Greek, a Little Hebrew and Humourless Irony: a 'Political' Education in Seventeenth-Century Cambridge[1]

Emmanuel College, Cambridge MS I.3.2

Daniel Andersson

> For euen as God, during the time of the olde Testament, spake by Oracles, and wrought by Miracles; yet how soone it pleased him to setle a Church which was bought, and redeemed by the blood of his onely Sonne Christ, then was there a cessation of both; Hee euer after gouerning his people and Church within the limits of his reueiled will.....And so the King became to be *Lex loquens*, after a sort, binding himselfe by a double oath to the obseruation of the fundamentall Lawes of his kingdome.[2]

The speech of King James, from which these words are taken, was much discussed. Unlike his somewhat opaque predecessor, James was an enthusiast of the persusasive possibilities of print, thereby enabling a much clearer and more consistent political language to be used by those interested in tracing the amabges of the King's mind. It is therefore no surprise to discover that the Latin words 'Lex loquens' should have become a slogan in early Stuart political culture, nor to find the phrase 'the magistrate is a speakinge lawe' on f.3 of this fascinating commonplace book.[3] The phrase (originally in Cicero, *De legibus* 3.1.2) occurs in the list of phrases with the heading 'Princes subjection', and throughout the volume a strongly political cast of thought emerges. As the Puritan divine, William Perkins had held: 'the neceesitie of the law dependenth on the necessitie of the good end thereof'.[4] The very phrase 'Princes subjection' already suggests a severely circumscribed, and godly, view of the power of the Prince. Language matters, and 'Princes subjection' had strong overtones of Purtian thought, as the William Jenkyns slightly later (1656), *The Policy of Princes in Subjection to the Son* sermon

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[1] These comments relate to the main body of the notes, though there is evidence of some one other than (as we will call him) Compiler A. My comments, however, focus on the interests of Compiler A.

[2] *The workes of the Most High and Mightie Prince, Iames by the Grace of God, King of Great Britaine, France and Ireland, Defender of the Faith, &c. Published by Iames, Bishop of Winton, and deane of his Maiesties Chappel Royall*, London: Robert Barker and John Bill, 1616.

[3] See K. Schoenfeld, 'Lex, rex et iudex. Montesqueieu et la bouche de la loi revisited', *European Constitutional Law Review*, 2008, pp. 274-301.

[4] William Perkins, *Discourse of Conscience*, London, 1596, p. 34.

made abundantly clear.[5] The highly religious colouring continues in the first hand that can be seen in this commonplace book with a providential account of the ten plagues that God sent on one of the many Old Testament types of the bad king, Pharaoh. Bad kings always seem to die 'in great anguish', such as Antiochus on f. 5 or Herod on f. 6. The godly interest also suggests a reason why our compiler copies out the European scholar Joseph Justus Scaliger's selection of Strabo, the Greek geographer. The discussion is of the educational achievements of the city of Tarsus (and how they'll surpass those of Athens and Alexandria), of interest to the students of famously godly Emmanuel, since Tarsus was the birthplace of St. Paul. This commonplace book suggests that such moralizing found a happy home in the close insitutional connection between ethical and political philosophy in the early seventeenth-century arts course.

The working assumption is that commonplace book belonged to someone from the University, or at least a university environment, but it cannot be asbolutely proved. Similarly, whether this book was the property of an undergraduate, a regent master or fellow is also an issue not capable of resolution. It is clearly the record of reading, perhaps at the direction of a tutor. Some notes definitely smell of the tutorial. A's takes two pages of notes from Scaliger's edition of the *Appendix Vergliana*. He is interested in the number of smaller philological points (such as *elogium* being what the French call *blason*: f°. 12ʳ), but though more interesting (in the context of endless plans for study and private curricula, such as the Directions for reading for Fulke Greville, associated with Francis Bacon) is the material found in a discussion of the educational origins of the word 'encyclopaedia'. The two Greek texts are neither obvious nor philologically easy: Pindar and Athenaeus. He finds Pindar sufficiently hard that he stops after a few lines, though this has been a common undergraduate experience. The passages from Atheneaus are more extensively covered, and we will suggest, in time, a reason why, but to do so, we must take a detour into the differing senses that political culture can be given in early seveneteenth-century England.

Whether in its godly or humanist guise, the political imagination needs both words and worlds. It is to these 'guises' (what Pocock might call 'languages') that the Emmanuel College manuscript speaks. For the long dominance of the Aristotelian curriculum in both the medieval and the Renaissance universities was very uneven in its distribution of emphases: Aristotle's *Politics* was one of the least lectured upon of his texts, and those who did so were nearly always poorly paid in comparison with their more presitigous colleagues in natural philosophy, civil law or medicine.[6] Moreover, key figures in the development of the discipline such as Donato Accaiuoli and Leonardi Bruni were not even professional university teachers. Discussion of political ideas in the sixteenth century had been therefore considerably enriched by the local intellectual contexts of Florentine humanism

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5 The word is a strong one. For a document using the word from 1622, which suggesting that subjection means something only slightly less than 'extermination', see British Library, Additional 12496, f. 80 (on colonial -for that is I think the right term here- plans in the Indies).

6 See Paul F. Grendler, *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance*, Baltimore, 2002, pp. 270, 398, 403. See also J. Woolfson, 'From Aristotle to Hobbes', in *Reassessing Tudor Humanism*, ed. *idem*, London, 2002, pp. 197-222.

and the progress of the Reformation, though the deeply scholastic work of Jean Buridan on the *Nicomachean Ethics* had been republished in Paris in the sixteenth century and was again republished in Cambridge in the seventeenth century. Richard Hakluyt wrote a compendium (BL MS Sloane 1982) of Aristotle's *Politics* but he was, by then (1588) moving outside of the university milieu, and its presence is not notable in the sixteenth-century English curriculum.

By 1600, moral philosophy, of which politics was normally considered part, still played second fiddle to logic and natural philosophy in seventeenth-century Cambridge. The alternative world, however, of Classical antiquity that the more historically-orientated scholarship of the latter years of the sixteenth-century had illuminated was now well-embedded in the minds of students. This was so in virtue not only of the rhetorical exercises debating the nature of the good king, but also the more generally humanistic nature of the educational culture of the university. Although the exact boundaries of the ancient world (how much, following the publication of Hieronymus Wolf's 1541 compendium of Byzantine historiography, of Byzantium to include?) were not fixed, it was possible to look back in 1620 on the achievements of the last two hundred years and imagine that a much more complete 'map' of knowledge achieved.

Humanism, then, in the sense of an educational agenda that, *via* imitation of ancient models sought to mould men capable of persuasive discourse, obviously has an essential connection with rhetoric. Rhetoric, however, was intimately linked with matters moral. This may be seen in our compiler's notes from Theophrastus (in Greek). The early seventeenth-century fashion in England (notable in the works of Thomas Overbury who wrote a *New Characters*) for the literature of the Theophrastan character was doubtless helped by the reputation of Isaac Casaubon, whose name as a scholar provided an additional impetus for the young to read the work. Not only did Casaubon produce a text but (*THEOPHRSTI CHARACTERES ETHICI, sive Descriptiones morum Graecè ISAACUS CASAUBONUS recensuit, in Latinum sermonem vertit, et LIBRO COMMENTARIO illustravit..* Paris: Apud Franciscus le Preux, 1592) he equipped the work with a commentary. Our compiler is careful (f. 10r) to skip Casaubon's opening badinage about manuscript tradition, and starts copying. We also know that there was some additional learning going on in this guided reading. Although Casaubon mentions a passage of Paul and suggests there is a Hebrew word behind it, he does not tell us what the Hebrew word is:

> Εικων & χαρακτηρ atque εσουπιον saepe eandem vim habent: Quare etiam, quod D. Paulus ad Coloss. Dixit, Christum esse εικονα του αοπατου θεου, in ea ad Hebraeos voce χαρακτηρ est expressum. (sig. A5ᵛ)

Our compiler goes a stage further. He tells us (f.10ʳ) that 'Hebraei naturam הטב vocant'. The Hebrews call nature (here in the sense of a person's nature). It is not surprising that this godly compiler should have had recourse to a Hebrew text, whether by himself or from a friend. It is interesting too that our godly compiler should have picked up on Casaubon's redefinition of irony. Theophrastan 'eironeia', says Casaubon, is morally quite without value, it should not be confused with the more gently self-deprecating Socratic irony. We should call it 'cavillatio', not mere 'dissimulatio'. What does our compiler make of all this? Well, he skips

nearly all of this discussion. What he does do is, however, interesting: he adds a religious dimension. Adopting a tag ultimately derived, I think, from a well-known (probably because it was the first in the collection of his letters) Cicero letter to Brutus about a man who 'ex animo et non sui commodi simulet' (*Ad Brutum* 1.1.15), he talks about the 'ironic' figure 'in sacris literis' (in holy writ). This is not mentioned in Casaubon's commentary on the passage.

The notable presence of purely ethical sources suggests the connection between being good and being of good service in the wider world. It is, in this regard, particularly important that our politic young man (for he will have been a man, if he studied at the university) that we be alert to the nuance of the Greek at f..76ʳ. The source is, in fact, the *Magna Moralia* (I.i; 1181a25 Bekker) of Aristotle (or, more probably, some later compendiast), whose opening reduces ethics to a branch of politics (rather than, as often, vice versa). This may have been part of this notably outward-facing of the ethical life, and yet our compiler is keen to extract only the ethical essentials from the work. He starts by quoting in Greek the (near) opening words of the *Magna Moralia* that virtues consists in the possesion of the virtues. The second axiom in Greek our compiler draws out is (I.8 II82a35 Bekker) banal enough, that each science aims at some good. Then, he switches in Latin to account of 1183a38, where the notion that ethics is 'scientia' is dismissed. In a mix of Greek and Latin, the theory of responisbility is outlined. The Greek continues soul has two parts, rational and irrational (1185b1 Bekker). There are three forms of desire, and so on. It is a very clear summary of the first few chapters of the *MM*.

The first thing to say about this summary is that it could not have been written by someone who didn't already have a clear idea of the outlines of Aristotelian moral philosophy, and therefore we should be sceptical as to whether these was teaching notes and that the *Magna Moralia* formed the basis of teaching. This is merely supplementary reading. Or, just as likely, they do not date from the first year of our student's time at Emmanuel. The second thing to note is our compiler's title of his summary as being 'axiomata', axioms. In fact, he says that they are 'οντως' axiomata. Οντως is a Greek adverb akin to an intensive particle, 'really', 'in their essence'. Already in 1569, Lord Henry Howard had adopted Fox-Morzillo's language of axioms, previously applicable in the field of mathematics. This was a first vernacular sign of a trend that grew in the late sixteenth century. Thirdly the highly political setting of the *Magna Moralia* is omitted and the emphasis is on the *MM* as a convenient summary of Aristotelian virtue theory. However much the 'surround-sound' emphasis on politics in the *MM* was of interest to him, he does not, however, allow that to distract him from what he sees as foundational assumptions, or axioms, in the work. The ethical character of this compilation continues to be abundantly clear.

A political education, in the sense of a training that could be put to use at the service of the polity (however one describes the politeia of pre-revolutionary England), also required a knowledge of history, the discipline whose formal absence from the traditional 'arts course' is notable. By the 1620s, however, following the impact of such humanist scholars as Scaliger, many disciplines were turning to their own history. This co-incided with an interest in the descriptive works of 'natural history', in which narrative accounts of people, plants and places,

were devoured by an eager English public. This was a genre came into its own in the 1620s. It is therefore entirely apposite that we should find several pages culled from the popularizing bastardizing work of natural history/gossip/travel writing, *Purchas his Pilgrims*. History could also be put to confessional uses, as at f.55^r. We have some comments on Platina, whose anti-papal *History of the Popes* was zealously deployed by reformers in England.

So we can see the likely context to which this connection of more and less academic texts is one informed by notions of public and probably godly service. I should like to end with an interesting (mis)translation. When he turned the words from Vergil's famous account of the many-winged 'Fama' (rumour, as we would say) into the aphorism (f.41^r) 'Nothing has swifter wings than fame', we should attend to the last word. The point of that monstrous description in Vergil is all about misreporting, rumour, gossip. 'Fama' there does not partake of the semantic field of our 'fame' or 'good report'. For Compiler A, here *fama* means here rather 'wordly repute'. He was perhaps thinking, in godly style, of the impermanence of worldly politics.[7] As the current little essay attempts to have shown, genealogies of intellectual allegiance are equally fleet of foot and a quarry as satisfying in the hunt as useful in the trap.

(Wolfson College, Oxford)

http://www.history.ox.ac.uk/faculty/staff/profile/andersson.html

daniel.andersson@gmail.com

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[7] Vergil, *Aeneid*, IV.256ff.