乌 托 邦

Utopia

More   莫 尔

Edited by

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中国政法大学出版社

MORE
Utopia

剑桥政治思想史原著系列

丛书编辑

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在政治理论领域，"剑桥政治思想史原著系列"作为主要的学生教科丛书，如今已牢固确立了其地位。本丛书旨在使学生能够获得从古希腊到 20 世纪初期西方政治思想史方面所有最为重要的原著。它囊括了所有著名的经典原著，但与此同时，它又扩展了传统的评价尺度，以便能够纳入范围广泛、不那么出名的作品。而在此之前，这些作品中有许多从未有过现代英文版本可资利用。只要可能，所选原著都会以完整而不删节的形式出版，其中的译作则是专门为本丛书的目的而安排。每一本书都有一个评论性的导言，加上历史年表、生平梗概、进一步阅读指南，以及必要的词汇表和原文注解。本丛书的最终目的是，为西方政治思想的整个发展脉络提供一个清晰的轮廓。

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Acknowledgements

Notes on the text

(1) *Documentation.* The paraphernalia of documentation have been kept to a minimum. Publication data for some standard works are given in Suggestions for further reading: in the footnotes, these works are cited only by author and title. With the exceptions noted in Suggestions for further reading, all citations of classical works are to the editions of the Loeb Classical Library. Neither editors' names nor publication data are given for these editions. References to the Bible are to the King James Version – except for the Apocrypha, where references are to the Vulgate.

(2) *Abbreviations. CW* = Yale *Complete Works of St Thomas More*; *CWE* = Toronto *Collected Works of Erasmus.*

(3) *Names.* Names of historical figures of More's era are spelled as in *Contemporaries of Erasmus: A Biographical Register of the Renaissance and Reformation.* The sole exception is Pieter Gillis, for whom we use the familiar anglicised form Peter Giles.

(4) *Modernisation.* Whenever sixteenth-century English is quoted, spelling (and sometimes punctuation) is silently modernised.

Introduction

The word 'utopia' entered the world with the publication of More's little book in December 1516. More coined it by fusing the Greek adverb *ou* – 'not' – with the noun *topos* – 'place' – and giving the resulting compound a Latin ending. Within the book's fiction, 'Noplace' is a newly discovered island somewhere in the New World. The meaning that 'utopia' has come to have as a common noun – a perfect society, or a literary account of one – seems authorised by the full title of the book, which is (translating from the Latin), 'Concerning the Best State of a Commonwealth and the New Island of Utopia'. The same Hellenist readers who recognised the etymology of 'Utopia' would also find this meaning suggested by the fact that the word puns on another Greek compound, *eutopia* – 'happy' or 'fortunate' place.

When we begin to read the book itself, though, the plausible supposition that *Utopia* is a utopia is rapidly undermined. First, the explorer whose account of the new island the book purports to record turns out to be named 'Hythloday' – another Greek compound, signifying 'expert in nonsense'. Second, the introductory, scene-setting pages are followed not by an account of Utopia but by a lengthy debate on the question whether it is worthwhile for Hythloday to enter practical politics by joining a king's council. Within this debate is another, recounted by Hythloday, on the problem of theft in More's England. Apart from a comic postlude to the second one, these two debates seem deadly serious, and they are powerfully written: but what are they doing in a book on the ideal common-

wealth? And when, at the beginning of the second part (or 'Book') of *Utopia*, we at last reach Hythloday's account of the new island, it is still not clear that we've reached eutopia.

The commonwealth of Utopia turns out to be a highly attractive place in some ways, but a highly unattractive one in others. No one goes hungry there, no one is homeless. The commonwealth is strikingly egalitarian. On the other hand, personal freedom is restricted in ways large and small. Discussing political issues outside the senate or the popular assembly is a capital offence; a citizen must get permission from the local magistrates to travel, and from spouse and father even to go for a walk in the country. In general, if Utopia anticipates the welfare democracies of our own time in many respects, the elaborate constraints imposed on its citizens also frequently put us in mind of modern totalitarian regimes. More's own society was rigidly hierarchical and highly regulated, so Utopia may not have seemed as restrictive to him as it does to us. Still, it is difficult to believe that he would have regarded as ideal all the features of Utopia that we find unattractive. Moreover, every Utopian proper noun embodies the same kind of learned joke as 'Utopia' and 'Hythloday'; and a few, at least, of the Utopian exploits and customs we are told about are hard to take seriously. Finally, at the end of the book More partly dissociates himself – or at least the dramatic character who goes by his name – from Utopia, saying that many of its laws and customs struck him as absurd, though there are many others that he would 'like rather than expect' to see in Europe.

These observations suggest three fundamental questions about *Utopia*. First, why did More invent a flawed commonwealth? It is easy to understand why a writer would want to create a fictional account of an ideal commonwealth, or a satire of a bad one. But what's the point of inventing a commonwealth that is partly good and partly bad? Second, what do the debates of Book I have to do with the account of Utopia in Book II, and with the subject of the best condition of the commonwealth? Third, how are we to understand the fact that More represents himself as disapproving of much of what Hythloday says – and that, by peppering the book with jokes, he even seems to deny its seriousness?

Utopia is endlessly enigmatic, and we don't pretend to have definitive answers to these questions, or to many others that the book prompts. But we can provide the necessary starting point for inter-

pretation, and offer some tentative answers to our questions, by set-
ting *Utopia* in the context of More's life and times, and the history of
political thought. In this process, the introduction provides the
broad outlines, and the annotations to the text fill in details.

II

More was born in London on 7 February 1478, or possibly 1477.[1] His
father, John More, was determined that his eldest son should follow
him into the legal profession. Thomas spent a few years at St
Anthony's School, learning the fundamentals of Latin grammar
and composition. At the age of about twelve, he was placed as a page
in the household of Henry VII's Lord Chancellor, John Morton.
(Morton was also Archbishop of Canterbury and, from 1493, a car-
dinal.) This placement was ideally suited to exposing More to the
ways of public life, and to securing him a powerful patron. After two
years at Morton's, the boy was sent to Oxford, presumably to
sharpen the skills in rhetoric and logic that would be important to a
legal career. He was then, at about sixteen, brought back to London
to begin legal training in the Inns of Court.

During his years as a law student, however, More came increas-
ingly under the influence of a group of literary scholars, central
figures of the emerging tradition of Renaissance humanism in Eng-
land. In the Renaissance, 'humanism' meant not so much a philo-
sophical position as a particular scholarly orientation. The term
'humanist' derives from *studia humanitatis*, a Ciceronian phrase that
came to designate a family of disciplines: grammar, rhetoric, his-
tory, poetry and moral philosophy.[2] As in the Middle Ages, Latin
remained the normal language of learning. Beginning in the four-
teenth century, humanists like Petrarch attempted to revive the clas-
sical form of that language; by the early fifteenth century, they had
undertaken a parallel attempt for classical Greek. More studied
Latin composition with the grammarian John Holt, and Greek
under William Grocyn. He also fell strongly under the influence of
John Colet. Like Grocyn, Colet had studied in Italy, the centre of
humanist learning. After his return to England in 1496, he gave

[1] See the most recent biography: Richard Marius, *Thomas More*, p. 7.
[2] See Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic, and Humanist Strains* (New York, 1961), pp. 8–23.

several series of lectures at Oxford on the epistles of St Paul, lectures that constituted the earliest English application of some of the exegetical and historiographical techniques of Italian humanism; later he became Dean of St Paul's Cathedral, and founded there the first of the humanist grammar schools in England. And in 1499, More made the acquaintance of the great Dutch humanist Erasmus, who in that year first visited England.

Indeed, at this period More seems to have been at least as intent on the pursuit of literary scholarship as of the law. He also seriously considered becoming a priest – doubtless in part because scholarship was almost exclusively the province of clerics. According to a biographical sketch of More that Erasmus wrote in 1519, for a time 'he applied his whole mind to the pursuit of piety, with vigils and fasts and prayer and similar exercises preparing himself for the priesthood' (*CWE*, VII, 21). In fact More seems to have tested his vocation not merely for the priesthood – a calling that, as Morton's example shows, need not have precluded a legal career – but also for a life of religious withdrawal. The biography by his son-in-law William Roper says that at about this time More lived for four years with the Carthusians, the strictest of the monastic orders.[3]

Eventually More made his choices. In late 1504 or early 1505, he closed the door to the priesthood and monasticism by marrying Jane Colt; nor is there any sign, in the period following his marriage, that he thought of abandoning the law. Given the necessity of supporting a growing family – Jane bore him four children before her death in 1511, after which More married a middle-aged widow, Alice Middleton – he could scarcely afford to entertain such thoughts.

In the decade following his first marriage, More rose rapidly in the legal profession. Roper says that he was a member of the Parliament of 1504, and he almost certainly represented the City of London in that of 1510. In the same year, he began to act as a city judge, having been appointed an Undersheriff of London. Increasingly he won assignments that drew on his literary and rhetorical as well as his legal skills. By August 1517, and perhaps somewhat earlier, he had entered Henry VIII's council.[4] His first conciliar assignment was as a diplomat, in a trade mission to Calais. And though his subsequent

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[3] *The Life of Sir Thomas More*, p. 198.
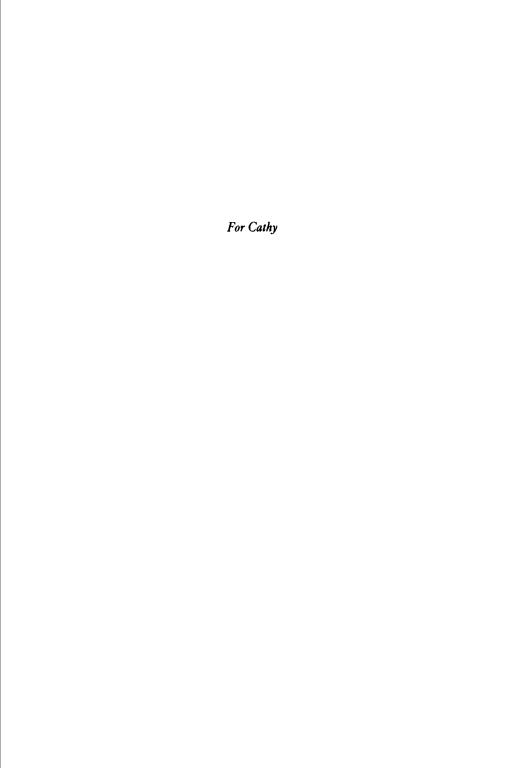[4] J. A. Guy, *The Public Career of Sir Thomas More*, pp. 6–7.

assignments spanned a broad range of activities, his main employment, before he became Lord Chancellor in 1529, was as secretary to the king. He also served frequently as the king's orator. And when Henry decided to write against Martin Luther (in 1520), More acted as his literary adviser and editor.

In the earlier part of his professional life, More also managed to carry out a substantial amount of independent scholarship and writing. It is striking how precisely his works of this period conform to the five associated disciplines of the *studia humanitatis*.[5] As grammarian (in the Renaissance understanding of the term), he translated-Greek poems, and four short works by the Greek ironist Lucian. As rhetorician, he wrote a declamation in reply to Lucian's *Tyrannicide*. (The declamation was a standard rhetorical exercise, a speech on a paradoxical or otherwise ingenious topic, often involving the impersonation of some historical or mythical figure.) Erasmus reports a lost dialogue, evidently in the spirit of a declamation, defending the community of wives advocated in Plato's *Republic*. Several of More's longer, polemical letters of these years belong to the rhetorical genre of the invective. As poet, he wrote, in addition to a few English poems, a large number of Latin epigrams. As historian, he practised the humanist genre of historical biography, in Latin and English versions of his unfinished *History of King Richard III* (a splendid, sardonic work that became the main source of Shakespeare's play), and in his translation of a biography of the fifteenth-century Italian philosopher Pico della Mirandola. As moral and political philosopher, he wrote *Utopia*. The publication of *Utopia* came near the end of this phase of More's literary career. For several years after 1516, he wrote little, other than what was required of him in his profession; and when he resumed writing books in the 1520s – works opposing the Lutheran 'heresy', and a series of devotional works – they no longer fitted the humanist categories.

[5] See P. O. Kristeller, 'Thomas More as a Renaissance Humanist', *Moreana*, no. 65–6 (1980), 5–22.

Contents

For Cathy

THOMAS MORE TO PETER GILES, GREETINGS[1]

My dear Peter Giles, I am almost ashamed to be sending you after nearly a year this little book about the Utopian commonwealth which I'm sure you expected in less than six weeks.[2] For, as you were well aware, I faced no problem in finding my materials, and had no reason to ponder the arrangement of them.[3] All I had to do was repeat what you and I together heard Raphael[4] describe. By the same token, there was no occasion for me to labour over the style, since what he said, being extempore and informal, couldn't be couched in fancy terms.[5] And besides, as you know, he's a man better versed in Greek than in Latin;[6] so that my language would be nearer the truth, the closer it approached to his casual simplicity. Truth in fact is the only quality at which I should have aimed, or did aim, in writing this book.

I confess, friend Peter, that having all these materials ready to hand made my own contribution so slight that there was hardly anything at all for me to do. Thinking through this topic from the beginning and disposing it in proper order might have demanded a lot of time and work even if a man were not deficient in talent and learning. And then if the matter had to be set forth with eloquence,

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[1] In the first edition of *Utopia*, this letter was called the 'preface' of the work; this is also its running title in the 1518 editions. On Giles (*c.* 1486–1533), see p. 9 and, on his role in the genesis of *Utopia*, Introduction, p. xvi.

[2] On the chronology, see Introduction, pp. xvi–xvii.

[3] Finding materials, disposing them in the proper order and couching them in the appropriate style are the three steps of literary composition (*inventio, dispositio, elocutio*), as that subject is treated in the classical textbooks of rhetoric and their medieval and Renaissance successors.

[4] I.e., Raphael Hythloday. His given name links him with the archangel Raphael, traditionally a guide and healer. (On his surname, see p. 5n.)

[5] Rhetorical theory identified three levels of style: the grand, the middle, and the plain. This sentence hints that *Utopia* is written in the plain style – according to theory, the appropriate one for philosophical dialogue.

[6] Knowledge of Greek was still uncommon among humanists in the early sixteenth century, and thus carried a good deal of status in their circles. Greek studies had been More's own preoccupation as a scholar in the decade leading up to *Utopia*.

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