On Thomas More's Utopia*

Eva Brann

Among the new and most peculiarly modern disciplines there is one, to be placed, I suppose, among the social studies, sometimes called "futurology," which deals with the art of conjecturing concerning the future. Those who pursue this art often say that there is a great "need for modern utopian pictures." Let me quote a passage from a founder of this art, Bertrand de Jouvenel:

> It is time that experts represented the many different outcomes which can be obtained by many different uses of our many and increasing possibilities. This representation should be in pictures according to the utopian tradition.

Since the "utopian tradition" begins with the book Thomas More called "Utopia" and since it is in human matters commonly the case that the first of a kind is also the truest to that kind, it seems right to go to More's book to consider what a utopia properly so called might be, and whether such a work can do what the student of the future needs it for--to supply the ends to be achieved by our profusion of means.

* Lecture given at St John's College, Annapolis, on May 5, 1972

1. Utopias as Political Poetry

Two poems purporting to be by the poet laureate of Utopia were prefixed to the book by More's Dutch friend Peter Giles, whose house is the setting for the narrative. One of them says:

> The ancients called me Utopia (or nowhere) because of my isolation; now however I am a rival of Plato's Republic, perhaps even a victor over it, for what it delineates in words, I alone have exhibited in men and works and the best laws. I deserve to be called by the name of Eutopia, (or the good place).

I cannot resist first quoting from the original of the other, which is given in the Utopian language and alphabet:

> " Bargol he maglomi baccan soma gymnosophaon.
> Agrama gymnosophon labarem bacha bodamilomin. "
>
> I alone of all lands without the aid of philosophy
> Have expressed for mortals the philosophical city.

Both poems express the same point. Utopia surpasses other cities "delineated in words" by its actuality. Now the original of this claim is to be found in Plutarch's Lives where it is made of Lycurgus, the founder of the Spartan polity:

> All who have written well on politics, such as Plato... have taken Lycurgus for their model, leaving behind them, however, mere projects and words: whereas Lycurgus was the author, not in writing but in reality, of a government... He by the example of a complete philosophic city raised himself high above the other lawgivers of Greece.

It is almost belaboring the obvious to point out that Utopia is not actual in quite the same way Sparta was, and yet this observation can serve to introduce the question concerning the way in which a utopia has being.

Now the answer to the question is not hard to formulate. Utopias are communities constructed in the imagination and expressed in words, word pictures, a kind of poetry. Accordingly Sir Philip Sidney includes the Utopia

as a poetic work in his Defense of Poesy and says of the utopian poet:

> ...he yieldeth to the powers of the mind an image of that whereof the philosopher bestoweth but a wordish description, which doth neither strike, pierce, nor possess the sight of the soul so much as that other doth.

Utopias, then, may be called political poetry and belong to the faculty of the imagination.

2. Utopia as Day-dream

The first kind of imagining which utopias suggest is day-dreaming, in the case of the first Utopia, a sort of exoteric dreaming carried on by a company united in a common desire. Certainly there was a great deal of charmed and longing make-believe among More and his many friends, of which Peter Giles' invention of a mellifluous Utopian language is an example--they were evidently so persuasive that one benighted cleric conceived a burning desire to be sent by the Pope to Utopia as bishop. In this spirit also More wrote Erasmus a letter telling of a day-dream in which he had seen himself as the chosen king of Utopia "marching along crowned with a diadem of wheat, very striking in my Franciscan garb."

But this view of Utopia as a day dream is inadequate. In fact, More's Utopia and most subsequent utopian constructions are sober and disciplined places which induce strong misgivings in most readers, especially more recent readers. These misgivings have to do not with that irresponsibly diversionary nature of utopian writing, which was castigated by Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto as an "unscientific," and ultimately reactionary, building of "castles in the air." On the contrary, the dissatisfaction comes precisely from the apprehension of utopias as practical proposals. Utopias offend because they are felt to be "static," : monotonous, regimented, drably uniform,

restrictive. Mumford, for instance, thinks of Utopia as a human machine which he regards as the original social evil, as "dystopia" or the "evil place", while another writer entitles an article on More's Utopia "A Detestable State."

3. More against his own Utopia

The most curious fact, however, is More's own relation to his book. I shall give an abbreviated list of items in respect to which More expressed disapprobation of Utopian institutions. It includes almost every feature that is fundamental.

He comments in his own behalf at the very end of the book, where he says:

> ...Many things came to my mind which in the manners and laws of that people seemed to be instituted and formed of no good reason, not only in the fashion of their chivalry and their sacrifices and religions and in others of their laws, but also, yea, and chiefly, in that which is the principal foundation of all their ordinances, that is to say, in the community of their life and living without occupying any money...

More in fact regarded communism as heretical.

Yet even more fundamental than the communism of the Utopians is their love of pleasure: "...they think that all our actions, and in them the virtues themselves, be referred at last to pleasure as their end and felicity." But More, who secretly wore a hair shirt next to his body, considered that "a perfect man should abstain not only from unlawful pleasure but from lawful."

Again, the Utopians permit free choice of religion, and thus have no idea of doctrinal heresy. More on the other hand, in several places, for instance in the Dialogue on Heresies, argues that heretical books should not be suffered to go abroad, and that the burning of heretics is sometimes lawful, necessary, and well done.

The Utopians permit a rationally planned suicide, More regards it as a devilish temptation under all circumstances; the Utopians permit a divorce under the condition of insuperable incompatibility, More opposes it; the Utopians use no images in their worship, More defends their necessity.

How did More manage to invent an ideal commonwealth whose institutions were contrary to his own views? What might seem to be the answer to the question, that the Utopians are not Christians, while More himself was a most devout Christian, is not sufficient for it does not explain why More should have imagined "the best state of the commonwealth" as pagan.

Thus it appears that the first Utopia is not a mere dream, but a wily and complex product of the imagination, and that, in order to understand it, it may be necessary to reflect on it specifically as an imaginative product as such.

4. Utopia as a Product of the Imagination

First of all, utopian communities, because they are visually conceived, are vivid pictures, and hence exhibit brightly delineated styles of life, usually leaning to one or the other extreme of possible public form. Some utopias, especially those celebrating technique, like the old Atlantis of Plato's Critias, display a somewhat sinister splendour, or like Bacon's New Atlantis, a mysterious but punctilious ritual magnificence; others, like Houyhnhnm Land in Gulliver's Travels are depicted as rejoicing in subdued and sober rustic decorousness. Utopia itself, with its monastic habits and absence of ornament, furnished the first example of the latter style, and indeed Swift, who numbered More in the unmatchable sextumvirate of statesmen which includes Socrates' name, made his horses, which have not even a name for the vice of pride, first cousins of the Utopians whose essence is, as we shall see, precisely the absence of pride.

Circumstantially painted though they may be, utopias, as beings of the imagination, are "arrested appearances," and as such motionless and fleshless. Hence a static and two-dimensional character does invariably pervade utopias; it is this in them which offends those modern critics, who regard social mobility and opportunity for experience as necessary conditions for a good society. Utopias are "quasi-crystalline structures" because it is in the nature of the imagination to arrest motion.

Secondly, utopias show modes of place and time which are appropriate to their origin in the imagination.

Augustine writes of his imaginative memory as containing images which can be recalled and reconstructed at pleasure:

> All this do I within, in that huge court of my memory. For there have I in readiness the heaven, earth, sea.... Yet I did not swallow them into me by seeing when as with my eyes I beheld them. Nor are the things themselves now with me, but the images of them only.

The imagination then is a power of unreal places which can be visited at will. Most utopias appear to have their origin in such voyages within the imagination; they are places of the imagination expressed as imaginary places. Therefore almost all in fact have the form of narrations of voyages of discovery; the Odyssey is their prototype. But utopian voyages differ from odysseys in the mode of their fictitiousness. For utopias are not pure inventions but images whose existence is--on one level--ardently desired. Hence their descriptions do not have the ingenious verisimilitude appropriate to tales of adventure. Insofar as utopian accounts are not disinterested in existence, being institutions of desire in the places of the imagination, they intrude the fact of the unreality of their place purposefully and persistently--the very word "utopia" means "no-place."

But what most intimately characterizes utopias is that they tamper with time.

This is because the sole source of the imagination is the past; it is stocked with "perpetual sense impressions" left by what is no longer present, and so is a power of bringing the past into the present, a commemorative power. Hence the products of the imagination are often cast in the past tense, "once upon a time," a paradigm product of the purifying and simplifying imagination being the Golden Age. But since utopias invariably stand as accusations against a particular present, they are often resurrections of a particular past, representing the pristine community "behind" the degenerate one. So Utopia with its fifty-four cities corresponding in number to the English shires, its capital called the "Darkling City," built like a foggy but salubrious London, and its unenclosed countryside unspoiled by rampaging sheep and fostered in harmonious balance with the cities, presents the old and merry England behind that of the fallen present.

It seems appropriate to note here that since utopias by their nature arise from dissatisfaction with the present, those which do not draw on the past are utopias of terror, in which the evils incipient in the present are projected in magnification onto the future and there depicted with fascinated and even avid horror. Such anti-utopias are warnings based on a modern notion of history as progress, but in this case as pejorative progress. The best known examples of futurist utopias are Huxley's Brave New World and Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four, and it is significant that both, but particularly the latter, understand the realization of their nightmare to depend primarily on the obliteration of the past.

5. The Special Place and Time of Utopia

As the expression of a thought-informed product of the imagination, that is, as political poetry, More's Utopia thus employs special modes of time and place.

Utopia is Greek and means "no-place". Utopia is a place of the imagination wordly in all respects but that it lacks bodily existence, the quality of being there, that is, of real location. More signifies this by having Hythloday, the narrator, fail to specify exact geographic coordinates. In addition some of the names, especially the place names of this region, are privative, like the land "Achoria"--"Un-country," and the river "Anydrus"--"Waterless". More and his friends engaged in much pleasantry concerning this lack of geographic placement, giving each other circumstantial explanations of how it came to be omitted in the account and earnest commissions to inquire further of Hythloday, so underscoring the claim that More's Utopia, although feigned in the imagination, is a place on earth in contrast to Plato's Polity, a product of the intellect, which is a "pattern laid up in heaven."

Now, curiously vague as is Utopia's location in place, its setting in time is very precise. Three exact dates are supplied: the date of its founding, according to the annals of Utopia 1760 years before Hythloday's account, that is in 244 B.C.; the arrival of some Romans and Egyptians 1200 years ago, that is, in the beginning of the fourth century A.D.; and the arrival of Hythloday's company, who were left behind during Amerigo Vespucci's last voyage which took place in 1504.

Each of these dates is significant. Utopia's present government was founded just when King Agis of Sparta attempted unsuccessfully to revive the constitution of Sparta's original lawgiver, Lycurgus. This constitution instituted a common way of life like that of the Utopians, except that land, though equally shared out, was held as private property. Agis had begun by rescinding a law opening the way for inequality of holdings, a law which, Plutarch says, had been "the ruin of the best state of the commonwealth." Utopia is thus Sparta's successful counterpart.

The Romans and Egyptians--note, no Greeks--arrived just before Constan-

tine made Christianity the Roman state religion, so that, while bringing the arts and useful inventions of antiquity and perhaps the occult wisdom of the Egyptians, they came without either the texts of the waning Greek philosophy or the news of the rising Christian faith. And finally Hythloday arrives with a box of humanistic learning.

The effect of these three dates is to mark the Utopians as being outside of the tragedies and passions, the rises and declines, of our human history. They live in natural but not in human times, they are not atemporal but they are, to use a modern term, ahistorical, that is to say, they are not bound by the conditions which arise from prior human action and passion, in particular from the fall of man. Hythloday startingly observes of the Utopians that if their chronicles are to be believed "cities were there before men were here." Utopians are not descended from Adam, nor, it seems, are they creatures in the sense of Genesis, namely such as are capable of rebellion against their creator.

6. More's Utopia as the "First City" of Plato's Republic

A very good way further to define Utopia as a city having its place and time in the imagination, is to see it in the light of its ostensible source and defeated rival, the polity which is the product of the intellect, namely that set out in Plato's Republic. Plato is the name most frequently mentioned by Hythloday; when in particular he speaks of "those things Plato feigneth in his weal-public or that the Utopians do in theirs," he is referring to Utopia's communism.

In Plato's dialogue Socrates raises the question "What is justice?" The way of answering this question assumes that justice is to be found in the relation of the parts of the human soul and that political communities are magnified expressions of these relations. He therefore constructs a sequence

of three cities each arising by the addition of a part of the soul and corresponding to the dominance of that part, proceeding in order from the most supine and common to the most superior and rare constituent of the soul.

Now the city in which a common way of life obtains is only the third city, which is under the dominion of the reasonable part of the soul, that is to say, which is ruled by philosopher kings. And even in this, the "philosophical city," only the rulers and their warrior auxiliaries live communally: "No one was to have any of the ordinary possessions of mankind. They were to be warrior athletes and guardians, receiving from the other citizens instead of annual payment only their maintenance." This is the first principle of unity of the philosopher's city; the second, and as Socrates acknowledges, even more offensive one is "that the wives of our guardians are to be common, and their children common and no person is to know his own child, nor any child his parent."

Since the social foundation of Utopia is the family, or rather the extended family or household, it certainly does not share the human aspect of Socrates' communism. But neither does it share the economic one.

The actual title of the book referred to as Utopia is On the Best State of the Commonwealth. The Latin term translated by "commonwealth" is "res publica." Sir Thomas Elyot, one of More's circle, in his Book Named the Governor speaks of the implications of this translation, referring to those who "do suppose it, so to be called for that, that everything should be to all men in common without discrepance of any estate or condition." Hythloday more than once alludes to this meaning of shared wealth. And precisely here lies the distinction between Utopia and the philosopher's city--the communism of the latter is an ascetic communism of poverty, while Utopian communism means shared wealth or well-being. If Utopia has anything to do with Plato's polity is not with its third or philosophical city--as Peter Giles' poem had hinted.

Now the first Socratic city corresponds to the desires in the soul and has two stages. At first there arises a "city of craftsmen," a small, simple, moderate and merry community based on division of labor for the purpose of satisfying basic necessities. Then, as desires become more complex and luxurious, the city of craftsmen, which Socrates calls the "true and healthy city," undergoes a transformation and becomes, as he says, feverish. To the simple crafts are added the arts of the embroiderer, gold and ivory are used, and people devoted to "forms and colors" are introduced into the city. The inflammation of desire makes the city predatory and brings about the formation of a warrior class whose presence will institute the second city.

Now Utopia clearly corresponds to this first city, the "true and healthy city" of craftsmen. There is a sign of this in the following. When Socrates' interlocutor Glaucus first hears a description of their simple and healthy common banquets he exclaims that this is a "city of pigs," by which he does not mean that they wallow but that they like simple and natural foods. Accordingly the lowest official of Utopia who sits over thirty families and whose chief function is the control of idleness, is one "which in their old language is called the Syphogrant..." The term is Greek (for the Utopians are said to have affinity to the Greeks) and means "pig-sty elder." The next higher officials who rule over ten stys are called "tranibors" or "plain (or clear) eaters," meaning, I suppose, that they eat perspicuously prepared dishes.

Furthermore the craftsmen of Socrates' city are limited to farmers, weavers, shoemakers, carpenters, smiths, and merchants. The Utopians also limit their crafts to farming, which all do, and these special crafts: wool and linen working, masonry and metal working, carpentry, and merchandising. The Utopians too have common banquets with music.

But the Utopians never become luxurious. With them that sophistication of the desires which is the occasion for the genesis of the second, the war-

rior, city never arises. The part of the soul which dominates in this second city is called by Socrates "spiritedness," which is a certain readiness to righteous wrath and a disposition to honor. As we have seen, the warring element is directly connected to such complexity of desire (whence, as Socrates says, arise all evils in cities) and particularly to a taste for magnificence and splendour.

Magnificence, however, is totally absent in Utopia. This is a consequence of "the community of their life and living without any occupying of money, by which thing only"--to continue More's criticism of Utopia quoted above--"all nobility, magnificence, honour, and majesty, the true ornaments, as the common opinion is, of the commonwealth, utterly be overthrown and destroyed." The Utopians prefer comfort to honour. To be sure, they too make war, though only in defense of their borders or their friends' rights, for they regard it with loathing as beastly, and they have no special class of warriors; their soldiers are the citizens of the land supplemented by mercenaries whenever possible. These citizen soldiers fight bravely, but they have no taste for gallantry, always prefering to win through calculation and cunning, if possible. Among the Utopians only one class of people is rewarded by display of honour--the virtuous dead.

7. The Utopians as People without Pride

The next question is what More means to signify by associating his Utopia with Plato's city of craftsmen.

Plato's first city is a <u>natural</u> city which arises naturally and whose citizens are close to nature, taken as the given and stable appearance within and without men. In this sense Utopia too is a natural city. The Utopians are said to be partly of Persian ancestry. Now the descriptions of the Persians in Herodotus' <u>History</u> (which, incidentally, Hythloday brings to Utopia)

show them as worshippers of nature who use no images, and who, unlike the Greeks and Christians, do not believe that the gods have the same nature as men, that is, that they can be imaged or made incarnate in human form. All this holds of the Utopians, of whom many worship the moon or one of the planets, while all agree on the worship of a sun god who is the artificer of the universe and bears the Persian name Mithras.

So also all the crafts of Utopia are close to nature and, of course, particularly so the universal craft, farming.

Sometimes the Utopians themselves act as forces of nature, as when King Utopus, the founder of Utopia, cut the channel which made Utopia into an island, or when the chicks they raise adopt them as mothers, or when they transplant whole forests to have a closer source of wood. And they appear natural--their woollen garments, for instance, have their natural color. So even their artifice is an intelligent and familiar adaptation of nature to their own use.

Thus the Utopians are not so much pagans as children of nature. This can be put another way.

To say that Utopia corresponds to Plato's first city only is to say that the Utopians are lacking in certain principles of the soul, particularly in that which gives rise to and dominates the second or warrior city and occasions in it magnificence, honor, and luxury--spiritedness, that is, self-assertion. Now the Christian translation of the faculty of spiritedness is the vice of pride.

Pride, "the craving for undue exhaltation," says Augustine in his City of God, was the origin of our evil will, that corruption of our nature which causes a self-assertive craving "forbidden" fruit because it is forbidden. Pride is thus the origin of perversion in the nature of man, and as More says in his Four Last Things, "the very head and root of all sins." Now as Hythloday points out, the Utopians have no such perverse pleasures; they never pre-

fer the bitter to the sweet; they have no "taste infected by the sickness of sin;" their desires are all satisfied by natural objects; they do not know the inverted pleasure of self-love; they are never unnatural. This is the case precisely because the Utopians were not created and therefore do not know that rebellion of the creature against its creator, called the fall of man, which is the original case of perverse pleasure. Hence they, unlike our pagans, are incapable of salvation by conversion to Christianity, although they absorb easily--for they are facile in absorbing everything profitable--those features of Christianity congenial to them. So it is by reason of their Utopian nature that Hythloday leaves them "unchristened" and only ostensibly because there is no priest among his company.

In his youth More read a series of well-attended lectures on Augustine's City of God, so we may well suppose that he considered the relation of his Utopia to the two cities of Augustine's work, which "have been formed by two loves, the earthly city by the love of self, even to the contempt of God, the heavenly by the love of God to the contempt of self." The Utopians are of neither city; their nature is nothing but absence of perversion; they have neither contempt of God, nor as we shall see, contempt of self; they inhabit an earthly paradise--and that is the essential character of the painted city of the imagination; its missing dimension is original human evil, which, as a kind of non-being, lies beyond the likeness-making imagination.

8. Utopia as a Community of Pleasure

But if Utopia is privative with respect to pride, it is positive with respect to pleasure. Freedom from the vices of the will leaves the Utopians to the enjoyment of their goods, and that enjoyment is the end and center of their community. What is its nature? To answer that question one must examine their education and their "philosophy."

All major utopias follow Plato's Republic in being essentially "educational provinces," transforming Socrates' deliberately image-less program of learning into vivid pictures of ideal institutions of instruction and inquiry. In the Republic itself, education forms both the political beginning and the philosophical end of the city.

But in the island of Utopia education has a characteristically different standing.

The liberal arts, are, to be sure, studied in Utopia as in the Republic, for the Utopians have made the same discoveries in learning as the Europeans. The trivium, which deals with the arts of language under grammar, rhetoric and logic, is reduced to one useful art--dialectics, "the ways of reasoning which reasoning has observed useful for investigating things." Hythloday emphasizes their lack of concern with pure logic. They have no universals and have never heard of a "second intention," the reflective product of the intellect "which," as More says elsewhere, "is nowhere." Utopia has nothing which is nowhere, no intellectual beings.

They possess the full quadrivium, which concerns the world of nature, and in it especially pursue astronomy, for they regard the world as a spectacle made for man--in fact the whole section on education appropriately comes within the section on sightseeing. They characteristically regard medicine as among the most useful branches of philosophy.

Now what characterizes this education is the absence of almost all philosophy, and first of all an absence of physics understood as the inquiry into causes; they confine themselves to engaging in desultory and inconclusive debates, inventing new theories to add to those of the ancients. Secondly there is an apparent absence of politics; inquiries concerning "the best state of the commonwealth" are absent in the best commonwealth.

And finally as for metaphysics, inquiries into being or god, they have none, but for their highest inquiry they conduct debates "in that part of philosophy which entreateth of manners and virtue," and their chief question is

> in what thing, be it one or more, the felicity of man consisteth. But in this point they seem almost too much given and inclined to the opinion of them which defend pleasure, wherein they determine either all or the chiefest part of man's felicity to rest. And (which is more to be marveled at) their defense of this so dainty and delicate an opinion they fetch even from their grave, sharp, bitter and rigorous religion.

Indeed they never have any philosophical discussions without resorting to religious principles, thus employing the exact converse of More's often repeated contention that reason should and can serve religion. The religious principles which they employ are two: they believe in a wise providence which governs the world and ordains felicity for man, and in the immortality of the soul and its reward and punishment after death. In all other respects Utopians are free to choose what religious practices please them, but these two principles they are strictly required to affirm, for as we shall see, they are the requirements of a communal pursuit of pleasure.

Now the content of their doctrines of pleasure are, as one might guess, what we would call Epicurean. It is the notoriously apolitical teaching of Epicurus modified to become the political philosophy of the most unlikely republic ever devised--a stable community of pleasure.

These are the modifications the Utopians make: the Epicureans believe that the gods, if there are any, do not guide the world; as mentioned before, the Utopians assert divine providence, presumably because without it the natural circumstance of man would not necessarily be conducive to pleasure. The Epicureans believe that the soul dissolves with the body; the Utopians require the immortality of the soul to assure that the calculus of

pleasures is not so short term as to admit impermissible or false pleasures. The Epicureans believe in private property; the Utopians in common wealth, for they regard all wealth as "materia voluptatis," the material of pleasure, though they abate their communism to the degree that privacy is necessary to pleasure--this is why they base their society on the family.

As far as the chief doctrine of Epicurus, that pleasure is the highest good, is concerned, they agree, but

> they think not felicity to rest in all pleasure, but only in that pleasure that is good and honest, and that hereto as to perfect blessedness our nature is allured and drawn even by virtue.

It follows that the Utopians find it possible to absorb the Stoic position, that is, to obviate the question of the priority of virtue and pleasure as ends among which a choice must be made, the reflection on which choice ennobles the pagan philosophers. In this they argue as follows.

The virtue most peculiarly belonging to human beings is "humanity," that is to say man's virtue is simply the realization of his essential nature. "Now the most earnest and painful followers of virtue and haters of pleasure exhort you to relieve the misery of others," praising such deeds as "humanity."

Thus virtue itself is nothing but an argument for and an instrument of pleasure, understood however in such a way as to become the basis for a theory of private and social contracts:

> But in that nature doth allow and provoke men one to help another live merrily...verily she commandeth thee to use diligent circumspection, that thou do not so seek for thine own commodities, that thou procure others' incommodities. Wherefore their opinion is, that not only covenants and bargains made among private men ought to be well and faithfully fulfilled, observed, and kept, but also common laws...

In this way the Utopians constitute a political community based on pleasure, that is, on nature, and therefore stable. Their only requirement is that

pleasures be true and not false.

To teach their citizens to make this discrimination is the object of their education. By false or "counterfeit" pleasures are, of course, meant those counter to natural desire, for "pleasure they call every motion and state of the body or mind wherein man has actually delectation." False pleasures are therefore perverse pleasures, namely those which yield no intrinsically pleasing state, but are present mostly for the sake of asserting oneself. First among these are the pleasures which result from a "futile conspiracy" of men, beginning with the mistaken pleasure of magnificence in dress, and going on to the pleasure taken in honor and nobility derived from property. Thus the prideful pleasure of conspicuous consumption is the cardinal sin of Utopia.

9. The Use of Utopia

Utopia then is a land of pleasure without pride. When Erasmus says of this book called On the Best State of the Commonwealth, that in it More "proposed to illustrate the source and spring of political evil," he must mean just this--that More in his Utopia has disclosed and eradicated the root of all evil in pride. Erasmus goes on to say that More first, at his leisure, wrote the second book (which contains Hythloday's narrative of Utopia) and "recognizing the need for it" hastily added a first. Where was the need to prefix this latter book, which at first sight, seems to contain mostly an account of the particular political evils of More's England for which Utopian institutions are proposed by Hythloday as the cure?

The answer is in the fact that it is "utopian" in the derogatory sense of the term to paint a pattern of a political community from which human evil is radically removed; or worse, as a straight political proposal, it is a culpably futile undertaking. But when Hythloday solemnly closes, saying

that all the world would long ago have been brought under the laws of Utopia "were it not that one only beast, the princess and mother of all mischief, Pride doth withstand and let it" he is taking a fierce pleasure in vitiating the book by underscoring precisely the futility of his narrative. Hence the first book was written to rehabilitate the second and contains directions for the proper use of utopias.

The first book is sometimes, appropriately, called a dialogue on counsel. For the occasion of Hythloday's relation of the evils of England is his decided refusal of Peter Giles' suggestion that he should get into a king's court to instruct him with examples and help him with counsel. Hythloday allows that he has learned in his travels of institutions which would cure the conditions which he had so acutely observed in England, but he shows by serious and comical examples how his solutions would never be taken seriously at court.

Raphael Hythloday's first name is Hebrew for "the physician of health," and his last name is Greek for "knowing in babble." Hythloday brings a salvation which is, first, in itself impossible and which he, secondly, refuses even to advocate in the places that matter. He is a babbler on two counts and he knows it.

More himself now attacks Hythloday:

> For whereas your Plato judgeth that weal-publics shall by this means attain perfect felicity either if philosophers be kings or else if kings give themselves to the study of philosophy, how far, I pray you, shall commonwealths then be from felicity, if philosophers will not vouchsafe to instruct kings with their good counsel?

Hythloday objects that philosophy can have no power among kings. More counters:

> Indeed, this school . philosophy (philosophia scholastica) hath not, which thinketh all things meet for every place. But there is another philosophy more civil (philosophia civilior)...which knoweth, as you would say, her own stage...And this is the philosophy you must use.

The Citizen and Under-Sheriff of London, King's Councillor to be and future Lord Chancellor of England then gives the content of this "more citizen-like philosophy," tacitly transmuting Plato's most radical proposal into practical wisdom:

> If evil opinions and naughty persuasions cannot be utterly and quite plucked out of their hearts, if you cannot even as you would remedy vices which use and custom has confirmed, yet for this cause you must not leave and forsake the commonwealth. You must not forsake the ship in a tempest because you cannot rule and keep down the winds. No, nor you must not labor to drive into their heads new and strange information which you know well shall be nothing regarded with them that be of clear contrary minds. But you must with crafty wile and a subtle train study and endeavor yourself, as much as in you lieth, to handle the matter wittily and handsomely for the purpose. And that which you cannot turn to good, so order it that it be not very bad. For it is not possible for all things to be well unless all men were good, which I think will not be yet this good many years.

Many books on counseling princes, such as Erasmus' Education of a Christian Prince and Machiavelli's Prince were written in More's age; from these the Utopia differs in being a book of counsel for subjects and citizens, and its first advice to them is not to inject utopia into their counsels. It is an attack on radical politics among the advisors of rulers. But what then is the profit, not in the book Utopia, but in the land Utopia of the second book, the ideal commonwealth itself?

First of all it seems to me that Utopia negatively proposes a great political principle, true in fact and potent as a conviction: that originally and fundamentally communities are expressions of human nature and that the converse is not so much the case. This understanding of the book is, of course, at variance with what Utopia appears to exemplify, namely the reconstruction of human nature through a perfectly planned society.

And secondly, in pointing to human perverseness as the spoiler of politics and naming it pride, and by painting a pattern of a prideless community,

More shows positively, by presenting it in delightful imaginative detail, what it would mean to live in Utopia, what the life of pleasure in abstraction from the original human condition looks like. The student of Utopia should become very sensitive to that in proposals for new and improved ways of life which really implies an alteration of human nature.

Finally, Utopia again by the negative influence of its imaginative realization, effects a kind of celebration of and satisfaction in the given human condition. In his last long work written in the Tower of London, and called A Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation, More argues that tribulation is the pre-condition of salvation, a truth which, even when it is not taken in its precise Christian meaning, exercises a powerful influence on the politics of those who believe it.

And finally, Utopia is the beneficial occasion of a kind of civic festivity. An early biographer calls More "our noble new Christian Socrates," and More, who resembles Socrates both in many particulars of the mode of his life and the crucial parts of the manner of his death, resembles him in nothing so much as in his serene playfulness. It was said of More that he "looks sadly when he means merrily" and the "island of Utopia" is written in that way. One of More's favorite writers, one which Hythloday brought to the Utopians, who take special delight in him for "his many conceits and jests," is the ancient writer of comic and fantastical dialogues, Lucian. Lucian wrote two accounts of voyages to the moon whence the foibles of earth come into sharpest focus. The Utopians, that "facile and facetious" people, equipped with golden chamber pots and followed about by loving chicks, are just such moon people--in fact the first thing Hythloday mentions about the island is that it is moon-shaped. More can afford such pranks, for although like Socrates a participant in dialogues, he is unlike the latter, a writing Socrates. This effects a difference

in the form of Socratic and Morean irony; the latter is author and interlocutor in one, whence he can by sober speech control from the inside of the dialogue Utopia what merriment he has set afoot from the outside by writing it.

Thus More has started a subtle and inviting game, which has always drawn together in a merry and melancholy inquiry those who would like to be citizens of the best commonwealth. Just this is conveyed in the full title of the book as printed in the first edition:

> A Truly Golden Booklet, as Saving as it is Festive, on the Best State of the Commonwealth and the New Island of Utopia.

Now to return to the beginning. I have tried to show, by looking to the book called Utopia, that the term "utopia" bears a certain particular original meaning to which the utopian tradition always bears some relation. But it is clear that utopias understood in that particular sense are unfitted to fill the needs formulated by those interested in conjecturing about and planning for the future. You will remember that the demand was for an imaginative presentation of a variety of possible "life styles" based on projections into the future of present possibilities. The utopian tradition was to be used as an instrument of the social sciences by means of which a more conscious choice of ends could be achieved. This seems to me inappropriate for two reasons. First I think there can be no deliberate pre-planned variety of utopias, for a utopia is not a description of mere style but a vividly delineated construction in the imagination of political wisdom, and its composition is presumably not undertaken until the author has settled his opinions and persuaded himself of their truth. And secondly a utopia is an imaginative realization of the impossible, which far from being a projection of present possibilities, if it lies anywhere in time, lies behind.

Critics of the utopian enterprise quite rightly characterize it as essentially nostalgic, backward-looking. In fact it might be said that the notion of utopia and the concept of a "Future" are incompatible. The urgent question is: the study of which of these makes for the better state of the commonwealth?