

Excerpt from Thomas More's *Utopia*, 1515

. . . To understand their way of life fully we must look at one point more carefully. They allot only six hours to labor, and you might think that a scarcity of essential goods would result. Actually their working hours are sufficient to provide not only an abundance, but even a superabundance of all the necessities and conveniences of life. You will easily understand this if you consider how large a part of the population in other countries is idle. In the first place, the women (and they are half the whole population) usually do not work, or if they do, their husbands lie snoring. Secondly, there is the multitude of priests and so-called religious men, as numerous as they are idle. Add to these all the rich men, especially great landlords, who are commonly called well-born and noble. Add their henchmen, the whole flock of swaggering bullies. Reckon in with these the strong and lusty beggars, who go about feigning some disease to excuse their laziness. You will find that actual number of workers who supply the needs of mankind is much smaller than you would think. And now consider how few of these workers are employed in really necessary work. Because we measure values by money, we have to carry on many superfluous trades to support luxury and wantonness. If the multitude of our workers produced only what men need for good living, there would be such an abundance of goods that prices would go down and workmen would prosper. You can easily imagine how little time would be enough to produce the goods that man's needs and convenience demand (and his pleasure too if it were true and natural pleasure), if only the workers in useless trades were placed in worthwhile occupations and all the idlers who languish in sloth but eat twice as much as laborers were put to work on useful tasks.

THEIR MORAL PHILOSOPHY

The Utopians wonder that there is any man who delights in the faint gleam of a little gem when he can look at some star or even the sun itself. They marvel that there is any man so foolish as to think himself the nobler because of the fine texture of his woolen clothing. No matter how fine the thread, a sheep once wore it, and the sheep was a sheep still for all its wearing it. They wonder that gold, so useless a thing in itself, is everywhere so highly esteemed that man himself, through whom and by whose use it obtains its value, should be less revered than it. And they do not understand why a blockhead with no more brains than a post, and bad as well as stupid, should have many wise and good men serving him, only because he happens to own a great sum of gold. If he should lose all his money to some utterly worthless fellow in his household, either by some chance or by a legal trick (which can produce changes as great as chance does), he would soon become one of this fellow's servants, as though he belonged to the money and was bound to follow its fortune. . . .

The Utopians have absorbed these and similar attitudes partly from their education, for they are brought up amidst customs and institutions quite opposed to such folly. They have also acquired these notions from their learning and literature. . . .

In their moral philosophy, they argue much as we do. They consider what things are truly good, both for the body and the mind, and whether it is proper to call external things good or only the gifts of the mind. They inquire into the nature of virtue and pleasure. But their chief concern is about human happiness, whether it consists of one thing or of many. They seem much inclined to the view that all or most of human happiness lies in pleasure. And what may seem strange, they seek support for their pleasure philosophy from religion, which is serious and stern, somewhat severe and forbidding. For they never discuss happiness without combining the rational principles of

philosophy with principles taken from religion. They think any inquiry concerning true happiness weak and defective unless it is based on religion.

The religious principles are these: that the soul of man is immortal and by divine beneficence has been ordained for happiness; and after this life there are rewards appointed for our virtues and good works and punishment for our sins. They think that although these beliefs belong to religion, it is in accordance with reason that they be held and acknowledged. They do not hesitate to assert that if these were rejected, no one would be so stupid as not to discern that he ought to seek pleasure regardless of right and wrong. . . . For what can one hope for after life without pleasure, that is, after a miserable life, if there is no reward after death?

The Utopians do not believe that there is happiness in all pleasures, but only in good and honest pleasures. To such, they believe, our nature is drawn as to its highest good by virtue itself. The opposite point of view is that happiness consists of virtue alone.

They define virtue as living according to nature. . . . they conclude that nature herself prescribes a life of joy (that is, of pleasure) as the goal of life. That is what they mean by saying that virtue is living according to nature. And as nature bids us mutually to make our lives merry and delightful, so she also bids us again and again not to destroy or diminish other people's pleasure in seeking our own. . . .

Thus after weighing the matter carefully, they conclude that all our actions, and among these our virtues, ultimately look toward pleasure and happiness as their end. They call pleasure all the acts and states of body or mind in which man naturally delights. But they include in their concept of pleasure only those appetites to which nature leads us. And they maintain that nature leads us only to the delights approved by right reason as well as by the senses, that is, only those delights by which we neither injure others, nor lose a greater pleasure for a less, nor suffer for later. Those attractions which are inconsistent with nature and which men call delights only by the emptiest of fictions (as if men could change their nature by changing their name), these things they say diminish happiness rather than increase it. For men whose minds are filled up with a false idea of pleasure have no room left for true pleasures and genuine delight. . . .

The Utopians . . . discriminate several kinds of true pleasures, some belonging to the mind, others to the body. Those of the mind are knowledge and the delight which comes from contemplation of the truth; also the pleasant recollection of a well-spent life and the assured hope of future well-being.

They divide bodily pleasures into two sorts. The first kind is that which fills the senses with immediate pleasure. This occurs when the body's parts are renewed and refreshed by food and drink, or when some excess in the body is discharged, as in bowel movements, procreation, or rubbing and scratching some itch.

There is a second kind of bodily pleasure that neither repairs nor relieves our bodies, but excites our senses with some hidden but unmistakable force and turns them inwardly upon themselves. Such is the pleasure that comes from music.

Another form of bodily pleasure consists of a quiet, sound condition of the body, its general wellbeing when disturbed by no disease. This condition in itself gives inward pleasure, though it is not excited by anything external. Although it affects the senses less strongly than the obvious satisfaction of eating and drinking, yet many count this the greater pleasure. Most of the Utopians say that this is the foundation of all pleasures, since it alone makes a calm and desirable condition. If it is lacking, there is no chance for any other pleasure. Mere absence of pain they call insensibility, not pleasure, unless it is a state of health.

In times past they carried on a vigorous controversy as to whether assured and tranquil health is really a pleasure, since it only makes itself felt when it is threatened by its opposite. Today they all agree that health is the greatest of all bodily pleasures....

Of all the pleasures they especially embrace those of the mind, for they esteem them most highly, thinking they arise from the exercise of the virtues and from the consciousness of a good life. Among bodily pleasures they give first place to health. They hold that the pleasure of eating and drinking and all other delights of the body are desirable only as they maintain health. They are not delightful in themselves, but only as they resist the encroachments of sickness. A wise man thinks it better to ward off sickness than to seek medicine, and to overcome troubles rather than to seek comfort. So it is better to reject these pleasures of sense than to be captivated by them. If any man thinks he is happy in the midst of these pleasures, then he must confess that he would be the happiest of men if he should spend his whole life in an unending round of hunger, thirst, itching, followed by eating, drinking, scratching and rubbing. Who cannot see that such a life is not only vile, but miserable? . . . So the Utopians think pleasures of this sort are not to be highly valued, except in so far as they are necessary to life. . . .

These are their ideas of virtue and pleasure, and they think that human reason can find none truer, unless some heavenly revelation should inspire more sublime ideas in men. I have no time to consider whether they are right in these views or not, nor do I think it necessary, as I only undertook to give an account of their customs, not to defend them. Whatever the validity of these principles, I am sure that nowhere is there a more excellent people or a happier commonwealth.

THEIR CARE OF THE SICK AND EUTHANASIA

The sick, as I have said, they tend carefully, omitting no medicine or food that will restore them to health. They relieve those who suffer from some incurable disease by sitting and talking with them and by alleviating their pain in every possible way. But if a person suffers from a disease which is both incurable and continually excruciating, the priests and magistrates come and urge him to make the decision not to nourish such a painful disease any longer. He is now unequal to all the duties of life, a burden to himself and to others, having really outlived himself. They tell him not to hesitate to die when life is such a torment, but in confidence of a better life after death, to deliver himself from the scourge and imprisonment of living, or let others release him. This, they say, he would do wisely, for by death he would lose nothing but suffering. Since he would be acting on the advice of the priests, who are the interpreters of God's will, he would act rightly and virtuously. Those who are moved by these arguments either starve themselves to death of their own accord or through the aid of an opiate die painlessly. If a man is not persuaded to this course, they do not force him to it against his will, nor do they lessen their care of him. To choose death under these circumstances is honorable. But they dishonor a man who takes his own life without the approval of the priests and senate. They consider him unworthy of decent burial and throw his body unburied and disgraced into a ditch.