Apparent Contradictions in More's *Utopia* (Cambridge UP, Revised edition)

1. On the **size** of Utopia: p. 41 (30,000 square miles -- smaller than Scotland) vs. p. 43 (100,000 square miles -- the size of Great Britain)

2. On the **cities**: Raphael says that the cities are “built on the same plan and have the same appearance” (43) and that “they're exactly alike” (44), yet he 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” (44-45). What accounts for this difference?

3. On the **work of farming**: Raphael insists that “everyone” farms, “with no exception” (48). This insistence is reinforced in the following paragraph: “Besides farming (which, as I said, everybody performs)....” Yet he then tells us that several hundred in each city are “permanently exempted from work so that they may devote themselves to study” (52).

4. On **travel**: Raphael says that “anyone” who wants to travel “can easily obtain permission...” (58). 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**: Raphael says that “the only prisoners of war the Utopians keep as slaves are those captured in was they fight themselves.” The children of slaves are not born into slavery, nor are any slaves imported from foreign countries” (77, 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**: Raphael repeats on page 82 what he stated on page 37, i.e., that Utopia has “very few laws.” Yet as the footnote on page 37 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” (83), but then says they “observe…religiously” truces made with enemies (92).

8. On **warfare**: Raphael reports that the Utopians “utterly despise war as an activity fit only for beasts” (85). Are there exceptions to this position? What reasons are given for going to war? What do you think of their wars for colonization (54)?

9. On **killing**: Raphael argues for a strict interpretation of “Thou shalt not kill” in Book 1 (21), thus arguing for no capital punishment for crimes, but he then expresses no difficulty with the Utopians’ desire to exterminate all Zapoletes (89).

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. 92)?

11. On the **purpose of Utopia's regime**: Compare the different formulations on pages 53 and 97; consider also the implications of page 50, last sentence of the first full paragraph. 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**: Raphael gives on pages 105-106 two different causes of injustice in two different paragraphs without indicating the possible connection between the two. Is there a connection? Pages 55 seems to identify “fear of want” and “pride.” Would you identify these?
Why? Page 83 states that “two evils, greed and faction...destroy all justice.” Is this true? On page 103, 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 (105), 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 “more than five years” in Utopia (p. 39). 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” (67), but then virtue is defined as “living according to nature” which is explained to mean living for pleasure (67, 69). How do the Utopians actually understand virtue?

16. On care for the sick: Raphael tells us that the Utopians “care for the sick with great affection” (78) and that they are “nursed with tender and watchful care” (56), and that “nobody” is sent to the city hospitals “against his will” (56). Yet he then tells us 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 (78). And what do the Utopians do if persons sick “with contagious diseases” (56) 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).