

Utopia, a Roundtable Discussion¹ with Drs. Clarence H. Miller, George M. Logan, Elizabeth McCutcheon *et al.*

Clarence Miller: The problem with *Utopia* is that the moment you start thinking about this powerful work, it goes to pieces completely. Consider if you had no laws and everything is done by judges who automatically go along and see that justice is done, and there is no real law to prove by, and the judges are appointed by favoritism. I think More knows that this is a kind of virtual case. And it belongs to a whole composite of the Utopia which is itself often deliberately not workable, and I think this is one of the cases where More would never have seriously thought you could run a country without laws.

George Logan: At the same time, it seems that More has some pretty deep ambivalence about the law, for the usual reasons. On the one hand, he seems to be quite incensed at lawyers. His father steered him very strongly toward the law, and it seems as if he resisted the steering for a while. He was always very enamored of the humanist circle that he fell in with in his early twenties. And then there is the interesting report in Roper's biography that he spent four years living in the Charterhouse of London, which suggests that he was thinking, as Erasmus says he was, not just of becoming a priest but maybe also of becoming cloistered, withdrawing from the world. But eventually, according to Erasmus, he decided he'd rather be a married man, than be "a priest impure." And so he got married and studied law, and entered the Inns of Court. Once he got into it, he was a marvelous lawyer. He certainly had a brilliant career. And yet, in a couple of passages in *Utopia*—banning lawyers from Utopia and the reduction of the number of laws, and the insistence that they all be written in common language, and then the figure of the pompous lawyer that Hythloday argues with in the first book of *Utopia*; and the chicanery of Buckingham's speeches and the legal chicanery that Buckingham quite correctly and powerfully calls attention to in the regime of Edward IV—all these indicate some less positive feelings about the law, which clearly have at their base the fact that the law can be cumbersome and serve only the intellectually and financially able people—and if that is true now, you can imagine how true it was in the England of that day.

¹ This discussion of *Utopia* occurred at the 2006 Thomas More Studies Conference at the University of Dallas.

Elizabeth McCutcheon: In *Utopia*, More seems to want to have it several ways. On the one hand, he's perfectly able to say, or have his Hythloday say, that the Utopians don't make treaties because they are broken, and that seems to be pointing more toward the West. In other words, there is a satiric edge, and so a lot of the comments about law are not limited to being in-house jokes, but he is well aware of the problems of law. On the one hand, I think of Stephen Greenblatt's critique, which argues that when you first look at Utopia there appears to be great freedom, but when you continue to read there are a lot of constraints. Likewise, George Logan has pointed out that though the Utopians seem to have very few laws, in fact they don't trust good men, and there are lots of laws and rules. So whether you want to call them laws, or something else, there are limits, and there are a number of natural law issues functioning below the surface as well. It gets very complicated and almost tragic when the Utopians find that their population explosion is such that they go into another country, and they argue on what seem to be natural law assumptions that because the other country is not using the land, and they need it, that they are entitled to it. This is a very devastating argument for people like the aborigines in Australia and other places, and so in a peculiar sense it seems to me that we come back to Dr. Miller's point, but in another direction. While More tries to solve certain problems, the best he can do is push them out further. He reaches a limit in any case, and so we are back in this world, although we start somewhere else. There are so many different things happening with or without law. On the one hand, he tries to readjust marriage which is treated as a bond in Utopia, and yet then there turn out to be limitations on that as well. So, whether we want to call them laws or something else, there are constraints that lead many people, including students, to think this is a prison. And if it is a prison there are certainly rules and regulations, whether we want to call them laws or something else.

Gerard Wegemer: The status of treaties seems to be an important element because a treaty is a law. At one point we are told "the Utopians make none at all with any nation" (CUP, 83 and again on 84), and then, ten pages later, we are told that a particular type of treaty—"truces made with the enemy" they observe "religiously" (92). How can we have it both ways? We are told they have very few laws, but there turn out to be exceptions to this, such as very strict laws regulating travel or political freedom in speech or action. The Utopians, we are told, can elect their own representatives, except that only two representatives a day are allowed into the senate chamber to discuss an issue of public business, and that issue can't be resolved unless it is discussed on three separate days, and then no representative can discuss any issue of public business outside of the senate, under pain of death. The more you look at these arrangements, the more you begin to see that there could be no better tyranny than in Utopia because their leaders cloak their tyranny in terms of rights and participation.

Yes, Raphael appeals very strongly to our sense of justice, but when he works it out, he is a tyrant because he does not believe in laws. Raphael has a tyrannical soul. Just as the *Republic's* tyrannical leaders are willing to send out everyone over thirteen in their city, Raphael does something similar. He is willing to do horrendous things for the sake of what he says is justice. He has given up his own family, because he

likes to travel, and although he says that property and money are the source of all evil, he says he does his duty to his family by giving them his property and money.

Fr. Joseph Koterski: Looking more broadly at the details of legislation and customs in Utopia helps us reflect on the relation between law and freedom. When Americans hear of law, we tend to hear of restrictions and what you can and cannot do. Whereas when More hears law, he hears it as a fence within which you are free to do what you like. Thomas More loves the rule of law because to know where the fence is, you are free to have your own initiatives, and you can be an entrepreneur. Sometimes the fence can move, and legislation can change, but there is a way in which the having a fence is a great protection for you. In Utopia, even though we are told there are few laws, nonetheless everything is so highly regulated, so even though there is the *appearance* of freedom by the absence of law, I sense a tremendous *lack* of freedom, that virtually everything is so equally arranged that there really is not the liberty.

Stephen W. Smith: The claim that there are few laws in Utopia and no lawyers may be the fulfillment of the imperative of Shakespeare in his infamous line, “Kill all the lawyers.” I wonder if that is represented as a good thing in Utopia. Is Utopia, where you have few laws, a good place? And is England, where you have a massive legal tradition, a tyrannical place?

Louis Karlin (lawyer): To take up the challenge from Professor Smith, the oft quoted “Let’s kill all the lawyers,” is voiced by Jack Cade, revolutionary, in *Henry VI, Part 2*. Although this is a quotation you often see on lawyers’ desks, it is important to read it in context, and what is happening here is a sort of a revolution or mob-rule situation developing, turning to utter lawlessness, and the battle cry of first thing lets kill all the lawyers, is going to be very chilling because the person who gets strung up in this is the person whose crime is that he can read and write. So, More, and Shakespeare, who is inheriting More’s ideas, is saying that law, reading, writing, and education are closely related. They can be abused, but those elements are necessary for the good society. In context, it fits with a lot of what More is saying. As Fr. Koterski was saying, laws are very important, as More saw, to provide the space of freedom. So especially at the end of his life when he is on defense, the privilege of remaining silent built into English law was the space that More hoped would give him the chance to survive. I do think that laws properly administrated allows for the freedom of conscience and the ability to reflect, which can make people more fully human.

Logan: I am not sure that it is quite fair to blame Hythloday for Utopia’s arrangement as if Hythloday is the creator of Utopia. It is a case of blaming the messenger; Hythloday is only the person who *reports* on Utopia. Hythloday is not a guy you would call to play pool with, nor would you have with More. If you saw the hair shirt peeking out behind his other clothes, you might think you’re in over your head. Hythloday is a stereotypical philosopher. He’s proud and testy, and he does not like to be disagreed with. At the same time, in many ways, he is shown right at the beginning to be an ideal humanist. He is often compared with Erasmus and associated with Pico de la Mirandola, who is one of More’s intellectual heroes, and

it’s pointed out that he knew Greek better than Latin, a very high-prestige thing to say about someone in 16th-century humanist circles. The initial description of Hythloday is much like that of Cardinal Morton. Both of these guys are people about whom it is stressed that they combine practical experience with lots of book learning, a combination which the humanists were very enamored of, centrally because of their close association with the rhetorical tradition. A figure like Cicero is their overall ideal figure; he wrote books, but was also consul, was a lawyer, and so on. So that much, by way of balance or correction on the figure of Hythloday.

My feeling is that Utopia certainly was not More’s ideal republic in every respect. You do not have to say more about it to prove this than to say it is not a Christian commonwealth, though it has a lot of features that More surely approved of. People often talk about the relation between Book 1 and Book 2. Book 1 is a devastating account of what is wrong with contemporary Europe, and one cannot help but notice that the flaws that are so devastatingly discussed in Book 1 have been eradicated in Utopia. There are lots of controls over individual freedom and activity, but nobody is hungry, nobody is under “the terrible necessity of stealing and then dying for it,” which is true in early 16th-century England. In Book 2 everyone is fed, everybody has medical care and a place to live, nobody has to worry about their children starving either before or after their own death, and so on. Still, it seems that Utopia is not so much a book about an ideal commonwealth as it is about how to think about improving a commonwealth, or a kind of meta-utopia, as it were. It says Plato and Aristotle were onto something about the ideal commonwealth, and what they were onto is that the key thing is realism about human nature and creating a structure of viewing the commonwealth as a system, as an institutional system, and thinking hard about how to create a structure of institutions that will channel human beings, given the kind of characters that we are, that will channel them in productive, constructive ways of life, instead of destructive ways of life.

One of the things weighing heavily on More’s mind, when he formed this thought experiment of creating an alternative structure of institutions from the ground up, was Aristotle’s critique of Plato’s *Republic*. The most famous or notorious feature of the *Republic* is that it is communist, thoroughgoing communism, including a community of wives that only the Guardian class enjoys. And More’s most conspicuous feature of Utopia is that it is communist too. Aristotle had said in his critique of the *Republic* that human nature is such that communism will not work. And More, at the end of Book 1, lists those Aristotelian objections, paraphrased quite closely, putting them into his own mouth. Hythloday says, “I’m wholly convinced that unless private property is entirely abolished, there can be no fair or just distribution of goods, nor can the business of mortals be conducted happily,” and so on. But “More” says, “I don’t see it that way. It seems to me that people cannot possibly live well where all things are in common. How can there be plenty of commodities where every man stops working? The hope of gain does not spur him on, and by relying on others he will become lazy. If men are impelled by need, and yet no man can legally protect what he has obtained, what can follow but continual bloodshed and turmoil, especially when respect for magistrates and their authority has been lost? I for one cannot even conceive of authority existing among men who are not distinguished from one another in any respect.” T.S. Eliot says about Dr. Johnson, “He is still a dangerous man to disagree with.” And this is certainly true of both Plato and Aristotle. Aristotle is a difficult man to disagree with, and More was

deeply impressed by those Aristotelian objections to communism, which is precisely why he puts them just a page before the account of *Utopia* begins. And again, in turn, this is why there is so much emphasis on various forms of social control, to keep people from getting out of hand in communist *Utopia*. Judging from the elaborate system of controls, moral suasion, positive and negative reinforcement, the laws—whether there are a few or a lot of them—found in *Utopia*, I infer that More was very concerned about the problem of order in a state where social hierarchy had been abolished, and it was a communist state. He figured in this thought experiment that a whole lot of restraints would need to be built into such a society to keep it from chaos. Maybe he was wrong in his calculations, and he recognizes the fact that he may be wrong in all his calculations by the way he treats himself in the book, which is to give it to Hythloday and to dissociate himself before the account of *Utopia* and right at the very end of the account of *Utopia*.

McCutcheon: I've never been quite as severe a critic of Hythloday as Dr. Wegemer is. I always think of him as being contrasted with the Portuguese and other explorers who at that point were ruthlessly going out to the new world searching for gold, seizing land, and so on. And the fact that he's left his property to his family makes him someone who, because he is detached, can observe, and travel, and see. It seems to be a necessary pre-condition for Raphael Hythloday's position. It is clearly not sufficient and not the whole answer, and it seems to come back to a larger question. In a sense, More is negating a negation; he is looking at what is wrong in Western Europe and engaging in a "thought experiment" to turn these things around. In doing that, you do not necessarily have a completely positive world. You have a negation of a negation. You can solve certain problems, or try to, but you create *other* problems. That is another way of saying that More is writing a book that encourages us to keep on asking these questions. For better and worse, it created the whole notion of utopianism that has encouraged people to look ahead. And the critiques we are making are part of this larger meta-utopia. To do it, he starts by negating a negation, as it were, and that is a particularly difficult construct, probably a very lawyerly one. Some think *Utopia* lacks a human warmth; this is the other side of law; there is a human warmth there, a charity and a trust which More does not always talk about when he is operating inside *Utopia*. One wonders, what is after all of the negatives? One thinks about the positive, or reversal of that. More's mind often works that way.

Wegemer: Do you find that *Utopia* points to a positive?

McCutcheon: One positive is the outcry against the injustice. For example, anyone who has gone to India today and sees that half of 14,000,000 people in Bombay (now called Mumbai) are homeless is going to be disturbed by the inequity between those who have money and have shelter and those who do not. In early 16th century England, there is a similar situation. In early Renaissance cities, people move in from the villages and the country. In 1563, a quarter of London's population was killed in a plague, and twenty years later, that population has already gone up. Where are those people living? They are living in shanties and hovels, scratching for a living. There is a compassion in that search: Is there housing? Is there medical care? I think social justice is a very real issue.

Wegemer: Could the negatives point us toward friendship and justice? – And toward the absolute need for law? But if so, how?

Plato's *Republic* is based on a noble lie, a lie to justify different ways of life. Ultimately, I see the lie of *Utopia* as ignoble, but that lie is given by Raphael, not by More. Part of the brilliance of the work is that the story of *Utopia* arises because Morus and Giles reject every other argument Raphael gives to justify his way of life. But Raphael's story has so many contradictions and impossibilities that a good lawyer or close reader would say, "This man is lying!" For example, to say that everyone is equal and then, at the very end of the work, to say, "Oh, yes, and there are the collectors of revenue, who live in great wealth in another country in great splendor." What has that got to do with Communism?

Through Raphael's way of explaining things, More is speaking ironically. For instance, in the section where Raphael says the *Utopians* have no treaties, he explains why they don't. They think it is a bad idea to have treaties, even if they were faithfully kept. Here is what Raphael says on p. 84: "A treaty implies that people 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 [Ironically, *Utopia* assumes you 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." In contrast, anyone with experience of marriages or communities would say the opposite, namely, that good treaties and good laws *strengthen* friendships and they are natural outcomes of good friendships: "Listen, you give me this, and I will give you that, and this is more or less fair." I would say that *Utopia* is designed in such a brilliantly ironic way that we do see through the negative.

Koterski: What are we to make of Raphael's character, since he does abandon any commitment at home and goes off on his search of the world? Doesn't he become a voyeur of these different cultures? When he does happen to return, I see in him a bit of arrogance, and he does think he knows better than anyone else in Europe. In Book 1 More seems to argue that you need to have commitment to the common good, which will focus your interest on things so that it now has a kind of service beyond just your own happenstance interest in things, and a willingness in the spirit of a lawyer, not to a kind of docility to law, that is a kind of willingness to respect the law and its procedure, not the docility which is pure passivity, but a willingness to have a docility to the truth about human nature and human community, and then a willingness to exercise your energies, creativity, and brilliance, and the knowledge you have obtained for this other end. So if we do a character analysis, I am more inclined to think of Raphael not as the humanist, but more as a humanist gone awry.

Logan: The author More does suggest that Hythloday has gone awry, but alas the direction in which he suggests he has gone awry is the direction of scholastic philosophy. After Hythloday's second account of an imaginary meeting of a privy council, the way he ends is to say to More, "Now, don't you suppose that if I set these ideas and others like them before men strongly inclined to the contrary, they would turn deaf ears to me?" More says, "Stone deaf, indeed, there's no doubt about it. And by heaven, it's no wonder! To tell you the truth, I don't think you should thrust forward ideas of this sort.... This academic philosophy [*philosophia scholastica*]

is pleasant enough in the private conversation of close friends, but in the councils of kings, where great matters are debated with great authority, there is no room for it.” Raphael replies, “That is just what I was saying; there is no place for philosophy in the councils of kings.” More says, “Yes, it is true that there is no place for this school philosophy which supposes every topic suitable for every occasion.” And he goes on to marshal the objections of humanists and rhetoricians to scholasticism and the philosophic tradition.

McCutcheon: Raphael claims, or at least he is introduced by Peter Giles’s, as one who has looked for wise and well-trained citizens, which is a remarkably difficult thing to find. I think we would have to agree that in some way the Utopian citizens are well trained. The point that More wanted order is certainly correct; in the end, Raphael insists that by some incredible exercise on the Utopians’ part, this is a society that is well-ordered and yet does not have the kinds of constraints that Western societies have. Now, at times we are not always noticing More’s wit and comic humor; we are discussing all of this in the most serious way, while More is both comic and serious. There are times when he is pulling our leg, but he is making a serious point at the same time. It is a difficult balancing act, which we see here. We go back and forth on Hythloday, on the nature of Utopian society, on the seriousness or lack of the engagement—disengagement. I think Hythloday has got to be disengaged to make the points he is making, but that is only part of a larger whole. In some ways, More is exaggerating his points. That is, if More the character is More, then he would not have been a martyr. So we have two partials here, but the whole is bigger than what we see in this.

Travis Curtright: More asks us to make judgments about his characters, and one means he uses to do so is the description of character of physical attributes and moral attributes. In the description of Raphael, he starts to talk about Raphael’s physical dress, using some of the models of decorum that Erasmus lists. Raphael’s physical attributes include that he is disheveled, he has a long beard, he is sunburned, and he is hanging around outside of church. Does this conjure up images of Socrates, a wild-eyed guy? Something different? We get those physical attributes and then we get details about things like the voyage of Amerigo Vespucci that never occurred, and then we have the passion with which he describes himself. Is Raphael a tyrannical soul? We know that a moral account of the character is in some way given through particular means of physical description and details. What kind of character do we have in Raphael? And what passages should we look at?

Audience: He is Ulysses on a walk-about.

Miller: Hythloday is double. He is both objectionable and admirable. This is parallel in some ways to Folly because Folly is speaking about things which we know are not acceptable, and at the same time, we know that she is saying the truth often. And this is also true of Hythloday.

McCutcheon: Even his name is double. His first name echoes the Raphael in the Bible, who, ironically, is the angel of marriage, but who also helps the young Tobit, who had a series of very unfortunate experiences. Also, he is the opener of the eyes

of the old Tobit, and so he is the angel of illumination, opening the eyes of the blind. To some degree, this is what Raphael tries to do; to make us look at the Western world and all of these large questions with different eyes. On the other hand, his last name means “Speaker of witty nonsense,” and so there we are. Let us look at Thomas More. His first name could remind us of the Thomas of the New Testament, who would not believe things until he actually felt Christ’s side, or we could look at *Morus*, which means “fool,” and so we have this very complicated interaction and double- and triple-play. We have this trouble with every aspect of *Utopia*. More tells us both that its set in the New World in the southern hemisphere, and then he gives us the arithmetic, geometric proportions which are self-contradictory. If you try to construct *Utopia*, you cannot; it will fall apart. The water is waterless, the city is named “Murky/Misty city,” which must be a pun on the dark pollution of London at the time. This goes on and on; so, he wants it several ways.

Logan: This doubleness is so characteristic of these books, and ultimately tracable to More’s own complexity of mind, his deep ambivalence about things. There are so many ways in which it manifests itself in both large and small aspects of his books. We think of the doubleness of Hythloday, and *Utopia*’s negating a negation, and of Elizabeth’s famous article about *Utopia* on the crucial importance of More’s use of the rhetorical figure of litotes, that is, affirming by denying the contrary, in *Utopia*. All these things are a profound fact about More. Interestingly, it was also self-identified as a profound fact about the father of humanism, Petrarch, who talks about his own division of mind. He sees himself similarly as being fundamentally identified by a similar doubleness.

Dwight Lindley: Rhetoric was one of the big returns in the Renaissance. In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle characterizes rhetoric in three types: deliberative, judicial, and epideictic. There is a good argument that deliberative is the most important rhetoric there, and one part of the tyranny of *Richard III* is that deliberative rhetoric is thwarted by fear, and fear of force. A few times it starts to get going but is immediately stopped. In *Utopia*, one way in which Raphael’s depiction of *Utopia* is not realistic is that there is no deliberative rhetoric there. The only rhetoric is of force, which is associated with Thrasymachus and the Sophists. So what does “no deliberative rhetoric” mean? There is no choice among the citizens. In that way, it seems that something of the soul is missing and is contributing to the lack of warmth that Dr. Miller mentioned. It seems to be a disturbing absence for More.

Miller: In style, Hythloday identifies himself also as a kind of absolutist. He uses words like “all,” “never”; everything is always absolute, whereas More does not. This is one way of seeing that Hythloday is not necessarily a definitive kind of character. There is something missing in the way he talks, and he does it especially about *Utopia*. In *Utopia*, everything just sort of works, and then you ask yourself, “How, in the name of Heaven, does that work?”

Wegemer: In going back to the question of the doubleness of the work, and the wit of the work, where do they come from? Raphael certainly does not have a sense of humor. The wit is the author working through Raphael’s saying things that *we* find funny, but Raphael does not. Even when he tells a joke, for example, the funny story

about Morton at table, he says, “I shouldn’t really tell this; it is rather absurd.” But actually, it is highly revealing – in part, about Raphael himself. But he does not see that; we do. Raphael uses “charity” twice and misuses it egregiously each time, and he does not act charitably. In contrast, More the character exercises extraordinary charity with this absolutist, rather hard-to-get-along-with person. Raphael calls More a liar—Maybe “it’s the business of a philosopher to tell lies...but it certainly isn’t mine”; Raphael’s rhetoric is insulting, and yet More the character accepts it very well. He acts like the ideal humanist described in the third paragraph of Book 1 that lists Giles many qualities, qualities we want to find in a great civic leader concerned for the common good. Among those qualities are friendship and *fides* (in fact *magna fides*, “of great loyalty”), along with simplicity and wisdom, *simplicitas* and *prudendum*. The true humanist has a character quite different from Raphael’s.

Miller: The fact remains that it is Hythloday who strips the veneer from the corruption of European politics. It is he who does that. Extreme or not, maybe it is more interesting. Erasmus and others wrote about government, but it is boring. Hythloday pushes the envelope.

McCutcheon: Book 2 is not intended to be deliberative rhetoric, which I think you were talking about within Book 2; really, it is a kind of description of a country, in some ways like a traveler’s report. More first has us look at the outside and work our way in, approaching it from the sea as a traveler at that time would have done. It is a weird bird’s eye view of a place. People have tried to replicate Utopia; Pueblo communities in Mexico have tried to replicate a lot of those things with the Indians. So, it has a para-reality, and at the same time we are told it could not exist. That is the same kind of problem we run into when we read Book 2. They, in a sense, play the game and are all agreeably listening. More knew Greek well enough; Morus could have said, “Wait a minute,” but he does not. One should read the second letter that More wrote to Peter Giles in which More answers the complaints of a sharp-eyed critic who may not be so sharp, who is complaining about these discrepancies in Utopia. More goes out of his way to explain, in a very complicated way, the doubleness of the names and the ambiguity without, in a sense, doing so.

David Oakley (lawyer): The books are complex and need to be read in community. Words repeated frequently are “doubleness” and “complexity,” and the word that comes to my mind is “indirection.” Here is a tour de force, and why does he expend his talent in this way? Indirection seems to be the order of the day. My question is this: What is the precedent of this in literary style—is it Socratic? Is More unique in his use of complexity and doubleness? Finally, contrast that with contemporary literature, which tend to be full of messages, but nobody seems to be expending effort so lavishly on indirection. I wonder how unique this is.

Miller: The paradoxical encomium does precisely that because it praises something which is not precisely praiseworthy. This is done in classical literature. But Erasmus is primarily responsible in *The Praise of Folly* (1509) in reviving that form, before *Utopia*, and then it took on. And people have talked about how *The Folly* resounds in Rabelais and in Shakespeare, and how that irony, that paradox, continues in the Renaissance, and it is a special feature in the Renaissance. I cannot say that Erasmus

is responsible for all of it, but *The Folly* is a big thing and it is precisely due to that.

Logan: The tradition of the paradoxical encomium is certainly one of the immediate *loci* for *Utopia* and, as Clarence says, it is traceable back to antiquity. If you look for the origins of this kind of indirection, you have to look at Socrates, as Clarence mentions. One of the things that is mentioned in *The Praise of Folly* is how Socrates was by Alcibiades associated with the dolls of the ugly god Silenus. You open dolls with an ugly outside, and you open it up and on the inside is a beautiful thing. This is a way of imaging visually the kind of indirection. The aspect that most strikingly reminds one of Socrates is the constant pretense of knowing nothing, when of course he is concealing the fact that he knows everything and is working to bring the interlocutors into agreement with him.

McCutcheon: The different kinds of irony, including Socratic irony and others, are further complicated by More’s sense of humor. Indirection is very useful in certain kinds of humor, and it may also be, and sometimes in More is, a defensive posture that guards him from attacks. You could read the early praise of Edward IV in the *History of Richard III* in a straight way, and there are other writings of More that have raised very similar questions. In his Latin epigrams, he has a great praise of Henry VIII. Later on, you have all those political epigrams that are clearly indictments of certain types of kingship. So how do you balance that early praise, “The Golden Age is come; the trumpets are blowing!” with what appears later in the epigrams? We also know that some of these epigrams could be read as compliments which, when placed in a different context, become critiques. There are even lyric poems in the Renaissance which you can read in absolutely opposite ways. Rhetoric plays a part, but there is also a fascination with this very complex world. Many factors are operating here; it’s cultural, it’s literary, it’s philosophical, it’s all sorts of things.

Miller: In English literature, I think of Chaucer. Chaucer is surely double, as he includes all kinds of layers, so it’s not entirely new. But what about Dante? Dante is not double: multiple conquests, vivid.

Karlin: More is a great respecter of personal integrity and personal liberty. What is really functioning in all this doubleness is More’s respect for his reader and his reader’s integrity and personal freedom. He does not want to write as a tyrant. Again, I go back to the idea of the narrator as an anti-tyrant. More is trying to write as an anti-tyrant. Leave the reader the chance; do not coerce him; artfully lead him. We do not see this so much in Modern literature. I think of Flann O’Brien’s *At Swim-Two-Birds*, in which you have a series of novels within a novel; a narrator writing a book about writing a book about a man who is writing a book. The characters in one of these internal books feel tyrannized by their author who is a man of dubious character; they are allowed some freedom when he is asleep, and so they drug him and try to kill him. These sort of ideas and this humor, and the idea of not being a tyrant and being an author play into it.

Wegemer: If we would think about *Utopia* as a critique of tyranny, what would that mean? Where would we find the critique of tyranny through indirection? For those

who have a more positive view of Raphael, how would you describe his alternative? Is Utopia more or less tyrannical than England when you really look at what happens to the citizens?

Miller: It may be as tyrannical, but it is a lot nicer place to live.

Wegemer: Why, in terms of tyranny and freedom?

Miller: You do not have to starve there. You have some intellectual training and opportunity to do intellectual training. You can go to classes in the morning, and you can move up the scale. There are many ways in which you are better off. I admit that it is kind of a constraining place, and there are other things about its lack of friendship and lack of humanity, and so on, and the laughing More, the writer, knows that, and he may want us to know that this kind of strict control is a bit much and may not be something that we would like. But, nevertheless, the fact remains that it is a better place to live.

Wegemer: But the plenitude of food is based on slaves, and it is easy to become a slave. As for classes, well, there are some things you cannot study, and the arts are pretty much eliminated. So, what is the case that what Raphael proposes is better than what is in England?

Matthew Mehan: And what about the heartless treatment of the family, with Utopian children simply shuffled around?

Miller: Deporting people to the continent, and taking the land over there and bringing them back; all of that is unreal.

McCutcheon: This whole thing is fascinating, and may be unique to More. He is working with an island. More lived on an island [England], I live on an island [Hawaii]; islands bring to the forefront these problems of population and food, and all the rest of it. He is carrying on a thought experiment; what do you do if you do not impose limits on childbirth? You encourage childbirth. And Raphael claims that the whole island is like a family. We have all experienced larger communities which have that family feeling. It is not unimaginable to think of a community that could feel like a family.

Wegemer: Does this Utopia feel like a family?

McCutcheon: No.

Wegemer: It seems to me that would be part of the indirection.

McCutcheon: But think of some of the families in England that did not even have the opportunity to be a family. We have five-year-olds working. We have whole classes of people who are put in as servants all over the place. Even in the 19th century we have Dickens writing about the problem of child labor, about the mortality rate of the very poor. We always read these things as somehow upper class

or something. With this island thing, we are going to reach limits. And then, as a thought experience, what are we going to do? More is realistic enough to say they did have the plague once, or they did have some disease once, so they had to bring their people back. But according to Raphael, most of the slaves are people who come in because life is better in Utopia than elsewhere. Now, we may not believe him, but that is what he says. And he is addressing just exactly this question.

Logan: What we are illustrating here is the fundamental fact about *Utopia*: it is an endlessly enigmatic, challenging, tantalizing book that people can talk about endlessly. That is why anyone who has taught *Utopia* knows it is literally a godsend, because students always respond to it. It is interesting to reflect in this context on the way More chooses to end the book, which, though in itself it is a complexly ironic passage which has interpretive difficulties, in essence it makes quite clear what I take to be More's own position on *Utopia* and thus can reconcile some of the disagreements that we have been having here: "When Raphael had finished his story, I was left thinking that not a few of the laws and customs he had described as existing among the Utopians were really absurd." And then he gives some examples, and those examples are complex and you are not quite sure in what ways they may be intended ironically. And then the last little paragraph of the book: "Meantime, while I can hardly agree with everything he said (though he is a man of unquestionable learning and enormous experience of human affairs), yet I freely confess that in the Utopian commonwealth there are very many features that in our own society I would wish rather than expect to see." That is my attitude too, and I think it is More's attitude.