

## UTOPIA (1516)

Sir Thomas More (Thomas Morus)-executed by King Henry VIII for not recognizing him as Supreme Head after England's break with the Catholic Church.

Questions:

- Why good can I do as an honorable man in a society of power-hungry individuals?
- What evil will I have to condone as the price of the good I accomplish?
- Can a community be organized for the benefit of all, and not satisfy the greed, lust, and appetite for domination of a few?
- How much repression is a good society justified in exercising in order to retain its goodness?
- Can we really stand a society in which everyone watches everyone?

### Book I

The Scene in Utopia:

“The most invincible King of England, Henry the Eighth of that name, a prince adorned with the royal virtues beyond any other, had recently some differences of no slight import with Charles, [15 yrs old, future King of Castille, then King of Spain and before he was 21, holy Roman Emperor], the most serene Prince of Castille, and sent me into Flanders as his spokesperson to discuss and settle them [he inherited the Low Countries, dispute about certain Dutch import duties, English government protested by declaring an embargo on all exports of wool to Holland ].” (Pg 1)

**More** (character) companion to **Cuthbert Tunstall** (scholar, influential Cleric was appointed Ambassador to Brussels in May 1515, and a year later became Master of the Rolls [formerly in charge of the Public Record Office])

In Bruges (capital city of Belgium and largest city of the province of West Flanders in the Flemish region of Belgium):

The people who met-dealed with them were “all excellent men”:

**The head and leader of the group:** Jean de Halewyn, Mangrave [title of nobility corresponding in rank to a British marquess] of Bruges

**Speaker:** Georges de Themsecke—the provost of Cassel was a native of Bruges, author of a regional history, and chief magistrate of Cassell, a small town.

They leave for a few days to consult their prince on certain points they could not agree on.

**Antwerp** (city in Belgium and capital of Antwerp province in Flanders):

Meanwhile, More goes to Antwerp. He was visited by:

**Peter Giles**, star pupil of Erasmus, town clerk of Antwerp

He brings **Raphael Hythloday** (knows Latin, and is particularly learned in Greek because his main interest is philosophy, he left his brothers the patrimony he was entitled to –in Portugal- and who took service under Amerigo Vespucci [born in Florence but employed by the monarchies of Spain and Portugal, claimed to have made four trips to America 1497-1504, account of voyages published 1507] to explore the world.

“Peter: “for there is no man alive today can tell you so much about unknown peoples and lands; and I know that you’re always greedy for such information.” (Pg 4)

Peter accompanied him in his last three voyages but did not return with him in the last one. He stayed with 24 men at the farthest point of the last voyage (Cape Frio, north of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil). He travelled to many countries with five companions, got to Calicut (district of India), then returned to his own country with a Portuguese ship.

More suggests that Raphael devotes his time to public affairs, to serve a king. But according to Raphael, he doesn’t have knowledge of the arts of war but the arts of peace.

**England:** Raphael went to England for several months after the revolt -King Henry VIII taxation, the men of Cornwall (Cornishmen) revolted and were slaughtered at Blackheath.

Raphael, John Cardinal Morton, layman dining. Layman praised the execution of **thieves** and wondered why so many thieves sprang everywhere.

Raphael advocates that a man will steal if he has no other means to eat. He defines the system as one resembling bad school masters who would rather whip their pupil than teach them, suggesting that they should be let to work. Those who are injured at war can’t find work, so they steal. Abbots enclose every acre for pasture, tenants are dismissed, cultivated land ruined, poor people sell, spend, can’t get any job because they only know farming (if they steal-hang justly, if they beg-rot in jail). Cattle get murrain (infectious disease carried by parasites) So the price of grain, wool goes up. The rich owners won’t sell until they get their price. This leads to oligopoly-a state of limited competition between a small number of producers or sellers.

So restore agriculture, let wool manufacture revive. Otherwise, punishing them for stealing is not just nor practical.

(p. 15) [Raphael: ]God has said, “Thou shalt not kill”; shall we kill so readily for the theft of a bit of small change? Perhaps it will be argued that God’s law against killing does not apply where human laws allow it. But then what prevents men from making other laws in the same way-perhaps even laws legalizing rape, adultery, and perjury? God has taken from each person the right not only to kill another, but even to kill himself. If mutual consent to human laws on manslaughter entitles men freely to exempt their agents from divine law and allows them to kill where he has given no example, what is this but preferring the law of man to the law of God?

(Alternative) Example: Raphael in his Persian travels observed Polylerites (imaginary place)

Thieves are not executed. If the stolen good has disappeared, the value of his property is estimated, restitution is made from it and the rest is handed over to the thief's wife and children.

The thieves work unguarded on public projects and locked up in their dormitories at night. They wear clothes of the same color, the tip of one ear is cut off, friends are allowed to give them food and clothing, but not money or weapons. They are whipped if they are lazy, but not insulted etc. if they carry out their work.

So, the aim of this punishment is to destroy vices and save men.

Those present indicate that this system could not be applied in England.

More: "Still, I don't give up my former opinion: I think if you could overcome your aversion to court life, your advice to a prince would be of greatest advantage to mankind. This, after all, is the chief duty of every good man, including you. Your friend Plato thinks that commonwealths will become happy only when philosophers become kings or kings become philosophers." P. 20

Raphael: Raphael gives examples illustrating that rulers wish to expand, are power-hungry and would not appreciate his advice.

Ex. Raphael asks More to imagine what the French King—who wanted to keep Milan, recover Naples, subdue all Italy and Burgundy besides other nations he had in mind to invade—say if he told him to keep to his own kingdom: "Suppose I said the king should leave Italy alone and stay at home, because the single kingdom of France all by itself is almost too much for one man to govern, and the king should not dream of adding others to it. [...] And therefore I would advise the king to look after his ancestral kingdom, improve it as much as he could, cultivate it in every conceivable way. He should love his people and be loved by them; he should live among them, govern them kindly, and let other kingdoms alone, since his own is big enough, if not too big for him. How do you think, my dear More, the other councillors would take this speech of mine?"

"Not very well, I'm sure" said I [More]

Ex. Raphael's second example: Imagine I was serving a king whose other counsellors are discussing various schemes for raising money to fill the treasury (1. Increasing the value of money when the king pays his debts & devaluing it when he collects his revenues. 2. Make believe war, then a ceremonious peace treaty after the money is collected 3. Collecting money from people breaking rules that are long forgotten 3. Gaining influence with the judges to decide every case in favor of the king etc.) "The king should in fact leave his subjects as little as possible, because his safety depends on keeping them from growing insolent with wealth and freedom." 24

“Now at this point, suppose I were to get up and again declare that all these counsels are both dishonorable and ruinous to the king?suppose I said that his honor and his safety alike rests on the people’s resources, rather than his own? Suppose I said that men choose a king for their own sake, not for his, so that by his efforts and troubles, they may live in comfort and safety? That is why, I would say, it is the king’s duty to take more care of his people’s welfare than of his own, just as it is the duty of a shepherd who cares about his job to feed his sheep rather than himself.” P. 24

Raphael claims that with such advice they would “turn deaf ears” to him: “There is no place for philosophy in the councils of kings.” P. 25

“But as a matter of fact, my dear More, to tell you what I really think, as long as you have private property, and as long as cash money is the measure of all things, it is really not possible for a nation to be governed justly or happily. For justice cannot exist where all the best things in life are held by the worst citizens; nor can anyone be happy where property is limited to a few, since those are always uneasy and the many are utterly wretched.” P. 28