

UTOPIA :
THE CASE FOR OPEN-MINDEDNESS
IN THE COMMONWEALTH

The *Utopia* has been read as an economic, social or political treatise, hailed as a precursor of communism, and praised for its illustration of medieval and monastic virtues. Some critics have analyzed its philosophic precepts, while others have seen it as a light-hearted *jeu d'esprit*. More's major work has fascinated and puzzled readers for generations.

The continuous popular appeal of the work may itself indicate, however, a more fundamental and universal meaning than that attributed to it by most critics. I believe that the dramatic emphasis of *Utopia* does not depend upon any philosophical or political system. Rather the two books form a self-contained literary unit whose consistent theme is the importance of open-mindedness for the improvement of the social order. The ability to experiment, learn, and change is more important to *Utopia* than any particular new institution or custom presented.

The importance of the experimental attitude is often overlooked, because critical debate frequently centers upon a reader's preference for Hythloday's or More's opinions. But a close reading indicates that both are created characters serving More's larger purpose. Hythloday's fictional nature is usually accepted, but, as early as the prefatory letter to Giles, the author begins to establish a fictional "Thomas More" as well.¹ In that letter More portrays himself as a scrupulously honest, literal reporter when in fact, as his humanist readers realized, he was a sophisticated feigner. Throughout *Utopia* More exists as a persona distinct from the author. He is literal-minded and pragmatic, occasionally almost fatalistic. This character confronts Raphael Hythloday, idealist, extremist, and revolutionary. The two personalities are deliberately played against one another, but finally neither has the upper hand. The reader is faced, directly and dramatically, with two different perspectives. He need accept neither "More" nor Hythloday as the author's spokesman nor, indeed, *Utopia* itself as a blueprint for the perfect order.

Although this uncertainty about how seriously to take the characters and the society they discuss has troubled many critics, it seemed to pose little problem to More's humanist readers. Their commendatory letters and verses, published with the first four editions of *Utopia*, share in its spirit and enhance its meaning. The prefatory letters are not dogmatic, but, as Peter Allen notes, they praise *Utopia* as "both a delightful literary game and an important philosophic work."² Many ideas,

1. Whenever necessary for clarity, the name of the character "More" will be distinguished from that of the author by quotation marks.

2. *Studies in the Renaissance*, 10 (1963), 106.

practical and impractical, are espoused in a highly imaginative fashion, and readers are invited to participate in this wise and witty discussion about society.

The tone of the prefatory material indicates that More's humanist readers did respond as he had intended. Guillaume Budé, for example, does not provide any absolute interpretation but adopts various points of view. First, in the manner of Hythloday, he attacks the vices of Europe; then, philosophically, he speculates on the nature of Utopia. Finally, although he seems to suggest that the island is ideal, Budé's closing advice to Europeans is not a thoughtless imitation of Utopia but a receptive attitude. He says that the present age and those succeeding will "hold his [More's] account as a nursery of correct and useful institutions from which every man may introduce and *adapt* transplanted customs to his own society"¹ (*italics mine*).

Further evidence of reactions that point toward More's basic meaning is given by Erasmus and Giles, the humanists most closely associated with *Utopia*. In a letter to William Cop Erasmus indicates his reaction to the work. Interestingly enough he does not commend it as the depiction of an ideal republic. By reading More's book, he says, you will be amused and simultaneously discover "the very sources from which almost all the evils of society rise."² A modern reader cannot be sure precisely what Erasmus meant by the "sources" of social evils. But the similarity of this remark to that of Peter Giles is striking. In his prefatory letter to Jerome Busleyden Giles does not know whether to admire most More's "happy memory" or the conversation with Hythloday "or the sagacity with which he has noted the sources from which all evils actually arise in the commonwealth or from which all blessings possibly could arise..."³

Giles provided a clue to his meaning by the quatrain in the "Utopian vernacular" he contributed to the first edition. In that little poem "Utopia" speaks, saying she represents the philosophical city for mortals but does so without the aid of any "abstract philosophy." No particular system or systems are mentioned to account for her greatness. The last lines of the verse reveal the actual source of Utopia's strength. "Ungrudgingly do I share my benefits with others; undemurringly do I adopt whatever is better from others."⁴ The willingness to learn and change is the origin of

1. "*Eius enim historiam aetas nostra, posteraeque aetates habebunt uel elegantium, uel utrumque institutorum seminarium, unde translatis mores in suam quisque ciuitatem importent & accommodent.*" Guillaume Budé to Thomas Lupset, *Utopia* in *The Complete Works of St. Thomas More*, vol. 4, ed. J.H. Hexter and Edward Surtz, S.J. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1965), p. 14. Subsequent references to *Utopia* are to this edition and are cited simply as *Utopia*.

2. "... fontes ipsos... unde omnia fere reipublicae mala oriuntur." *Opus Epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami*, ed. P.S. and H.M. Allen, 12 vols. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1906-58), II, Ep. 537, 11. 17-19.

3. "*an prudentiam, qui... fontes unde omnia reipublicae uel oriuntur mala, uel oriri possent bona, sic animaduertit.*" Peter Giles to Jerome Busleyden, *Utopia*, p. 22.

4. The Utopian Alphabet, *Utopia*, p. 19. See the facsimile below, p. 106.

Utopian blessings, just as the narrow-mindedness shown in the council scenes of Book One is the source of the evils that afflict Europe.

The two men closest to the *Utopia*, Erasmus and Giles, do not hold it up as a model, nor do they isolate any of its institutions for special praise or imitation. Rather they admire the expanded awareness afforded by More's book. The *Utopia* illustrates a certain plasticity of attitude, a fundamental insight which illuminates the causes of evil in the social order. Agreeing on a generalized tribute to More's insight rather than to the particular constitution of the island, Erasmus and Giles perhaps also agreed on the crucial importance of tolerance and receptivity expressed in the lines of Giles' quatrain.

Although later commentators tended to dismiss *Utopia* as unreal or dogmatically assert, with Hythloday, that it was totally ideal, More probably desired more flexibility from his reader. His use of two fictional characters served this end.

In traditional voyage tales the reader responds solely to the point of view of the adventurer himself. He may dismiss the traveler's stories as far-fetched, the strange customs as simply wrong, the lands as unreal. Even if he fully approves the new institutions, he may not see any hope of applying them to his nation. By using two narrators, however, More incorporated some of these very "realistic" reactions into the work itself. As a practical man of affairs the character "More" points out the extremism of many of Hythloday's views and often voices persuasive reasons for compromise. Thus he often emphasizes the potential relevance of Utopian institutions. But his final resignation to the status quo expresses the very reaction that readers of *Utopia* might have had without him. By incorporating this passive reaction into the work More revealed its inadequacy. Such apparent apathy, following as it does Hythloday's persuasive peroration contrasting Utopian industry and European complacency, pushes the reader toward a positive "Utopian" response. Let us see, he might say, if we cannot profit from these new ways and appropriate to ourselves "whatever seems better." The contrasting personalities of More's two characters thus might make the reader affirm the necessity for change. Confronted by opposites and given no definite solution, the reader is freed to react with his own suggestions for reform — to participate in the process of devising a better society.

If opening the reader's mind to social change was More's purpose, the form of *Utopia* suits his aim. The unresolved opposition between "More" and Hythloday leaves both books open-ended. In addition, contrasts are established on multiple levels between Europe and Utopia. These numerous differences do not, however, lead to an absolute choice between the two societies. Just as the exchange between Hythloday and "More" is inconclusive, the merits of the two governments remain relative. This relativity is emphasized through the dialogue form of Book One, and the conflicts there prepare the reader to see contrasts between Utopia and Europe implied in Book Two. Thus a tension between opposites tends to shape both sections to More's purpose.

The open-ended form created by More's controlled use of contrast advances the theme of *Utopia* as well as its purpose. A textual analysis of both books should show that the importance of experimental attitudes is the real subject of the work.

This theme finds dramatic focus at the end of each book. At the conclusion of his debate with Giles and "More", Hythloday reveals what is actually most important about Utopia. Denying the usefulness of counsel in a corrupt state, he summarizes his position by contrasting the "holy institutions of the Utopians" with the injustices of European society. When "More" objects to communism, Hythloday's response is significant. He tells "More" that he should have seen Utopia, not because of its communism, but because of the people's "industry". It is not their intelligence but their willingness to apply new ideas that causes the citizens of Utopia to surpass Europeans. "I hold for certain," Hythloday says, "that even though we surpass them in brains, we are far inferior to them in application and industry."¹

Although Utopians have had little contact with distant countries, their chronicles do report the landing of shipwrecked Romans and Egyptians some twelve hundred years earlier. "Now mark what good advantage their industry took of this one opportunity," says Hythloday. "The Roman empire possessed no art capable of any use which they did not either learn from the shipwrecked strangers or discover for themselves after receiving the hints for investigation – so great a gain was it to them that on a single occasion some persons were carried to their shores from ours" (p. 109). Hythloday draws the important parallel with European response to his landing and the new information he brings. "But if any like fortune has ever driven anyone from their shores to ours, the event is as completely forgotten as future generations will perhaps forget that I had once been there. And just as they immediately at one meeting appropriated to themselves every good discovery of ours, so I suppose it will be long before we adopt anything that is better arranged with them than with us. *This trait, I judge, is the chief reason why, though we are inferior to them neither in brains nor in resources, their commonwealth is more wisely governed and more happily flourishing than ours*" (italics mine, p. 109). It is Utopian ability to change, to heed and apply new ideas that Hythloday lauds as their chief quality – not their communism, Epicureanism, nor any of their customs.

Utopian open-mindedness comes dramatically to the fore again at the end of Book Two. At this point it is not Hythloday's opinions but a vision of the Utopians themselves that emphasizes their chief virtue. The account of their religious belief has become increasingly more impressive and is finally crowned by the description of the Utopians at prayer. These people, who have achieved so much in the way of material well-being and philosophic sanity, humbly beg further instruction. The Utopian thanks

1. *Utopia*, p. 107. Subsequent references to *Utopia* are noted in the text.

God for "benefits received, particularly that by divine favor he has chanced on that commonwealth which is the happiest and has received that religion which he hopes to be the truest." Then the Utopian adds, "If he errs in these matters or if there is anything better and more approved by God than that commonwealth or that religion, he prays that He will, of His goodness, bring him to the knowledge of it, for he is ready to follow in whatever path He may lead him" (p. 237). Despite all his justifiable reasons for pride and a strong sense of self-assurance, the Utopian readily admits the limits of his knowledge. He prefaces his belief with a conditional and is able to qualify even his religious views. Addressing God he says, "if this form of a commonwealth be the best and his religion the truest, he prays that then He may give him steadfastness and bring other mortals to the same way of living and the same opinion of God – *unless* there be something in this variety of religions which delights His inscrutable will" (italics mine, p. 237). The humility that allows such qualification also fosters progress. This is the point brought out in a variety of ways and climactically espoused at the end of each book.

Even as these dramatic high-points reveal the importance of a receptive attitude, so too does the chief line of argument in the body of each book. This consistency of theme welds the somewhat disparate forms of the two sections into an effective whole. An analysis first of the dialogue and then of Hythloday's monologue – the description of Utopia – should reveal this underlying thematic unity.

The conversation between Giles, "More" and Hythloday in Book One centers ostensibly on the value of service at a royal court. After the introduction to "More" is completed and the three are comfortably seated, Giles says, "Why, my dear Raphael, I wonder that you do not attach yourself to some king" (p. 55). The debate is on. It is concluded, although not resolved, at the end of the book when Hythloday says that service in any state other than Utopia is futile.

Perhaps, then, a critic of *Utopia* should concentrate on external information about More's own decision to enter the court circle. Presumably he decided to enter Henry's service soon after the composition of *Utopia*. The danger is, however, that the analysis may lead away from the work itself toward More's "probable" thinking and "possible" conversations with friends around 1515. When J.H. Hexter, for example, tries to ascertain the "furniture of More's mind" in 1515, he fails to see the relevance of the actual dialogue in Book One to the whole of *Utopia*.

Why, in fact, is there such a conflict about the merit of royal service? The debate arises from the underlying recognition of the difficulty of provoking change. European kings, courtiers, and even ordinary citizens are not ready to receive new ideas. The dialogue in Book One brings out the importance of this issue in several ways.

After Giles has urged Raphael to join some court in order to benefit himself and his friends, "More" then tries to persuade him on the basis of public service. Hythloday modestly denies the ability More ascribes

to him, but adds the real reason why he disdains councilorship. He says, "Among royal councilors everyone is actually so wise as to have no need of profiting by another's counsel, or everyone seems so wise in his own eyes as not to condescend to profit by it... If anyone, when in the company of people who are jealous of others' discoveries or prefer their own, should propose something which he either has read of as done in other times or has seen done in other places, the listeners behave as if their whole reputation for wisdom were jeopardized and as if afterwards they would deserve to be thought plain blockheads unless they could lay hold of something to find fault with in the discoveries of others. When all other attempts fail, their last resource is a remark such as this: 'Our forefathers were happy with that sort of thing, and would to heaven we had their wisdom'" (pp. 57, 59). In this fashion Hythloday points out the destructiveness of provincialism and insists that while it exists, no counsel can be useful.

After the disadvantage of excessive respect for tradition has been pointed out, Book One falls roughly into three council scenes: the one at Cardinal Morton's remembered by Hythloday, and the imaginary councils of the French king and those of another, unidentified ruler. In each case Hythloday explores some particular English or European evil and offers remedies for it. He supports his arguments by examples from history and from travel. But his final point in each case is that his proposals make no difference, since they will not be heeded. When he opposes capital punishment for theft at Cardinal Morton's and indicates the evils of enclosure and of idle retainers, he is immediately dismissed by a supposedly learned lawyer — a representative of English justice. After he suggests bondage as a punishment for theft, Hythloday adds that he sees "no reason why this method might not be adopted even in England..." The lawyer replies: "Never could that system be established in England without involving the commonwealth in a very serious crisis..." Hythloday recalls, not without bitterness, that "all who were present gave him their assent" (p. 81). Although the Cardinal sways his courtiers to a more favorable reception, Hythloday realizes that the primary reaction to his new ideas is based on traditionalism, national pride, and preference for one's own opinions.

Apologizing to "More" for the length of his tale, Hythloday points out, "This conversation I had to relate, though somewhat concisely, to exhibit the attitude of those who had rejected what I had said at first yet who, immediately afterward, when the Cardinal did not disapprove of it, also gave their approval, flattering him... From this reaction you may judge what little regard courtiers would pay to me and my advice" (p. 85). When "More" still demurs, Hythloday offers a hypothetical case. The French king decides to meet with his council to determine the most successful method of waging war on Italy. His councilors argue about which plan will best further the king's goal. Suppose I, asks Hythloday, suggested that Italy be left alone. Suppose I opposed war in general. "What reception from my listeners, my dear More, do you think this speech of

mine would find?" (p. 91). "More" must concede Hythloday's reiterated point. "To be sure, not a very favorable one, I granted" (p. 91). Hythloday proceeds to make his case about the narrow-mindedness of European rulers still stronger. "Picture the councilors of some king or other," he continues, "debating with him and devising by what schemes they may heap up treasure for him" (p. 91). "At this point suppose I were again to rise and maintain that these counsels are both dishonorable and dangerous for the king, whose very safety, not merely his honor, rests on the people's resources rather than his own" (p. 95). Hythloday returns to the purpose of his hypothesis: "To sum it all up, if I tried to obtrude these and like ideas on men strongly inclined to the opposite way of thinking, to what deaf ears should I tell the tale!" (p. 97). Again "More" concedes the point, "Deaf indeed, without doubt, I agreed" (p. 97).

As the book closes, Hythloday reiterates his position about the futility of advising kings who will not listen. Then he contrasts Utopia. His climactic testimony to Utopian open-mindedness bears directly on the issue at the heart of the entire book. Hythloday's fundamental frustration with Europeans is not their private property, but their "deaf ears". By the time the reader reaches the end of Book One and learns of the readiness with which Utopians heed new ideas, he might well agree that "this trait" could be "the chief reason" why a commonwealth might be "more wisely governed and more happily flourishing."

In spite of Hythloday's consistent disparagement of European courts, however, the question of counsel remains open. "More" argues for the necessity of setting forth new ideas even in a hostile atmosphere. And some hope of response is offered. In the first council scene, cited by Hythloday to prove the futility of advice, one major source for optimism exists — Morton himself. The lawyer and the rest of the company dismiss Hythloday's suggestions, to be sure, but the Cardinal quells the disapproval with these words: "It is not easy to guess whether it would turn out well or ill inasmuch as absolutely no experiment has been made" (p. 81).

In his willingness to experiment, the Cardinal foreshadows the Utopian attitude lauded in Book Two. He also offers a positive counter to Hythloday's pessimistic view on the fruits of counsel in Europe. The uncompromising Hythloday is too much angered by the general lack of response to appreciate the importance of the Cardinal's interest. But the Cardinal gives weight to More's argument — the possibility of effecting some change. After recalling his conversation at Morton's, Hythloday points out the futility of his service, but "More", without openly disagreeing, dwells on the Cardinal and his happiness at his court as a boy. Later "More" does voice his opinion. He admits that Hythloday's radical advice would encounter deaf ears. But he adds, "and by heaven I am not surprised. Neither, to tell the truth, do I think that such ideas should be thrust on people, or such advice given, as you are positive will never be listened to" (p. 99). "More" then argues that some good can be

achieved by working through the convictions of the hearers – and not in direct opposition. He actually states the basic assumption about human nature presupposed by his view. He tells Hythloday that by “the indirect approach you must seek and strive to the best of your power to handle matters tactfully. What you cannot turn to good you must make as little bad as you can. For it is impossible that all should be well unless all men were good, a situation which I do not expect for a great many years to come!” (pp. 99-101).⁴

“More”, accepting the severe limits of human nature, is willing to adapt to a given situation. Rather than pessimism, he urges gratitude for whatever small change might be effected. Hythloday, on the other hand, insists that a favorable climate of opinion is a necessary base for any improvement. Both, however, recognize the fundamental importance of receptive attitudes to the welfare of the state, and both make the primacy of this issue apparent to the reader. They differ only in the degree which each deems acceptable for progress. The confrontation of Hythloday, the radical idealist, and “More”, the practical man of affairs, provides the reader a complete spectrum of possibilities on the issue of change in an established state. The question of whether or not to advise kings is necessarily based on the possible effect of such advice. And it is this issue that relates the dialogue intrinsically to Hythloday’s discourse.

In the course of Hythloday’s description of the island, constituting Book Two, Utopian willingness to take advice is seen as a vital factor in their achievement. For instance, Hythloday points out the eagerness with which Utopians adopted the ideas introduced by his company. They learned Greek, discovered the art of printing and manufacture of paper, and received the religious doctrine of Christianity from Hythloday and his companions. Appropriately enough, Hythloday stresses the teachableness of the Utopians in his discussion of Utopian travel. The citizens travel little, but can take full advantage of new experiences, whether their own journeys or, as in the case of Hythloday and his friends, the travels of others. “When they had heard from us about the literature and learning of the Greeks,” Hythloday says, “it was wonderful to see their extreme desire for permission to master them through our instruction” (p. 181). At first the Portuguese adventurers only humored their hosts, doubting their ability to grasp so difficult a tongue. Yet, Hythloday confesses his astonishment, “in less than three years they were perfect in the language and able to peruse good authors without any difficulty unless the text had faulty readings” (p. 181).

In the case of printing on paper, the Utopians did not even wait for explicit instruction. So ready were they to respond to new methods that they seized the initiative. In Europe it might be necessary to explain painstakingly the advantages of something different, and then justify the cost and labor involved in conversion to such new methods. In Utopia the citizens were so intrigued by the very sight of Aldine printing that they promptly set to work on the problem of reproducing it. Hythloday tells the

reader that neither he nor any of his companions were “expert in either art”. With “the greatest acuteness” the Utopians guessed how it was done. The most important factor in their success, however, was not their intelligence, but, as Hythloday had suggested earlier, their open-mindedness and industry. Hythloday says, “Their first attempts were not very successful, but by frequent experiment they soon mastered both” (p. 183). His closing remarks seem to emphasize the most important aspect of his comments on travel. “Whoever, coming to their land on a sight-seeing tour, is recommended by any special intellectual endowment or is acquainted with many countries through long travel, is sure of a hearty welcome, for they delight in hearing what is happening in the whole world” (p. 185).

The observations about travel are not the only points in Book Two that indicate the over-riding virtues of Utopians. In his account of their religion Hythloday gives another example of the educability of the island’s citizens. He says, “After they had heard from us the name of Christ, His teaching, His character... you would not believe how readily disposed they, too, were to join it [the Christian religion]” (p. 219). Many Utopians were baptized, persuaded to love the sacraments and “desire them with the greatest eagerness.” In religion, as in more earth-bound affairs, the Utopians were eager to appropriate whatever seemed better.

In the case of the Utopian interest in Christianity, however, Hythloday rounds out his account with a particularly interesting story. First he pays tribute even to those Utopians who did not adopt Christianity. Even those, he says, “who do not agree with the religion of Christ do not try to deter others from it. They do not attack any who have made their profession.” More remarkable, still, than this tribute to pagan tolerance and maturity coming from a Christian, is its juxtaposition with the account which follows. “Only one of our company, while I was there, was interfered with. As soon as he was baptized, in spite of our advice to the contrary, he spoke publicly of Christ’s religion with more zeal than discretion. He began to grow so warm in his preaching that not only did he prefer our worship to any other but he condemned all the rest. He proclaimed them to be profane in themselves and their followers to be impious and sacrilegious and worthy of everlasting fire” (p. 219). The fiery neophyte oversteps the forms of decorum observed by his fellow Utopians. He abandons reason and the sense of his own finite limitation to impose his views on others. In the end he is sentenced to exile, not for his Christianity, but for his bigotry.

The over-zealous Utopian described in Book Two corresponds to the friar at Cardinal Morton’s mentioned in Book One. Like the friar, the Utopian becomes destructive through his excessive partisanship. He damns all who do not agree with him just as the friar threatens all who scorn friars with excommunication. Because he forsakes the tolerance that made his nation great, the baptized Utopian is made to look as foolish as the friar.

In both books, then, More discloses the folly of narrow-mindedness and also reveals the value of tolerance for social improvement. In addition, he gives evidence that Utopians themselves recognize the importance of maintaining receptive attitudes and make notable efforts to preserve them.

The founder of the island avoided rigid precepts and showed a profound personal tolerance. Utopus readily admitted the limits of human knowledge and was, says Hythloday, "uncertain whether God did not desire a varied and manifold worship and therefore did not inspire people with different views" (p. 221). He was open to all possibilities but felt the best approach was ideological freedom. "Even if it should be the case that one single religion is true and all the rest are false, he foresaw that, provided the matter was handled reasonably and moderately, truth by its own natural force would finally emerge sooner or later and stand forth conspicuously" (p. 221). He felt it his duty to promote free exchange and control any violent suppression of views, for, he observed, "the worst men are always the most unyielding" (p. 221). Here, as in the rest of *Utopia*, flexibility seems to be a necessary condition for the emergence of the best. With such premises Utopus, says Hythloday, "made the whole matter of religion an open question..." (p. 221).

The citizens' common life, often held up as the most important aspect of *Utopia*, also contributes to flexibility. In so far as communism encourages detachment, it encourages change. Possessions tend to generate protective or acquisitive attitudes that limit the actions and even the thinking of the owner. Hythloday notes one social result of common life when he says, "No city has any desire to extend its territory, for they consider themselves the tenants rather than the masters of what they hold" (p. 113).

Since the Utopians have no need – either personal or national – to acquire more land or goods, they do not rush into war. They decide to do battle only if they judge it to be in the best interest of the commonwealth or of their allies. Once the decision is made, they endeavor to accomplish their goals with as little bloodshed as possible. They devise new military strategies, because they are no more bound by concepts of honor than they are by desire for land. Encouraging treachery within the enemy ranks, the Utopians capture their leaders and so demoralize their opponents. They do not disdain such betrayal, because it saves lives on both sides. Hythloday says, "They boast themselves as having acted with valor and heroism whenever their victory is such as no animal except man could have won, that is by strength of intellect..." (p. 203). They do not consider it heroic or honorable to die unnecessarily. Life is not cheap in a state where each citizen has equal access to pleasure – material and intellectual.

If the society as a whole adopts new approaches to age-old human problems, the ordinary citizen is likely to be receptive to new methods too. Hythloday often comments on those aspects of Utopian common life that encourage individual pliancy. For example, he points out that men

alternate between rural and urban life on a regular basis. Each man thus has the experience of two quite different ways of life on which to base his judgments. He does not have to defend his profession, since he has at least two. Nor is he limited to the virtues of town or country life and so likely to scorn one or the other.

His personal flexibility is encouraged by other, apparently diverse, Utopian customs. For example, Hythloday notes that the Utopians change their homes by lot every ten years. He does not explain the purpose of this rotation, yet it surely discourages attachment. In this communistic society no one becomes so concerned about his home that he is not willing to risk losing it if the occasion demands. In only one aspect of Utopian life is the competitive drive mentioned. The Utopians do take pride in the beauty of the gardens behind their homes. Yet even this rivalry is skillfully contrived to hinder individual vanity. For the "keen competition" which Hythloday observes in the case of gardens is "between blocks" (p. 121).

The family structure is also designed to discourage protective self-interest. Members may be transferred from one family unit to another on the basis of the size of each group. A major result of this regulation, too, must be to free the individual to think about the good of the community. He need not fearfully resist change lest it endanger his family or his goods.

Just as many features of Utopian communism encourage receptive attitudes, so too does Utopian natural philosophy. Much has been written about Epicurean and Stoic elements in the *Utopia* and the sources of More's version of them. Yet what is important in Hythloday's lengthy description of Utopian philosophy is not just its relationship to classical schools of thought, but its relevance to More's basic purpose. When the Utopians define virtue as living according to nature's precept, they are espousing a system that tends to discourage an accretion of irrational traditions. Nature, reason, and use afford a yardstick against which to measure customs, institutions, and ideas.¹

1. The standards of nature, reason, and use do not become absolute and self-limiting since they are finally referred to the religious realm. As Hythloday says, "They [Utopians] never have a discussion of happiness without uniting certain principles taken from religion as well as from philosophy which uses rational arguments. Without these principles, they think reason is insufficient and weak by itself for the investigation of true happiness" (p. 161).

The religious precepts which buttress Utopian natural philosophy do seem to constitute a limit to open-mindedness, since they postulate the immortality of the soul and fit retribution for good or bad in an after life. These two dogmas are Utopian absolutes.

Yet Utopian philosophic and religious agreement finally seems to have a more broadening than limiting effect. "Reason," Utopians believe, "first inflames men to a love and veneration of the divine majesty, to whom we owe both our existence and our capacity for happiness" (p. 163). Gratitude is here clearly a part of Utopian faith and tends to prevent national or personal pride and its accompanying proclivity to dogma. For the religious truth must ultimately reside in "the divine majesty," or the Infinite. Since man can grasp only portions of infinite truth at a time, he must be constantly ready to modify his opinion or increase his knowledge. Therefore the philosophic and theological precepts of Utopians tend to support receptive attitudes.

Hythloday illustrates the function of their philosophy in his discussion of false pleasure. He notes that when fashion is artificially determined, men tend to measure their own value by the quality of their clothes. Yet, as Hythloday observes, "If you consider the use of the garment, why is wool of finer thread superior to that of thicker?" (p. 167). He goes on to question the worth of "empty and unprofitable honors", asking "what natural and true pleasure can another's bared head or bent knees afford you? Will this behavior cure the pain in your own knees or relieve the lunacy in your own head?" (p. 167). In Utopia citizens are honored in proportion to their contributions to society, their strength of intellect, or their virtue. Freed from the bonds of artificial social conventions, Utopians are able to respond to new customs or ideas on the basis of their natural utility.

Utopian conclusions about dress, ways of showing honor, and other issues are not meant to be whole-heartedly embraced by the reader, but the fresh perspective their system offers is of great significance. Hythloday summarizes his presentation of Utopian philosophy by saying, "This is their view of virtue and pleasure. They believe that human reason can attain to no truer view, unless a heaven-sent religion inspire man with something more holy. Whether in this stand they are right or wrong, time does not permit us to examine – nor is it necessary. We have taken upon ourselves only to describe their principles, and not also to defend them" (italics mine, p. 179).

It is not necessary or important to establish the absolute validity of the Utopian system. In fact the whole method of *Utopia* tends to confute absolutism. Hythloday himself had expressed hesitation about the high estimation of pleasure in Utopia, and the qualification about "heaven-sent religion" in the passage quoted probably indicates a Christian reservation about a pagan state. But Hythloday's main emphasis is on the triumphant result of Utopian attitudes. He commends their "nimbleness" of body and their nimbleness of mind after discussing their philosophy. It is at this point in fact that he praises their quick comprehension of Greek, printing, and papermaking. Because they are no more bound by provincial pride in their own techniques than they are by an artificially established nobility, Utopians can experiment freely with new methods, even as they can value men for their minds.

Utopian religion, communism, and moral philosophy all contribute to the inquisitiveness and intellectual agility of the citizens. Humility before God's superior wisdom forbids an absolutist acceptance of man-made dogma, and an eagerness to know the divine will encourages an exploration of nature. Hythloday observes that when the Utopians investigate "the secrets of nature, they appear to themselves not only to get great pleasure in doing so but also to win the highest approbation of the Author and Maker of nature" (p. 183). The Utopian system of communism frees citizens from the worries of private property, and the business of accumulating goods for oneself and one's family, and it

frees the state from deleterious wars. Consequently, individual and national efforts may be turned to intellectual and cultural improvements. And, finally, Utopian natural philosophy offers the perspective of nature and reason by which to judge individual and social endeavors.

These three major aspects of Utopian society foster the willingness to change that both "More" and Hythloday agree is crucial for the good state. In addition, the Utopians preserve their social pliancy in many incidental ways. For example, they do not establish a rigid schedule for labor. Normally they work six hours a day, but if production needs do not require the fruits of any particular trade, the men are freed for more useful work. If the roads need repair, the unoccupied workers may do that. If no work remains to be done, then "they announce publicly that there will be fewer hours of work. For the authorities do not keep the citizens against their will at superfluous labor..." (p. 135). Regulations like these indicate a kind of built-in flexibility in the Utopian system. Another example is a rather remarkable rule for debate in the Utopian senate. Utopians refuse to discuss any proposition on the same day it is laid before the body. In this case, the officials reveal their awareness of the dangers of dogmatic stands and try to avoid them. As Hythloday explains, "This is their rule lest anyone, after hastily blurting out the first thought that popped into his head, should afterwards give more thought to defending his opinions than to supporting what is good for the commonwealth..." (p. 125).

Not only does Hythloday describe regulations in Utopian society which indicate the citizenry's own appreciation of pliancy and respect for learning, he also relates humorous tales about the state which, even as they amuse, suggest the value of such attitudes. In the first chapter of Book Two, for example, the Utopian method of hatching eggs is introduced. In the midst of the serious discussion of agriculture and the duties of farmers, the reader is suddenly confronted with the startling image of chickens pursuing human beings as their parents. Some readers might have heard of the ancient Egyptian method of artificial incubation via Pliny, Diodorus Siculus, or Mandeville, although the practice did not yet exist in Europe. But the suggestion that the newly hatched chickens followed "humans as their mothers" probably seemed strange and funny. In many of their institutions Utopians were wholly admirable, a reader might well observe, but in cases like this they were just peculiar. Yet even this amusing Utopian phenomenon contributes subtly to More's larger purpose. On a level more of entertainment than of Platonic discussion, the artificial incubation of chickens gives a striking alternative to something as apparently standardized as the way of raising fowl. The crowning touch is of course the claim that chicks follow humans as mothers. In other words, chickens adapt to the situation in which they find themselves; their custom is modified by experience – not maintained in spite of it. With a laugh then, More says, look here, even chickens can change.

There are many other whimsical tales in the *Utopia*, such as the story of the Anemolian ambassadors, the legend about the creation of the island from a peninsula, the strange methods of Utopian courtship, the description of the outlandish garb worn by Utopian priests, and Herculean methods of placing raw materials near urban centers. These accounts of strange Utopian customs all give fresh perspective to traditional European values. The legend about Utopus' conquest and his subsequent excavation of fifteen miles of land connecting the island to the peninsula shows the fruit of cooperative effort. As the marginal note points out, "What Is Common to All Is Borne Lightly". The "light work" of course is of heroic proportions and so serves to remove Utopians from the realm of a purely practical discussion of the best state – even as it testifies to the advantages of communism.

The laughter evoked by such strange tales serves its own purpose. A sober discussion of the best state of the commonwealth might well seem to forbid purely experimental ideas. Such a ponderous subject seems to call for only the most prudent suggestions. But the humorous stories and occasional excesses of Utopian customs lend a lighter tone. In this atmosphere, one feels, there is the freedom to make mistakes. Engaged by the wit as well as the subject of the discussion, a reader might well respond with his own ideas for an improved commonwealth. To awaken this response was surely More's primary intent in the *Utopia*.

The amusing aspects of Utopia also serve to limit the land as an ideal, and, in fact, Hythloday's final remarks do not simply hold up the vision of a perfect state. Instead his closing statement contrasts Europe and Utopia and then points to the source of European failure – pride. Europe might long ago have admitted the superiority of such just methods as those practiced in Utopia, Hythloday says, "had not one single monster, the chief and progenitor of all plagues, striven against it – I mean Pride" (p. 243). The angry diatribe against pride which follows is intrinsically related to the entire movement of More's work. Since More's fundamental message is the vital importance of receptive attitudes, it is logical that his protagonist should finally lash out against the enemy of change. It is the vanity of nationalism and delight in one's own opinions that prevent Europeans from heeding a fresh suggestion. Pride is a "serpent from hell" because she closes men's minds to improvement for the community at large. Under her influence people foolishly exalt the status quo, like the lawyer at Cardinal Morton's. Because she drains men's objectivity and capacity to "see life whole," pride, says Hythloday, "acts like the suckfish in preventing and hindering them from entering on a better way of life" (p. 245). Hythloday's final anger is consistent with his frustration at the inflexibility of European thinking seen throughout Book One. In his early conversation with "More", Hythloday suggests the relationship between pride and the refusal to accept new ideas. He will not offer his counsel to European governments because "everyone seems so wise in his own eyes as not to condescend to profit by it [another's

counsel]..." (p. 57). Excessive self-esteem prevents most men from listening to others. Or if the proud do deign to hear anyone else, they only criticize. As Hythloday says, "The listeners behave as if their whole reputation for wisdom were jeopardized... unless they could lay hold of something to find fault with in the discoveries of others" (p. 59). Pride is therefore the vice most to be feared in the royal councils of Europe, the reason for Hythloday's own unwillingness to enter public service, and the appropriate subject of his final denunciation.

The pertinence of Hythloday's final attack on pride is only one indication of the unity between the two books of *Utopia*. Positing the basic need for experimentation in all efforts for the "best state of a commonwealth", More skillfully interlocks both sections. The dialogue, concentrating as it does on Hythloday's account of European ills, tends to stress the negative – the disadvantages of pride and provincialism. The reversed image, Utopia, affords a view of positive achievement. Here is a society where a flexible outlook is fostered and preserved – by the religion, the economy, and a variety of regulations and customs.

The contrast is not that simple, however. As if to illustrate formally the substance of his work, More never shuts the door to debate. Therefore Book One is not wholly taken up with the limited vision of Europeans. Cardinal Morton testifies to the possibility of change. And More argues that improvement might be effected, even in England. Similarly, Book Two does not present a perfect state. Not only is Utopia pagan, but some of its rules are excessive, some of its customs absurd. Finally, neither the positive vision of the imaginary Utopian at prayer nor the negative attack on European pride predominates. Rather, the contrast itself, like more subtle juxtapositions throughout the text, creates the lasting impression and serves to encourage a realistic approach to social problems.

More includes a discussion of actual contemporary evils in the larger context of urging experimental attitudes. By way of indicating English pride Hythloday points out specific injustices, like capital punishment for theft. And although he denies that partial remedies to such problems have any real utility, he does suggest ways to alleviate this evil. In Book Two Utopian humility, teachableness, and the conscious effort to preserve flexibility are revealed again and again. In the process, however, the particular achievements possible in such a society are noted. Practices like bondage as a punishment for crime, electoral representation of the people, and the provision of adequate hospital facilities relate pertinently to European ills. Throughout his work, then, More is trying both to point out the general social advantages of flexibility and to bring about a willingness to change in the case of specific practical problems.

The very existence of *Utopia* reveals Thomas More's hope that new ideas could have some effect in the European state. The depiction of the conflict between "More" and Hythloday, like Hythloday's surprising admission that he left Utopia only "to make known that new world," indicates a basic optimism about the possibility of creating – not a perfect commonwealth – but a better one.

