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Utopia 500 An Introduction

Michael P. Malloy

The University of the Pacific, McGeorge School of Law

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An Introduction

*Michael P. Malloy**

Over almost 50 years of reading, writing about, and lecturing on Thomas More's *Utopia*, I have finally come to a realization—there is always something new and exciting to learn about the man, the lawyer, and his iconic work. The year 2016, the quincentennial of the first printing of *Utopia*, prompted McGeorge School of Law to launch UTOPIA500, an interdisciplinary, multi-sited series of events honoring More and all that is new and exciting about his book. *Utopia* and the personal history of its author embody interdisciplinarity itself, making unique contributions to political philosophy, law, literature, ethics, and religious studies.

In More himself, patron saint of lawyers, we have a stark example of the tension between personal and professional responsibilities, which is also reflected in the contrasting positions taken on many critical issues by the book's two principal characters Hythloday (a "peddler of lies") and More—or perhaps we should say "More," very definitely in quotation marks. Both as a work of political philosophy and as a work of literature, UTOPIA has spawned themes and traditions that have rolled forward through the centuries since its initial publication. Indeed, the book has achieved the distinction of having its central image and idea—*the country of Utopia*—detach itself from the book and become a cultural artifact known to so many who have never read the book—what Eco would call the semiosis of "utopia" as an image or concept.

UTOPIA500 consisted of a series of interrelated events and products emerging over much of 2016. The principal events were as follows. First, the *Law and Literature Seminar Sessions* from January to April 2016 offered McGeorge law students the opportunity to explore *Utopia* and many works that were influenced by it and which in turn contribute to the utopian thematic tradition.

The seminar also served as the venue for the second important element of UTOPIA500, seriatim lectures by noted history, legal, and literature scholars. Rather than a traditional one-date, one-pot symposium feeding a special issue of the *Law Review*, UTOPIA500 hosted a series of single-speaker events devoted to an aspect of the quincentennial theme chosen by the speaker. UTOPIA500 also sponsored lectures at Oxford University and at the Athens International Conference on Law in July 2016.

* Distinguished Professor of Law, McGeorge School of Law, University of the Pacific. The author thanks the Bishop Eustace Preparatory School for standing back and letting him do what he did, and his father for offering him his first copy of *Utopia* so many lives ago.

The seriatim lectures provided the material for the third important element of UTOPIA500, this symposium issue of the Law Review. The six articles that follow offer valuable points of entry into the conceptual territory of Utopia. The book is a vital contribution to the law and literature movement—a provocative and ironic tour of an “ideal” country written by a practicing lawyer with an unexpectedly wicked sense of humor and a wry perspective on law, lawyers, and society. Examining the work prompts some reflection on competing approaches to literary analysis and criticism, whether to seek out an author’s intentions or the resonance that a work has among its readers over time. It also has much to say about changing perceptions of human nature and personhood over time. Further, taken as a literary artifact, it has long been popular in American literary and legal circles, perhaps influencing our intuitive understanding about what would qualify as a good society. That influence persists in our contemporary discourse about such issues as income insecurity and equity, and even in our fundamental perceptions of constitutional values.

As you will discover in the articles that follow, all of these themes reside in the territory of Utopia. The quincentennial is literally a once-in-a-lifetime event for McGeorge School of Law and the broader academic community. The humane nature of the book and its progeny and the interdisciplinarity of its concerns are especially cogent reasons for us to seize this exciting intellectual opportunity.

The opportunity would have escaped us but for the generous support and assistance of many individuals in the McGeorge Law School community. Dean Francis J. Mootz and Associate Dean Raquel Aldana offered their encouragement and the resources needed to bring the project to successful completion. The University of the Pacific Law Review editors and staff, both of Volume 47 and of the current Volume 48, were unstinting in their support of UTOPIA500, and it is due to their extraordinary efforts that you will be able to share the thoughts of our authors. Those authors themselves are most sincerely thanked for their generosity, their spirit, and their engagement in the world. Thomas could not ask for more.