2

THE RENAISSANCE
(1485-1625)

THE PURITAN AGE
(1625-60)

Utopia

'Utopia: Any real or imaginary society, place, state, etc. considered to be perfect or ideal.'
Collins English Dictionary

▼ Italian artist, *Prospettiva architettonica*, late 1500s. Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore.

❶ **Man has always dreamt of an ideal world in which to live. Discuss in pairs how your ideal world would be, and compare your ideas with the rest of the class.**

What would you include in your world and what would you omit? Make a list.

❷ **The Christian Bible depicts an ideal world in The Garden of Eden, and Paradise is an ideal place which one can enter after having led a true Christian life. Do you think Bosch's 'Earthly paradise' depicts an ideal world?**

▲ Hieronymus Bosch, *Garden of Earthly Delights*, c. 1500. Museo del Prado, Madrid.

❸ **With the Hindu Moksha and Buddhist Nirvana Utopia is not a place but an internal state of mind achieved through meditation. Have you ever tried meditating to reach your Utopia?**


◄ A statue of Buddha. Lanta, China.

Over time political ideals have also been associated with Utopia, such as a utopian socialism – seen as a response against the surge of capitalism. While at the opposite end of the political spectrum, capitalism represented an economic Utopia for many with its foundations based on private enterprise and personal initiative.

A good example of this can found in the 'model' communities built in the 19th century by the two industrialists Robert Owen and Sir Titus Salt. During a time of great industrial growth they built self-contained communities around their textile mills which not only supplied the people with work and housing but also with schools, churches and gardens.

❹ **The aim of these social experiments was to give a better quality of life to their workers. But were Owen and Salt simply opportunists – keeping their workers happy to improve production and guarantee a certain amount of control over them? What do you think?**
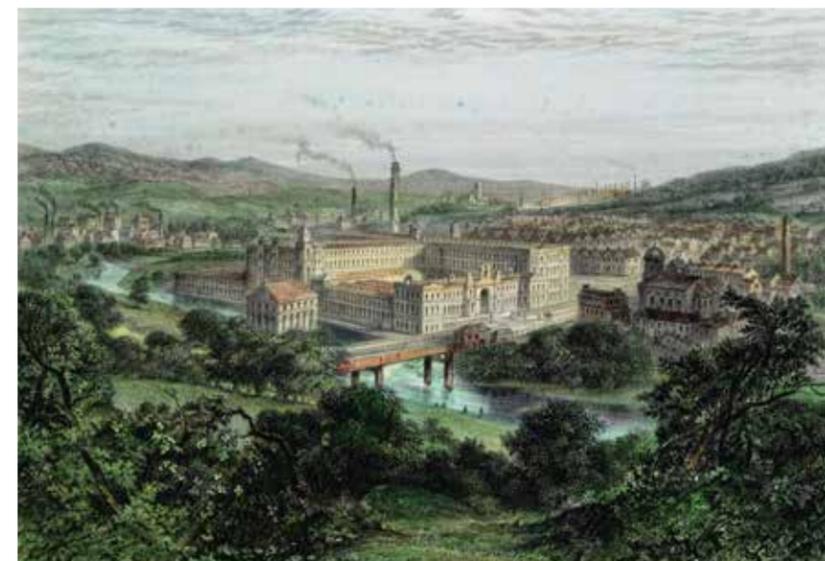
◄ Saltaire Village, Yorkshire. Built by Robert Owen and Sir Titus Salt.

❺ For some people science and technology are the only means of improving our society to obtain anything close to a utopian existence. Through science and technology, they feel, all suffering and illness will eventually be eliminated and every human need will be satisfied.
'Star Trek – a Utopia of the 60s?' Science and technology for the perfect world or a return to basics. What do you think?

▶ *Star Trek* (1996) directed by G. Roddenbury.

❻ Again, as with politics, there is a contrasting school of thought to this. Those who feel that the past was a kind of 'Golden Age' in which man lived in a primitive and uncomplicated state, free from stress and with only essential needs which could be easily satisfied. Do you think that in today's society there is often a nostalgia for the past, and sometimes even for the primitive?

❼ After these different examples do you think it would ever be possible for man to create a real Utopia? If not, what benefits can be gained from seeking one? Discuss.

▲ Lucas Cranach the Elder, *The Golden Age*, c. 1530. Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlugen, Munich.

Sir Thomas More
Utopia (1516)

The word 'Utopia' was introduced into the English language by Sir Thomas More (1478?-1535) in his work by that name. The word was coined from the Greek 'ou-topos', meaning 'no place'. At the same time 'eu-topos' means 'a good place' consequently More was raising a fundamental question: 'Can the perfect place/society ever be created?'

Who was Sir Thomas More?

In 1521 More was knighted by Henry VIII and in 1529 he was assigned the most important political position in England, that of **Lord Chancellor**. This same king, however, also had him imprisoned and executed in the Tower of London in 1535. Sir Thomas More was an extremely well-educated and a highly religious Catholic and he could not accept the king's decision to make himself head of the Church of England following the schism with Rome. For this he resigned from his position of Lord Chancellor, stating just before his execution: '**The King's good servant, but God's first.**'

Utopia (1516)

During his lifetime Sir Thomas More gained fame and popularity above all in Europe due to his influential work, *Utopia*, which his friend, the Dutch scholar Desiderius Erasmus, helped him to publish. His main aim with this work was to point out the contrasts between a state which is rational and ordered and the Europe of his day, in which he saw every member of society obssessed with acquiring power and accumulating wealth. More's *Utopia* was a fictional island in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean and an example of social and political perfection. More presents his work as a dialogue between himself and a traveller he meets known as Hythloday – which in Greek means 'babbler' (someone who talks a great deal).
In the following extract Hythloday is explaining to More how his utopian commonwealth is based on a form of communism. We have used a modernised version of the text by Gilbert Burnet.

◀ The map of Utopia from the first edition of *Utopia*.

Utopia

1. **goods:** beni.
2. **want:** bisogno.
3. **latter:** quest'ultimi (cioè i poveri).
4. **crafty:** furbi.
5. **humble:** umili.
6. **fair:** corretto.
7. **plenty:** abbondanza.
8. **willing:** disposto.
9. **stung:** colpiti da.
10. **right:** diritto.
11. **treachery:** slealtà.
12. **bloodshed:** spargimento di sangue.

Hythloday: 'The one and only way to establish the wealth of a community is for equality of all things to be introduced and established. And I think this is not possible if every man's goods[1] are his own, for where every man, under various titles and pretences, takes for himself as much as he can, so that a few men divide all the wealth among themselves, then even in the richest and most fruitful country, the rest of the nation will live in poverty and want[2]. And usually it is these latter[3] who deserve to be wealthy more than the rich, who are usually avaricious, crafty[4] and unproductive. On the other hand the poor are humble[5], simple, and by their daily labour produce more for the state than for themselves. And so I am convinced that no fair[6] and just distribution of things will ever be achieved, and that human beings will never live in perfect wealth, until private property is abolished and forbidden.'

More: 'I don't agree with you…for I think that men will never live in plenty[7] where all things are owned in common. For how can there be an abundant production of goods, or of anything, where no one is willing[8] to work? Since no one would have to work for his own profit, everyone would become lazy by relying on others to work for him. Then, when men are stung[9] by poverty, and yet no law or right[10] allows them to defend and keep for themselves what they have earned with the labour of their own hands, then is it not inevitable that there will be continual treachery[11] and bloodshed[12]?'

✎ **OVER TO YOU**

❶ **Answer the following questions according to Hythloday.**

1. What is the only way to ensure wealth for everyone?
2. Who usually works most in a community?
3. Who usually has the greatest wealth?
4. How does Hythloday describe the poor?
5. How does he describe the rich?

❷ **Complete Sir Thomas More's argument.**

1. More says everyone will become lazy because _____ .
2. There will be treachery and bloodshed if _____ .

❸ **Who is saying the following?**

'It is better to work for oneself and earn one's own profit.'
☐ Hythloday
☐ More

❹ **In pairs, can you find a strong and weak point in both arguments?**

Sir Francis Bacon
The New Atlantis (1627)

Another Utopia

Although there are certain similarities between the careers of **Sir Thomas More** and **Sir Francis Bacon** (1561-1626) (Bacon was also knighted by James I in 1603 and became Lord Chancellor in 1618), their ideas of a utopian existence **are fundamentally different**. More's society was **pagan**, against war and private wealth. More's aim was to create a stark contrast with the Europe of his day. **Bacon's society**, on the other hand, is **Christian** and driven by a desire to understand God and his creations through scientific study. The word 'science' in Sir Francis Bacon's time had very different connotations to the word we use today. It was associated with knowledge, but also 'general truths'. Yet in a century of exploration (Amerigo Vespucci) and revolutionary astronomical thought (Galileo), **man's sense of the universe and his fields of knowledge** began to be questioned. Gradually new empirical attitudes towards these long-held truths brought man out of his 'comfort zone' of simply accepting and encouraged him to see reason at work.
An affirmation could no longer be accepted as true just because it had been stated as such by an unquestionable authority. More and more people, whom we may now refer to as the **first modern-day scientists**, began to question these authorities. Sir Francis Bacon was one of these. He believed that the methods and results of science practised at the time were wrong.
Although best remembered for his *Essayes* (1597) his main aim in life was to dedicate himself to the **discovery of truth** and to serve his country and his church. Scientific truth, he felt, could only be obtained by a more systematic and methodological approach. In his unfinished work *The New Atlantis* Bacon describes his ambition to create a college of study to benefit mankind, 'a college instituted for the interpreting of nature and the producing of great and marvellous works for the benefit of men', as quoted in one preface. This was Bacon's idea of *Utopia*. He called this college Salomon's House and placed it on the imaginary island of Bensalem. In this extract the director of Salomon's House is describing the college.
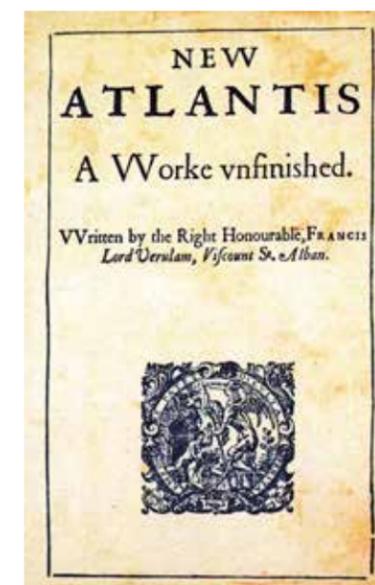
▲ Frontispiece to *New Atlantis*.

▲ Engraving from *New Atlantis*.

The New Atlantis

1. **end:** scopo.
2. **enlarging the bounds of Human Empire:** aumentare il potere dell'uomo sulla natura.
3. **divers:** diversi.
4. **meteors:** fenomeni metereologici.
5. **hail:** grandine.
6. **fair:** belli.
7. **arefaction:** l'asciugamento.
8. **sinews:** tendini, nervi.
9. **orchards:** frutteti.
10. **bear:** produrre.
11. **afar off:** lontani.
12. **feigned:** che le distanze ingannano.
13. **spectacles:** occhiali.

1

'The End[1] of our Foundation is the knowledge of Causes and secret motions of things, and the enlarging of the bounds of Human Empire[2], to the effecting of all things possible.[...]

2

'We have high towers, the highest about half a mile in height, and some of them likewise set upon high mountains[...]. We use these towers, according to their several heights and situations, for insolation, refrigeration, conservation, and for the view of divers[3] meteors[4], as winds, rain, snow, hail[5], and some of the fiery meteors also.[...]

3

'We have also fair[6] and large baths of several mixtures for the cure of diseases and the restoring of man's body from arefaction[7], and others for the confirming of it in strength of sinews[8], vital parts, and the very juice and substance of the body.

4

'We have also large and various orchards[9] and gardens[...] where trees and berries are set whereof we make divers kinds of drinks[...]. And we make (by art) in the same orchards and gardens trees and flowers to come earlier or later than their seasons, and to come up and bear[10] more speedily than by their natural course they do.[...] And many of them we so order as they become of medicinal use.'[...]

5

'We have also perspective-houses, where we make demonstrations of all lights and radiations, and of all colours[...]. We procure means of seeing objects afar off[11], as in the heaven and remote places, and represent things near as afar off and things afar off as near, making feigned[12] distances. We have also helps for the sight, far above spectacles[13] and glasses in use.'[...]

6

'We have also engine-houses, where are prepared engines and instruments for all sorts of motions. There we imitate and practise to make swifter motions than any you have[...]. We imitate also flights of birds; we have some degrees of flying in the air; we have ships and boats for going under water...'

OVER TO YOU

❶ **Go through the text and write in the chart the number of the paragraph (1 paragraph is used twice) which seems to be describing the following features of our modern-day societies.**

Modern Features	Paragraph number
1. Telescopes and magnifying apparatus	....
2. Food conservation	....
3. Spas	....
4. Aviation and engineering works	....
5. Observatories/meteorological centres	....
6. Selective crop growth and herbal remedies	....

❷ **Sir Francis Bacon's work was groundbreaking in that it not only influenced such writers as Diderot, Hobbes, Hume and Swift but gave rise to the formation of the Royal Society, thus, in a way, fulfilling Bacon's dream of an institution dedicated to learning and the pursuit of knowledge. Find out when the Royal Society was formed.**