

from *Utopia*

SIR THOMAS MORE

In Book One of Utopia, More describes how he and a friend met Raphael Hythlodaye, a sailor who has seen much of the newly discovered world. In their discussion Hythlodaye criticizes the evils of the poverty and the luxury he has seen in England. In Book Two, Hythlodaye tells about a faraway land called Utopia that does not have the inequalities or injustices of England. Here, everyone is educated and everyone has work. No one owns property in this land, and all that is produced is shared equally in a spirit of cooperation and reason. At this point, Hythlodaye talks about the various jobs men and women in Utopia have.

Occupations

Agriculture is the one pursuit which is common to all, both men and women, without exception. They are all instructed in it from childhood, partly by principles taught in school, partly by field trips to the farms closer to the city as if for recreation. Here they do not merely look on, but, as opportunity arises for bodily exercise, they do the actual work.

Besides agriculture (which is, as I said, common to all), each is taught one particular craft as his own. This is generally either wool-working or linen-making or masonry or metal-working or carpentry. There is no other pursuit which occupies any number worth mentioning. As for clothes, these are of one and the same pattern throughout the island and down the centuries, though there is a distinction between the sexes and between the single and married. The garments are comely to the eye, convenient for bodily movement, and fit for wear in heat and cold. Each family, I say, does its own tailoring.

Of the other crafts, one is learned by each person, and not the men only, but the women too. The latter as the weaker sex have the lighter occupations and generally work wool and flax.¹ To the men are committed the remaining more laborious crafts. For the most part, each is brought up in his father's craft, for which most have a natural inclination. But if anyone is attracted to another occupation, he is transferred by adoption to a family pursuing that craft for which he has a liking. Care is taken not only by his father but by the authorities, too, that he will be assigned to a grave and honorable householder. Moreover, if anyone after being thoroughly taught one craft desires another also, the same permission is given. Having acquired both, he practices his choice unless the city has more need of the one than of the other.

1. **flax:** plants with stem fibers that are spun into linen thread.

The chief and almost the only function of the syphogrants² is to manage and provide that no one sit idle, but that each apply himself industriously to his trade, and yet that he be not wearied like a beast of burden with constant toil from early morning till late at night. Such wretchedness is worse than the lot of slaves, and yet it is almost everywhere the life of workingmen—except for the Utopians. The latter divide the day and night into twenty-four equal hours and assign only six to work. There are three before noon, after which they go to dinner. After dinner,³ when they have rested for two hours in the afternoon, they again give three to work and finish up with supper. Counting one o'clock as beginning at midday, they go to bed about eight o'clock, and sleep claims eight hours.

The intervals between the hours of work, sleep, and food are left to every man's discretion, not to waste in revelry or idleness, but to devote the time free from work to some other occupation according to taste. These periods are commonly devoted to intellectual pursuits. For it is their custom that public lectures are daily delivered in the hours before daybreak. Attendance is compulsory only for those who have been specially chosen to devote themselves to learning. A great number of all classes, however, both males and females, flock to hear the lectures, some to one and some to another, according to their natural inclination. But if anyone should prefer to devote this time to his trade, as is the case with many minds which do not reach the level for any of the higher intellectual disciplines, he is not hindered; in fact, he is even praised as useful to the commonwealth.

After supper they spend one hour in recreation, in summer in the gardens, in winter in the common halls in which they have their

meals. There they either play music or entertain themselves with conversation. Dice and that kind of foolish and ruinous game they are not acquainted with. They do play two games not unlike chess. The first is a battle of numbers in which one number plunders another. The second is a game in which the vices fight a pitched battle with the virtues. In the latter is exhibited very cleverly, to begin with, both the strife of the vices with one another and their concerted opposition to the virtues; then,

2. **syphogrants** (sī' fō grants): magistrates who oversee thirty households each and represent them in the Senate.

3. Dinner was usually served between 10:00 A.M. and 11:00 A.M. in England.



THE EFFECTS OF GOOD GOVERNMENT ON THE CITY Ambrogio Lorenzetti early 14th century Palazzo Pubblico, Siena/Scala/Art Resource, New York.

what vices are opposed to what virtues, by what forces they assail them openly, by what stratagems they attack them indirectly, by what safeguards the virtues check the power of the vices, by what arts they frustrate their designs; and, finally, by what means the one side gains the victory.

summarize

How do Utopians spend their time in a typical day?

But here, lest you be mistaken, there is one point you must examine more closely. Since they devote but six hours to work, you might

possibly think the consequence to be some scarcity of necessities. But so far is this from being the case that the aforesaid time is not only enough but more than enough for a supply of all that is requisite for either the necessity or the convenience of living. This phenomenon you too will understand if you consider how large a part of the population in other countries exists without working. First, there are almost all the women, who constitute half the whole; or, where the women are busy, there as a rule the men are snoring in their stead. Besides, how great and how lazy is the crowd of priests and so-called religious! Add to them all the rich, especially the masters of estates, who are commonly termed gentlemen

Words
to Know
and Use

stratagem (strat' ə jəm) *n.* any trick or scheme for achieving some purpose
phenomenon (fə nām' ə nən) *n.* any fact or experience that is apparent to the senses

and noblemen. Reckon with them their retainers⁴—I mean, that whole rabble of good-for-nothing swashbucklers. Finally, join in the lusty and sturdy beggars who make some disease an excuse for idleness. You will certainly find far less numerous than you had supposed those whose labor produces all the articles that mortals require for daily use.

infer

What is More's attitude toward people who do not work?

Now estimate how few of those who do work are occupied in essential trades. For, in a society where we make money the standard of everything, it is necessary to practice many crafts which are quite vain and superfluous, ministering only to luxury and licentiousness.⁵ Suppose the host of those who now toil were distributed over only as few crafts as the few needs and conveniences demanded by nature. In the great abundance of commodities which must then arise, the prices set on them would be too low for the craftsmen to earn their livelihood by their work. But suppose all those fellows who are now busied with unprofitable crafts, as well as all the lazy and idle throng, any one of whom now consumes as much of the fruits of other men's labors as any two of the workingmen, were all set to work and indeed to useful work. You can easily see how small an allowance of time would be enough and to spare for the production of all that is required by necessity or comfort (or even pleasure, provided it be genuine and natural).

After the narrator describes all the occupations of Utopia, he goes on to describe

other aspects of life, including family relations, travel, politics, war, and religion. Some of his concluding comments are presented below.

Now I have described to you, as exactly as I could, the structure of that commonwealth which I judge not merely the best but the only one which can rightly claim the name of a commonwealth. Outside Utopia, to be sure, men talk freely of the public welfare—but look after their private interests only. In Utopia, where nothing is private, they seriously concern themselves with public affairs. Assuredly in both cases they act reasonably. For, outside Utopia, how many are there who do not realize that, unless they make some separate provision for themselves, however flourishing the commonwealth, they will themselves starve? For this reason, necessity compels them to hold that they must take account of themselves rather than of the people, that is, of others.

Why do people outside of Utopia have to worry about themselves first?

clarify

On the other hand, in Utopia, where everything belongs to everybody, no one doubts, provided only that the public granaries are well filled, that the individual will lack nothing for his private use. The reason is that the distribution of goods is not niggardly.⁶ In Utopia

4. **retainers:** servants.

5. **licentiousness** (lī sen' shəs nes): a disregard for morals.

6. **niggardly** (nig' ərd lē): stingy.

Words to Know and Use

superfluous (sə pur' flū əs) *adj.* not needed; unnecessary; irrelevant
commodity (kə mād' ə tē) *n.* anything bought and sold; any article of commerce
flourishing (flur' ish' ŋ) *adj.* prosperous; successful

there is no poor man and no beggar. Though no man has anything, yet all are rich.

For what can be greater riches for a man than to live with a joyful and peaceful mind, free of all worries—not troubled about his

great-grandsons, great-great-grandsons, and all the long line of their descendants that gentlefolk anticipate? Then take into account the fact that there is no less provision for those who are now helpless but once worked than for those who are still working.

At this point I should like anyone to be so bold as to compare this fairness with the so-called justice prevalent in other nations, among which, upon my soul, I cannot discover the slightest trace of justice and fairness. What brand of justice is it that any nobleman whatsoever or goldsmith-banker or moneylender or, in fact, anyone else from among those who either do no work at all or whose work is of a kind not very essential to the commonwealth, should attain a life of luxury and grandeur on the basis of his idleness or his nonessential work? In the meantime, the common laborer, the carter, the carpenter, and the farmer perform work so hard and continuous that beasts of burden could scarcely endure it and work so essential that no commonwealth could last even one year without it. Yet they earn such scanty fare and lead such a miserable life that the condition of beasts of burden might seem far preferable. The latter do not have to work so incessantly nor is their food much worse (in fact, sweeter to their taste) nor do they entertain any fear for the future. The workmen, on the other hand, not only have to toil and suffer without return or profit in the present but agonize over the thought of an indigent old age. Their daily wage is too scanty to suffice even for the day: much less is there an excess and surplus that daily can be laid by for their needs in old age.

Now is not this an unjust and ungrateful commonwealth? It lavishes great rewards on so-called gentlefolk and banking goldsmiths and the rest of that kind, who are either idle or

SIR THOMAS MORE Hans Holbein the Younger © The Frick Collection, New York.

food or harassed by the querulous demands of his wife or fearing poverty for his son or worrying about his daughter's dowry, but feeling secure about the livelihood and happiness of himself and his family: wife, sons, grandsons,

Words
to Know
and Use

querulous (kwer' yoo les) *adj.* complaining; peevish
incessantly (in ses' ent le) *adv.* constantly; endlessly
indigent (in' di jent) *adj.* in poverty; needy; poor
suffice (sa fis') *v.* to be enough; to be adequate

mere parasites and purveyors of empty pleasures. On the contrary, it makes no benevolent provision for farmers, colliers, common laborers, carters, and carpenters without whom there would be no commonwealth at all. After it has misused the labor of their prime and after they are weighed down with age and disease and are in utter want, it forgets all their sleepless nights and all the great benefits received at their hands and most ungratefully requites them with a most miserable death.

What is worse, the rich every day extort a part of their daily allowance from the poor not only by private fraud but by public law. Even before they did so it seemed unjust that persons deserving the best of the commonwealth should have the worst return. Now they have further distorted and debased the right and, finally, by making laws, have palmed it off as justice. Consequently, when I consider and turn over in my mind the state of all commonwealths flourishing anywhere today, so help me God, I can see nothing else than a kind of conspiracy of the rich, who are aiming at their own interests under the name and title of the commonwealth. They invent and devise all ways and means by which, first, they may keep

without fear of loss all that they have amassed by evil practices and, secondly, they may then purchase as cheaply as possible and abuse the toil and labor of all the poor. These devices become law as soon as the rich have once decreed their observance in the name of the public—that is, of the poor also!

Yet when these evil men with insatiable greed have divided up among themselves all the goods which would have been enough for all the people, how far they are from the happiness of the Utopian commonwealth! In Utopia all greed for money was entirely removed with the use of money. What a mass of troubles was then cut away! What a crop of crimes was then pulled up by the roots! Who does not know that fraud, theft, rapine, quarrels, disorders, brawls, seditions, murders, treasons, poisonings, which are avenged rather than restrained by daily executions, die out with the destruction of money? Who does not know that fear, anxiety, worries, toils, and sleepless nights will also perish at the same time as money? What is more, poverty, which alone money seemed to make poor, forthwith would itself dwindle and disappear if money were entirely done away with everywhere. ❧

*Words
to Know
and Use*

purveyor (pər vā' ēr) *n.* one who furnishes or supplies
benevolent (bə nev' ə lənt) *adj.* doing good; kindly; charitable
extort (ek' sɔrt) *v.* to get money or goods from someone by violence, threats, or misuse of authority
insatiable (ɪn sə' shə bəl) *adj.* very greedy; constantly wanting more

Responding to Reading

First Impressions

1. Do you think you would like to live in Utopia? Why or why not?

Second Thoughts

2. How does your list of important jobs compare to the jobs that are regarded as essential in Utopia? Why might your list differ?
3. Most Utopians learn their father's craft, and most workers follow the same daily schedule. Is this kind of system desirable? Why or why not?

Think about

- how this system might benefit and hurt society and individuals
 - the potential conflict between society's needs and an individual's needs
4. What do you think of the Utopians' leisure activities?
 5. Why do the Utopians do away with money? What do you think of this idea?
 6. Using the chart you made contrasting Utopia and England, discuss what More finds wrong with the English social system.
 7. How would More define responsibility? In his view, for whom is society responsible? Do you agree? Explain your opinion.

Broader Connections

8. What kinds of problems might arise in a community that places the common good above the needs and desires of the individual? Should we try to turn our own society into a modern utopia? Explain.

Literary Concept: Identifying Tone

In literature, **tone** describes the attitude that a writer takes toward the subject. The tone of a work is communicated by the writer's choice of words and details. A writer's tone may be sarcastic, playful, bitter, objective, serious, or any other attitude. Tone may be difficult to identify because readers have to interpret what the words suggest about the writer's attitude. Readers may disagree in their interpretation.

More's tone varies, depending on whom he is describing. His tone toward England's working poor is one of sympathy: "The common laborer, the carter, the carpenter, and the farmer perform work *so hard and continuous* that *beasts of burden could scarcely endure it.*" The words shown in italics indicate pity yet admiration for the workers. Find descriptions of the rich in the second part of the selection, and identify the tone used.