Professor Baker-Smith's main thesis about Utopia is that, being a literary work and not a treatise, it does not 'propose a course of action but rather seeks to induce a new attitude or quality of mind'. From first to last, 'the reader is continuously subjected to rhetorical controls which complicate response and work against any easy identification with a single view'. Neither of the principal characters in More's dialogue should be regarded as the author's mouthpiece: through the powerfully argued, largely opposed positions of Hythloday and 'Morus', 'we are made aware of issues and possibilities, but not of positive recommendations'.

Very similar points can be made about Baker-Smith's own book. In setting out, he observes that 'the reader of Utopia need not feel under any compulsion to force a definitive reading on the book'; that indeed 'such an effort runs counter to the careful balance of More's dialogue'. The great strength of Baker-Smith's study is that he is able to avoid such forcing, while also avoiding the opposite danger of writing an aimless book. From the structure of individual sentences and paragraphs to that of chapters and the book as a whole, what is most impressive about the study is Baker-Smith's ability to suspend, in precisely the right hierarchy and proportion, a range of diverse points and perspectives. There is little that is new in his book--fittingly, since the volumes of...