*Utopia*, Thomas More (ca 1478-1535)

Thomas More was the foremost English Humanist of his day. Unlike Erasmus, More attempted to put his Humanist learning to use for his King, society, and church. Like Erasmus’s *Praise of Folly* (1509), More’s Utopia is a “serious joke,” a work written in Latin for the delight of humanist circles but having a deeper significance as social critique. The narrator of More’s Utopia, the traveler Raphael Hythloday, extols the virtues of the Utopian society, but we are to take his comments with a grain of salt - after all, the Greek roots of his name show him to be a peddler of nonsense. And, as More’s learned readers would clearly see, “Utopia” itself meant “no place.” Hythloday’s comments do offer, however, an acute and rational critique of English society. Such criticisms are not blatant, though: Hythloday praises Utopian ways of life and since these ways are totally opposite to those of More’s England, the criticism comes by negative comparison.

[…]

Thus have I described to you, as particularly as I could, the constitution of that commonwealth, which I do not only think the best in the world, but indeed the only commonwealth that truly deserves that name. In all other places it is visible, that while people talk of a commonwealth, every man only seeks his own wealth; but there, where no man has any property, all men zealously pursue the good of the public: and, indeed, it is no wonder to see men act so differently; for in other commonwealths, every man knows that unless he provides for himself, how flourishing soever the commonwealth may be, he must die of hunger; so that he sees the necessity of preferring his own concerns to the public; but in Utopia, where every man has a right to everything, they all know that if care is taken to keep the public stores full, no private man can want anything; for among them there is no unequal distribution, so that no man is poor, none in necessity; and though no man has anything, yet they are all rich; for what can make a man so rich as to lead a serene and cheerful life, free from anxieties; neither apprehending want himself, nor vexed with the endless complaints of his wife?

[…]

Therefore I must say that, as I hope for mercy, I can have no other notion of all the other governments that I see or know, than that they are a conspiracy of the rich, who on pretence of managing the public only pursue their private ends, and devise all the ways and arts they can find out; first, that they may, without danger, preserve all that they have so ill acquired, and then that they may engage the poor to toil and labor for them at as low rates as possible, and oppress them as much as they please. And if they can but prevail to get these contrivances established by the show of public authority, which is considered as the representative of the whole people, then they are accounted laws. Yet these wicked men after they have, by a most insatiable covetousness, divided that among themselves with which all the rest might have been well supplied, are far from that happiness that is enjoyed among the Utopians: for the use as well as the desire of money being extinguished, much anxiety and great occasions of mischief is cut off with it. And who does not see that the frauds, thefts, robberies, quarrels, tumults, contentions, seditions, murders, treacheries, and witchcrafts, which are indeed rather punished than restrained by the severities of law, would all fall off, if money were not any more valued by the world? Men’s fears, solicitudes, cares, labors, and watchings, would all perish in the same moment with the value of money: even poverty itself, for the relief of which money seems most necessary, would fall. But, in order to the apprehending this aright, take one instance.

[…]

When Raphael had thus made an end of speaking, though many things occurred to me, both concerning the manners and laws of that people, that seemed very absurd, as well in their way of making war, as in their notions of religion and divine matters; together with several other particulars, but chiefly what seemed the foundation of all the rest, their living in common, without the use of money, by which all nobility, magnificence, splendor, and majesty, which, according to the common opinion, are the true ornaments of a nation, would be quite taken away;--yet since I perceived that Raphael was weary, and was not sure whether he could easily bear contradiction, remembering that he had taken notice of some who seemed to think they were bound in honor to support the credit of their own wisdom, by finding out something to censure in all other men’s inventions, besides their own; I only commended their constitution, and the account he had given of it in general; and so taking him by the hand, carried him to supper, and told him I would find out some other time for examining this subject more particularly, and for discoursing more copiously upon it; and indeed I shall be glad to embrace an opportunity of doing it. In the meanwhile, though it must be confessed that he is both a very learned man, and a person who has obtained a great knowledge of the world, I cannot perfectly agree to everything he has related; however, there are many things in the Commonwealth of Utopia that I rather wish, than hope, to see followed in our governments.

THE END

During the Age of Enlightenment people spent a great deal of time discussing ways to improve society and, in turn, their own lives. These discussions often took place in form of a “salon,” a meeting/party/discussion held in the drawing rooms of the wealthy for the purpose of proposing a topic and allowing individuals to offer their opinions on the ideas presented.

Your task is to write a speech that you would present at a salon promoting your idea of what a so-called “perfect society” would look like. You will write your plan in persuasive speech format: what would you say to your audience to persuade them to agree with your idea? Although you must address each of the categories below, you do not need to answer EVERY question in each category - use the questions as a guide for what you might say about that subject.

You should consider the following questions when developing your framework:

**Government:**

What kind of government should this society have? Should everyone have an equal voice or should only the best-educated and best-informed rule? If there are leaders, how should they be chosen?

**Economy:**

How should the people earn a living? How much should they be paid? How should the wealth be distributed? Is private property to be allowed?

**Agriculture:**

How should food be grown and how should it be distributed?

**Law:**

How should people who don’t follow the rules be punished? Who will decide the punishment?

**Living Arrangements:**

What kinds of shelters will be available? Will people live together as families or communally? Will there be houses or apartments, or both?

**Education:**

What kind of education system will be in place? Will it be mandatory, and if so, how many years will be required? Will everyone receive the same kind of education or will some received specialized training?

**Recreation:**

What kinds of recreational activities will be available? Will public recreation be provided or will people create their own amusement?

**Other:**

What other programs or institutions will be included in this perfect society?

Be sure to use correct spelling and grammar, proper sentence structure, and thoughtful word choice. You may hand write or type and print this speech.