

## Study Guides for *Utopia*

(All page numbers refer to the Cambridge University Press, first edition)

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### Major Questions to Have in Mind While Reading More's *Utopia*:

1. *Utopia*, Book 1: Who wins this argument: More the lawyer or Raphael the experienced observer? Can the learned professions really affect justice?
2. More's *Utopia*, Book 2: According to Raphael's account, what is the view of law, justice, government, and statesmanship as they have evolved over the 1,760 years of *Utopia*'s existence? Is this view attractive to you? Why?
3. More's *Utopia* as a whole: What does *Utopia* help us see about human nature, law, justice, government, statesmanship?

## Dates and Names in *Utopia* (Cambridge UP, 1<sup>st</sup> ed.)

### Dates

ca.1497 – Raphael meets and speaks with Archbishop Morton (p.16n18 of 1<sup>st</sup> Cambridge UP edition.)  
 1501, 1503 – Vespucci's 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> (and only\*\*) voyages to the New World; Raphael says he was on the last 3 of Vespucci's 4 voyages (p. 10)  
 ca.1504-1509 – Raphael then spends “more than five years” in Utopia (p. 40)  
 ca.1504 – *Four Voyages of Amerigo Vespucci* (a forgery\*\*) published in Vienna & becomes best seller  
 1514 – first printing of Hesychius' Greek dictionary, which Raphael says he took with him in 1503  
 1515 – More's trip to Antwerp where he meets Giles and Raphael and then writes most of *Utopia*  
 1519-22 – Magellan is first to circumnavigate the globe, unless Raphael's claim is correct

### Names

Utopia – “noplacē” in Greek (Eutopia would have been “happy place.”)  
 Raphael – “God's healer” in Hebrew  
 Hythlodæus – “distributor or peddler of nonsense” in Greek  
 Morus – “fool” in Greek

### Names of rulers before Utopus conquered

syphogrant – “old men of the sty”\*; compare with Plato's “sycophant” at 340d *et al* in *Republic*  
 tranibor – “plain glutton”\*  
 Barzanes (former name of the ruler or *princeps*) – “leader of cattle,”\* *barion* (“cattle”) + *zanides* (“one who leads”)

### Name of ruler after Utopus conquered

Phylarch – “fond of power”; “head of a tribe” (CW 4, p. 114/7)  
 Protophylarch – *proto* means “first,” so the ruler “most fond of power”  
 Ademos (present name of the *princeps*, instead of “Barzanes”) - *ademon*: not being native, *adema*: “dogma, without form or idea”;\* *a demos*: “without people” (CW 4, 133/8-9)

### Names associated with Utopian religion

Abraxa - former name of island; highest of 365 spheres of gnostic universe  
 Mithra - name of Persian gnostic god and of Utopia's god  
 Buthrescas - Bythus (a gnostic god) + *ureskos* (“superstitious”) or *ureskeia* (“religious cult”) = superstitious cult of Bythus

### Other names

Amaurot (name of a Utopian city) – “[made]\* dark”  
 Anyder (name of a Utopian river) – “without water”  
 Anemolian [ambassadors] – “windy”  
 Nephelotes – “People born from the clouds” [allies of Utopians]  
 Alaopolitans – “people without a country” [reduced to slavery by Nephelotes]  
 Zapoletes – “busy sellers” [mercenaries hired by Utopians]  
 quaestor – “Financial Agent” (p. 95)  
 Polylerites – “people of much nonsense (or lying)”\* [example used with Cardinal Morton]  
 Achorians – “people without a country” [later example used by Raphael in book 1]

**Title in Latin:** De Optimo Reipublicae / Statu deque / nova insula Utopia libellus vere aureus, / nec minus salutaris quam festivus, / clarissimi disertissimique viri Thomae Mori / inclytæ civitatis Londinensis civis / & Vicecomitis.

\*See Ward Allen's "Speculations on St. Thomas More's Use of Hesychius" in *Philological Quarterly* 46.2 (April 1967), 156-166.

\*\*See F.J. Pohl's *Amerigo Vespucci* (1945); Peter Ackroyd's *Thomas More*, p. 170 (1998); Dominic Baker-Smith's *More's Utopia*, pp. 91-92 (2000).

## BOOK 1 OF *UTOPIA* (Cambridge UP, 1st edition)

N.B.: “Morus” refers to the character, whereas “More” refers to the author.

1. **Introduction** (pages 8-13)
  - a. Morus explains his presence in Antwerp (paragraphs 1 & 2).
  - b. Morus meets Peter Giles; Peter is described (paragraph 3).
  - c. Morus meets Raphael outside Notre Dame; Raphael is described (paragraphs 4ff).
  - d. Giles, Raphael, and John Clement are invited to Morus’s garden (page 11). Morus summarizes the long conversation with Raphael; Morus states his intention in telling the narrative that follows (pp.11-13).

**Study questions:** *What do we learn about each of these characters?*  
*What do we learn about Morus’s intentions in narrating this account?*
2. **The Main Issue of Debate Is Posed:** Should a counselor like Raphael serve a king? (13-15)
  - a. Raphael argues no.
  - b. Morus and Giles argue yes.

**Study question:** *What are the arguments on each side? With whom do you agree?*
3. **Raphael’s First Example of the Futility of Service:** Cardinal & Lord Chancellor Morton (15-28)
  - a. John Morton is described (15)
  - b. With a lawyer, Raphael discusses the cause of thievery in England (15-18).
  - c. Raphael condemns enclosures (18-21).
  - d. Lawyer objects but the Cardinal asks Raphael to explain his position (21-22).
  - e. Raphael suggests ways of remedying theft in England (22-23); he explains methods used by the Polyerites (23-25).
  - f. Lawyer objects; the company agrees; Cardinal expresses interest (25).
  - g. Raphael relates a “silly” incident between a friar and a fool (26-28).
  - h. Raphael concludes; **Morus still disagrees** and invokes Plato; Raphael objects (28-29).

**Study question:** *Explain how this example supports Raphael’s argument against serving.*
4. **Raphael’s Second Example:** An imaginary court of some French king set on war (29-31)
  - a. In a 464-word sentence, Raphael advises the French king to imitate the Achorians who asked their king to rule only one kingdom (30-31)
  - b. **Morus’s four-word response** to Raphael (31)

**Study question:** *What is the main point of Raphael’s argument here? Do you agree?*
5. **Raphael’s Third Example:** An imaginary court of a king set on accumulating money (31-38)
  - a. At the end of this 926-word sentence, Raphael gives the example of the Macarians.
  - b. **Morus gives his longest reply**, distinguishing academic from political philosophy (35-36).

**Study question:** *Who seems to make the stronger argumentation here?*
6. **Introducing Raphael’s Fourth Example:** Utopia (36-41)
  - a. Raphael disagrees with Morus, invoking Plato and Utopians and Christ (36-38).
  - b. Raphael then explains why the elimination of private property is needed for justice (38-40).
  - c. **Morus strongly disagrees, invoking the need for legal protection** (40).
  - d. Raphael responds by wishing that More had seen Utopia (39-40).
7. **Morus invites Raphael to tell him all about Utopia**, after they have lunch (41).

## BOOK 2 OF *UTOPIA* (Cambridge UP, 1<sup>st</sup> edition)

1. **Introduction** (pp. 42-45)
  - First view, origin, general features
2. **The Cities**, esp. Amaurot\* (45-48)
  - Number, size, rotate homes, gardens, Utopus' design, founding in 244 BC
3. **The Officials**\* (48-50)
  - Number, way of selection, prince elected for life (49), how senate works (49)
4. **Occupations**\* (50-55)
  - Farming, trades, recreation, architecture, clothing
5. **Social Relations**\* and distribution of goods (55-60)
  - Household and population policies, colonization (56), source of greed and pride (56)
  - Distribution of food (57), hospitals (57), eating arrangements (57-60)
6. **Travels of Utopians**\* (60)
  - Regulations and punishments
7. **Food Distribution**; use of money and surpluses (61-2)
  - "whole island is like a single family" (61)
8. **Attitude towards Gold and Jewels** (62-65)
  - Raphael's concern that he won't be believed (62), rationale for this policy. Example of Anemolian ambassadors (62-5).
9. **Education** (65-80)
  - Utopian institutions and good character (65-66), what they study (66-68). Ethics (67-77): nature of human happiness (67-8), philosophy based on religious principles (68), *summum bonum* (69), relation of virtue and pleasure, true and false and best pleasures (69-77), absurdity of fasting (76-7), description of Utopian people (77-8), Raphael's "Great Books" [N.B.: No Bible or Christian book is included] (78-9), Utopians and medicine and inventions (79).
10. **Slaves**\* (80-87)
  - Types and treatment of slaves (80), care for sick and euthanasia (80-81), marriage and premarital inspection (81-2), divorce and punishment for adultery and attempted seduction (82-84), treatment of fools (84), attitude towards cosmetics (84), public honors and penalty for campaigning (84), few laws and no lawyers (84-5), Utopians as excellent officials (85), what destroys justice (86), Utopia vs. Europe on treaties (86-7), understandings of justice (87).
11. **Military Affairs**\* (87-95)
  - Attitude towards war and why they go to war (87-9), how they wage war (89-95) and their use of Zapoletans (90-2), why wives and children fight (92-3), amazing armor and weapons (94), "truces...observed religiously" (94, vs. 86), victors live abroad "in great style" (95).
12. **Utopian Religions**\* (95-106)
  - who/what is worshiped (95-6), Mithras (96), relation to Christianity (96-7), Utopus' rules about religion (97), compulsory and other beliefs (98-100), 2 religious sects ("haereses" 100-1), role of priests (101-3), religious worship, architecture of churches, practices, rituals, how they spend the 2 religious days each month (103-6), military training (106).
13. **Raphael's Peroration** (107-110)
  - Why Utopia is the "best" and "only" country deserving the name "republic" (107), justice of Utopians vs. the "conspiracy of the rich" in other places (107-8), R's diatribe against money, greed, pride (109-10). Money is the main problem preventing good social order (109); pride prevents this needed social change (109-10).
14. **Morus' Final Comment** (110-111)
  - What does More object to in Utopia? Is he ironic or serious here? Why doesn't he raise his objections to Raphael? What does Morus do instead? Why?

\*These titles appear in Thomas More's 1516 edition of *Utopia*

## FORM(S) OF GOVERNMENT IN UTOPIA (Cambridge UP, 1<sup>st</sup> edition)

### What form of government does Utopia have?

Is Utopia more democratic in its popular election of sypogranths? Or more republican in the sypogranths' election of the "princeps"? Or more aristocratic in that the major positions are limited to the scholar class? Or more monarchical in the "princeps'" ability to hold office for a lifetime?

**In Each City** ("The welfare or ruin of a commonwealth depends wholly on the character of the officials." p.85)

- 1 prince -- elected for life by 200 sypogranths by secret ballot<sup>1</sup>
  - the prince works with the senate every day on state matters and settling private disputes (49); he can also lighten or remit punishments (83)
- 20 protophylarchs/tranibors -- elected annually from the scholar class, they comprise the senate and are each set over 10 phylarchs (48-9)
- 200 phylarchs/sypogranths -- elected annually by 30 households (48)
- 300 scholars, who can become ambassadors, priests, tranibors, prince (53)
- Each household has 10-16 adults, with the oldest ruling; 6000 households in each city (55)
  - Marriage: women at 18, men at 22; custom for choosing a marriage partner (81)
- 60,000 to 96,000 are in each city plus slaves (number unknown) plus farmers and children would give over 100,000 people. [London at the time was roughly 60,000 people.]
- Each rural household has less than 40 men and women and 2 slaves; 1 phylarch serves over 30 rural households; city folk serve two-year stints (44)
- 13 priests at most (one priest for roughly 7,600 people); 1 high priest (101); not subject to law (102)
- Very few laws (38, 84, 85; see 53, 56, 70, 98), but many customs, conventions, and regulations<sup>2</sup>
- No lawyers (85)
- Senate serves as judiciary authorizing suicide & divorce (80-81, 82-3, 102); it also serves legislative and executive functions (consider 49), but are there independent judges (85, 102)?
- Slaves: most are citizens, but "considerable numbers" are bought or brought (80)
- Men, women, children all train for war after their twice-a-month (103) church services (106)
- Popular vote can lighten or remit slavery (83)

### Beyond the city

- General council (49) of whole island, composed of 3 representatives from each city (44,45,49,61,63)
- Utopians serve as magistrates for other countries (85)
- Secret agents work in enemy countries and serve as assassins (89)
- Financial Factors: manage estates and live "in great style...like magnates" (95)

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<sup>1</sup>All officials are elected by a secret ballot (101).

<sup>2</sup>For example, they must take turns farming (44), change houses every ten years (47), conduct secret votes every year (48-9), rotate phylarchs every day (49), deal with family transfers (50, 55), make sure no one sits in idleness (51), care for food distribution (57, 58, 61), deal with travel requests (60-1), handle and sell extensive exports (61).

## PUNISHMENTS AND REWARDS IN UTOPIA (Cambridge UP, 1<sup>st</sup> ed.)

### Punishments

1. "Only fixed penalties" (83):
  - a. 1<sup>st</sup> adultery: strict slavery and divorce (83)
  - b. 2<sup>nd</sup> adultery: death (83)
  - c. suicide without approval: no burial (81)
  - d. premarital intercourse: no marriage ever (81)
  - e. behavior in a marriage leading to a divorce: forbidden to remarry (82)
  
2. Senate decrees:
  - a. Gravest crimes: slavery (83)
  - b. Proselytism: exile (97)
  - c. Impiety: "not even his body is altogether secure" (102); citizenship revoked, "but they do not punish him" (98)
  
3. Impiety: excommunication by the priests (102)
  
4. Slave rebellion: instant death (96)
  
5. Attempted seduction: the same as seduction (84)
  
6. Killing or maiming a Utopian citizen: death or slavery (88-89); war declared if offender is not surrendered for punishment
  
7. Campaigning for office: disqualified from all offices (84)
  
8. 2<sup>nd</sup> travel violation: slavery (60)
  
9. Consulting outside the senate or popular assembly about public business: death (49)

**N.B.:** Compare these punishments with those of the Polylerites in Book 1(23-25), whose aim is "to destroy vices and save men" (24) and where criminals are punished "so that they necessarily become good" (24).

***What is the aim of Utopian punishments? Is rehabilitation a main motive? Are these punishments just?***

-Notice how Lord Chancellor Morton finds a way to experiment with new punishments without changing existing laws (p. 25, last full paragraph). Is this wise or foolhardy?

### Rewards in Utopia

-The Utopians "incite [their citizens] to virtue by public honors" (84). Besides the example of "set[ting] up...statues of distinguished men who have served their country well" (84), ***what other examples of rewards are given?***

## CHARACTERISTICS OF UTOPIA (Cambridge UP, 1<sup>st</sup> edition)

### What seems undoubtedly good in Raphael's Utopia?

- There is plenty of everything for all.
- All eat well.
- There is only a six-hour work day, and there are no idlers.
- Goods are justly distributed.
- Scholarship and learning are respected.
- No wasted time in building and rebuilding since all are built to last.
- Compassion or humanity (57, 70) reigns, not competition.

### What is impossible in Utopia?

- ability to “promptly cut a channel fifteen miles wide” (43), making a peninsula into an island
- clothing that serves for both warm & cold weather (50, 54-5)
- very old buildings are so well built that they need “minimum repairs” (54)
- adults are “easily” transferred from one household to another, to maintain population limits (55-6)
- chains to bind slaves made of gold and silver (63)
- ability to “transplant a forest from one district to another” (77)
- armor that “doesn't even interfere with swimming” (94)

### What questions are raised by Raphael's account of Utopia?

- Is the elimination of money, private property, and hereditary right prudent?
- What sense of personal privacy exists in Utopia? (See p. 60.)
- Is there free expression of ideas and open debate and discussion of public matters in Utopia?
- Is the effective elimination of entrepreneurship healthy? Is the elimination of competition between citizens likely or wise?
- Is evil in human life and individual lives eliminated by the Utopian system?
- Do Utopian citizens lose anything by the absence of lawyers?
- Do Utopian policies toward wrong-doers aim at rehabilitating them?
- How would Utopian government officials respond to the idea of public campaigns and elections?
- Raphael remarks that there are very few laws in Utopia—do all Utopians enjoy equality under those laws?
- What kind of division of power exists among the branches of Utopian government?
- How would you characterize church/state relations in Utopia?
- What is the status of romantic love among the Utopians?
- How do the Utopians understand or define charity? (see 70, 83, 100; CW 4 164/31, 190/6, 224/8)
- Are the Utopians predominantly a contemplative or active people? How many contemplate God? How many contemplate nature (100)? Are all capable of contemplating? (See 51.)
- How do the Utopians understand and practice friendship among themselves? How among wartime allies (86-8, 90-2)?
- What is family life like on a daily basis for the Utopians? How is family time structured?
- What is the Utopian sense of beauty? See the discussion of usefulness and thriftiness on 47.
- What is the Utopian sense of the arts, including poetry and literature (66, 78)?
- What is the purpose of Utopian religion (102)? Do the priests attend to the needs of individual citizens?
- What is the Utopian attitude toward slavery? See 60, 80, and 87.
- What is the Utopian attitude toward state-encouraged suicide (81)?
- What might be some consequences of the Utopian policy forbidding marriage to those youth involved in sexual affairs (81)?
- Why do the Utopians involve “senators and their wives” in the investigations for divorce (83)?
- Does the Utopian system effectively privilege “scholars” (53-4, 58), priests (101-5, 58), and “financial factors” (95)?
- What do the Utopians do with contagiously diseased people who don't want to go to hospitals? (57)

## Apparent Contradictions in More's *Utopia* (Cambridge UP, 1<sup>st</sup> edition)

1. On the **size** of Utopia: p. 42 (30,000 square miles -- smaller than Scotland) vs. p. 43-4 (100,000 square miles -- the size of Great Britain)
2. On the **cities**: Pages 43-4 and 45 claim that the cities are "built on the same plan and have the same appearance" and that "they're exactly alike" yet p. 45 then goes on to say that "Amaurot [is] the most worthy of all" the cities and that "its eminence is acknowledged by the other cities." What accounts for this difference?
3. On the **work of farming**: Page 50 insists that "everyone" farms, "with no exception." This insistence is reinforced in the following paragraph: "Besides farming (which, as I said, everybody performs)...." Yet on page 53 we learn that several hundred in each city are "permanently exempted from work so that they may devote themselves to study."
4. On **travel**: On page 60 we are told that "anyone" who wants to travel "can easily obtain permission...." Yet what follows is such a list of restrictions, obligations, and severest of punishments that no one could say that it is easy to travel in Utopia.
5. On **slavery**: Page 80 begins the treatment of slavery by stating that "The Utopians keep as slaves *only* prisoners of wars fought by the Utopians themselves. The children of slaves are not born into slavery, nor are *any* slaves imported from foreign countries" (emphasis added). This leads one to think that slaves are restricted in number and somewhat mercifully treated. Does the rest of the book support this position?
6. On **laws**: Page 84 repeats what was stated on page 38, i.e., that Utopia has "very few laws." Yet as the footnote on page 38 points out, there are, however, "an oppressive number of codes, customs and conventions."
7. On **truces**: Raphael says the Utopians make no truces "at all with anyone" (86), but then says they "observe religiously" truces made with enemies (94).
8. On **warfare**: Page 87 declares that the Utopians "despise war as an activity fit only for beasts." Are there exceptions to this position? What reasons are given for going to war? What do you think of their wars for colonization (56)?
9. On **killing**: Raphael argues for a strict interpretation of "Thou shalt not kill" in Book 1 (22), thus arguing for no capital punishment for crimes, but he then expresses no difficulty with the Utopians' desire to "exterminate" all Zapoletes (92).
10. On **equality**: We have been reassured that all of Utopian society is designed to eliminate money and luxuries, so that all live equally. Why then do some Utopian leaders live "in great style and conduct themselves like magnates" (p. 95)?
11. On the **purpose of Utopia's regime**: Compare the different formulations on pages 55 and 100; consider also the implications of the last sentence on page 51. The crucial clause in the original Latin is "quorum animus in nullius contemplatione disciplinae consurgit." Other translations are: "as is the case with many minds which do not reach the level for any of the higher intellectual disciplines" (Yale CW translation); "if they don't have the capacity for intellectual work" (Penguin translation).
12. On the **cause of injustice**: Page 109 gives two different causes in two different paragraphs without indicating the possible connection between the two. Is there a connection? The effect is to identify money with pride. Pages 56-57 seems to identify "fear of want" and "pride." Would you identify these? Page 86 states that "two evils, greed and faction...destroy all justice." Is this true? On page 107, after making the startling statement that Utopia is "not only the best [commonwealth] but indeed the only one that can

rightfully claim that name," Raphael indicates that injustice is caused by private property. Does the book as a whole confirm this assessment?

13. On **money and property**: Raphael identifies these as the cause of greed and injustice (109), but he says he does his duty to his relatives & friends by having distributed his possessions to them before leaving them so he can travel as he wills (13).

14. On **dates**: 1. Vespucci's third and last voyage\* was May 1503 – June 1504; Raphael says he was on the last three of Vespucci's four voyages (p. 10), after which Raphael then spends five years in Utopia (p. 40). In **1504/7** *Four Voyages of Amerigo Vespucci* (a forgery\*) was published in Vienna and became the best seller, i.e., "common reading everywhere" (10). 2. 1514 was the first printing of Hesychius' Greek dictionary, but Raphael says he took with him in 1503.

15. On **virtue and pleasure**: In one place, virtue is described as "harsh and painful" (69), but then virtue is defined as "living according to nature" which is explained to mean living for pleasure (69, 71). How do the Utopians actually understand virtue?

16. On **care for the sick**: We are told that the sick are "carefully tended" (80), "nursed with tender and watchful care" (57), and that "nobody" is sent to the city hospitals "against his will" (57). Yet we are then told that "the priests and public officials" urge some of the sick to "starve themselves to death or take a drug which frees them from life without any sensation of dying" (81). And what do the Utopians do if persons sick "with contagious diseases" (57) decide they want to stay home? Would they really not oblige such a person "against his will" to go to the hospital's isolation wards?

\*See F. J. Pohl's *Amerigo Vespucci* (1945); Peter Ackroyd's *Thomas More*, p. 170 (1998); Dominic Baker-Smith's *More's Utopia*, pp. 91-92 (2000).