker of nature. They suppose that like other artists he created this visible mechanism of the world to be admired – and by whom, if not by man, who is alone in being able to appreciate such an intricate object? Therefore he is bound to prefer a careful observer and sensitive admirer of his work before one who, like a brute beast, looks on the grand spectacle with a stupid and blockish mind.

Once stimulated by learning, the minds of the Utopians are wonderfully quick to seek out those various arts which make life more agreeable and convenient. Two inventions, to be sure, they owe to us: the art of printing and the manufacture of paper. At least they owe these arts partly to us, and in some measure to their own cleverness. While we were showing them the Aldine editions of various books, we talked about paper-making and type-cutting, though without going into details, for none of us had had any practical experience. But with great sharpness of mind they immediately grasped the basic principles. While previously they had written only on vellum, bark and papyrus, they now undertook to make paper and print with type. Their first attempts were not altogether successful, but with practice they soon mastered both arts. If they had the texts of the Greek authors, they would soon have no lack of volumes; but as they have no more than those I mentioned, they have contented themselves with reprinting each in thousands of copies.

Any sightseer coming to their land who has some special intellectual gift, or who has travelled widely and seen many countries, is sure of a warm welcome, for they love to hear what is happening throughout the world. This is why we were received so kindly. Few merchants, however, go there to trade. What could they import, except iron – or else gold and silver, which everyone would rather take home than send abroad? As for the export trade, the Utopians prefer to do their own transportation, instead of letting strangers come to fetch the goods. By carrying their own cargoes, they are able

⁷⁷ Hippocrates (fifth century BC) and Galen (second century AD) were the most influential Greek medical writers.

Medicine most
useful of all
studies

Contemplation of
nature

to learn more about their neighbours and keep their own navigational skills from getting rusty.

SLAVES

*The wonderful
fairness of these
people*

The Utopians keep as slaves only prisoners taken in wars fought by the Utopians themselves.⁷⁸ The children of slaves are not born into slavery,⁷⁹ nor are any slaves imported from foreign countries. Most are either their own citizens, enslaved for some heinous offence, or else foreigners who had been condemned to death in their own land; the latter sort predominate. Sometimes the Utopians buy them at a very modest rate, more often they ask for them, get them for nothing, and bring them home in considerable numbers. Both kinds of slaves are not only kept constantly at work, but are always fettered. The Utopians, however, deal more harshly with their own people than with the others, feeling that their crimes are worse and deserve stricter punishment because, as it is argued, they had an excellent education and the best of moral training, yet still couldn't be restrained from wrongdoing.⁸⁰ A third class of slaves consists of hard-working penniless drudges from other nations who voluntarily choose to take service in Utopia. Such people are treated fairly, almost as well as citizens, except that they are assigned a little extra work, on the score that they're used to it. If one of them wants to leave, which seldom happens, no obstacles are put in his way, nor is he sent off empty-handed.

The sick

As I said before, the sick are carefully tended, and nothing is neglected in the way of medicine or diet which might cure them. Everything possible is done to mitigate the pain of those suffering from incurable diseases; and visitors do their best to console them by sitting and talking with them. But if the disease is not only incurable, but excruciatingly and unremittingly painful, then the priests and

⁷⁸ In classical times prisoners of war – civilians as well as soldiers – constituted a major source of slaves. By More's day there was general agreement that it was wrong for Christians to enslave Christian captives; but non-Christians – especially Africans and American Indians – were often regarded as a different matter. A later passage (p. 95) suggests that the Utopians enslave only the defenders of cities they have had to besiege.

⁷⁹ The non-hereditary character of Utopian slavery distinguishes it sharply from that of the classical world and from medieval serfdom.

⁸⁰ For the same reason, Plato would punish lawbreakers among the citizens of his ideal commonwealth more severely than non-citizens who commit the same crime (*Laws* IX.854E).

public officials come and urge the invalid not to endure further agony. They remind him that he is now unequal to any of life's duties, a burden to himself and others; he has really outlived his own death. They tell him he should not let the disease prey on him any longer, but now that life is simply torture and the world a mere prison cell, he should not hesitate to free himself, or let others free him, from the rack of living. This would be a wise act, they say, since for him death puts an end, not to pleasure, but to agony. In addition, he would be obeying the advice of priests, who are interpreters of God's will; thus it will be a pious and holy act.⁸¹

Deliberate death

Those who have been persuaded by these arguments either starve themselves to death or take a drug which frees them from life without any sensation of dying. But they never force this step on a man against his will; nor, if he decides against it, do they lessen their care of him. The man who yields to their arguments, they think, dies an honourable death; but the suicide, who takes his own life without approval of priests and senate, him they consider unworthy of either earth or fire, and they throw his body, unburied and disgraced, into the nearest bog.

Women do not marry till they are eighteen, nor men till they are twenty-two. Clandestine premarital intercourse, if discovered and proved, brings severe punishment on both man and woman; and the guilty parties are forbidden to marry for their whole lives, unless the prince by his pardon mitigates the sentence. Also both the father and mother of the household where the offence occurred suffer public disgrace for having been remiss in their duty. The reason they punish this offence so severely is that they suppose few people would join in married love – with confinement to a single partner and all the petty annoyances that married life involves – unless they were strictly restrained from promiscuity.

Marriages

In choosing marriage partners they solemnly and seriously follow a custom which seemed to us foolish and absurd in the extreme. Whether she be widow or virgin, the bride-to-be is shown naked to the groom by a responsible and respectable matron; and similarly, some respectable man presents the groom naked to his prospective

*Not very modest,
but not so
impractical either*

⁸¹ Though in the ancient world suicide was regarded as an honourable way out of deep personal and political difficulties, neither suicide nor euthanasia was (or is) acceptable in Catholic Christianity. More discusses the 'wicked temptation' of suicide at length in *A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation* (1534) (*CW*, XII, 122–57).

bride. We laughed at this custom, and called it absurd; but they were just as amazed at the folly of all other peoples. When men go to buy a colt, where they are risking only a little money, they are so cautious that, though the animal is almost bare, they won't close the deal until saddle and blanket have been taken off, lest there be a hidden sore underneath.⁸² Yet in the choice of a mate, which may cause either delight or disgust for the rest of their lives, men are so careless that they leave all the rest of the woman's body covered up with clothes and estimate her attractiveness from a mere handsbreadth of her person, the face, which is all they can see. And so they marry, running great risk of bitter discord, if something in either's person should offend the other. Not all people are so wise as to concern themselves solely with character; even the wise appreciate physical beauty as a supplement to a good disposition. There's no doubt that a deformity may lurk under clothing, serious enough to make a man hate his wife when it's too late to be separated from her. If some disfiguring accident takes place after marriage, each person must bear his own fate; but the Utopians think everyone should be legally protected from deception beforehand.

There is extra reason for them to be careful, because in that part of the world they are the only people who practise monogamy,⁸³ and because their marriages are seldom terminated except by death — though they do allow divorce for adultery or for intolerably offensive behaviour. A husband or wife who is an aggrieved party to such a divorce is granted leave by the senate to take a new mate, but the guilty party suffers disgrace and is permanently forbidden to remarry.⁸⁴ They absolutely forbid a husband to put away his wife

⁸² Plato's *Laws* commends with perfect seriousness a practice similar to the Utopians': 'when people are going to live together as partners in marriage, it is vital that the fullest possible information should be available . . . One should regard the prevention of mistakes here as a matter of supreme importance — so important and serious, in fact, that even the young people's recreation must be arranged with this in mind. Boys and girls must dance together at an age when plausible occasions can be found for their doing so, in order that they may have a reasonable look at each other; and they should dance naked, provided sufficient modesty and restraint are displayed by all concerned' (VI.771E–772A).

⁸³ In this respect the Utopians resemble the ancient Germans as portrayed by Tacitus: 'the marriage tie with them is strict: you will find nothing in their character to praise more highly. They are almost the only barbarians who are content with a wife apiece' (*Germany* 17).

⁸⁴ Although the Church in More's day permitted separation in the case of adultery, it did not allow the injured party to remarry.

against her will and without any fault on her part, just because of some bodily misfortune; they think it cruel that a person should be abandoned when most in need of comfort; and they add that old age, since it not only entails disease but is a disease itself,⁸⁵ needs more than a precarious fidelity.

It happens occasionally that a married couple cannot get along, and have both found other persons with whom they hope to live more harmoniously. After getting approval of the senate, they may then separate by mutual consent and contract new marriages. But such divorces are allowed only after the senators and their wives have carefully investigated the case. Divorce is deliberately made difficult because they know that couples will have a hard time settling down if each partner has in mind that a new relation is easily available.

They punish adulterers with the strictest form of slavery. If both parties were married, both are divorced, and the injured parties may marry one another if they want, or someone else. But if one of the injured parties continues to love such an undeserving spouse, the marriage may go on, provided the innocent person chooses to share in the labour to which every slave is condemned. And sometimes it happens that the repentance of the guilty and the devotion of the innocent party so move the prince to pity that he restores both to freedom. But a second conviction of adultery is punished by death.

No other crimes carry fixed penalties; the senate decrees a specific punishment for each misdeed, as it is considered atrocious or venial. Husbands chastise their wives and parents their children, unless the offence is so serious that public punishment is called for. Generally, the gravest crimes are punished with slavery, for they think this deters offenders just as much as immediate capital punishment, and convict labour is more beneficial to the commonwealth. Slaves, moreover, are permanent and visible reminders that crime does not pay. If the slaves rebel against their condition, then they are put instantly to death, like savage beasts which neither bars nor chains can tame. But if they are patient, they are not left altogether without hope. When subdued by long hardships, if they show by their behaviour that they regret the crime more than the punishment, their slavery is lightened or remitted altogether, sometimes by the prince's pardon, sometimes by popular vote.

⁸⁵ The phrase comes from Terence's comedy *Phormio* (IV.4; l. 575).

*Degrees of
punishment left to
magistrates*

The penalty for soliciting to lewdness

Attempted seduction is subject to the same penalty as seduction itself. They think that a crime attempted is as bad as one committed, and that failure should not confer advantages on a criminal who did all he could to succeed.

Pleasure derived from fools

They are very fond of fools, and think it contemptible to insult them. There is no prohibition against enjoying their foolishness, and they even regard this as beneficial to the fools. If anyone is so solemn and severe that the foolish behaviour and comic patter of a clown do not amuse him, they don't entrust him with the care of such a person, for fear that a man who gets no fun from a fool's only gift will not treat him kindly.

To deride a person for being deformed or crippled is considered disgraceful, not to the victim but to the mocker, who stupidly reproaches the cripple for something he cannot help.

Artificial beauty

Though they think it a sign of weak and sluggish character to neglect one's natural beauty, they consider cosmetics a detestable affectation. From experience they have learned that no physical attractions recommend a wife to her husband so effectually as truthfulness and honour. Though quite a few men are captured by beauty alone, none are held except by virtue and compliance.

Citizens to be animated by rewards for good conduct

The Utopians not only deter men from crime by penalties, but they incite them to virtue by public honours. Accordingly, they set up in the marketplaces statues of distinguished men who have served their country well, thinking thereby to preserve the memory of their good deeds and to spur on citizens to emulate the glory of their ancestors.

Running for office condemned

In Utopia any man who campaigns for a public office is disqualified for all of them. Their civic life is harmonious, and their public officials are never arrogant or unapproachable. They are called 'fathers', and that indeed is the way they behave. Because officials never extort respect from the people against their will, the people respect them spontaneously, as they should. Not even the prince is distinguished from his fellow citizens by a robe or a crown; he is known only by a sheaf of grain carried before him, as the high priest is distinguished by a wax candle.⁸⁶

Magistrates held in honour

Dignity of the ruler

Few laws

They have very few laws, and their training is such that they need no more. The chief fault they find with other nations is that, even

⁸⁶ Grain (suggesting prosperity) and candle (suggesting vision) symbolise the special function of each.

with infinite volumes of laws and interpretations, they cannot manage their affairs properly. They think it completely unjust to bind men by a set of laws that are too many to be read or too obscure for anyone to understand. As for lawyers, a class of men whose trade it is to manipulate cases and multiply quibbles, they wouldn't have them in the country. They think it better for each man to plead his own case, and say the same thing to the judge that he would tell his advocate. This makes for less confusion and readier access to the truth. A man speaks his mind without tricky instructions from a lawyer, and the judge examines each point carefully, taking pains to protect simple folk against the false accusations of the crafty. This sort of plain dealing is hard to find in other nations, where they have such a multitude of incomprehensibly intricate laws. But in Utopia everyone is a legal expert. For the laws are very few, as I said, and they consider the most obvious interpretation of any law to be the fairest. As they see things, all laws are promulgated for the single purpose of advising every man of his duty. Subtle interpretations admonish very few, since hardly anybody can understand them, whereas the more simple and apparent sense of the law is open to everyone. If laws are not clear, they are useless; for simple-minded men (and most men are of this sort, and must be told where their duty lies) there might as well be no laws at all as laws which can be interpreted only by devious minds after endless disputes. The common man cannot understand this legal chicanery, and couldn't even if he devoted his whole life to studying it, since he has to earn a living in the meantime.

The useless crowd of lawyers

Some free nations bordering on Utopia (the Utopians themselves previously liberated many of them from tyranny) have learned to admire the Utopian virtues, and now of their own accord ask the Utopians to supply magistrates for them. Of these magistrates, some serve for one year, others for five. When their service is over, they return home with honour and praise, while others are sent out in their place. These countries seem to have settled on an excellent scheme to safeguard their happiness and security. Since the welfare or ruin of a commonwealth depends wholly on the character of the officials, where could they make a more prudent choice than among Utopians, who cannot be tempted by money? For money is useless to them when they go home, as they soon must, and they can have no partisan or factional feelings, since they are strangers to the affairs

of the city over which they rule. Wherever they take root in men's minds, these two evils, greed and faction, soon destroy all justice, which is the strongest bond of any society. The Utopians call these people who have borrowed governors from them their allies; others whom they have benefited they call simply friends.

Treaties While other nations are constantly making, breaking and renewing treaties, the Utopians make none at all with anyone. If nature, they say, doesn't bind man adequately to his fellow man, will an alliance do so? If a man scorns nature herself, is there any reason to think he will care about mere words? They are confirmed in this view by the fact that in that part of the world, treaties and alliances between princes are not generally observed with much good faith.

In Europe, of course, and especially in these regions where the Christian faith and religion prevail, the dignity of treaties is everywhere kept sacred and inviolable. This is partly because the princes are all so just and virtuous, partly also from the awe and reverence that everyone feels for the Popes.⁸⁷ Just as the Popes themselves never promise anything that they do not scrupulously perform, so they command all other princes to abide by their promises in every way. If someone quibbles over it, by pastoral censure and sharp reproof they compel him to obey. They think, and rightly, that it would be shameful if people who are specifically called 'the faithful' acted in bad faith.

But in that new world, which is distanced from ours not so much by geography as by customs and manners, nobody trusts treaties. The greater the formalities, the more numerous and solemn the oaths, the sooner the treaty will be broken. The rulers will find some defect in the wording, which often enough they deliberately inserted themselves, so that they're never at a loss for a pretext. No treaty can be made so strong and explicit that a government will not be able to worm out of it, breaking in the process both the treaty and its own word. If such craft (not to call it deceit and fraud) were practised in private contracts, the righteous politicians would raise a

⁸⁷ The European rulers of the time were in fact ruthless and casual violators of treaties. So also were two recent Popes, Alexander VI and Julius II. Of the former, Machiavelli says admiringly that he 'never did anything else and never dreamed of anything else than deceiving men . . . Never was there a man more effective in swearing and who with stronger oaths confirmed a promise, but yet honored it less' (*The Prince*, chapter 18; trans. Allan Gilbert, in Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Chief Works and Others*, 3 vols. (Durham, N.C., 1958), 1, 65).

great outcry against both parties, calling them sacrilegious and worthy of the gallows. Yet the very same politicians think themselves clever fellows when they give this sort of advice to kings. Thus men are apt to think that justice is a humble, plebeian virtue, far beneath the dignity of kings. Or else they conclude that there are two kinds of justice, one for the common herd, a lowly justice that creeps along the ground, hedged in everywhere and encumbered with chains; and the other, which is the justice of princes, much more free and majestic, which can do anything it wants and nothing it doesn't want.

This royal practice of keeping treaties badly is, I suppose, the reason the Utopians don't make any; doubtless if they lived here they would change their minds. However, they think it a bad idea to make treaties at all, even if they are faithfully kept. The treaty implies that men divided by some natural obstacle as slight as a hill or a brook are joined by no bond of nature; it assumes they are born rivals and enemies, and are right in trying to destroy one another except when a treaty restrains them. Besides, they see that treaties do not really promote friendship; for both parties still retain the right to prey on one another, unless extreme care has been used in drafting the treaty to outlaw freebooting. The Utopians think, on the other hand, that no man should be considered an enemy who has done no harm, that the kinship of nature is as good as a treaty, and that men are united more firmly by good will than by pacts, by their hearts than by their words.

WARFARE

They despise war as an activity fit only for beasts,⁸⁸ yet practised more by man than by any other animal. Unlike almost every other people in the world, they think nothing so inglorious as the glory won in battle. Yet on certain assigned days both men and women carry on vigorous military training, so they will be fit to fight should the need arise. They go to war only for good reasons: to protect their own land, to drive invading armies from the territories of their friends, or to liberate an oppressed people, in the name of humanity,

⁸⁸ A folk etymology, mistaken like most of them, derived Latin *bellum* ('war') from *belua* ('beast'). For the most part, the Utopians' attitudes towards war are similar to those of More and his humanist circle. For a full account, see R. P. Adams, *The Better Part of Valor*.

from tyranny and servitude. They war not only to protect their friends from present danger, but sometimes to avenge previous injuries; but enter a conflict only if they themselves have been consulted in advance, have approved the cause, and have demanded restitution, but in vain. Then and only then they think themselves free to declare war. They take this final step not only when their friends have been plundered, but also, and even more fiercely, when their friends' merchants have been subjected to extortion in a third country, either through laws unjust in themselves or through the perversion of good laws.

This and no other was the cause of the war which the Utopians waged a little before our time on behalf of the Nephelogetes against the Alaopolitans.⁸⁹ Under pretext of right, a wrong (as they saw it) had been inflicted on some Nephelogete traders residing in Alaopolis. Whatever the rights and wrongs of the quarrel, it developed into a fierce war, into which the neighbouring nations poured all their resources, thereby inflaming mutual hatreds. Some prosperous nations were ruined completely, others badly shaken. One trouble led to another, and in the end the Nephelogetes not only crushed the Alaopolitans but (since the Utopians weren't involved on their own account) reduced them to slavery – even though before the war the victors had not been remotely comparable in power to their rivals.

So sharply do the Utopians punish wrong done to their friends, even in matters of mere money; but they are not so strict in enforcing their own rights. When they are cheated in any way, so long as no bodily harm is done, their anger goes no further than cutting off trade relations with that nation till restitution is made. The reason is not that they care less for their own citizens than for their friends', but that the latter, when they lose goods from their private stock, feel the loss more bitterly. The Utopian traders, by contrast, lose nothing but what belongs to the general public, more particularly goods that were already abundant at home, even superfluous, since otherwise they wouldn't have been exported. Hence no one individual has to stand the loss. So small an injury, which affects neither the life nor the livelihood of any of their own people, they consider it cruel to avenge by the deaths of many soldiers. On the other hand, if one of their own is maimed or killed anywhere, whether by a public

⁸⁹ More Greek compounds: 'People Born from the Clouds' and 'People without a Country'.

official or by a private citizen, they first send envoys to look into the circumstances; then they demand that the guilty persons be surrendered; and if that demand is refused, they are not to be put off, but at once declare war. If the guilty persons are surrendered, their punishment is death or slavery.

The Utopians are not only troubled but ashamed when their forces gain a bloody victory, thinking it folly to pay too high a price even for the best goods. But if they overcome the enemy by skill and cunning, they exult mightily, celebrate a public triumph, and raise a monument as for a glorious exploit. They think they have really acted with manly virtue when they have won a victory such as no animal except man could have achieved – a victory gained by strength of understanding. Bears, lions, boars, wolves, dogs and other wild beasts fight with their bodies, they say; and most of them are superior to us in strength and ferocity; but we outdo them all in shrewdness and rationality.

The only thing they aim at, in going to war, is to secure what would have prevented the declaration of war, if the enemy had conceded it beforehand. Or, if they cannot get that, they try to take such bitter revenge on those who provoked them that they will be afraid ever to do it again. These are their chief aims, which they prosecute vigorously, yet in such a way as to avoid danger, rather than to win fame or glory.

As soon as war is declared, therefore, they have their secret agents set up overnight many placards, each marked with their official seal, in the most conspicuous places throughout enemy territory. In these proclamations they promise immense rewards to anyone who will eliminate the enemy's king. They offer smaller but still substantial sums for killing any of a list of other individuals whom they name. These are the persons whom they regard as most responsible, after the king, for plotting aggression against them. The reward for an assassin is doubled for anyone who succeeds in bringing in one of the proscribed men alive. The same reward, plus a guarantee of personal safety, is offered to any one of the proscribed men who turns against his comrades. As a result, the enemies of the Utopians quickly come to suspect everyone, particularly one another; and the many perils of their situation lead to panic. They know very well that many of them, including especially their princes, have been betrayed by those in whom they placed complete trust – so effective

Victory too dearly bought

are bribes as an incitement to crime. Knowing this, the Utopians are lavish in their promises of bounty. Being well aware of the risks their agents must run, they make sure the payments are in proportion to the peril; thus they not only offer, but actually deliver, enormous sums of gold, as well as valuable landed estates in very secure locations on the territory of their friends.

Other nations condemn this custom of bidding for and buying the life of an enemy as the cruel villainy of a degenerate mind; but the Utopians consider it good policy, both wise and merciful. It enables them to win tremendous wars without fighting any actual battles; and it enables them, by the sacrifice of a few guilty men, to spare the lives of many innocent persons who would have died in the fighting, some on their side, some on the enemy's. They pity the mass of the enemy's soldiers almost as much as their own citizens, for they know common people do not go to war of their own accord, but are driven to it by the passions of their rulers.

If assassination does not work, they stir up dissensions in enemy ranks by inciting the king's brother or some other member of the nobility to plot for the crown.⁹⁰ If internal discord dies down, they try to rouse up neighbouring peoples against the enemy, by reviving forgotten claims to dominion, of which kings always have an ample supply.

When they promise their resources to help in a war, they send money very freely, but commit their soldiers very sparingly indeed. They hold their own people dear, and value them so highly that they would not exchange one of their citizens for an enemy's king. But gold and silver, which they keep for the purpose of war alone, they spend without hesitation; after all, they will continue to live just as well even if they waste the whole sum. Besides the wealth they have at home, they keep a vast treasure abroad since, as I described before, many nations owe them money. So they hire mercenary soldiers from all sides, especially the Zapoletes.⁹¹

⁹⁰ The stratagems of this paragraph, presented without criticism, compare interestingly with the recommendations of the corrupt privy councillors in Hythloday's imaginary strategy session (p. 30).

⁹¹ As the gloss points out, the Zapoletes (from Greek: 'busy sellers') resemble the Swiss, who provided Europe's most feared and hated mercenaries. Many Italian princes, as well as the French, hired Swiss mercenaries; and Popes have Swiss guards to this day. Johann Froben, who printed the 1518 editions of *Utopia*, was Swiss himself and omitted the gloss.

These people live five hundred miles to the east of Utopia, and are rough, rude and fierce. The forests and mountains where they are bred are the kind of country they like: tough and rugged. They are a hard race, capable of standing heat, cold and drudgery, unacquainted with any luxuries, careless of the houses they live in or the clothes they wear; they don't till the fields but raise cattle instead. Most survive by hunting and stealing. These people are born for battle and are always spoiling for a fight; they seek it out at every opportunity. Leaving their own country in great numbers, they offer themselves for cheap hire to anyone in need of warriors. The only art they know for earning a living is the art of taking life.

*A people not so
unlike the Swiss*

For the people who pay them they fight with great courage and complete loyalty, but they will not bind themselves to serve for any fixed period of time. If someone, even the enemy, offers them more money tomorrow, they will take his side; and the day after tomorrow, if a trifle more is offered to bring them back, they'll return to their first employers. Hardly a war is fought in which a good number of them are not engaged on both sides. It happens every day that men who are united by ties of blood and have served together in friendship through long campaigns, but who are now separated into opposing armies, meet in battle. Forgetful of kinship and comradeship alike, they furiously run one another through, for no other reason than that they were hired for paltry pay by opposing kings. They care so much for money that they can easily be induced to change sides for an increase of only a penny a day. They have picked up the habit of avarice, but none of the profit; for what they earn by blood-letting they quickly squander on debauchery of the most squalid sort.

Because the Utopians pay better than anyone else, these people are ready to serve them against any enemy whatever. And the Utopians, as they seek out the best possible men for proper uses, hire these, the worst possible men, for improper uses. When the situation requires, they thrust the Zapoletes into the positions of greatest danger by offering them immense rewards. Most of these bravos never come back to collect their stipend, but the Utopians faithfully pay off those who do survive, to encourage them to try it again. As for how many Zapoletes get killed, the Utopians never worry about that, for they think they would deserve well of all mankind if they could

exterminate from the face of the earth that entire vicious and disgusting race.⁹²

After the Zapoteles, they employ as auxiliaries the soldiers of the people for whom they have taken up arms, and then squadrons of all their other friends. Last, they add their own citizens, including some man of known bravery to command the entire army. They also appoint two substitutes for him, who hold no rank as long as he is safe. But if the commander is captured or killed, the first of these two substitutes becomes his successor, and in case of a mishap to him, the other.⁹³ Thus, despite the many accidents of war, they ensure that the whole army will not be disorganised through loss of the general.

Only volunteers are sent to fight abroad; they are picked men from within each city. No one is forced to fight abroad against his will, because they think a man who is naturally fearful will act weakly at best, and may even spread panic among his comrades. But if their own country is invaded they call to arms even the fearful (as long as they are physically fit), placing them on shipboard among braver men, or here and there along fortifications, where there is no place to run away. Thus shame at failing their countrymen, desperation at the immediate presence of the enemy and the impossibility of flight often combine to overcome their fear, and they turn brave out of sheer necessity.

Just as no man is forced into a foreign war against his will, so women are allowed to accompany their men on military service if they want to – not only not forbidden, but encouraged and praised for doing so. Each leaves with her husband, and they stand shoulder to shoulder in the line of battle; in addition, they place around a man all of his children, kinsmen and blood- or marriage-relations, so that those who by nature have most reason to help one another may be closest at hand for mutual support. It is a matter of great reproach for either spouse to come home without the other, or for a son to

⁹² Sixteenth-century accounts of horrors perpetrated by mercenaries – including an account by More of the sacking of Rome in 1527 (*Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, *CW*, vi, 370–2) – help to explain the Utopians' genocidal policy towards the Zapoteles. In *The Education of a Christian Prince*, Erasmus says of mercenaries that 'there is no class of men more abject and indeed more damnable' (*CWE*, xxvii, 283). How the Utopians reconcile their employment of the Zapoteles with their aim of minimising bloodshed and plunder in war is unclear.

⁹³ This is a Spartan practice. See Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* iv.xxxviii.

return after losing his father. The result is that as long as the enemy stands his ground, the hand-to-hand fighting is apt to be long and bitter, ending only when everyone is dead.

As I observed, they take every precaution to avoid fighting in person, so long as they can use mercenaries to fight for them. But when they are forced to enter the battle, they are as bold in the struggle as they were formerly prudent in putting it off. In the first charge they are not fierce, but gradually as the fighting goes on they grow more determined, putting up a steady, stubborn resistance. Their spirit is so strong that they will die rather than yield ground. They have no anxieties about making a living at home, nor any worry about the future of their families (and that sort of care often daunts the boldest spirits); so their spirit is proud and unconquerable. Knowing the job of warfare and knowing it well gives them extra confidence; also they have been trained from infancy in sound principles of conduct (which their education and the good institutions of their society both reinforce); and that too adds to their courage. They don't hold life so cheap that they throw it away recklessly, nor so dear that they grasp it greedily at the price of shame when duty bids them give it up.

At the height of the battle, a band of the bravest young men who have taken a special oath devote themselves to seeking out the opposing general. They assail him directly, they lay secret traps for him, they hit at him from near and far. A continuous stream of fresh men keep up the assault as the exhausted drop out. In the end, they rarely fail to kill or capture him, unless he takes flight.

When they win a battle, it never ends in a massacre, for they would much rather take prisoners than cut throats. They never pursue fugitives without keeping one line of their army drawn up under the colours and ready to renew the fight. They are so careful of this that if they win the victory with this last reserve force (after the rest of their army has been beaten), they would rather let the enemy army escape than get into the way of pursuing fugitives with their own ranks in disorder. They recall what has happened more than once to themselves: that when the enemy seemed to have the best of the day, had routed the main Utopian force, and scattered to round up runaways, a few Utopians held in reserve and watching their opportunity have suddenly attacked the dispersed enemy just when he felt safe and had lowered his guard. Thereby they changed the fortune

The enemy general to be most fiercely attacked, so as to end the war sooner

of the day, snatched certain victory out of the enemy's hands, and, though beaten themselves, were able to overcome their conquerors.

It is not easy to say whether they are more crafty in laying ambushes or more clever in avoiding those laid for them. Sometimes they seem about to run away when that is the last thing in their minds; when they are really ready to retreat, you would never guess it. If they are too few to mount an attack, or if the terrain is unsuitable, they shift their ground silently by night or get away by some stratagem; or if they have to withdraw by day, they do so gradually, and in such good order that they are as dangerous to attack then as if they were advancing. They fortify their camps thoroughly, with a deep, broad ditch all around them, the earth being thrown inward to form a wall; the work is done not by labourers but by the soldiers themselves with their own hands. The whole army pitches in, except for a guard posted around the workers to prevent surprise attack. With so many hands at work, they complete great fortifications, enclosing wide areas with unbelievable speed.

The variety of their weapons

Their armour is strong enough for protection, but does not prevent free movement of the body; indeed, it doesn't even interfere with swimming, and part of their training consists of swimming in armour. For long-range fighting they use arrows, which they fire with great force and accuracy, from horseback as well as on the ground. At close quarters they use not swords but battle-axes, which because of their sharp edge and great weight are lethal weapons, whether used to slash or thrust. They are very skilful in inventing machines of war, but carefully conceal them, since if they were made known before they were needed, the enemy might turn them to ridicule and lessen their effect. Their first consideration in designing them is to make them easy to carry and aim.⁹⁴

Truces

Truces made with the enemy they observe religiously and will not break even if provoked. They do not ravage the enemy's territory or burn his crops; indeed, so far as possible, they avoid any trampling of the fields by men or horses, thinking they may need the grain

⁹⁴ The military devices of the Utopians are a patchwork of different notions from the common knowledge of the day. Their camps are fortified like Roman ones. Their reliance on archery links them with the English – though their skill in shooting arrows from horseback recalls the ancient Parthians and Scythians. The 'machines' are evidently like Roman *ballistae*, *arietes*, *scorpiones* (stone-throwers, battering rams, dart-hurlers); but the emphasis on their portability probably reflects contemporary experience with cannon, which were terribly hard to drag over the muddy routes of the time.

themselves. Unless he is a spy, they injure no unarmed man. Cities that are surrendered to them they keep intact; even after storming a place, they do not plunder it, but put to death the men who prevented surrender, enslave the other defenders, and do no harm to civilians. If they find any inhabitants who recommended surrender, they give them a share in the property of the condemned. What is left they divide among their auxiliaries; for themselves, the Utopians never take any booty.

After a war is ended they collect the cost of it, not from the allies for whose sake they undertook it, but from the conquered. They take as indemnity not only money, which they set aside to finance future wars, but also landed estates, from which they may enjoy forever a substantial annual income. They now have property of this sort in many different countries, acquired on many occasions and augmented over the years in various ways, till its revenue amounts to over seven hundred thousand ducats a year.⁹⁵ As managers of these estates, they send abroad some of their citizens with the title of Financial Factors. Though they live on the properties in great style and conduct themselves like magnates, plenty of income is still left over to be put in the treasury, unless they lend it to the conquered nation. They often do the latter until they happen to need the money, and even then it's rare for them to call in the entire debt. As I've already noted, they also give some of the estates to those who have taken great risks on their behalf.

But today the victors foot most of the bill

If a foreign prince takes up arms and prepares to invade their land, they immediately attack him full force outside their own borders. For they don't like to wage war on their own soil, and would not allow foreign auxiliaries on their island under any necessity.

RELIGIONS OF THE UTOPIANS .

There are different forms of religion throughout the island, and in the different cities as well. Some worship as a god the sun, others the moon, still others one of the planets. There are some who worship a man of past ages, conspicuous either for virtue or glory; they consider him not only a god, but the supreme god. The vast majority of

⁹⁵ Gold coins of this name were minted by several European countries. Four ducats of Burgundy, Venice or Hungary were roughly equivalent to an English pound; and the pound itself was worth several hundred times its value today.

Utopians, however, and among these all the wisest, believe nothing of the sort: they believe in a single power, unknown, eternal, infinite, inexplicable, far beyond the grasp of the human mind, and diffused throughout the universe, not physically, but in influence. Him they call father, and to him alone they attribute the origin, increase, progress, change and end of all visible things; they do not offer divine honours to any other.

Though the other sects differ from this group in various particular doctrines, they all agree in a single main head, that there is one supreme power, the maker and ruler of the universe; in their native tongue they all call him Mithra.⁹⁶ Different people define him differently, and each supposes the object of his worship is the special vessel of that great force which all people agree in worshipping. But gradually they are coming to forsake this mixture of superstitions and unite in that one religion which seems more reasonable than any of the others. And there is no doubt that the other religions would have disappeared long ago, had not various unlucky accidents, befalling certain Utopians who were thinking of changing their religion, been interpreted as a sign of divine anger, not chance – as if the deity who was being abandoned were avenging an insult against himself.

But after they heard from us the name of Christ, and learned of his teachings, his life, his miracles, and the no less marvellous devotion of the many martyrs whose blood, freely shed, had drawn nations far and near into the Christian fellowship, you would not believe how they were impressed. Either through the secret inspiration of God, or because Christianity seemed very like the belief that most prevails among them, they were well disposed towards it from the start. But I think they were also much influenced by the fact that Christ encouraged his disciples to practise community of goods, and that among the truest groups of Christians, the practice still prevails.⁹⁷ Whatever the reason, no small number of them chose to join our communion and were washed in the holy water of baptism.

Monasteries

⁹⁶ In ancient Persian religion, Mithra or Mithras, the spirit of light, was the supreme force of good in the universe. Recall that the Utopians' language 'resembles Persian in most respects' (p. 78), and that under the name of Mithra some of them worship the sun or other heavenly bodies.

⁹⁷ The communist practice of the disciples is described in Acts 2:44–5 and 4:32–5.

By that time, two of our group had died, and among us four survivors there was, I am sorry to say, no priest. So, though they received instruction in other matters, they still lack those sacraments which in our religion can be administered only by priests.⁹⁸ They do, however, understand what these are, and eagerly desire them. In fact, they dispute warmly whether a man chosen from among themselves could be considered a priest without ordination by a Christian bishop. Though they seemed about to select such a person, they had not yet done so when I left.

Those who have not accepted Christianity make no effort to restrain others from it, nor do they criticise new converts to it. While I was there, only one of the Christians got into trouble with the law. As soon as he was baptised, he took on himself to preach the Christian religion publicly, with more zeal than discretion. We warned him not to do so, but he soon worked himself up to a pitch where he not only preferred our religion, but condemned all others as profane, leading their impious and sacrilegious followers to the hell-fires they richly deserved. After he had been going on in this style for a long time, they arrested him. He was tried on a charge, not of despising their religion, but of creating a public disorder, convicted, and sentenced to exile. For it is one of their oldest rules that no one should suffer for his religion.

Men must be drawn to religion by its merits

Even before he took over the island, King Utopus had heard that the natives were continually squabbling over religious matters. Actually, he found it easy to conquer the country because the different sects were too busy fighting one another to oppose him. As soon as he had gained the victory, therefore, he decreed that every man might cultivate the religion of his choice, and proselytise for it too, provided he did so quietly, modestly, rationally and without bitterness towards others. If persuasions failed, no man might resort to abuse or violence, under penalty of exile or slavery.

Utopus laid down these rules not simply for the sake of peace, which he saw was being destroyed by constant quarrels and implacable hatreds, but also for the sake of religion itself. In such matters he was not at all quick to dogmatise, because he suspected that God perhaps likes various forms of worship and has therefore deliber-

⁹⁸ The Catholic Church allows that, in case of need, any person can perform baptism. The other six sacraments require an ordained priest.

ately inspired different men with different views. On the other hand, he was quite sure that it was arrogant folly for anyone to enforce conformity with his own beliefs by threats or violence.⁹⁹ He supposed that if one religion is really true and the rest are false, the true one will sooner or later prevail by its own natural strength, if men will only consider the matter reasonably and moderately. But if they try to decide things by fighting and rioting, since the worst men are always the most headstrong, the best and holiest religion in the world will be crowded out by foolish superstitions, like grain choked out of a field by thorns and briars. So he left the whole matter open, allowing each person to choose what he would believe. The only exception was a positive and strict law against anyone who should sink so far below the dignity of human nature as to think that the soul perishes with the body, or that the universe is ruled by blind chance, not divine providence.¹⁰⁰

Thus they believe that after this life vices will be punished and virtue rewarded. Anyone who denies this proposition they consider less than a man, since he has degraded the sublimity of his own soul to the base level of a beast's wretched body. Still less will they count him as one of their citizens, since he would openly despise all the laws and customs of society, if not prevented by fear. Who can doubt that a man who has nothing to fear but the law, and no hope of life beyond the grave, will do anything he can to evade his country's laws by craft or to break them by violence, in order to gratify his own personal greed? Therefore a man who holds such views is offered no honours, entrusted with no offices, and given no public responsibility; he is universally regarded as a low and sordid fellow. Yet they do not punish him, because they are persuaded that no man can choose to believe by a mere act of the will. They do not compel him by

⁹⁹ This was not the attitude More took a decade later, when he was involved in the prosecution of Protestants. In the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, he wrote that 'if it were now doubtful and ambiguous whether the church of Christ were in the right rule of doctrine or not, then were it very necessary to give them all good audience that could and would anything dispute on either party for or against it, to the end that if we were now in a wrong way, we might leave it and walk in some better' (*CW*, vi, 345-6). In Utopia, which has not had the Christian revelation, a high degree of religious toleration is appropriate; in England, the fact that the 'right rule of doctrine' was clearly established justified, so More believed, harsh suppression of dissenting views.

¹⁰⁰ The Utopians regard basic truths about immortality and divine providence as attainable by natural reason and as providing the only rational sanction for the life of virtue (pp. 68-9).

threats to dissemble his views, nor do they tolerate in the matter any deceit or lying, which they detest as next door to deliberate malice. The man may not argue with common people on behalf of his opinion; but in the presence of priests and other important persons, they not only permit but encourage it. For they are confident that in the end his madness will yield to reason.

There are some others, in fact no small number of them, who err the other way in supposing that animals have immortal souls, though not comparable to ours in excellence nor destined to equal felicity. These men are not thought to be evil, their opinion is not considered wholly unreasonable, and so they are not interfered with.

*A strange opinion
on the souls of
animals*

Almost all the Utopians are absolutely convinced that man's bliss after death will be enormous and eternal; thus they lament every man's sickness, but mourn over a death only if the man was torn from life wretchedly and against his will. Such behaviour they take to be a very bad sign, as if the soul, despairing and conscious of guilt, dreaded death through a secret premonition of punishments to come. Besides, they suppose God can hardly be well pleased with the coming of one who, when he is summoned, does not come gladly, but is dragged off reluctantly and against his will. Such a death fills the onlookers with horror, and they carry off the corpse to the cemetery in melancholy silence. There, after begging God to have mercy on his spirit and to pardon his infirmities, they bury the unhappy man. But when someone dies blithely and full of good hope, they do not mourn for him, but carry the body cheerfully away, singing and commending the dead man's soul to God. They cremate¹⁰¹ him in a spirit of reverence more than of grief, and erect a tombstone on which the dead man's honours are inscribed. As they go home, they talk of his character and deeds, and no part of his life is mentioned more frequently or more gladly than his joyful death.

They think that recollecting the good qualities of a man inspires the living to behave virtuously and is the most acceptable form of honour to the dead. For they think that dead persons are actually present among us, and hear what we say about them, though through the dullness of human sight they remain invisible. Given

¹⁰¹ Cremation was standard practice in most of the ancient world, but was not used by Christians before the nineteenth century because it was thought to be at odds with the doctrine of resurrection of the body.

their state of bliss, the dead must be able to travel freely where they please, and it would be unkind of them to cast off every desire of seeing those friends to whom in life they had been joined by mutual affection and charity. Like other good qualities they think that after death charity is increased rather than diminished in all good men; and thus they believe the dead come frequently among the living, to observe their words and acts.¹⁰² Hence they go about their business the more confidently because of their trust in such protectors; and the belief that their forefathers are physically present keeps men from any secret dishonourable deed.

Fortune-telling and other vain, superstitious divinations, such as other peoples take very seriously, they consider ridiculous and contemptible. But they venerate miracles which occur without the help of nature, considering them direct and visible manifestations of the divinity. Indeed, they report that miracles have often occurred in their country. Sometimes in great and dangerous crises they pray publicly for a miracle, which they then anticipate with great confidence, and obtain.

The active life They think the investigation of nature and the reverence arising from it are most acceptable to God. There are some people, however, and quite a few of them, who from religious motives reject literary and scientific pursuits, and refuse all leisure, but devote their full time to good works. Only by constant dedication to the offices of charity, these people think, can happiness after death be earned; and so they are always busy. Some tend the sick; others repair roads, clean ditches, rebuild bridges, dig turf, sand, or stones; still others fell trees and cut them up, and transport wood, grain or other commodities into the cities by wagon. They work for private citizens as well as for the public, and work even harder than slaves. With cheery good will they undertake any task that is so rough, hard and dirty that most people refuse to tackle it because of the toil, tedium and frustration involved. While constantly engaged in heavy labour themselves, they procure leisure for others, yet claim no credit for it. They neither criticise the way others live, nor

¹⁰² In the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, More wrote of the saints that 'if their holy souls live, there will no wise man ween them worse, and of less love and charity to men that need their help, when they be now in heaven, than they had when they were here in earth . . . When saints were in this world at liberty and might walk the world about, ween we that in heaven they stand tied to a post?' (*CW*, vi, 211, 213).

boast of their own doings. The more they put themselves in the position of slaves, the more highly they are honoured by everyone.

These people are of two sects. The first are celibates who abstain not only from sex, but also from eating meat, and some from any sort of animal food whatever. They reject all the pleasures of this life as harmful, and look forward only to the joys of the life to come, which they hope to merit by hard labour and all-night vigils. As they hope to attain it soon, they are cheerful and active in the here and now. The other kind are just as fond of hard work, but prefer to marry. They don't despise the comforts of marriage, but think as they owe nature their labour, so they owe children to their country. Unless it interferes with their labour, they avoid no pleasure, and gladly eat meat, precisely because they think it makes them stronger for any sort of heavy work. The Utopians regard the second sort as more sensible, but the first sort as holier. If anyone chose celibacy over marriage and a hard life over a comfortable one on grounds of reason alone, they would laugh at him; but as these men say they are motivated by religion, the Utopians respect and revere them. On no subject are they warier of jumping to conclusions than in this matter of religion. Such, then, are the men whom in their own language they call *Buthrescas*, a term which can be translated as 'specially religious'.¹⁰³

Their priests are of great holiness and therefore very few. In each city there are no more than thirteen, one for each church. In case of war, seven of them go out with the army, and seven substitutes are appointed to fill their places for the time being. When the regular priests come back, the substitutes return to their former posts, serving as assistants to the high priest until one of the regular thirteen dies, when a substitute takes his place. The high priest is, of course, in authority over all the others. Like all other officials, priests are elected by secret popular vote, to avoid partisan feeling.¹⁰⁴ After election they are ordained by the college of priests.

They preside over divine worship, decree religious rites, and act as censors of public morality; for a man to be summoned before them and scolded for not living an honourable life is considered a

¹⁰³ 'Buthrescas' is another Greek compound, translated in the text. The constant, selfless industry of the *Buthrescas* embodies the monastic ideal.

¹⁰⁴ They are elected from the class of scholars - whose members are nominated by the priests and elected by the *syphogrants* (p. 53).

great disgrace. As the duty of the priests is merely to counsel and advise, so correcting and punishing offenders is the duty of the prince and other officials, though the priests may and do exclude flagrant sinners from divine service. Hardly any punishment is more dreaded than this; the excommunicate incurs great infamy, and is tortured by the fear of damnation. Not even his body is altogether secure, for unless he quickly convinces the priests of his repentance, he will be seized and punished by the senate for impiety.

The priests do the teaching of children and young people.¹⁰⁵ Instruction in good manners and pure morals is considered no less important than learning proper. From the first they make every effort to instil in the pupils' minds, while they are still young and tender, principles useful to the community. What is planted in the minds of children lives on in the minds of adults and serves to strengthen the commonwealth; its decline can always be traced to vices which arise from wrong attitudes.

Female priests

Women are not debarred from the priesthood, but only a widow of advanced years is ever chosen, and it doesn't happen often. Except for women who are priests themselves, the wives of priests are the most important women in the whole country.

Unworthy priests

No official is more honoured among the Utopians than the priest, to such an extent that even if one of them commits a crime, he is not brought to court, but left to God and his own conscience. They think it wrong to lay human hands on a man, however guilty, who has been specially consecrated to God, as a holy offering, so to speak. This custom is the easier for them to observe because their priests are so few and so carefully selected. Besides, it rarely happens that a man chosen for his goodness and raised to high dignities solely because of his moral character will fall into corruption and vice. If such a thing should happen, human nature being as changeable as it is, no great harm is to be feared, because the priests are so few and have no power beyond that which derives from their good repute. In fact, the reason for having so few priests is to prevent the order, now so highly esteemed, from being cheapened by numbers. Besides, they think it would be hard to find many men qualified for a dignity to which merely ordinary virtues could never raise them.

But what a crowd of them we have!

¹⁰⁵ Surely the priests only supervise the teaching. There are but thirteen of them per city, whereas each city includes a good many thousand children.

Their priests are esteemed no less highly abroad than at home, the reason for which can be seen, I think, from the following account. Whenever their armies join in battle, the Utopian priests are to be found, a little removed from the fray but not far, wearing their sacred vestments and down on their knees. With hands raised to heaven, they pray first of all for peace, and then for victory to their own side, but without much bloodshed on either part. Should their side be victorious, they rush among the combatants and restrain the rage of their own men against the defeated. If any of the enemy see these priests and call to them, it is enough to save their lives; to touch the flowing robes of a priest will save all their property from confiscation. This custom has brought them such veneration among all peoples, and given them such genuine authority, that they have saved Utopians from the rage of the enemy as often as they have protected the enemy from Utopians. Sometimes when the Utopian line has buckled, when the field was lost, and the enemy was rushing in to kill and plunder, the priests have intervened, separated the armies, and concluded an equitable peace. There was never anywhere a tribe so fierce, cruel and barbarous as not to hold their persons sacrosanct and inviolable.

O priests far more holy than our own!

The Utopians celebrate the first and last days of every month, and likewise of each year, as holy days. They divide the year into months, which they measure by the orbit of the moon, just as they measure the year itself by the course of the sun. In their language, the first days are known as the Cynemern and the last days as the Trapemern, which is to say 'First-feast' and 'Last-feast'.¹⁰⁶ Their churches are beautifully constructed, finely adorned, and large enough to hold a great many worshippers. This is a necessity, since churches are so few.¹⁰⁷ Their interiors are all rather dark, not from architectural ignorance, but from deliberate policy; for the priests

Holidays observed by the Utopians

What their churches are like

¹⁰⁶ More Greek compounds, literally meaning 'Dog-day' (or possibly 'Starting-day') and 'Turning-day'. A note in J. H. Lupton's edition of *Utopia* explains that in ancient Greece the 'dog's day' was 'strictly the night between the old and new [months], when food was placed out at the cross-roads, and the barking of the dogs was taken as a sign of the approach of Hecate [goddess of darkness and the underworld]. It may be relevant that Solon, the legendary lawgiver of Athens, called the last day of each month the 'Old-and-New day' (Diogenes Laertius 1.58).

¹⁰⁷ Doubtless there are several shifts of worship, but even so the churches must be very large: there are thirteen of them in each city, and each city contains over 100,000 people.

(they say) think that in bright light the congregation's thoughts will go wandering, whereas a dim light concentrates the mind and aids devotion.

Though there are various religions in Utopia, as I've said, all of them, even the most diverse, agree in the main point, which is worship of the divine nature; they are like travellers going to a single destination by different roads. So nothing is seen or heard in the churches that does not square with all the creeds. If any sect has a special rite of its own, that is celebrated in a private house; the public service is ordered by a ritual which in no way derogates from any of the private services. Therefore in the churches no images of the gods are seen, so that each man may be free to form his own image of God after his heart's desire, in any shape he pleases.¹⁰⁸ There is no special name for God, apart from the common word Mithra. Whatever the nature of the divine majesty may be, they agree to refer to it by that single word, and their prayers are so phrased as to accommodate the beliefs of all the different sects.

They meet in their churches, therefore, on the evening of 'Last-feast', and while still fasting they thank God for their prosperity during the month or year just ending. Next day, which is 'First-feast', they all flock to the churches in the morning to pray for prosperity and happiness in the month or year just beginning. On the day of 'Last-feast', at home, before they go to church, wives kneel before their husbands and children before their parents, to confess their various failings and acts of negligence, and beg forgiveness for their offences. Thus if any cloud of anger or resentment has arisen in the family, it is dispersed, and they can attend divine services with clear and untroubled minds, for they are too scrupulous to worship with a rankling conscience.¹⁰⁹ If they are aware of hatred or anger towards anyone, they do not take part in divine services till they have been

The Utopian confession

But among us the worst sinners try to crowd closest to the altar

¹⁰⁸ In one way or another, Utopian religion answers or somehow satisfies a great many of the complaints of the religious reformers of More's time – including complaints about idolatry and superstitious practices, ecclesiastical wealth and corruption, and censorship of expression on religious matters.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Christ's injunction: 'if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift' (Matthew 5:23–4). The Catholic institution of confession to priests is evidently not paralleled in Utopia. More pointed out to his daughter Margaret that 'in Greece before Christ's days they used not confession, no more the men then, than the beasts now' (*The Correspondence of Sir Thomas More*, ed. Elizabeth F. Rogers (Princeton, 1947), p. 520).

reconciled and have cleansed their hearts, for fear of some swift and terrible punishment.

As they enter the church they separate, men going to the right side and women to the left.¹¹⁰ Then they take their seats so that the males of each household are placed in front of the head of that household, while the womenfolk are directly in front of the mother of the family. In this way they ensure that everyone's public behaviour is supervised by the same person whose authority and discipline direct him at home. They take great care that the young are everywhere placed in the company of their elders. For if children were trusted to the care of other children, they might spend in infantile foolery the time they should devote to developing a religious fear of the gods, which is the greatest and almost the only incitement to virtue.

They slaughter no animals in their sacrifices, and do not think that a merciful God, who gave life to all creatures that they might live, will be gratified with the shedding of blood. They burn incense, scatter perfumes and light a great number of candles – not that they think these practices profit the divine nature in any way, any more than human prayers do; but they like this harmless kind of worship. They feel that sweet smells, lights and rituals somehow elevate the mind and lift it with a livelier devotion towards the adoration of God. When they go to church the people all wear white. The priest wears a robe of many colours, wonderful for its workmanship and decoration, though not of materials as costly as one would suppose. It contains no gold embroidery nor any precious stones, but is decorated with the feathers of different birds so skilfully woven together that the value of the handiwork far exceeds the cost of the richest materials.¹¹¹ Also, certain symbolic mysteries are hidden in the patterning of the feathers on the robes, the meaning of which is carefully handed down among the priests. These messages serve to remind them of God's benefits towards them, and consequently of the gratitude they owe to God, as well as of their duty to one another.

As the priest in his robes appears from the vestry, the people all fall to the ground in reverence. The stillness is so complete that the

¹¹⁰ Separation of the sexes in church had been customary since the early Christian centuries.

¹¹¹ The choice of feathers for the vestments may reflect Vespucci's observation that the Indians' riches 'consist of variegated birds' feathers' (*Four Voyages*, p. 98).

Utopian music

scene strikes one with awe, as if a divinity were actually present. After remaining in this posture for some time, they rise at a word from the priest. Then they sing hymns to the accompaniment of musical instruments, quite different in shape from those in our part of the world. Many of them produce sweeter tones than ours, but others are not even comparable. In one respect, however, they are beyond doubt far ahead of us, because all their music, both vocal and instrumental, renders and expresses natural feelings and perfectly matches the sound to the subject.¹¹² Whether the words of the psalm are cheerful, supplicatory, serene, troubled, mournful, or angry, the music represents the meaning through the melody so admirably that it penetrates and inspires the minds of the ardent hearers. Finally, the priest and the people together recite certain fixed forms of prayer, so composed that what they all repeat in unison each individual can apply to himself.

In these prayers the worshippers acknowledge God to be the creator and ruler of the universe and the author of all good things. They thank God for benefits received, and particularly for the divine favour which placed them in the happiest of commonwealths and inspired them with religious ideas which they hope are the truest. If they are wrong in this, and if there is some sort of society or religion more acceptable to God than the present one, they pray that he will, in his goodness, reveal it to them, for they are ready to follow wherever he leads. But if their form of society is the best and their religion the truest, then they pray that God will keep them steadfast, and bring other mortals to the same way of life and the same religious faith – unless, indeed, there is something in this variety of religions which delights his inscrutable will.

Then they pray that after an easy death God will receive each of them to himself, how soon or late it is not for them to say. But if it please God's divine majesty, they ask to be brought to him soon, even by the hardest possible death, rather than be kept away from him longer, even by the most prosperous of earthly careers. When this prayer has been said, they prostrate themselves on the ground again; then after a little while they rise and go to dinner. The rest of the day they pass in games and military training.

¹¹² Surtz points out that Hythloday's dissatisfaction with the increasingly elaborate church music of his time was shared by many other intellectuals (*CW*, IV, 555–6).

Now I have described to you as accurately as I could the structure of that commonwealth which I consider not only the best but indeed the only one that can rightfully claim that name. In other places men take very liberally of the commonwealth, but what they mean is simply their own wealth; in Utopia, where there is no private business, every man zealously pursues the public business. And in both places men are right to act as they do. For elsewhere, even though the commonwealth may flourish, each man knows that unless he makes separate provision for himself, he may perfectly well die of hunger. Bitter necessity, then, forces men to look out for themselves rather than for the people, that is, for other people. But in Utopia, where everything belongs to everybody, no man need fear that, so long as the public warehouses are filled, he will ever lack for anything he needs. Distribution is not one of their problems; in Utopia no men are poor, no men are beggars, and though no man owns anything, everyone is rich.

For what can be greater riches than for a man to live joyfully and peacefully, free from all anxieties, and without worries about making a living? No man is bothered by his wife's querulous complaints about money, no man fears poverty for his son, or struggles to scrape up a dowry for his daughter. Each man can feel secure of his own livelihood and happiness, and of his whole family's as well: wife, sons, grandsons, great-grandsons, great-great-grandsons, and that whole long line of descendants that the gentry are so fond of contemplating. Indeed, even those who once worked but can no longer do so are cared for just as well as if they were still productive.

At this point, I'd like to see anyone venture to compare this equity of the Utopians with the so-called justice that prevails among other nations – among whom let me perish if I can discover the slightest scrap of justice or fairness. What kind of justice is it when a nobleman, a goldsmith,¹¹³ a moneylender, or someone else who makes his living by doing either nothing at all or something completely useless to the commonwealth, gets to live a life of luxury and grandeur, while in the meantime a labourer, a carter, a carpenter, or a farmer

¹¹³ In addition to being the creators of objects which are, from the Utopian point of view, worthless, goldsmiths often functioned as bankers. As the inclusion of moneylenders in this list suggests, the idea that lending money at interest constituted sinful usury remained strong in More's time – though the sentence also makes it clear that the practice was firmly established.

works so hard and so constantly that even beasts of burden would scarcely endure it; and this work of theirs is so necessary that no commonwealth could survive for a year without it? Yet they earn so meagre a living and lead such miserable lives that beasts would really seem to be better off. Beasts do not have to work every minute, and their food is not much worse; in fact they like it better, and besides, they do not have to worry about their future. But workmen must not only sweat and suffer without present reward, but agonise over the prospect of a penniless old age. Their daily wage is inadequate even for present needs, so there is no possible chance of their saving for their declining years.

Now isn't this an unjust and ungrateful commonwealth? It lavishes rich rewards on so-called gentry, loan sharks, and the rest of that crew, who don't work at all or are mere parasites, purveyors of empty pleasures. And yet it makes no provision whatever for the welfare of farmers and colliers, labourers, carters and carpenters, without whom the commonwealth would simply cease to exist. After society has taken the labour of their best years, when they are worn out by age, sickness and utter destitution, then the thankless commonwealth, forgetting all their pains and services, throws them out to die a miserable death. What is worse, the rich constantly try to grind out of the poor part of their meagre pittance, not only by private swindling but by public laws. It is basically unjust that people who deserve most from the commonwealth should receive least. But now they have distorted and debased the right even further by giving their extortion the form of law; and thus they have palmed injustice off as legal.¹¹⁴ When I run over in my mind the various commonwealths flourishing today, so help me God, I can see in them nothing but a conspiracy of the rich, who are fattening up their own interests under the name and title of the commonwealth.¹¹⁵ They invent ways and means to hang on to whatever they have acquired by sharp practice, and then they scheme to oppress the poor by buying up their toil and labour as cheaply as possible. These devices become law as soon

Reader, note well!

¹¹⁴ Russell Ames suggests that there is a particular reference to legislation of recent Parliaments, completed in 1515, 'which re-enacted the old statutes against laborers while removing clauses unfavorable to employers' (*Citizen Thomas More and His Utopia* (Princeton, 1949), p. 128).

¹¹⁵ Many readers have seen an allusion here to the judgement of St Augustine: 'if justice is left out, what are kingdoms but great robber bands?' (*The City of God* iv. iv).

as the rich, speaking through the commonwealth – which, of course, includes the poor as well – say they must be observed.

And yet when these insatiably greedy and evil men have divided among themselves goods which would have sufficed for the entire people, how far they remain from the happiness of the Utopian Republic, which has abolished not only money but with it greed! What a mass of trouble was cut away by that one step! What a thicket of crimes was uprooted! Everyone knows that if money were abolished, fraud, theft, robbery, quarrels, brawls, seditions, murders, treasons, poisonings and a whole set of crimes which are avenged but not prevented by the hangman would at once die out. If money disappeared, so would fear, anxiety, worry, toil and sleepless nights. Even poverty, which seems to need money more than anything else, would vanish if money were entirely done away with.

Consider if you will this example. Take a barren year of failed harvests, when many thousands of men have been carried off by hunger. If at the end of the famine the barns of the rich were searched, I dare say positively enough grain would be found in them to have kept all those who died of starvation and disease from even realising that a shortage ever existed – if only it had been divided equally among them. So easily might men get the necessities of life if that cursed money, which is supposed to provide access to them, were not in fact the only barrier to our getting what we need to live. Even the rich, I'm sure, understand this. They must know that it's better to have enough of what we really need than an abundance of superfluities, much better to escape from our many present troubles than to be burdened with great masses of wealth. And in fact I have no doubt that every man's perception of where his true interest lies, along with the authority of Christ our Saviour (whose wisdom could not fail to recognise the best, and whose goodness would not fail to counsel it), would long ago have brought the whole world to adopt Utopian laws, were it not for one single monster, the prime plague and begetter of all others – I mean Pride.

A striking phrase

Pride measures her advantages not by what she has but by what other people lack. Pride would not deign even to be made a goddess if there were no wretches for her to sneer at and domineer over. Her good fortune is dazzling only by contrast with the miseries of others, her riches are valuable only as they torment and tantalise the poverty of others. Pride is a serpent from hell that twines itself around the

hearts of men, acting like a suckfish¹¹⁶ to hold them back from choosing a better way of life.

Pride is too deeply fixed in human nature to be easily plucked out. So I am glad that the Utopians at least have been lucky enough to achieve this republic which I wish all mankind would imitate. The institutions they have adopted have made their community most happy and, as far as anyone can tell, capable of lasting forever. Now that they have torn up the seeds of ambition and faction at home, along with most other vices, they are in no danger from internal strife, which alone has been the ruin of many other nations that seemed secure. As long as they preserve harmony at home, and keep their institutions healthy, the Utopians can never be overcome or even shaken by their envious neighbours, who have often attempted their ruin, but always in vain.

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When Raphael had finished his story, I was left thinking that quite a few of the laws and customs he had described as existing among the Utopians were really absurd. These included their methods of waging war, their religious practices, as well as others of their customs; but my chief objection was to the basis of their whole system, that is, their communal living and their moneyless economy. This one thing alone utterly subverts all the nobility, magnificence, splendour and majesty which (in the popular view) are the true ornaments and glory of any commonwealth. But I saw Raphael was tired with talking, and I was not sure he could take contradiction in these matters, particularly when I recalled what he had said about certain counsellors who were afraid they might not appear knowing enough unless they found something to criticise in other men's ideas. So with praise for the Utopian way of life and his account of it, I took him by the hand and led him in to supper. But first I said that we would find some other time for thinking of these matters more deeply, and for talking them over in more detail. And I still hope such an opportunity will present itself some day.

Meantime, while I can hardly agree with everything he said (though he is a man of unquestionable learning and enormous

¹¹⁶ The remora has a suction plate atop its head, by which it attaches itself to the underbelly of larger fish or the hulls of ships. Impressed by the tenacity of its grip, the ancients fabled that it could impede ships in their course.

experience of human affairs), yet I freely confess that in the Utopian commonwealth there are many features that in our own societies I would like rather than expect to see.

END OF BOOK II.

THE END OF THE AFTERNOON DISCOURSE OF
RAPHAEL HYTHLODAY ON THE LAWS AND
INSTITUTIONS OF THE ISLAND OF UTOPIA,
HITHERTO KNOWN TO BUT FEW, AS
RECORDED BY THE MOST
DISTINGUISHED AND LEARNED MAN,
MR THOMAS MORE,
CITIZEN AND SHERIFF OF LONDON.

