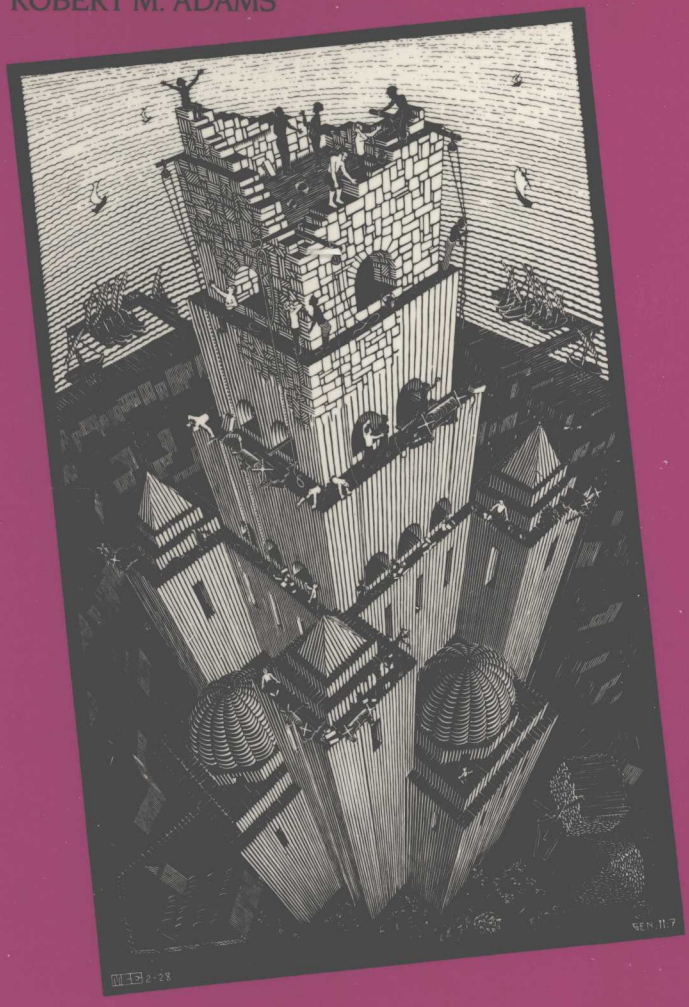
UTOPIA

SECOND EDITION

SIR THOMAS MORE

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY
ROBERT M. ADAMS



A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

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Sir Thomas More
UTOPIA

A REVISED TRANSLATION
BACKGROUNDS
CRITICISM
SECOND EDITION

Translated and Edited by

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Preface to the Second Edition

Utopia is one of those mercurial, jocoserious writings that turn a new profile to every advancing generation, and respond in a different way to every set of questions addressed to them. Though small in size and flippant in tone, it is in fact two very heavy books. The first part propounds a set of riddles such as every sincere man who enters public life is bound to ask himself, whether he is living in early-capitalist England, late-capitalist America, or any other society dominated by the money-mad and the authority-intoxicated. He must think, What 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? And how can I tell when the harm I am doing, by acting as window-dressing for evil, outweighs my potential for good? The second part of *Utopia* offers a set of no less disturbing questions. For example, Can a community be organized for the benefit of all, and not to 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? And finally, When we give some persons power in our society (as we must), and appoint others to watch them (as we'd better), who is going to watch the watchers? Can we really stand a society in which everybody watches everybody?

Almost everyone has seen that these are some of the major questions the *Utopia* raises; they include many of the classical questions of political economy and social organization. As for what answers the author of *Utopia* provided, we are still in dispute; he was a complex man who understood very well that it is not always safe or politic to speak one's entire mind—even supposing it is ever possible. Most of the authorities whose essays are assembled at the back of the book try to calculate the answers. More gave to his questions by studying the way in which they are framed or the context in which they occurred to him. Some see him as a man modern far beyond his era, proposing prophetic remedies for the problems of an outworn social system; others see him as a conservative, medieval-minded man whose ideal community was patterned on that of the monastery. Still others deny that he meant anything at all, preferring to describe his book as a joke. Some feel that the book can be understood in terms of its literary form or genre, in terms of its predecessors among the imaginary commonwealths, or in terms of the ideals prevalent among More's literary friends on the Continent. Some find

the key to its equivocal patterns of meaning in an equivocal pattern of syntax; it has been argued that Utopia was a real place located in Peru, and Hythloday a real man who had visited it and talked with More. In "modern times" (which seems now to mean mostly the age of mass production, mass mental-control, and mass murder), speculative thinkers have played variations, mostly sardonic, on themes sounded half a millennium ago by Thomas More. A gamut of speculation is thus offered to the reader, spreading, if not from the sublime to the ridiculous, at least from the plausible to the improbable.

But, whatever the book "really" meant when it was written, one aspect of it that our materials do not properly emphasize (simply because of lack of space) is the enormous influence it had on men's minds. It had this influence not only on socialist Utopians of the nineteenth century like William Morris and Edward Bellamy, but on men of its own time, that is, the sixteenth century. America had been discovered for fewer than twenty-five years when the *Utopia* appeared in print. Europeans knew very little about the new land beyond the ocean, and what information they got from the first explorers was sparse, ill-written, and, worst of all, not very interesting, especially when it was accurate. Just at this moment, More appeared with a finished and elegant literary production, describing some enchanting people who, in addition to all the "natural" virtues like innocence, simplicity, and native honor, had some very sophisticated institutions perfectly suited to comment on the most notorious abuses of contemporary Europe. No wonder the book took European readers by storm. Naive folk of the early sixteenth century swallowed More's account of Utopia as a fair description of the New World; tougher and more practical men still tended, when they came to America, to see the natives as potential Utopians or ex-Utopians. In Mexico and South America the best and most generous of the explorers tried to form the tribes and pueblos they discovered into little Amaurots. These, of course, disintegrated; but throughout the centuries and across most of the American latitudes, there have rarely failed to be found little groups of true believers whose social ideals owed something to the inspiration of More's *Utopia*. The book is thus of special interest to Americans, North and South; it helped to make us what we are today by determining, not our immediate institutions, but the level of our expectations. And in the long run that may be the most important, though the least formal, of our institutions.

If, then, it was a mere joke, More's book was one of the most appealing and influential jokes ever made—consequently, one of the cruelest. And that, I think, takes it outside the limits of More's character. The power of the book's idealism is a real ingredient of its structure; that fact has been demonstrated, not in a learned article, but by the testimony of history. We may interpret it as we will, but the way a book like *Utopia* has been read and lived across the centuries is an authentic part of its

nature. However we choose to read it, we cannot deprive it of qualities it has proved on the pulses of mankind. On these terms it cannot be other than a compassionate and generous book, as well as a witty one—that is, a book interested in living people and the way they live, not just in verbal phantoms and personae. To read it is a test of one's own temper. We in the United States should be particularly aware of this book as we move beyond the two hundredth anniversary of our own generous, perilous experiment.

ROBERT M. ADAMS

1991

Translator's Note

Translations, according to a cynical, sexist wheeze, are like mistresses; the faithful ones are apt to be ugly, and the beautiful ones false. This glib cliché can be supplemented by another one, declaring that the translator's game always involves an effort to have his cake and eat it too. He wants to catch, to savor, to crystallize in his mind the special qualities of his original, and at the same time to transfuse them into an entirely different medium, readable modern English. Thomas More's *Utopia* is not cast in artificial or ornate literary language, as his age understood it. The Latin More uses is simple, conversational, everyday prose such as a lawyer, a diplomat, or a humanist might employ about the normal occasions and business of daily existence. But it is quite unlike modern English in several important respects. The sentences are longer and less tightly knit in patterns of subordination. The main idea of a sentence may be hidden in an ablative absolute, or hung out at a considerable distance in space and syntax. Because it is an inflected language, Latin can scatter the ingredients of a sentence about more loosely than English does, in the assurance that a reader will be able to assemble them within his own mind. An English sentence is expected to do more of the reader's work for him. At the same time, Latin, or at least More's lawyerly Latin, has a whole mass of delicate innuendoes and qualifications at its disposal—double negatives, ironic appositives, pseudo-antitheses, and formal (but only formal) correlatives. To represent the structure of More's Latin syntax in English would create the impression of a whirling chaos; reproducing his stylistic nuances would give rise to a mincing and artificial English, as of a rhetorical sophist. And in either case, the real flavor of More's book, which is casual and colloquial, would be lost completely.

A constant temptation of the translator is to go for one quality of his original at the expense of all the others. More's long, loosely articulated sentences can be made swift and clear by rearranging some of their parts and omitting others; his rhetorical structure can be retained, at the cost of sacrificing the colloquial and conversational flavor of his book. In trying to respond to all four demands (for clarity, completeness, colloquial ease, and a sense of contour in the prose), I have consulted from time to time the work of my predecessors. Three in particular proved suggestive and challenging. Ralph Robynson's 1551 rendering is a superb achievement; it still withstands the severest test of any translation, close

comparison with the original. To be sure, Robynson is so anxious to squeeze out every drop of More's meaning, that he sometimes translates one word by two or four or more; and his language, after more than four hundred years, requires no less glossing and translation than the original text. H. V. S. Ogden (1949) is swift, deft, and modern; but to gain these qualities, he omits not only elements of More's meaning but most of the nuances of More's expression. It is an extraordinary *flat* translation, as if written for someone in a great hurry; and it occasionally misrepresents to odd effect the actual sense of the Latin. Finally, Father Edward Surtz's (1965) recension of the (1923) translation by G. C. Richards strives as earnestly as Robynson for completeness of expression. But, following a Latinate word order, this version is generally stiff and sometimes wooden; its sentences, with their intricate turnings and grammatical suspensions, often defy articulation by the mouth of anyone who knows and cares for English idiom. Yet all three translations catch intersecting and overlapping sectors of an original that is richer than any of them. In the process of making my own text, I consulted these various versions freely, and even when dissatisfied with the work of one of my predecessors, drew from it the stimulus of disagreement. A. E. Housman dedicated his great edition of Manillius *in usu editorum*—for the use of those future editors who, he supposed, would *really* study the complexities of a text to which he had merely indicated the first approaches. Less formidably, any "new" translation of a much-translated text can best define itself as a temporary trial balance, for the guidance of future translators in their search for a miracle capable of reversing the action of the old philosopher's stone. For where the alchemist's dream was of turning lead to precious gold, the translator's dream is that he may somehow be kept from reducing gold to common lead.

This translation is dedicated to the memory of Mr. William Nagel of the Horace Mann School for Boys, who more than forty years ago taught me—reluctant and ungrateful infant that I was—the rudiments of the Latin tongue.

R.M.A.

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The Text of UTOPIA

This woodcut image of Utopia is from the March 1518 edition printed in Basel by John Froben. It was the work of Ambrosius Holbein (brother of the more famous Hans Holbein the Younger). There had been a different and much simpler (yet in some ways more literal) image of the island before the first (1516) edition printed at Louvain. For analysis and discussion of these illustrations, see W. W. Wooden and John N. Wall, Jr., "Thomas More and the Painter's Eye," in *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 15 (1985): 231–63.

CONCERNING THE BEST STATE OF A COMMONWEALTH AND THE NEW ISLAND OF UTOPIA

A Truly Golden Handbook
No Less Beneficial Than Entertaining
by the Most Distinguished and Eloquent Author
THOMAS MORE
Citizen and Sheriff of the Famous City of London

BOOK ONE

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, the most serene Prince of Castille,[1] and sent me into Flanders as his spokesman to discuss and settle them. I was companion and associate to that incomparable man Cuthbert Tunstall,[2] whom the King has recently created Master of the Rolls, to everyone's great satisfaction. I will say nothing in praise of this man, not because I fear the judgment of a friend might be questioned, but because his learning and integrity are greater than I can describe and too well-known everywhere to need my commendation—unless I would, according to the proverb, "Light up the sun with a lantern."[3]

[The word "Utopia" is compounded from Greek *ou* and *topos*, meaning "no place"; there may also be a pun on *eutopos*, meaning "good place." More sometimes spoke of his book by a Latin equivalent, Nusquama, from *nusquam*, nowhere. This whole ornate title is translated from the title page of the March 1518 edition—the third—published by Froben at Basle.]

1. The Prince of Castille is the future Charles V (Carlos Quinto), as yet only fifteen years old and under the guardianship of his grandfather, but about to be come King of Castille, then King of Spain, and, before he was twenty-one, Holy Roman Emperor. As part of his royal possessions, he inherited the Low Countries. The matters in dispute between him and Henry were certain Dutch import duties, against which the English government protested by declaring an embargo on all exports of wool to Holland. In retaliation for this act Charles was hinting at an expropriation of the English fleet, or such parts of it as he could get his hands on.

2. An admired scholar and influential cleric, though not yet a bishop, Cuthbert Tunstall (1474–1559) was appointed Ambassador to Brussels in May 1515, and a year later became Master of the Rolls.

3. Analogues of this saying are scattered through the *Adagia* of Erasmus, an immense collection of proverbs and popular sayings: see especially No. 1407 in the *Opera* (Leyden, 1703–6) 2, 556.

Those appointed by the prince to deal with us, all excellent men, met us at Bruges by prearrangement. Their head and leader was the Margrave, so called, of Bruges,[4] a most distinguished person. But their main speaker and guiding spirit was Georges de Themsecke, the Provost of Cassel,[5] a man eloquent by nature as well as by training, very learned in the law, and most skillful in diplomatic affairs through his ability and long practice. After we had met several times, certain points remained on which we could not come to agreement; so they adjourned the meetings and went to Brussels for some days to consult their prince in person.

Meanwhile, since my business permitted it, I went to Antwerp.[6] Of those who visited me while I was there, Peter Giles[7] was more welcome to me than any of the others. He was a native of Antwerp, a man of high reputation, already appointed to a good position and worthy of the very best: I hardly know a young man more learned or of better character. Apart from being cultured, virtuous, and courteous to all, with his intimates he is so open, trustworthy, loyal and affectionate that it would be hard to find another friend like him anywhere. No man is more modest or more frank; none better combines simplicity with wisdom. His conversation is so merry, and so witty without malice, that the ardent desire I felt to see my native country, my wife and my children (from whom I had been separated more than four months) was much eased by his agreeable company and pleasant talk.

One day after I had heard mass at Nôtre Dame, the most beautiful and most popular church in Antwerp, I was about to return to my quarters when I happened to see him talking with a stranger, a man of quite advanced years. The stranger had a sunburned face, a long beard, and a cloak hanging loosely from his shoulders; from his appearance and dress, I took him to be a ship's captain. When Peter saw me, he approached and greeted me. As I was about to return his greeting, he drew me aside, and, indicating the stranger, said, "Do you see that man? I was just on the point of bringing him to you."

"He would have been very welcome on your behalf," I answered.

"And on his own too, if you knew him," said 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."

"In that case," said I, "my guess wasn't a bad one, for at first glance I supposed he was a skipper."

4. J. (for Jean or Jacques) de Halewyn, Seigneur de Maldeghem, was Margrave of Bruges. Bruges itself, after a rich commercial flowering in the fourteenth century (when it was the central distributing point and an important manufacturing center for English wool), was losing some of its commercial clout in the early sixteenth century, partly because its harbor was silting up. Like the town itself, the title "Margrave of Bruges" was mostly vestigial but still impressive.

5. Georges de Themsecke, Provost of Cassel, was a native of Bruges, author of a regional history, and chief magistrate of Cassel, a small town between Dunkirk and Lille.

6. Antwerp and Brussels are about equidistant (sixty miles) from Bruges.

7. Peter Giles (1486?–1533) had been a star pupil of Erasmus, and was now (1515) town clerk of his native Antwerp, as well as a poet and editor of Latin texts.

"Then you're not quite right," he replied, "For his sailing has not been like that of Palinurus,[8] but more that of Ulysses, or rather of Plato. This man, who is named Raphael—his family name is Hythloday[9]—knows a good deal of Latin, and is particularly learned in Greek. He studied Greek more than Latin because his main interest is philosophy, and in that field he found that the Romans have left us nothing very valuable except certain works of Seneca and Cicero. Being eager to see the world, he left to his brothers the patrimony to which he was entitled at home (he is a native of Portugal), and took service with Amerigo Vespucci.[1] He accompanied Vespucci on the last three of his four voyages, accounts of which are now common reading everywhere; but on the last voyage, he did not return home with the commander. After much persuasion and expostulation he got Amerigo's permission to be one of the twenty-four men who were left in a fort at the farthest point of the last voyage.[2] Being marooned in this way was altogether agreeable to him, as he was more anxious to pursue his travels than afraid of death. He would often say, 'The man who has no grave is covered by the sky,' and 'The road to heaven is equally short from all places.'[3] Yet this frame of mind would have cost him dear, if God had not been gracious to him. After Vespucci's departure, he traveled through many countries with five companions from the fort. At last, by strange good fortune, he got, via Ceylon, to Calicut,[4] where by good luck he found some Portuguese ships; and so, beyond anyone's expectation, he returned to his own country."

When Peter had told me this, I thanked him for his kindness in wishing to introduce me to a man whose conversation he hoped I would enjoy, and then I turned to Raphael. After greeting one another and exchanging the usual civilities of strangers upon their first meeting, we

8. The pilot of Aeneas slept over his steering oar, fell overboard, and perished: *Aeneid* 5.832 ff. Palinurus is a type of the careless traveler, Ulysses is a type of the man who learns from traveling, and Plato (who made trips to Sicily and Egypt) is a type of the man who travels to learn.

9. Raphael will not be known specifically as the "affable archangel" till Milton writes *Paradise Lost* a century and a half hence; still, he is already known as a comfortable, sociable archangel, as contrasted with Michael the warrior: witness his befriending of Tobias in the apocryphal Book of Tobit. The first root of "Hythloday" is surely Greek *huthlos*, meaning "nonsense"; the second part of the name may suggest *daien*, to distribute, i.e., a nonsense-peddler. A fantastic trilingual pun could make the whole name mean "God heals [Heb., *Raphael*] through the nonsense [Gr., *huthlos*] of God [Lat., *dei*]."

1. Amerigo Vespucci's last two voyages were made for the King of Portugal, so a Portuguese nationality was natural for Hythloday. By making him a foreigner, More also disposed of him conveniently out of range of the curious. Vespucci, born in Florence, but employed by the monarchies of Spain and Portugal, claimed to have made four trips to America between 1497 and 1504. His account of these voyages (excerpted below, pp. 104–7) circulated widely through Europe after its publication in 1507, and did more to make him famous than the earlier and more substantial explorations of Columbus and Cabot.

2. Cape Frio, north of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil.

3. Both these dicta are from classical sources: Lucan, *Pharsalia* 7.819; and Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 1.104.

4. More covers in a prepositional phrase the distance from Eastern Brazil to Ceylon, a distance of about fifteen thousand miles. Somewhere in there is Utopia.

Calicut (from which we first received the cloth known as calico) is a district of India not far from Madras.

all went to my house. There in the garden we sat down on a bench covered with turf to talk together.

He told us that when Vespucci sailed away, he and his companions who had stayed behind in the fort often met with the people of the countryside, and by ingratiating speeches gradually won their friendship. Before long they came to dwell with them safely and even affectionately. The prince also gave them his favor (I have forgotten his name and that of his country), furnishing Raphael and his five companions not only with ample provisions, but with means for traveling—rafts when they went by water, wagons when they went by land. In addition, he sent with them a most trusty guide who was to introduce and recommend them to such other princes as they wanted to visit. After many days' journey, he said, they came to towns and cities, and to commonwealths that were both populous and not badly governed.

To be sure, under the equator and as far on both sides of the line as the sun moves, there lie vast empty deserts, scorched with perpetual heat. The whole region is desolate and squalid, grim and uncultivated, inhabited by wild beasts, serpents, and also by men no less wild and dangerous than the beasts themselves. But as they went on, conditions gradually grew milder. The heat was less fierce, the earth greener, men and even beasts less savage. At last they reached people, cities, and towns which not only traded among themselves and with their neighbors, but even carried on commerce by sea and land with remote countries. After that, he said, they were able to visit different lands in every direction, for he and his companions were welcome as passengers aboard any ship about to make a journey.

The first vessels they saw were flat-bottomed, he said, with sails made of papyrus-reeds and wicker, or occasionally of leather. Farther on, they found ships with pointed keels and canvas sails, very much like our own.[5] The seamen were skilled in managing wind and water; but they were most grateful to him, Raphael said, for showing them the use of the compass, of which they had been ignorant. For that reason, they had formerly sailed with great timidity, and only in summer. Now they have such trust in the compass that they no longer fear winter at all, and tend to be overconfident rather than cautious. There is some danger that through their imprudence, this discovery, which they thought would be so advantageous to them, may become the cause of much mischief.

It would take too long to repeat all that Raphael told us he had observed, nor would it make altogether for our present purpose. Perhaps in another place we shall tell more about the things that are most profitable, especially the wise and sensible institutions that he observed among the civ-

5. As a matter of fact, the native Americans, when they traveled by water, used canoes made of hollow logs. Likewise, they did not understand the use of the wheel, the casting of iron, or the forging of steel—all of which are common among the Utopians and their South American neighbors. But More was not interested in authenticity at that level.

ilized nations. We asked him many eager questions about such things, and he answered us willingly enough. We made no inquiries, however, about monsters, which are the routine of travelers' tales. Scyllas, ravenous Celaenos, man-eating Lestrygonians[6] and that sort of monstrosity you can hardly avoid, but governments solidly established and sensibly ruled are not so common. While he told us of many ill-considered usages in these new-found nations, he also described quite a few other customs from which our own cities, nations, races, and kingdoms might take example in order to correct their errors. These I shall discuss in another place, as I said. Now I intend to relate only what he told us about the manners and laws of Utopians, first explaining the occasion that led him to speak of that commonwealth. Raphael had been talking very wisely about the many errors and also the wise institutions found both in that hemisphere and this (as many of both sorts in one place as in the other), speaking as shrewdly about the manners and governments of each place he had visited briefly as though he had lived there all his life. Peter was amazed.

"My dear Raphael," he said, "I'm surprised that you don't enter some king's service; for I don't know of a single prince who wouldn't be eager to employ you. Your learning, and your knowledge of various countries and men would entertain him while your advice and your supply of examples would be very helpful in the counsel chamber. Thus you might advance your own interest and be useful at the same time to all your relatives and friends."

"I am not much concerned about my relatives and friends," he replied, "because I consider that I have already done my duty by them. While still young and healthy, I distributed among my relatives and friends the possessions that most men do not part with till they are old and sick (and then only reluctantly, because they can no longer keep them). I think they should be content with this gift of mine, and not expect that for their sake I should enslave myself to any king whatever."

"Well said," Peter replied; "but I do not mean that you should be in servitude to any king, only in his service."

"The difference is only a matter of one syllable," Raphael replied.[7]

"All right," said Peter, "but whatever you call it, I do not see any other way in which you can be so useful to your friends or to the general public, apart from making yourself happier."

"Happier indeed!" exclaimed Raphael. "Would a way of life so absolutely repellent to my spirit make my life happier? As it is now, I live as

6. Scyllas and Lestrygonians are Homeric bogeys, from *Odyssey* 12 and 10, a monster and a nation that eat men alive. Celaeno was the leader of the Harpies that so tormented Phineus (*Aeneid* 3.211 ff.). This is Professor Hexter's "curious paragraph," that marks the transition to the interpolated "dialogue of counsel," which was written and inserted after Book Two was completed. See *More's Utopia: the Biography of an Idea* (Princeton, 1952), Part 1, Sec. 3.

7. The play on words here rendered by "service" and "servitude" takes the form in Latin of *servias* and *inservias*.