

**TOTA FAMILIA ARISTOTELIS: ON SOME SOURCES OF  
BACON'S CONTRIBUTION TO MEDIEVAL  
POLITICAL DISCOURSE\***

**TOTA FAMILIA ARISTOTELIS: SOBRE ALGUNAS FUENTES DE  
LA CONTRIBUCIÓN DE BACON AL DISCURSO  
POLÍTICO MEDIEVAL**

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**Abstract**

Writing his *Moralis philosophia*, Roger Bacon discussed issues relevant to medieval political discourse. He felt the need to appeal to the authority of Aristotle, but having no access to Aristotle's *Politica*, he tried to reconstruct its main tenets through the writings of other thinkers, such as Avicenna and Alfarabi. The result of this attempt is a sketch of a political theory that goes mainly under the name of Aristotle but has little to do with the actual contents of the *Politica*. In the following years, Bacon remained faithful to his first reconstruction. The author suggests that, with all probability, Bacon, never read the actual text of the *Politica*. The result is that Bacon's contribution in this field was not influenced by Aristotle's political masterpiece, but by other texts, in particular by Avicenna's *Philosophia prima*. Such an assessment should not imply a negative judgement on Bacon. Rather, we should consider him among those authors who contributed to the rich diversity of medieval political thought independent of Aristotle's *Politica*.

**Keywords**

Roger Bacon; Moral Science; Medieval Political Discourse; Aristotle's *Politics*; Avicenna

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## Resumen

Al escribir su *Moralis philosophia*, Roger Bacon trató temas relevantes para el discurso político medieval. Sintió la necesidad de apelar a la autoridad de Aristóteles, pero al no tener acceso a la *Política* de Aristóteles, intentó reconstruir sus principios fundamentales a través de los escritos de otros pensadores, como Avicena y Alfarabi. El resultado de esta tentativa fue un esbozo de teoría política que se presenta principalmente bajo el nombre de Aristóteles, pero que tiene poco que ver con el contenido real de la *Política*. En los años siguientes, Bacon se mantuvo fiel a su primera reconstrucción. El autor sugiere que, con toda probabilidad, Bacon nunca leyó el texto real de la *Política*. El resultado fue que la contribución de Bacon a este campo no estuvo influida por la obra maestra de la política de Aristóteles, sino por otros textos, en particular por la *Philosophia prima* de Avicena. Esta valoración no debe implicar un juicio negativo sobre Bacon. Por el contrario, debemos considerarlo entre los autores que contribuyeron a la rica diversidad del pensamiento político medieval independientemente de la *Política* de Aristóteles.

## Palabras clave

Roger Bacon; Ciencias morales; Discurso político medieval; *Política* de Aristóteles; Avicena

The Epilogue of the commemorative volume *Roger Bacon and the Sciences*, penned by Jeremiah Hackett, bears the subtitle ‘*Roger Bacon’s Moral Science*’ and occupies six pages out of more than four hundred.<sup>1</sup> This state of affairs can be taken as symbolic of the paradox of Bacon’s contribution to medieval practical philosophy. The English Franciscan repeats time and again that moral philosophy is the most noble of all branches of knowledge, since human learning culminates in *scientia moralis*.<sup>2</sup> His contribution to ethics and political thought, however, is not the field of scholarly production to which he devoted most of his efforts. Other aspects of his outstanding intellectual output - such as his semiotics and philosophy of language, his approach to the science of perspective, his theory of knowledge, his concept of experimental science, for example, have captured

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah Hackett, “Epilogue: Roger Bacon’s Moral Science” in *Roger Bacon and the Sciences. Commemorative Essays*, edited by J. Hackett (Leiden, New York and Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1997), 405-410.

<sup>2</sup> About this well-known principle of Bacon’s cultural agenda, see, for example, Jeremiah Hackett, “Philosophy and Theology in Roger Bacon’s *Opus Maius*”, in *Philosophy and the God of Abraham. Essays in Memory of James. A. Weisheipl, O.P.*, edited by R. James Long (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1991), 55-69; Catherine König-Pralong, *Le bon usage des savoirs. Scolastique, philosophie et politique culturelle* (Paris: Vrin, 2011), 128-165; Jeremiah Hackett, “Roger Bacon and the Moralization of Science: From Perspectiva through Scientia experimentalis to Moralis Philosophia”, in *I Francescani e le scienze. Atti del XXXIX Convegno internazionale* (Assisi, 6-8 ottobre 2011) (Spoleto: CISAM, 2012), 369-392.

much more the attention of scholars.<sup>3</sup> A visit to the site of the Roger Bacon Research Society, under the heading 'studies', lists over nine hundred entries, which confirms such an observation,<sup>4</sup> although there are some noteworthy exceptions.<sup>5</sup> This is particularly true for Bacon's contribution to political thought, which is, according to him, an integral part of moral philosophy. Some interesting contributions concern the use of rhetoric in moral persuasion,<sup>6</sup> but important remarks about his political ideas tend to be scattered in publications that deal with Bacon's works in the context of more comprehensive issues, such as the reception of Aristotle's *Politica*,<sup>7</sup> or Bacon's views on mission and conversion of the 'infidels'.<sup>8</sup> This situation does not seem to be accidental. If one takes into consideration the *Opus maius*, for example, the extreme conciseness of Part II of the *Moralis philosophia* (where Bacon deals with political issues) stands out in comparison to the rest of the work. "Part II is an outline of social order taken from Avicenna. It is very brief." This remark by Hackett in the aforementioned Epilogue is correct but could understandably betray a kind of disappointment as well.<sup>9</sup>

The present paper does not claim to substantially modify previous assessments concerning Bacon's ethical and political thought, but limits itself, rather, to a closer scrutiny of some passages that can help situate the *Doctor mirabilis* in medieval political discourse. In particular, I will focus on Bacon's understanding of the *philosophi* – and

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<sup>3</sup> Similar remarks already in Georg Wieland, "Ethik und Metaphysik. Bemerkungen zur Moralphilosophie Roger Bacons", in *Virtus Politica. Festgabe zum 75. Geburtstag von Alfons Hufnagel* (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann - Holzboog, 1974), 147-173.

<sup>4</sup> See <https://rogerbaconresearchsociety.com/studies/>, last visited 15 July 2021.

<sup>5</sup> For example, see Franco Alessio, *Introduzione a Ruggero Bacone* (Roma and Bari: Laterza, 1985), where almost a tenth of the book (107-118) is devoted to the *Moralis philosophia*. Günther Mensching, *Roger Bacon* (Munster: Aschendorff, 2009) is more generous: more than twenty pages (101-123) of his introductory booklet deal with this work of Bacon.

<sup>6</sup> Jeremiah Hackett, "Roger Bacon on Magnanimity and Virtue", in *Les philosophies morales et politiques au Moyen Age / Moral and Political Philosophies in the Middle Ages*, edited by B. Carlos Bazán, E. Andújar, and L. G. Sbocchi (New York: LEGAS, 1995), 367-377; Jeremiah Hackett, "Practical Wisdom and Happiness in the Moral Philosophy of Roger Bacon", *Medioevo* 12 (1986): 55-110; Jeremiah Hackett, "Moral Philosophy and Rhetoric in Roger Bacon", *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 20 (1987): 18-40. See also Astrid Schilling, *Ethik im Kontext erfahrungsbezogener Wissenschaft. Die Moralphilosophie des Roger Bacon (ca. 1214-1292) vor dem Hintergrund der scholastischen Theologie sowie der Einflüsse der griechischen und arabischen Philosophie* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2016), in particular, 152-187, where the author offers a description of the *Moralis philosophia* in the framework of a comparison with the ethical parts of Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*.

<sup>7</sup> Gianfranco Fioravanti, "Politia Orientalium et Aegyptiorum: Alberto Magno e la *Politica* aristotelica", *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser., 9 (1979): 195-246, in part. 209-212; Gianfranco Fioravanti, "La *Politica* aristotelica nel Medioevo: linee di una ricezione", *Rivista di storia della filosofia*, n.s., 52 (1997): 17-29, in part. 20.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Davide Bigalli, *I Tartari e l'Apocalisse. Ricerche sull'escatologia in Adamo Marsh e Ruggero Bacone* (Florence: la Nuova Italia, 1971); Amanda Power, *Roger Bacon and the Defence of Christendom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Paolo Evangelisti, *Dopo Francesco, oltre il mito. I frati Minori fra Terra Santa ed Europa (XIII-XV secolo)* (Rome: Viella, 2020), 154-170.

<sup>9</sup> Hackett, "Epilogue", 407.

especially of Aristotle – as sources for political ideas. In this respect, my contribution can be placed in the wake of Gianfranco Fioravanti’s seminal article, ‘*Politiæ Orientalium et Aegyptiorum*,’ where he emphasises the gap between Bacon’s expectations concerning Aristotle’s *Politica* and the actual structure and contents of the text made available to the Latin West thanks to William of Moerbeke’s translation.<sup>10</sup> In the following pages, I will show, in the first place, that Bacon’s division of ‘moral philosophy’, its originality notwithstanding, should be situated within the context of the Parisian Arts Faculty in the mid-thirteenth century, where different interpretations of the structure of practical philosophy were circulating. Second, I will show how Bacon attributes to Aristotle’s *Politica* claims and remarks which he finds in other authors, such as Alfarabi and Avicenna. He is, in fact, persuaded that Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes also follow Aristotle’s teachings as far as political thought is concerned. Third, turning my attention to Bacon’s later writings, it will become evident that over the years Bacon remains faithful to his own interpretation of Aristotle’s political thought, even at a time when Aristotle’s *Politica* had become available in Latin translation.

#### “*Civilis scientia*” in Bacon’s division of the *Moralis philosophia*

It can be useful to recall that Bacon’s *MP* is the seventh and last part of his *Opus maius*.<sup>11</sup> Begun at the invitation of Clement IV in 1266, the *Opus maius* is a gigantic effort to outline a complete renewal of scientific knowledge, though clearly dissenting with the mainstream academic trends of his times. One of the leading principles of Bacon’s reform is that practical sciences are the final goal of all human knowledge.<sup>12</sup> According to the *Doctor mirabilis*, the seventh and final part of his *Opus maius* deals, therefore, with the best and most noble of all sciences – moral philosophy – and represents, so to speak, the culmination of the whole work. In turn, this seventh part of the *Opus maius* is divided into six parts. Part I concerns the relationship of human beings to God and deals, therefore, with the ultimate *finis hominis*. Part II examines relationships between human beings. Part III concerns virtues of the individual person. In Part III, divided into seven distinctions, the reader finds not only a classification of virtues, but also a large collection of excerpts from Latin authors, in particular from Seneca. The following parts, which Bacon sees as applied knowledge, are devoted to the art of persuasion. Part IV, divided into three distinctions, is devoted to the means that can be used to convince the truth of the Christian religion. In comparison to previous sections, Parts V and VI are rather brief. Part V deals with rhetorical arguments which encourage virtue, in particular the virtue of justice. Finally, Bacon limits himself to indicate that the subject matter of Part VI should

<sup>10</sup> Fioravanti, “*Politiæ Orientalium*”, 209-215.

<sup>11</sup> In what follows, with the abbreviation *MP* I will refer to Eugenio Massa’s critical edition: Roger Bacon, *Moralis philosophia*, after Ferdinand Delorme edited by E. Massa (Zürich: Thesaurus Mundi, 1953).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. for example, Hackett, “Practical Wisdom and Happiness”; and Schilling, *Ethik im Kontext*, 126-151.

be 'forensic rhetoric', arguing that the *Opus maius* is already too lengthy and that the pertinent sources were not yet correctly translated.<sup>13</sup> The first chapter of this present paper will focus mainly, albeit not exclusively, on Part II, which, as already mentioned, deals with relations between human beings and comes closer to our understanding of political thought.

In the opening section of the *MP* (called *prohemium* by its critical editor, Eugenio Massa), Bacon does not distinguish between *scientia moralis* and *scientia civilis*,<sup>14</sup> but uses the two adjectives as synonyms, attributing this identification in the first place to Aristotle. According to him, the Stagirite and others call this science 'civilis' because it demonstrates and constructs the laws (*iura*) of the citizens (*cives*) and of the body politic (*civitas*). Explaining that he takes the meaning of 'civitas' literally, Bacon shows that this depends on the fact that in the past, cities ruled over vast regions, as was the case for Rome.<sup>15</sup> For this reason, it is called 'civic,' although it concerns the laws (*iura*) of the kingdom and the empire.<sup>16</sup> Most probably, referring to Aristotle, Bacon has in mind book I, chapter I of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where already Burgundio had rendered the Greek 'politiké' with 'civilis'.<sup>17</sup> As Irene Zavattero remarked, Bacon shares this identification of *moralis* and *civilis* with early commentators on the *Ethics*, such as Pseudo-Peckham and Robert Kilwardby.<sup>18</sup> This circumstance brings him closer to the first stages of the reception of *Nicomachean Ethics*, which occurred in the milieu where he himself had been active before entering the Order of Friars Minor: namely, the Parisian Arts Faculty.

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<sup>13</sup> For former debates among scholars about part VI of the *Moralis philosophia*, see E. Massa, *Ruggero Bacone. Etica e politica nella storia dell' "Opus Maius"* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1955), 7-55; an updated and reliable assessment can be found in Hackett, "Moral Philosophy and Rhetoric".

<sup>14</sup> Bacon, *MP*, I, 4: "hec vero practica vocatur moralis et civilis sciencia."

<sup>15</sup> The interpretation of 'civitas' as meaning a concrete urban reality and not an abstract concept of 'political' community will also be one of the typical features of the first stages in the reception of the *Politica*; see e. g. Ulrich Maier, *Mensch und Bürger: Die Stadt im Denken spätmittelalterlicher Theologen, Philosophen und Juristen* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1994), 69-70.

<sup>16</sup> Bacon, *MP*, I, 5-6: "Hec vero scientia moralis vocatur ab Aristotile et aliis civilis scientia, quia iura civium et civitatum demonstrat. Et quoniam solebant civitates dominari regionibus, ut Roma imperabat mundo, ideo hec scientia civilis denominatur a civitate, iura tamen regni et imperii construendo."

<sup>17</sup> Aristotle, "Ethica nova", in *Ethica Nicomachea. Translatio antiquissima, libri. II-III sive 'Ethica Vetus', Translationis Antiquioris quae supersunt sive 'Ethica Nova', 'Hoferiana', 'Borghesiana'*, edited by R.-A. Gauthier, *Aristoteles Latinus*, XXVI/1-3, fasc. 1 (Leiden: E. J. Brill; Bruxelles: Desclée de Brouwer, 1972), 66 (1194a27-28): "Videtur autem utique principalissime et maxime architectonice. Talis autem et que civilis videtur"; for the attribution to Burgundio, see Fernand Bossier, "L'élaboration du vocabulaire philosophique chez Burgundio de Pise", in *Aux origines du lexique philosophique européen: l'influence de la Latinitas*, edited by J. Hamesse (Louvain-la-Neuve: Brepols, 1997), 81-116; Riccardo Saccenti, *Un nuovo lessico morale medievale. Il contributo di Burgundio da Pisa* (Canterano [Roma]: Aracne, 2016), 63-69.

<sup>18</sup> Irene Zavattero, "Éthique et politique à la Faculté des arts de Paris dans la première moitié du XIIIe siècle", in *Les débuts de l'enseignement universitaire à Paris (1200-1245 environ)*, edited by J. Verger and O. Weijers (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2013), 205-245, here in part. 229-234.

Bacon's stress on *iura* and *leges* as the principal objects of *civilis scientia*, however, points to an influential literary genre issuing from the same environment: the 'introductions to philosophy'. With the expression "introductions to philosophy" (or, in French, 'introductions à la philosophie'; or, in German, 'Einführungen in die Philosophie'), scholars generally refer to texts which, in the first decades of the thirteenth century, played a relevant role in the definition of philosophy, of its various branches and of their mutual relationships.<sup>19</sup> Adopting a threefold division of practical philosophy in ethics, *oeconomica* (identified with the government of the *oikos* or 'household') and politics,<sup>20</sup> many of such introductions, in fact, identify the object of political science with laws.<sup>21</sup> Written before the diffusion of the Latin translation of Aristotle's *Politics* and the pseudo-Aristotelian *Oeconomica*, such introductory texts encounter some difficulties in identifying authoritative textbooks for the second and third branches of moral philosophy. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is, in fact, acknowledged (with a broad consensus) to be the textbook for the first branch, called not only *ethica*, but often also *monastica*.<sup>22</sup> For *oeconomica*, the most frequent choice is Cicero's *De officiis*, while the object of *politica* is described as '*leges et decreta*' where the two substantives refer respectively to civil law and canon law.<sup>23</sup> This reference has obvious philosophical implications, since it implies that the main concern of politics coincides with the object of legal studies.

Bacon's agreement with this tradition is only partial. On the one hand, as we shall see, he interprets the identification of the object of *scientia civilis* with laws in a way that differs from what most introductions to philosophy seem to imply, that is, that civil science deals with positive laws. On the other hand, he adopts a division of moral/civic science that is at variance with the accepted and more widely spread distinction between ethics, *oeconomica* and politics. According to Bacon, in fact, in its first articulation, moral or civil

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<sup>19</sup> For a ground-breaking study of the literary genre called 'introductions to philosophy' see Claude Lafleur, *Quatre introductions à la philosophie au XIIIe siècle. Textes critiques et étude historique* (Montréal: Institut d'Études Médiévales, Paris: Vrin, 1988); Claude Lafleur and Joanne Carrier, "L'enseignement philosophique à la Faculté des arts de l'Université de Paris en la première moitié du XIIIe siècle dans le miroir des textes didascaliques", *Laval théologique et philosophique* 60 (2004): 409-448; For the use of the concept, see also Alexander Fidora, "The Arabic Influence on the Classification of Philosophy in the Latin West: The Case of the Introductions to Philosophy", *Micrologus: Natura, Scienze e Società Medievali* 28 (2020): 191-209.

<sup>20</sup> For examples of the division in *solitaria*, *oeconomica*, and *politica* going back to the XII<sup>th</sup> century, for example to Hugh of Saint-Victor's *Didascalicon*, see Gian Carlo Alessio, "Sul De ortu scientiarum di Robert Kilwardby", in *La divisione della filosofia e le sue ragioni. Letture di testi medievali (VI-XIII secolo)*, edited by G. D'Onofrio (Cava de' Tirreni, Salerno: Avagliano 2001), 107-135, in part. 124-126.

<sup>21</sup> Zavattero, "Éthique et politique", 210-211; see also Gilbert Dahan, "Théologie et politique aux XII<sup>e</sup> et XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles. Quelques réflexions", *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 91 (2011): 507-523.

<sup>22</sup> For an example of the use of 'monastica', see the introductory texts edited in Claude Lafleur and Joanne Carrier, "La 'philosophia' d'Hervé le Breton (alias Henri le Breton) et le recueil d'introductions à la philosophie du ms. Oxford, Corpus Christi College 283 (deuxième partie)", *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Âge* 62 (1995): 359-442, in part. 384.

<sup>23</sup> See, e. g. the witness by Arnulfus Provincialis, *Divisio Scientiarum*, in Lafleur, *Quatre introductions*, 295-355, in part. 334: "et hanc dicunt quidam haberi per leges et decreta."

science is divided in three: first comes the orientation to God, then to our neighbour, and lastly to ourselves.<sup>24</sup> The third member of this division corresponds roughly to a virtue ethics, while the first concerns theological truths that can be grasped by philosophical means alone. Pia Antolic-Piper has pointed out that this structure strongly recalls what we can find in the introductory text known as the 'guide de l'étudiant' but now referred to also as *Nos gravamen*.<sup>25</sup> As a matter of fact, the anonymous author of this 'guide' divides moral philosophy according to different aspects of the life of the soul. First, the soul lives in the divine good; second, in the good of the others (*in bono aliorum*); and third in itself, governing the sensitive powers of the soul. The second term of the division is, in turn, distinguished in two parts: the first, rather enigmatic, is called '*ipotica*' and consists in governing one's subjects.<sup>26</sup> The second part, *politica*, is concerned with life according to the *lex communis*.<sup>27</sup> Although the coincidence between the position upheld in *Nos gravamen* and the division of moral philosophy adopted by Bacon is far from being complete, three points do stand out: the inclusion of the orientation to God (understood loosely) as part of moral philosophy (although *Nos gravamen* does not go into detail, dealing in reality only with *Ethica nova* and *vetus*). Second is the precedence of the discipline concerned with life in community over individual ethics.<sup>28</sup> And third, the identification of the object of *politica* with *leges* (although Bacon does not mention *decreta* in this context).

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<sup>24</sup> For a synthetic presentation of the structure of practical philosophy according to Bacon, see Nikolaus Egel, "Einleitung" in Roger Bacon, *Opus tertium*, Lateinisch-Deutsch, (Hamburg: Meiner, 2020), cxii-cxiii.

<sup>25</sup> Pia Antolic-Piper, "Einleitung" in Roger Bacon, *Opus Maius. Eine moralphilosophische Auswahl*, edited, introduced and translated by P. Antolic-Piper (Freiburg, Basel and Wien: Herder, 2008), 45-46; a rich literature has been devoted to the study of *Nos gravamen*, starting from various contributions by its critical editor, Claude Lafleur, for example, *L'enseignement de la philosophie au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Autour du 'Guide de l'étudiant' du ms. Ripoll 109*, edited by C. Lafleur (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997).

<sup>26</sup> On this issue, see Francisco Bertelloni, "Politologische Ansichten bei den Artisten um 1230/1240: Zur Deutung des anonymen Studienplans Hs Ripoll 109", *Theologie und Philosophie* 69 (1994): 34-73; critical remarks in Zavattero, "Éthique et politique", 221-223, who provides a clue to the understanding of what is meant by *ypotica*, referring to the reception of Algazel (see 212, footnote 31). Attention to Zavattero's remarks is very useful when reading Francisco Bertelloni's groundbreaking contributions to the definition of *politica* in XIII century introductions to philosophy, such as, "Presupuestos de la recepción de la 'Politica' de Aristóteles" in *Aristotelica et Lulliana: magistro doctissimo Charles H. Lohr septuagesimum annum feliciter agenti dedicata*, edited by F. Dominguez Riboira et alii (Steenbrugge-The Hague: Nijhoff 1995), 35-54 or the later "Les schèmes de la philosophia practica antérieurs à 1265: leur vocabulaire concernant la Politique et leur rôle dans la réception de la Politique d'Aristote", in *L'élaboration du vocabulaire philosophique au Moyen Age: Actes du Colloque international de Louvain-la-Neuve et Leuven*, 12-14 septembre 1998, edited by J. Hamesse and C. Steel (Brepols: Turnhout 2000), 171-202.

<sup>27</sup> Anonymus, *Compendium Nos Gravamen*, in *La "Guide de l'étudiant" d'un maître anonyme de la faculté des arts de Paris au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, edited by C. Lafleur and J. Carrier (Québec: Faculté de philosophie, Université Laval, 1992), 53: "Item, anima uiuit in bono omnium communiter secundum legem comunem, et secundum hoc est scientia que traditur in legibus et decretis."

<sup>28</sup> I can't agree with Astrid Schilling's attempt to downplay the philosophical relevance of this priority on the basis of the limited extension of *Moralis philosophia*, part II, see Schilling, *Ethik im*

We may conclude that Bacon's classification of moral/civic knowledge shows several points of contact with the proposals circulating in the Parisian Faculty of Arts in the decades preceding his main work, the *Opus maius* (1266-67). On the other hand, it is not surprising that he is aware of the peculiarities of his own position. He defends it at the beginning of the *MP*, Part III arguing that the worship of God has precedence and that the common good precedes the private good, in the same way as virtues (such as *caritas*) concerning the community, are superior to the *mores* of the individual.<sup>29</sup> It might be that Bacon's decision to place political concerns before individual ethics is influenced by the well-known passage of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I - "Amabile quidem enim et uni soli, melius vero et divinius genti et civitatibus" as it is rendered in Grosseteste's *recensio recognita*.<sup>30</sup> As a matter of fact, in this context, the *Doctor mirabilis* does not quote Aristotle's *Ethics*, but other authors, such as Avicenna. According to him, Bacon writes, "homo est animal sociale" and, therefore, the laws regulating social life receive priority with respect to individual virtue.<sup>31</sup> The eremitical life - which was going to represent a stimulating case for later commentators on Aristotle's *Politica* - is here excluded by Bacon from the discussion on the basis of Aristotle's and Averroes' sharp judgement: the hermit, who is not part of the *civitas*, can be neither good nor bad.<sup>32</sup> In reality, this statement, as Eugenio Massa rightly remarks in his *apparatus fontium*, can be read only in Averroes' commentary

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Kontext, 175-176: "Wäre Bacon die Politik bzw. die öffentliche Ethik wirklich so wichtig gewesen, hätte er ihr mit Sicherheit einen grösseren Platz eingeräumt."

<sup>29</sup> Bacon, *MP*, III, 45: "Et quod hec debeat esse tercia, patet evidenter: quoniam illa pars, que continet cultum Dei, planum est quod est prima, sicut declaratum est. Bonum autem commune preponitur bono privato ...; sed pars precedens bonum habet commune, pars ista bonum exhortatur privatam. Caritas enim maxima virtus est; et hec ordinatur ad bonum commune, et concordia et pax et iusticia eam comitantur; que virtutes excedunt mores singularium personarum." About the concept of "bonum commune" see Matthew S. Kempshall, *The Common Good in Late Medieval Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>30</sup> Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, *Translatio Roberti Grosseteste Lincolnienis sive 'Liber Ethicorum'* B. *Recensio recognita*, I, edited by R.-A. Gauthier, Aristoteles latinus, XXVI/1-3, fasc. IV (Leiden: E. J. Brill; Bruxelles: Desclée de Brouwer, 1973), 376 (1094b10). The former translation known as *Ethica nova* has the reading 'divinum' instead of 'divinius', cf. Aristotle, *Ethica nova* (edition as in footnote 17, above), 66. For an English rendering of the passage, see Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by J. A. K. Thomson, revised by H. Tredennick, introduction by J. Barnes (London *et alibi*: Penguin, 2004), 4-5: "For while it is desirable to secure what is good in the case of an individual, to do so in the case of people or a states is something finer and more sublime."

<sup>31</sup> Bacon, *MP*, III, 45: "Nam homo est animal sociale, et de sua proprietate est, ut dicit Avicenna quinto de anima et in Radicibus moralis philosophie, ut non vivat solus sicut brutum animal, quod sibi soli in vita sua sufficit. Et ideo leges, que ordinant homines ad proximum, sunt maiores." For a similar standpoint, by the anonymous author of the introduction *Dicit Aristotiles*, see Zavattono, "Éthique et politique", 215; the edition of the passage is in Lafleur and Carrier, "La 'philosophia'", 384.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Marco Toste, "The Naturalness of Human Association in Medieval Political Thought Revisited", in *La nature comme source de la morale au Moyen Âge*, edited by M. van der Lugt (Florence: SISMEL-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2014), 113-188. From a philosophical point of view, see Juhana Toivanen, *The Political Animal in Medieval Philosophy. A Philosophical Study of the Commentary Traditions c. 1260-c. 1410* (Leiden and Boston: E. J. Brill, 2021): 281-354.



on the *Metaphysics*.<sup>33</sup> Bacon is persuaded of the priority of common laws with respect to moral individual perfection and wants to show that he is not in contradiction with the Philosopher, although the latter follows a different order in his writings. According to Bacon's explanation, in fact, the two approaches differ only because, in his investigation, Aristotle takes his point of departure from what is more known to us rather than from what is more known by nature.<sup>34</sup> Bacon's acquaintance with the division of moral science in ethics, *oeconomica*, politics, does not necessarily mean, of course, that he had direct access to all Aristotelian works (with the notable exception of the *Nicomachean Ethics*). For example (as far as the relationship between ethics and politics is concerned), such an assertion could have been grasped from the concluding remarks of the *Nicomachean Ethics* itself.<sup>35</sup> Prologues to commentaries on Porphyry, such as *Sicut dicit Ysaac*, and the aforementioned Arnoul de Provence (dated before 1246-1247) already witness that some authors shared the conviction that Aristotle had indeed dealt with *oconomica* and *politica*, but in books which had not yet been translated into Latin.<sup>36</sup>

Bacon's definition of *moralis philosophia* and its divisions can, therefore, be situated in the fluidity of the context in the Arts Faculty at the beginning of the reception process of Aristotelian practical philosophy, where diverging approaches were in circulation. To the best of my knowledge, it does not seem that his position can be traced back to a single source; rather he seems to be combining different elements. Without a doubt, Bacon attaches importance to the possibility of attributing some tenets of his own position to Aristotle's teaching; this is true for the identification of *moralis* with *civilis*, but also for his judgement concerning eremitical life, although it is not present in the Stagirite, but only in his Commentator.

### Avicenna and Aristotle in Part II of the *Moralis Philosophia*

As seen above, Bacon argues in favour of the 'ontological' priority of the community over the individual, referring to both Aristotle and Avicenna. When it comes to deal with "laws and statutes regulating the relations among human beings" in Part II, his mentor is

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<sup>33</sup> Bacon, *MP*, III, 45-46: "Et secundum eundem Aristotilem et Averroym, decimo Metaphisice, vir heremita, qui non est pars civitatis, sed sibi soli vacat, neque est bonus neque malus"; see Averroes, in Aristotle, *Metaphysicorum libri XIII, cum Averrois Cordubensis in eosdem commentariis*, X, 6 (Venice: Apud Iunctas, 1572), 264: "...vt quedam habeant medium v. g. quoniam homo eremita qui non est pars ciuitatis, non est bonus aut malus et est medius"; for the same reference in the anonymous introduction to philosophy *Dicit Aristotiles*, see Lafleur and Carrier, "La 'philosophia'", 384; the editors rightly refer to *Opus maius* for the presence of the same quotation.

<sup>34</sup> Bacon, *MP*, III, 46: "Et hoc est verum secundum ordinem dignitatis nature et simpliciter loquendo, licet Aristotiles hunc modum non teneat in libris suis, quia procedit secundum viam inquisitionis et ideo ab eis, que notiora sunt nobis, non nature."

<sup>35</sup> Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea, Translatio Roberti Grosseteste* (edition as above, footnote 30), X, 586-588 (1180b29-1181b23).

<sup>36</sup> Zavattero, "Éthique et politique", 212-213.

almost exclusively Avicenna.<sup>37</sup> In fact, the *MP*, part II, can be seen as a sort of commented collection of excerpts from Avicenna's *Philosophia prima*, Book X, parts 4 and 5, which Bacon often refers to under the title *Radices moralis philosophiae*.<sup>38</sup> This choice is not unprecedented. Explicitly referring to Avicenna, Gundissalinus's *De divisione philosophiae* distinguishes different parts of practical philosophy, treating *politica* or *civilis ratio* first.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, a branch of this science is called *scientia legis*: in his treatment of the subject, Gundissalinus tacitly inserts a long quotation from Avicenna's *Philosophia prima*, which coincides - although only in part - with the text that Bacon uses as a main source for the *MP*, part II.<sup>40</sup> It is worth underscoring that Bacon is selective in his use of Avicenna. Unlike Avicenna, who starts from the division of the *civitas* in three parts, for Bacon the laws of marriage come first.<sup>41</sup> *Inter alia*, these laws should forbid fornication and sodomy.<sup>42</sup> After this first literal quotation from Avicenna - from which Bacon leaves out the long digression on polygamy and divorce - he inserts his own considerations on other laws, namely, those regulating relations between subjects and prelates and princes, and between servants and masters.<sup>43</sup> In this wide spectrum of power relations, Bacon includes

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<sup>37</sup> Bacon, *MP*, II, 39: "Secunda pars descendit ad leges et statuta hominum inter se."

<sup>38</sup> Avicenna, *Liber de Philosophia Prima sive scientia divina, Partes V-X*, edited by S. Van Riet (Louvain: Peeters, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980); Bacon, *MP*, I, 9 provides a sort of explanation of this title: "Et per hec continuatur methaphisica cum morali et descendit in eam, sicut in finem suum, sicut Avicenna pulcre coniungit eas in fine Methaphisice."

<sup>39</sup> Dominicus Gundissalinus, *De divisione philosophiae*, edited and translated to German by A. Fidora and D. Werner (Freiburg, Basel and Wien: Herder, 2007), 252-262. For an updated source of information and materials about Dominicus Gundissalinus, see Nicola Polloni, *Potestas essendi*: <https://potestas-essendi.com/> (accessed 31 January 2022).

<sup>40</sup> Gundissalinus, *De divisione*, 256-260; Zavattero "Éthique et politique", 219 draws attention on this implicit quotation; about his moral philosophy Alexander Fidora, "A tripartição da filosofia prática na obra 'De divisione philosophiae' de Domingos Gundisalvo", in *Idade Média: Tempo do mundo, tempo dos homens, tempo de deus*, edited by J. A. de C. R. De Souza (Porto Alegre: Est Edições, 2006), 417-428. Concerning the relationship between Gundissalinus and Avicenna in general, see Nicola Polloni, "Gundissalinus and Avicenna: Some Remarks on an Intricate Philosophical Connection", *Documenti e Studi sulla Tradizione Filosofica Medievale* 28 (2017): 515-552.

<sup>41</sup> Avicenna, *Liber de Philosophia*, X, 4, 542. The commented translation from Arabic into Italian, which contains the Latin version too, is an extremely useful tool, although its main interest is devoted to the original Arabic, while for the present research the Latin text is decisive; see Avicenna, *Metafisica*, testo arabo a fronte, testo latino in nota, edited by O. Lizzini and P. Porro (Milano: Bompiani 2006), in part. 1273-1277 for explicative footnotes.

<sup>42</sup> Bacon, *MP*, II, 39: "Et ideo dantur leges coniugii; et statuunt quomodo habent fieri et qualiter impedimenta amoveantur, et precipue quod a civitatibus excludantur fornicatores et sodomite..."; see Avicenna, *Liber de Philosophia*, X, 4, 544: "ut prohibeat etiam actiones quae, si negliguntur, inducunt contrarium constructioni civitatis, sicut fornicatio et sodomia quae retrahunt homines ab eo quod melius est in civitate, scilicet coniugio."

<sup>43</sup> Bacon, *MP*, II, 39: "Deinde dantur leges secundum quas ordinantur subditi ad prelatos et principes, et e converso, et servi ad dominos, secundum omne genus domini et servicii, et secundum quas paterfamilias debet vivere in regimine proles et familie, et magister ad discipulos." It is worth noting that Bacon does not quote Avicenna here, most probably because there is no pertinent passage in his source.

the relation between a paterfamilias and his offspring which, according to a more widespread division of practical philosophy already mentioned, would belong to the *oeconomica*.<sup>44</sup> Bacon adds, however, the relationship between teacher and pupils and the structure of the craft guild, where experienced craftsmen instruct the young, to which Bacon significantly assimilates doctors, that is, teachers of a science.<sup>45</sup>

A second quotation from Avicenna supports the idea of a hierarchically ordered society, where everybody has a direct superior and a specific role that contributes to the common good (*utilitas*) of the whole community. In the Latin translation of Avicenna's *Philosophia prima*, the three essential constitutive parts of the political community are named as "*dispositores*", "*ministri*" and "*legis periti*".<sup>46</sup> Instead of explaining what is exactly meant by the first two expressions, Bacon refers to an opinion which he attributes to Plato but derives, in fact, from a *dictum* of the *Decretum Gratiani*: "in Plato where it is described that the most justly organised *civitas* is where everybody ignores his own affections".<sup>47</sup> In such a highly structured society, inspired by the superiority of the whole over the parts, there is no place for idleness. Those who cannot be restrained should be expelled from the city, unless they are ill or too old to fulfil their duties. Bacon skips here Avicenna's refusal to allow euthanasia but quotes the long passage where the Persian philosopher describes how a sort of 'national treasury' should be established and used, among other purposes, to fund the assistance to those who cannot take care of themselves because of sickness and - Bacon adds - old age.<sup>48</sup> As an additional task of the lawgiver, Bacon indicates the regulation of patrimonies, contracts, and the like. Unsurprisingly, the aim of such regulations are peace and justice. Consistently, activities that lead to the loss of property should be forbidden. Quoting Avicenna, Bacon mentions wrestling and gambling.<sup>49</sup> As 'doctrines' contrary to what is advantageous for the whole community, he mentions the "*doctrina furandi et rapiendi*"; these should be prohibited as well.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>44</sup> For the rich literature concerning medieval *oconomica* see Pavel Blažek, *Die mittelalterliche Rezeption der aristotelischen Philosophie der Ehe. Von Robert Grosseteste bis Bartholomäus von Brügge* (Leiden and Boston: E. J. Brill, 2007).

<sup>45</sup> This is not surprising, if one recalls the early origins of the University: see e. g. Nathalie Gorochov, *Naissance de l'université. Les écoles de Paris d'Innocent III à Thomas d'Aquin (v.1200-v.1245)* (Paris: Champion 2012).

<sup>46</sup> Bacon, *MP*, II, 39; see Avicenna, *Liber de Philosophia*, X, 4, 542.

<sup>47</sup> Bacon, *MP*, II 40; Eugenio Massa fails to mention this source, but the correspondence is literal: *Corpus Iuris canonici*, I, *Decretum magistri Gratiani*, dist. VIII, *dictum ante*, edited by E. Friedberg (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1879), 12. On this passage see Stephan Kuttner, "Gratian and Plato", in *Church and Government in the Middle Ages: Essays presented to Christopher R. Cheney*, edited by C.N.L. Brooke *et alii* (Cambridge *et alibi*: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 93-111.

<sup>48</sup> Bacon, *MP*, II, 40; see Avicenna, *Liber de Philosophia*, X, 4, 542-543.

<sup>49</sup> Bacon, *MP*, II 40-41; see Avicenna, *Liber de Philosophia*, X, 4, 544. Concerning the medieval discussions on the admissibility of gambling, see Giovanni Ceccarelli, *Il gioco e il peccato. Economia e rischio nel Tardo Medioevo* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003).

<sup>50</sup> For a summary description of the well-organized society according to Bacon, see Bigalli, *I Tartari*, 155-158.

The last paragraph of the first section of Part II regards – so to speak – ‘foreign relations’: the members of the community should be ready to defend it and to fight against enemies of the law. One cannot miss the shift, in this passage taken from Avicenna, from the plural ‘laws,’ (concerning, as seen above, marriage, contracts and illicit activities) to the singular ‘law.’ There cannot be much doubt that Bacon’s source – Avicenna – refers to the Islamic religion.<sup>51</sup> This is the case in the following sentence too, where he states that the existence of another city or kingdom founded on good constitutions and laws (plural) is not in itself incompatible with the one established by the lawgiver, until the time comes in which only one law (singular) – the best one – should rule the whole world.<sup>52</sup> Bacon reads Avicenna as referring to the Christian religion.<sup>53</sup> The paragraph ends with a further quotation from the *Philosophia prima*, according to which, those who – after being admonished – continue to dissent from the law, should be killed.<sup>54</sup>

Part II of the *MP* contains a second, brief section, dealing with the succession of the lawgiver. Bacon again quotes Avicenna, albeit tacitly modifying the Latin translation; for he substitutes ‘*propheta*’ with legislator and he omits the specification that his successor should be “*de genere suo*”.<sup>55</sup> According to this excerpt from Avicenna’s *Philosophia prima*,

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<sup>51</sup> Meryem Sebti, “Le gouvernement selon Avicenne. Providence divine et statut de la politique dans la Métaphysique du *Şifāʾ*”, *Archives de Philosophie* 82 (2019): 719-728.

<sup>52</sup> Bacon, *MP*, II, 41; see Avicenna, *Liber de Philosophia*, X, 4, 550-551: “*Si autem alia civitas fuerit bonarum constitutionum, hoc non adversatur ei, nisi tempus fecerit debere non esse aliam legem nisi illam quae descendit, cuius institutio, quoniam optima est, tunc dilatanda est per totum mundum.*”

<sup>53</sup> Bacon, *MP*, II, 41: “*Et in hoc verbo lex christiana innuitur.*” Bacon is projecting on Avicenna his persuasion of the final victory of the Christian faith, that he believes to prove on the basis of Albumasar’s historical astrology. See Roger Bacon, *Opus Maius*, IV, edited by J. H. Bridges, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899), 254-269. In *Moralis philosophia*, IV, 193-195, Bacon refers to the astrological section of *Opus maius*. The whole issue is obviously connected to Bacon’s eschatology and his project of the diffusion of the Christian faith. About this interesting issue, which, after seminal research by Bigalli, *I Tartari*, is now receiving renewed interest, see e. g. Timothy J. Johnson, “That They May Love the Faith: Roger Bacon on Culture, Language, and Religion”, in *From La Florida to La California: Franciscan Evangelization in the Spanish Borderlands*, edited by T. J. Johnson and G. Melville (San Francisco: Academy of American Franciscan History, 2013), 23-33; see also above, footnote 8.

<sup>54</sup> Avicenna, *Liber de Philosophia*, X, 5, 551: “*Si autem aliqui fuerint inter eos qui in aliquo a lege discordent, prius corrigantur ut respiciant; quod si facere noluerint, occidantur.*”

<sup>55</sup> Bacon, *MP*, II, 41: “*Et ultimum, quod hic exigitur, est quod legis lator ‘sibi constituat successorem’. Et hoc fit, secundum Avicennam, per hunc modum. Debet enim hoc facere ‘cum consensu maiorum et vulgi et talem eligat qui bene regere possit’...*” See Avicenna, *Liber de Philosophia*, X, 5, 548: “*Post hoc, oportet ut propheta constituat sibi successorem de genere suo, sed cum consensu maiorum et vulgi, et ut talem eligat qui bene regere possit.*” The issue of the successor of the prophet/lawgiver plays a key-role in Avicenna: see e. g. Miriam, Galston, “Realism and Idealism in Avicenna’s Political Philosophy”, *The Review of Politics* 41/4 (1979): 561-77; James W. Morris, “The Philosopher-Prophet in Avicenna’s Political Philosophy”, in *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy Essays in Honor of M. S Mahdi*, edited by Ch. Butterworth (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 142-188. Bacon’s attitude to Avicenna theological-political assumptions (so to speak) deserves an investigation of its own, since in

the legislator chooses his successor with the consensus of the most important figures (the *maiores*) and of the people, He should be the best available expert of the law and possess the virtues necessary to rule. Opposition to this choice and attempts to elect another person amount to denying God, in such a way that the members of the community have the duty to fight against such an intruder and kill him. However, Avicenna does leave open the possibility of arguing that the one elected is, in fact, unworthy. In this case, he can be replaced by another.<sup>56</sup> Bacon then closes his treatment of the issue, remarking that civil law (*ius civile*) now in force among Latins belongs to this part of the *MP*. This is not surprising, since – as seen above – many divisions of philosophy considered *leges* (that is, civil law) to be the object of the *Politics*. Bacon insists, however, on the philosophical origins of legal wisdom, claiming that the Latins received their laws from the Greeks, that is, from the books of Aristotle and Theophrastus.<sup>57</sup>

In sum, in the *MP*, part II, Roger Bacon has carefully extracted from Avicenna's *Philosophia prima*, X, 4 and 5 some basic tenets of political thought, leaving aside all aspects that link that section to the Islamic tradition (for example, by substituting the word 'propheta' with 'legis lator', or omitting passages regarding polygamy). In another passage in the *MP*, part I, Bacon quotes Avicenna speaking of the "Deus humanus, quem licet adorare post deum", but, unlike Avicenna, he avoids using terms connected to prophecy.<sup>58</sup> One possible explanation of such omissions on the part of Bacon could be that he wants to present Avicenna first and foremost as a philosopher who has access, to use Hackett's words, "to a more general universal revelation of truth to all wise philosophers and wise persons".<sup>59</sup> The label 'Avicennian' can, therefore, be consistent with Bacon's contribution to medieval political thought, but not without some qualifications. In the first place, 'Avicennian' should be interpreted not as referring to the 'political philosophy of Avicenna in itself,' but as the choice of a text by Avicenna in Latin translation as a leading

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this passage he avoids overtly speaking of the religious character of the lawgiver, but in other passages acknowledges it: *MP*, I, 8-9: "decimoseptimo, quod uni tantum debeat fieri revelatio, quod iste debeat esse mediator Dei et hominum, et vicarius Dei in terra, cui subiciatur totum genus humanum... et iste est legis lator et summus sacerdos, qui in temporalibus et spiritualibus habet plenitudinem potestatis, tamquam 'Deus humanus, ut dicit Avicenna in decimo Metaphisice, quem licet adorare post Deum'." Bacon's language ("temporalia", "spiritualia", "plenitudo potestatis") is clearly reminiscent of the debates about the relationship between Pope and secular rulers, see Bigalli, *I Tartari*, 141-167.

<sup>56</sup> Bacon, *MP*, II, 42; see Avicenna, *Liber de Philosophia*, X, 5, 549.

<sup>57</sup> Bacon, *MP*, II, 42: "Et certum est quod Latini a Grecis habuerunt iura et leges, scilicet a libris Aristotelis ac Theophrasti, eius successoris, preter leges duodecim tabularum, quas primo transtulerunt de legibus Solonis Atheniensis." The source of this last claim could be the *Decretum Gratiani*: see *Corpus Iuris canonici, I, Decretum magistri Gratiani*, dist. VII, ch 1., 12.

<sup>58</sup> Bacon, *MP*, I, 8; Avicenna, *Liber de Philosophia*, X, 5, 553.

<sup>59</sup> Jeremiah Hackett, "Roger Bacon and Peter John Olivi on the 'status' of the Philosophers", in *Edizioni, traduzioni e tradizioni filosofiche (secoli XII-XVI). Studi per Pietro B. Rossi*, edited by L. Bianchi, O. Grassi and C. Panti, vol. II, (Canterano, Roma: Aracne, 2018), 557-571, here 559. A "philosophical" (as opposed to "theological") reading of Avicenna's is supported by scholars such as Olga Lizzini, "Le théologico-politique à la lumière de la philosophie. Prophète, Halifa et espèce humaine selon Avicenne", in *Le théologico-politique au Moyen Âge*, edited by D. Poirel (Paris, Vrin: 2020), 71-86.

*auctoritas* in treating political issues. From this perspective, based on textual evidence, it is possible to highlight at least three important issues in which Bacon draws inspiration from Avicenna's *Philosophia prima*. First, Bacon finds that the architecture of this work, where the treatment of political matters occupies the last section of the last book, expresses a fundamental philosophical option which he makes his own: namely, that moral philosophy is not an adjunct to metaphysics, but rather its fulfilment. The *Doctor mirabilis* is consistent with this interpretation of Avicenna - something which is not uncontroversial among nowadays interpreters of the Persian philosopher.<sup>60</sup> Second, he concurs with Avicenna in supporting the concentration of power in the hands of one person: he speaks of the lawgiver in the singular and writes about the way he should provide for a successor. In another passage, Bacon writes again in the singular, of *princeps civitatis*, while no mention is made of the possibility of a collective government.<sup>61</sup> The monarchical form of government is, so to speak, taken for granted. This is probably not the case for a hereditary monarchy since Bacon omits Avicenna's "de genere suo". The consent of the *maiores* (and of the *vulgus*, for that matter) seems to play a role only in the moment of succession and, in Bacon's medieval eyes, could be understood, I think, as a practice belonging to what scholarship now calls '*konsensuale Herrschaft*.' This phrase, coined by Bernd Schneidmüller, refers to a sort of implicit but very influential assumption that the ruler, even the emperor, should act in agreement with the leading noble exponents of his kingdom. According to this view, even though there is no institutional procedure limiting the power of the sovereign, listening to the *maiores regni* and making consensual decisions belong to the moral duties of a just ruler.<sup>62</sup> And third, Bacon shares with Avicenna the idea that political power coincides mainly with law-making, and enacting rules encompassing the whole life of society, from family to the division of labour, from economic exchange to welfare institutions. Consistently, one of the qualities the successor of the lawgiver must possess is knowledge of the law at the highest level.<sup>63</sup>

It seems difficult to deny that adhesion to such principles also influences Bacon's expectations regarding Aristotle's *Politica*. While he was working on his *Opus maius*, the Latin translation of the *Politics* had just started circulating.<sup>64</sup> Bacon knew that Aristotle had written a book called *Politica*, but many clues point to the conclusion that he had no direct acquaintance with it yet. His claim that Aristotle's *Politica* is a *liber legum* has already been interpreted by specialists, such as Fioravanti and Flüeler, as a sign that at that time,

<sup>60</sup> Lizzini, "Le thèologico-politique", in part. 72.

<sup>61</sup> Bacon, *MP*, II, 40.

<sup>62</sup> Bernd Schneidmüller, "Konsensuale Herrschaft. Ein Essay über Formen und Konzepte politischer Ordnung im Mittelalter", in *Reich, Regionen und Europa in Mittelalter und Neuzeit. Festschrift für Peter Moraw*, edited by P.-J. Heibig et alii (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2000), 53-87.

<sup>63</sup> Bacon, *Moralis philosophia*, II, 42: "... 'peritus legis, quo nullus sit peritior'..."

<sup>64</sup> For a thorough discussion of evidence supporting a dating of Moerbeke's complete translation around 1265 see Christoph Flüeler, *Rezeption und Interpretation der Aristotelischen Politica im späten Mittelalter*, 2 vols. (Amsterdam-Philadelphia: B. R. Grüner, 1992), 1, 15-19; Jürgen Miethke, *Politiktheorie im Mittelalter. Von Thomas von Aquin bis Wilhelm von Ockham* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 27 accepts this dating.

he had no access to the text.<sup>65</sup> In fact, Bacon's definition of *Politica* seems to derive not from an actual reading of the Latin translation, but rather from the convergence of an established tradition mirrored in the 'introductions to philosophy' mentioned above, of Avicenna's insistence on the law-giver, and perhaps, of the closing remarks of the *Liber Ethicorum* (the title attributed to Grosseteste's translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics*): "...et qualis policia optima, et qualiter unaqueque ordinat, et quibus legibus et consuetudibus utens."<sup>66</sup>

In a further passage of the *MP*, Bacon writes that, in his *Politica*, the Stagirite analyses different species of *sectae* and *leges*, differentiating simple (which cannot be more than four or five) and composite ones according to the ends they pursue. According to Bacon, Aristotle would even prove which *sectae* and *leges* corrupt cities and kingdoms.<sup>67</sup> One could be tempted to try to figure out which parts of the *Politica* the English friar is referring to; but such speculation would be in vain, since Bacon himself gives the decisive clue, stating that Alfarabi, in his *De scientiis*, explains Aristotle's opinion about *sectae*.<sup>68</sup> The *Doctor mirabilis* is, therefore, not referring to any book of the *Politics*, but rather to Gerard of Cremona's translation of *De scientiis*, chapter five.<sup>69</sup> In this context, Alfarabi mentions Aristotle's *Politica* as source for the *scientia civilis*.<sup>70</sup> This 'science' examines many aspects of the political sphere and distinguishes between customs which are appropriate to the

<sup>65</sup> Fioravanti, "Politia Orientalium", 209; Flüeler, *Rezeption und Interpretation*, I, 12-13.

<sup>66</sup> Aristotle, *Ethica Nicomachea*, *Translatio Roberti Grosseteste* (edition as above, footnote 30), X, 588 (1181b21-23). I owe this suggestion to an anonymous reader of a previous version of this paper: this reference to *Nicomachean Ethics* alone, however, would hardly account for Bacon's position. For an English version: Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 284: "...what kind of constitution is best and the best system of laws and customs for it to use."

<sup>67</sup> Bacon, *MP*, IV, 188: "Aristotiles autem in sua *Politica* descendit ad species sectarum, et dicit quod ipse vult considerare de sectis et legibus civitatum quatuor vel quinque simplicium et videre que leges corrumpunt civitates et regna, et que non. Et dicit quatuor esse vel quinque simplices sectas corruptas, intendens quod secta dicitur 'simplex' propter finem simplicem..."

<sup>68</sup> Bacon, *MP*, IV, 188-189: "ut docet Alfarabius, in libro *De scientiis*, sententiam Aristotelis circa sectas exponens."

<sup>69</sup> Eugenio Massa refers here to Alfarabi, *Catálogo de la ciencias*, edited by Á. González Palencia (Madrid: Maestre, 1932), 172-174. I am using Alfarabi, *Über die Wissenschaften. De scientiis. Nach der lateinischen Übersetzung Gerhards von Cremona*. Mit einer Einleitung und kommentierenden Anmerkungen herausgegeben und übersetzt von F. Schupp (Hamburg: Meiner 2005), 112-135 (Latin text with parallel German translation). For interesting remarks on this subject, see Massimo Campanini, "L'ordinamento delle scienze in Al-Farabi, tra epistemologia e politica", *Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica* 108 (2016): 207-213.

<sup>70</sup> This information is available also in Gundissalinus's translation: Gundissalinus's version of *De scientiis*; see Alfarabi, *De scientiis secundum versionem Dominici Gundisalvi*, Lateinisch-Deutsch, edited by J. H. J. Schneider (Freiburg, Basel and Wien: Herder, 2006), 196. The rest, however, is contained only in Gerard of Cremona's translation, which adds Plato as a source for *scientia civilis*. See Alfarabi, *Über die Wissenschaften. De scientiis*, 118. About Alfarabi as source for Bacon in the *Moralis philosophia*, see also Francesco Bottin, "Introduzione" in *La classificazione delle scienze (De scientiis)*, translation and notes by A. Pozzobon (Padova: il Poligrafo, 2013), 48-51.

“*civitates bonae*”.<sup>71</sup> In the same chapter, Alfarabi introduces an *ars legis* and an *ars elocutionis*. The first consists in deriving further norms from the law established by the *legis positor*. The second is described as an apology of the teachings of the lawgiver and, therefore, of his *secta* in comparison with other *sectae*.<sup>72</sup> Although we do not find in the *De scientiis* neither a distinction between simple and composite nor a list of the four or five *sectae corruptae*,<sup>73</sup> it seems evident that Bacon is elaborating on Alfarabi and not on Aristotle’s *Politica*. He is, rather, reconstructing the contents of a book not available to him, working on the witness of the commentators he holds for the most part reliable. Avicenna, *precipuus Aristotilis expositor*,<sup>74</sup> plays a pivotal role, but Alfarabi’s *De scientiis* is also extremely influential. Together with Averroes, whose judgement about the eremitical life is attributed to the Stagirite as well, they all belong to the *domus Aristotelis*.<sup>75</sup> In the opening passages of the *PM*, albeit discussing a more general issue, Bacon seems to hint at the hermeneutical strategy which he has followed. He maintains that philosophers have included moral teachings into their speculative works as well because they knew that moral philosophy – the mistress of human wisdom – is the ultimate goal of human knowledge. For this reason, it is not inappropriate to insert in the *philosophia moralis auctoritates* taken from texts which do not belong to this discipline.<sup>76</sup> On the other hand, Bacon adds, we cannot deny that such claims are not contained in books pertinent to *scientia moralis*, since the philosophy of Aristotle, Avicenna and Averroes has been only partially translated into Latin.<sup>77</sup> In the case of Aristotle’s *Politica*, the *Doctor Mirabilis* seems to have applied an analogous approach. On the basis of what is found in other works, he feels entitled to assume that some statements must be contained therein.

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<sup>71</sup> Alfarabi, *Über die Wissenschaften. De scientiis*, 118: “Deinde demonstrat quod ille operationes, et consuetudines et habitus omnes sunt egritudines civitatibus bonis.”

<sup>72</sup> Alfarabi, *Über die Wissenschaften. De scientiis*, 122-124.

<sup>73</sup> It seems to me that here Bacon is somehow superimposing the astrology of religions he has already expounded in *Opus maius* IV, edited by J. H. Bridges, vol. I (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897), 253-269; on Alfarabi, and through him on Aristotle. Bacon resumes the discussion in *Moralis philosophia* IV, 188-195. On this issue, see Jole Agrimi and Chiara Crisciani, “Albumazar nell’astrologia di Ruggero Bacone”, *Acme* 25 (1972): 315-338; Charles Burnett, “The Astrological Categorization of Religions in Abū Ma’shar, the *De vetula* and Roger Bacon”, in *Language of Religion - Language of the People. Medieval Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, edited by E. Bremer et alii (Munich: Fink, 2007), 127-138.

<sup>74</sup> Bacon, *MP*, I, 12.

<sup>75</sup> Bacon, *MP*, I, 23. For Averroes, see above, footnote 33.

<sup>76</sup> Bacon, *MP*, I, 5: “Et ideo, si allegem auctoritates de aliis locis quam eas, que in libris moralibus continentur, considerari oportet quod he in hac scientia debent proprie collocari.”

<sup>77</sup> Bacon, *MP*, I, 5: “Nec possumus negare ea esse scripta in libris huius scientie, quia non nisi secundum partes in latino habemus phylosophiam Aristotelis et Avicenne et Averrois, qui sunt autores in huiusmodi principales.”



### *Opus tertium and Compendium studii philosophiae*

As its critical editor, Nikolaus Egel, could ascertain, the *Opus tertium* is not a mere abridgment of the *Opus maius*.<sup>78</sup> Although they obviously do not represent a radical change with respect to the *Opus maius*, the summary expositions of the *Moralis philosophia* contained in the *Opus tertium* add some qualifications with respect to the more expanded version. As far as politics is concerned, Bacon's task becomes somewhat easier, because he does not feel the need to literally quote Avicenna. The starting point is the same: part II of moral science concerns laws, or better, public laws, which manage worship, marriage and the way to secure justice and peace for *cives* and kingdoms.<sup>79</sup> The introduction concerning worship entails a modification in the list of the essential parts of the *civitas*. In the *Opus maius*, one finds three parts, their titles taken directly from Avicenna: *dispositores*, *ministros* and *legis peritos*.<sup>80</sup> In the *Opus tertium*, Bacon distinguishes four main groups, describing them in more detail: those responsible for divine worship; those with administrative and jurisdictional competences (the *sapientes*); those with law enforcement functions (*milites*); and, finally, *populus*.<sup>81</sup> In the following section, Bacon repeats his assertion from the *Opus maius* that the *ius civile* is contained in part II of *scientia moralis*, not as positive law, but rather in the form of the principles from which legislation descends. He offers a similitude. The relationship between this part of philosophy and positive law is analogous to that obtaining between a geometer and a carpenter.<sup>82</sup> In this way, what was implicit in the *Opus maius* (where Bacon had claimed that the Latins had received their laws from the Greeks) becomes clearer.<sup>83</sup> Moral philosophy explains the causes of law, while legal learning deals with existing laws as something given, *absolute*, without investigating their *rationes*. In comparison to the *MP*, Bacon introduces here a distinction between *laicale* and *sapientiale*. The approach of legal learning is considered a task of lay people, who content themselves with positive law, while wise men (*sapientes*) investigate the origins of norms. Bacon complains that among the Latins this part of philosophy is treated only *laicaliter*, that is, studying what was established by emperors

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<sup>78</sup> Nikolaus Egel, "Einleitung", in Roger Bacon *Opus tertium*, edited by N. Egel (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 2020), xxxiii-xxxiv.

<sup>79</sup> Roger Bacon, *Opus tertium*, II, 107 edited by N. Egel (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 2020), 900.

<sup>80</sup> See above, footnote 46.

<sup>81</sup> Bacon, *Opus tertium*, II, 107, 902: "Et ideo docet hec pars quod civitas dividatur principaliter in 4 partes: scilicet in eos qui divino cultui vacare debent; et secundo in sapientes qui de omnibus temporalibus ordinare debent et iudicare; et 3° sunt milites, qui exsequantur edicta publica per potestatem, et observent pacem et iustitiam, refrenando malos et discolos qui perturbant bonum commune; et 4° est populus, qui distribuatur secundum officia et artes diversas rei publice utiles." Here one cannot miss the echoes of late medieval distinctions between the secular sphere (*temporalia*) and divine worship.

<sup>82</sup> Bacon, *Opus tertium*, II, 107, 902: "Sicut enim carpentator utitur figuris, et angulis et lineationibus, et causas ac rationes eorum non assignat, sed geometer; sic est de iure civili laicorum, quod fundatur super sapientiam traditam in libris philosophorum de hoc eodem iure. Nam philosophia habet causas omnium et rationes sufficienter dare."

<sup>83</sup> See above, footnote 57.

and kings. Aristotle and Theophrastus, who dealt *philosophice* with this subject matter, are not in use.<sup>84</sup> As Gianfranco Fioravanti has shown, with this claim, Bacon is in line with many other masters, artists and theologians, who questioned the ‘monopoly’ of jurists in the sphere of political thought.<sup>85</sup> With respect to the *Opus maius*, Bacon has, therefore, added relevant specifications concerning the relationship between philosophy and legal learning; on the other hand, he omits the law-giver, who played such an important role in the former account. In the *Opus tertium*, the first promulgation of law lies more generically with the *sapientes*, while the populace acts according to the existing laws. Despite this relevant divergence, the two works agree on the identification of this part of *scientia moralis* with law-making. The existence of the community depends on rules that somebody, on the basis of his superior knowledge, dictates to the others. Aristotle’s *Politica* is mentioned in the *Opus tertium* as the book where the Philosopher, carefully examining the laws of different cities and regions, singles out the best one.<sup>86</sup> Aristotle’s judgement is confirmed by Alfarabi in his *De scientiis*, by Avicenna in the *Radices moralis philosophiae* and by “*tota familia Aristotelis*”. The *Opus tertium* also reiterates the claim that Aristotle’s *Politica* examines simple and composite *leges* or *sectae*, criticising the corrupt ones and proving which one might be perfect.<sup>87</sup>

The *Opus tertium* is dated to 1267 (or 1268 at the latest, since the dedicatee, pope Clemens IV, died on the 29<sup>th</sup> of November of the same year);<sup>88</sup> approximately five years later, Bacon came back to the discussion of the object of moral science in his *Compendium studii philosophiae*.<sup>89</sup> In chapter IV of this work, we find a sweeping indictment against the

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<sup>84</sup> Bacon, *Opus tertium*, I, 14, 102: “sed dolendum est quod haec pars philosophiae non est apud Latinorum usum nisi laicaliter, secundum quod imperatores et reges statuerunt; nam philosophice, secundum quod tradita est ab Aristotele et Theophrasto, non est haec pars in usu Latinorum.” Bigalli, *I Tartari*, 147-149 interprets such passages by Bacon mainly as a negation of the autonomy of human law with respect to divine law. This is in part true, although the term ‘laicaliter’ is here opposed to ‘philosophice’ and implies an epistemological distinction and a vindication of the superiority of philosophy. See Dahan, “Théologie et politique”, 507-509.

<sup>85</sup> Gianfranco Fioravanti, “Filosofi contro legistae. un momento dell’autoaffermazione della filosofia nel Medioevo”, in *Was ist Philosophie im Mittelalter?*, edited by J. A. Aertsen and A. Speer (Berlin-New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1998), 421- 427.

<sup>86</sup> Bacon, *Opus tertium*, II, 109, 910-912: “Et ad hanc sectam inveniendam Aristoteles in libro suo de *Politica* descendit, revolvens leges singularum civitatum et regionum et fines illarum legum, ut per honestatem et utilitatem legum et sublimitatem finis eligat legem que excellat omnes ... Et nos Christiani credimus quod nostra lex sit illa sola que hominis continet finalem salutem.”

<sup>87</sup> Bacon, *Opus tertium*, II, 109, 920: “et Aristoteles in *Politica* sua i. e. in *scientia civili*, revolvit has leges simplices et compositas, ut destruat eas que male sunt, et unam, que perfecta est, certificet. Et Alpharabius, in libro de *Scientiis*, et Avicenna, in *Radicibus Moralis Philosophiae* et *tota familia Aristotelis* eum exponit et confirmat in hujus legis certificatione.”

<sup>88</sup> Egel, “Einleitung”, xxi, footnote 26 rightly remarks that the year 1267 is mentioned explicitly in part I of the *Opus tertium*. One cannot rule out, however, that the completion of the work took some more time.

<sup>89</sup> Thomas S. Maloney, “Introduction”, in Roger Bacon, *CSP*, edited and translated by T. S. Maloney (Oxford: British Academy, 2018), xvi-xvii.

errors caused by the overvaluing of civil law. In the *Opus maius*, civil law had been defined as “Latinorum”.<sup>90</sup> In the *CSP*, *ius civile* is labelled in a rather specious way as specifically ‘Italian’, for the very understandable reason that Bologna, in the thirteenth century, was acknowledged to be the main centre of legal learning. To the Bolognese civil lawyers, Bacon reproaches their appropriation of the title of *magistri*, even though they are laymen and in fact deal with laws enacted by lay rulers for their lay subjects.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, the English Franciscan objects that it is absurd to export Italian laws (Bacon uses this polemical label to refer to *ius commune*) to other kingdoms, such as England or France, and to subject clergy to legal regulation pertaining to the secular sphere.<sup>92</sup> That which in the *Opus tertium* could sound as a methodological distinction, becomes here a polemical weapon. Civil law and moral philosophy are related to each other in the same way as the art of building and geometry are related to each other. This implies, according to Bacon, that *ius civile* is a ‘mechanical’ (*mechanica*) discipline devoid of any philosophical feature.<sup>93</sup> In this way, the *Doctor mirabilis* not only defends the privileges of the clergy but reaffirms, in more dismissive terms, the issue of the superiority of moral philosophy over civil law that had already surfaced in the *Opus tertium*.<sup>94</sup> Few chapters of Aristotle’s political philosophy contain more than the whole corpus of Italian laws.<sup>95</sup> Aristotle and his followers (*sequentes*) have taught who should be the legislator and how to provide for his

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<sup>90</sup> See above, footnote 57.

<sup>91</sup> Roger Bacon, *CSP*, IV, 56: “Quod est manifestum si consideremus quod hoc ius et a laicis principibus statutum est et pro laico populo dirigendo. Atque domini legum Bononiae et per totam Italiam volunt vocari magistri vel clerici, nec coronam sicut clerici habent. Uxores ducunt et omnino sicut laici familiam regunt et consortio et consuetudinibus laicalibus sunt subiecti.”

<sup>92</sup> Roger Bacon, *CSP* IV, 56: “Praeterea omne regnum habet sua iura quibus laici reguntur, ut iura Angliae et Franciae. Et ita fit iustitia in aliis regnis per constitutiones quas habent, sicut in Italia per suas. Quapropter, cum iura Angliae non competant statui clericorum, nec Franciae nec Hispaniae nec Alemanniae, similiter nec iura Italiae conveniunt ullo modo, quia, si debeant clerici uti legibus patriae, tunc minus est inconveniens ut clerici Angliae utantur legibus Angliae, et clerici Franciae legibus Franciae, et sic de aliis, quam clerici Angliae et Franciae utantur legibus Italiae.”

<sup>93</sup> Roger Bacon, *CSP*, IV, 56-58: “Nam scire debemus quod omnia quae sunt in usu laicorum sunt mechanica respectu philosophiae, ut ars aedificatoria est mechanica geometriae et non est pars philosophiae, et ars aurifabri est mechanica respectu alchimiae, et sic de omnibus artibus quae sunt in usu laicorum. Quapropter, ars iuris civilis laicorum est mechanica respectu iuris civilis philosophiae, et non est pars philosophiae, quia Aristoteles docet primo *Metaphysicae* differentiam inter artes mechanicas et scientias philosophiae, dicens quod isti mechanici operantur sine causae cognitione et ratione examinandi, sicut bruta animalia et sicut inanimata, velut ignis comburit, ut ait.”

<sup>94</sup> One recalls the disparaging label ‘legisti idiotae politici’, used by Giles of Rome and later authors, cf. Jacques Krynen, “Les légistes ‘idiots politiques’. Sur l’hostilité des théologiens à l’égard des juristes, en France, au temps de Charles V” in *Théologie et droit dans la science politique de l’État moderne*. Actes de la table ronde de Rome (12-14 novembre 1987) (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1991), 171-198.

<sup>95</sup> Bacon, *CSP*, IV, 62: “Certe maiora sunt hic in paucis capitulis quam in toto corpore iuris Italici.”

successor.<sup>96</sup> In his passionate plea for Aristotle, the *Doctor mirabilis* drafts a kind of table of contents of the *Politica*: in the beginning, one would find there the foundations of divine worship, the laws for cities and kingdoms, and rules to be followed in legal disputes.<sup>97</sup>

In one passage of chapter IV, Bacon recalls that he has already written about this issue to the late Pope Clement.<sup>98</sup> In his *CSP*, he indeed remains faithful to the main tenets of *scientia civilis* which he had already exposed in the *MP*. Over the years, his understanding of *leges* as object of this science has been clarified thanks to a sharper distinction between the approach towards laws typical of legal science and that of philosophy. On the other hand, his reconstruction of the contents of Aristotle's *Politica* does not reveal substantial changes. This can be surprising, if one takes into consideration the fact that in 1272, Moerbeke's translation had been circulating for some years, while some authors had already started using it and, most probably, two important commentaries on the *Politica* had already been written. A slight uncertainty could remain for Aquinas's commentary, which is by common consent dated to the second Parisian stay of the Dominican Master and, therefore, could have been written at almost the same time. Since Albert the Great's commentary pre-dates that of Aquinas and could even go as far back as 1265, at least one commentary on the *Politica* was without doubt already available in 1272.<sup>99</sup> In search of an explanation, Gianfranco Fioravanti interpreted Bacon's attitude either as a "cultural lag", or as an "obstinate fidelity to an old pattern" or as an "audacious and extreme (un po' piratesca) reduction of Aristotle's complexity to his own agenda of cultural politics".<sup>100</sup> One could try to go beyond the alternatives put forward by the latter Italian scholar.<sup>101</sup> As

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<sup>96</sup>Bacon, *CSP*, IV, 62: "Nam Aristoteles et sui sequentes docent quod haec lex, Deo revelante, haberi debet, et quis erit legislator, et quomodo probetur quod legem a Deo recepit, ut tandem credatur ei omnino; et qualiter ipse habet legem promulgare, et quomodo ordinare debeat de suo successore..." Here Bacon clearly echoes the contents of the *MP*, part II, drawn from Avicenna. See above, footnotes 42-55.

<sup>97</sup> Bacon, *CSP*, IV, 62: "Et primo statuit quod homines vivant in omni virtute, ut in decem libris constituit qui vocantur libri Ethicorum, quibus iungit libros Politicæ in quibus primo statuit cultum divinum, in quo magnificat se adorare Deum unum et trinum eminentem proprietate rerum creaturarum, investigans quamdam trinitatem in omnibus rebus creatis quae primo reperitur in creatore.[...] Deinde specialiter constituit sacrificia tria et orationes tres in honore trium personarum et postea reliqua quae ad cultum Dei pertinent, secundum quod philosophia potuit edocere. Et postea leges civitatum et regnorum instituit et oratorias et rhetoricas constitutiones, quibus causae discendantur sine strepitu litis."

<sup>98</sup> Bacon, *CSP*, IV, 64: "Haec autem sub compendio collegi et misi domino Clementi apostolicae recordationis sicut multa alia..."

<sup>99</sup> See Flüeler, *Rezeption und Interpretation*, I, 15-29; François Cheneval, "Considérations presque philosophiques sur les commentaires de la Politique d'Albert le Grand et de Thomas d'Aquin", *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 45 (1998): 56-82; Toivanen, *The Political Animal*, 27-28.

<sup>100</sup> Fioravanti, "Politiae Orientalium", 214-215: "Si tratta ormai o di ritardo culturale o di una ostinata fedeltà o di un'audace e un po' piratesca riduzione della complessità del testo aristotelico ai propri programmi di politica culturale."

<sup>101</sup> I would like to express my gratitude to an anonymous reader, whose critical remarks about a previous version of this paper convinced me to modify my position on this point.

I have tried to show, Bacon has 'reconstructed' – so to speak – a political Aristotle based on his own expectations and on the assumption that what he called the *familia Aristotelis* had followed the Stagirite in political philosophy as well. Such a reconstruction of the Stagirite as a political thinker is very coherent with his comprehensive project of reform, so that it would have been difficult for Bacon to change it dramatically. He continued to maintain the position expressed in the *MP*, where the identification of politics with the legislative action of a virtuous and wise monarch is placed under the aegis of the Stagirite and his *sequentes*. Did Bacon cling to his reconstruction also after having access to the actual text of Aristotle's *Politica*? A positive answer would most probably imply the "audacious" attitude of Fioravanti's third hypothesis. Although it sounds unlikely, given the lively cultural exchanges in the second half of the thirteenth century, I came to the conviction that the *Doctor mirabilis* had no opportunity of carefully reading Moerbeke's translation. If he had received additional information, it must have not been detailed and structured enough to revise a position that had become well integrated into his whole cultural programme. Bacon's failure to have Aristotle's *Politica* in his hands can be a matter of happenstance; but it is also possible that over time he lost interest in looking for a book whose contents he was convinced he knew before reading it. In the latter case, fidelity to his own former assessments could well have played a role. The fact that Bacon fails to take into consideration the actual contents of a book he refers to time and again as a pillar of political science remains puzzling. My suggestion rests admittedly on speculation. To corroborate it I can put forward only one argument, which is *e silentio* and, therefore, not decisive. In his *Compendium studii theologiae*, written near the end of his life, in 1292, complaining that Aristotle's works were translated too late, he mentions, in the last place, the *Ethica*, which was – according to him – made available to European scholars even later (*tardius*).<sup>102</sup> Reference to the *Ethica* is immediately followed by a rather typical complaint on his part about the huge quantity of books written by Aristotle, which have not yet been translated into Latin, with the effect of putting serious limits to our knowledge of his thought.<sup>103</sup>

### Conclusions

It would be naively pretentious to claim that the present contribution deals with all aspects of Bacon's contribution to medieval political discourse. Among the issues which

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<sup>102</sup> Roger Bacon, *CST*, II, edited by T. S. Maloney (Leiden *et alibi*: E. J. Brill, 1988), 47: "Et tardius communicata est *Ethica* et nuper a magistris lecta et raro."

<sup>103</sup> Roger Bacon, *CST*, II, 47; see above footnote 102. About Bacon's attitude to translators and translations into Latin see Richard Lemay, "Roger Bacon's Attitude Toward the Latin Translations and Translators of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries", in *Roger Bacon and the Sciences. Commemorative Essays*, edited by J. Hackett (Leiden, New York and Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1997), 25-47 and Nicola Polloni, "Disentangling Roger Bacon's Criticism of Medieval Translations" in *Early Thirteenth-Century English Franciscan Thought*, edited by L. Schumacher (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2021), 261-282.

deserve further investigation, I would mention, first, Bacon's edition of the *Secretum secretorum*, to which he also refers with the title *De regimine regnorum*.<sup>104</sup> The *Secretum* was considered, at least in part, a Mirror of Princes.<sup>105</sup> Mainly for this reason, I think, in his entry in the *Stanford Encyclopedia* on Roger Bacon, Jeremiah Hackett deals almost exclusively with this work under the heading *Bacon's Political Philosophy*.<sup>106</sup> Examining Bacon's edition of the *Secretum* would be necessary in order to attain a more comprehensive picture of Bacon's contribution in this field, but it raises so many questions that a separate study seems to be unavoidable.<sup>107</sup> A second, more general subject could be the relationship existing between what we could call - for simplicity's sake - his 'political philosophy' (which is the main focus of the present paper) and his 'political theology' (also including his ecclesiology).

If the present contribution succeeds in persuading specialists in the field, the desired further developments, just sketched above, can benefit from its conclusions. Roger Bacon's division of moral science can be considered a product of the intellectual milieu of the Parisian Arts Faculty of the mid-thirteenth century. It shows important resemblances to the didactic literature known as 'introductions to philosophy', which is, in turn, an expression of a fluid situation, open to different interpretations of the structure of practical philosophy. The process of the reception of Aristotle's works was still in progress during Bacon's lifetime. Writing the last part of his *Opus maius*, Bacon felt the need to appeal to the authority of the Stagirite; but having no access to Aristotle's *Politica* in Latin, he tried to reconstruct its main tenets through the writings of other thinkers, such as Avicenna and Alfarabi. The result of this attempt is a sketch of a political theory that goes mainly under the name of Aristotle but has little to do with the actual contents of the *Politica*. In the following years, Bacon remained faithful to his first reconstruction, not only in the *Opus tertium*, which was finished shortly after the *Opus maius*, but also in his

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<sup>104</sup> Bacon, *MP*, I, 17: "Aristotiles quidem, in libro De regimine regnorum, expresse ponit et nominat Adam et Enoch..."; see Steven J. Williams, "Roger Bacon and His Edition of the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Secretum Secretorum*", *Speculum* 69 (1994): 57-73. For the wider context of the receptions of the *Secretum Secretorum*, Steven J. Williams, *The Secret of Secrets. The Scholarly Career of a Pseudo-Aristotelian Text in the Latin Middle Ages* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2003).

<sup>105</sup> On the reception of the *Secretum* as a mirror for princes: Steven J. Williams, "Giving Advice and Taking it: The Reception by Rulers of the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Secretum Secretorum* as a *Speculum Principis*", in *Consilium. Teorie e pratiche del consigliare nella cultura medievale*, edited by C. Casagrande, C. Crisciani, and S. Vecchio (Florence: SISMEL-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2004), 139-180. See also Chiara Crisciani, "Ruggero Bonace e l'Aristotele del *Secretum secretorum*", in *Christian Readings of Aristotle from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, edited by L. Bianchi (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 37-64; in particular 46-49.

<sup>106</sup> Jeremiah Hackett, "Roger Bacon", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2020 Edition), edited by E. N. Zalta: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2020/entries/roger-bacon/>. Accessed 25 Apr. 2021.

<sup>107</sup> One of the preliminary questions is the biographical setting of Bacon's work on *Secretum secretorum*; see Williams, "Roger Bacon and His Edition", 63, and Jeremiah Hackett, "Roger Bacon". I think that, in principle, the idea of "editing" a mirror for princes attributed to Aristotle is consistent with Bacon's political theory. To argue in favour of this persuasion, however, would require further investigation.

CSP. As scholars agree on the fact that the CSP was written in 1271 or 1272, when Aristotle's *Politica* had already been translated and commented on, it can be surprising that Bacon does not make any relevant modifications in his account of the contents of this work. I suggest therefore that, with all probability, for a variety of reasons, he never read the actual text of the *Politica*. Whatever the explanation of this relatively paradoxical situation might be, the result is that, in spite of his own claims, Bacon's contribution in this field was not influenced by Aristotle's political masterpiece, but by other texts, in particular by Avicenna's *Philosophia prima*.

From the point of view of an intellectual historian, such an assessment should not in any way imply a negative judgement on Bacon. Rather, it suggests that we should consider him among those authors who contributed to the rich diversity of medieval political thought independent of Aristotle's *Politica*.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Among Bacon's almost contemporaries, one could mention Guibert of Tournai, Roberto Lambertini, "Francescani e teorie politiche a metà Duecento: il caso di Guiberto di Tournai", in *Arbor Ramosa. Studi per Antonio Rigon da allievi amici colleghi*, edited by L. Bertazzo et alii (Padova: Centro Studi Antoniani, 2011), 183-194; Alexander Horowski, "Opere e manoscritti di Gilberto di Tournai (Nota bibliografica integrativa)", *Collectanea Franciscana* 85 (2015): 693-720.