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CLUJ-NAPOCA
FACULTATEA DE ISTORIE ȘI FILOSOFIE
ȘCOALA DOCTORALĂ DE FILOSOFIE**

John of Salisbury's Politics of Reason

REZUMATUL TEZEI DE DOCTORAT

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2022

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Keywords

- John of Salisbury
- *Policraticus*
- *Metalogicon*
- Political Philosophy
- Reason
- Charity
- Law
- Tyranny
- Body Politic
- Structure of the *Policraticus*
- Main Theme of the *Policraticus*
- *Otium*
- *Negotium*
- God
- Liberal Arts
- Friendship
- Prince
- Epicureans

Synthesis of the Main Ideas of the Thesis

John of Salisbury has been credited as one of the main representatives of the movement entitled the Twelfth Century Renaissance. Despite the passing of over one hundred years of study on his texts and a good number of contributions from esteemed professors, the topic has by no means been exhausted.

At least one major puzzle has remained, so far, unsolved by scholars, that of identifying thematic unity in John of Salisbury's works in general and in the *Policraticus* in particular. Most specialists in the field have characterized John's main treatise as fragmentary or as a heterogenous collection of ideas. Some have gone as far as stating that such unity should not even be sought. In the best-case scenario, a plurality of topics has been identified in John's works (for example by Cary J. Nederman and Christophe Grellard), but without a single unifying thread between them.

Such a lack of coherence in John of Salisbury's writings comes across as odd, given the great amount of detail present even in the structure of his phrases. In addition, his affiliation to Cicero and the New Academy, together with the emphasis he puts on rhetoric render the dissipated structure even stranger. Moreover, given that John's *Policraticus* had been sent to several of his close friends for correction, it seems more likely that the case is not of a lack of central theme, but rather of its not being as obvious to the modern reader as it was to John's twelfth century circle of *litterati*.

Taking into consideration the above points, the present thesis aims at providing a potential solution to the question of the central theme of John's works in general, focusing on the *Policraticus* in particular. This solution is *reason* and it has at its core John's statement in the second book of the *Policraticus* that God "is indisputably a God of knowledge"¹.

Reason appears as the central theme connecting John of Salisbury's works. Reason is of divine origin, being located in the most upper part of the soul and coordinating the rest of the soul's functions. It differentiates man from the rest of creation, as only he shares it with the Creator. It is thus by way of reason that man must get closer to God. While it was man's search for knowledge that brought his fall from Eden, through Christ's sacrifice as the incarnate Word of God, man is not only allowed, but required to pursue the path of knowledge, in order to obtain salvation.

¹ John of Salisbury: *Frivolities of Courtiers and Footprints of Philosophers*. Transl. Joseph B. Pike. II.27. *Policraticus*. Ed. Katherine Keats-Rohan. "procul dubio scientiarum Dominus est".

John's attention to reason can be observed in his analysis of the process of knowing, starting from perception, going to understanding, and being defined by reason. It is a journey of abstraction, from matter to form, from earthly experiences to spiritual development.

In the process of knowledge arises the topic of the universals. John of Salisbury regards universals as mental concepts, which the human mind uses as tools to know. Despite providing his input on the question of universals, John also approaches it with scepticism, viewing it as a theme on which pseudo-philosophers thrive. Such a view might have been generated by his experience with his own masters.

Man's historically dynamic relationship with knowledge is also tackled. Originally, man's fall was caused by his wish to attain knowledge, prompted by his pride in wanting to become God's equal. Through Christ's sacrifice, who is the *Logos* par excellence, the tree of knowledge metaphorically becomes the wood of the cross. Moreover, as an opposite movement to man's original pride, Christ humbles Himself to the human condition. Thus, man is not only permitted access to knowledge, but is actually required to cultivate reason, in order to connect to God and obtain salvation.

John does not limit himself to analysing how knowledge occurs, but he provides a series of steps for those aspiring to knowledge. He uses as a starting point Bernard of Chartres's keys of knowledge, to which he adds Quintilian's seventh key. To these he adds his own, the key of keys, which is God, without Whom true wisdom cannot be attained.

In the relationship between man and God, mediated by knowledge, John brings the metaphor of the world as a stage. For those who do not seek knowledge the world is an apparent comedy. However, regardless, of how good their earthly life is, life is in fact a tragedy for them, since they are condemned to damnation. The wise are situated both inside and outside this comedy-tragedy of life. On the one hand, inside it they are regarded as fools by the frivolous, in an ironic inversion. On the other hand, outside, they are the spectators together with God, because they are the ones who truly understand what is happening in earthly life and what its goal is. This metaphor, of life as a stage and of the seeming fool, who is in fact a sage, finds its posterity in William Shakespeare's works, being clearly stated in *As You Like It*.

Reason does not remain a merely philosophical tool, it is present in all aspects of man's life. It is reason which serves as criterion between man's appropriate and inappropriate actions. In the *Policraticus*, John takes up from Cicero the distinction between man's active life, *negotium*, and his spare time activities, *otium*. In both the realm of *otium* and *negotium* there are appropriate activities, those which stimulate reason and bring man closer to God, and those

which do not stimulate reason and cause man's damnation. Through their practice, these activities necessarily entail either virtue or vice, depending on which category they belong to.

As inappropriate forms of *otium* John enumerates hunting, gambling, music, theatre, and divinatory practices. However, in certain contexts these can be lawful activities (hunting as *negotium*, gambling to relieve stress, music in the religious context and at philosophical banquets, theatre if it is morally instructive, and foretelling future events if it is done in a scientific way, like in the case of the weather). The fault in these pastimes is the fact that they do not cultivate reason. Moreover, some of them break the balance between *otium* and *negotium*, encouraging man to practice *otium* after *otium*. As a result, instead of stimulating virtue, they lead man to vice.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, the only appropriate form of *otium* is philosophy, as it concentrates on stimulating man's rationality. From John's perspective his contemporary philosophy was largely indebted to the ancient one. In this context he dwells upon the metaphor of the dwarfs standing on the shoulders of the giants, taken from Bernard of Chartres.

In terms of *negotium*, reason is embodied in the form of law. Lay law necessarily derives from divine law, otherwise it is null. Law makes the distinction between the appropriate manifestation of *negotium*, the body politic, and the inappropriate one, tyranny.

It becomes apparent that John's knowledge of both Canon Law and Roman Law was solid, enabling him to conduct the legal affairs of Theobald's household and to represent his master at the Curia. The traces of his legal knowledge can be observed both in his *Letters* and in his *Policraticus*. However, in the timeline of his studies, law is neither mentioned, nor does it fit the narrow space. From here, as well as from certain Bolognese influences detectable in his approach to legalities, it becomes probable that John had taken up legal studies from master Vacarius, who was part of Theobald's household in the 1140's.

The approved form of *negotium* is the body politic, led by the prince. The prince willingly subdues himself to the law and cultivates his rationality and virtue, propagating these values to the rest of the commonwealth.

Each part of the commonwealth has an assigned role and needs to be subordinated to the law. In addition, each part is important and all its members need to work in harmony, in order for it to function organically and thrive.

On the other hand, tyranny comes from the disobedience of the law. It can occur at all levels of society, including amongst the clergy. The ruler's tyrannical character entices the rest of the commonwealth to vice. It is lawful to remove such a ruler, but only under certain circumstances, as usually a tyrant is God's punishment for a sinful people.

The origin of tyranny is attributed by John to an imbalance between man's focus on matter and his focus on form. Such a shift in priorities can be seen amongst the Epicureans, who, by putting earthly pleasure before reason, end up damning themselves.

The classification of the different types of activities into appropriate and inappropriate *otium* and *negotium* provides the *Policraticus* with a symmetrical structure. There is an inverse three to one ratio, meaning that there are three books dealing with the inappropriate forms of *otium*, three books dealing with the appropriate form of *negotium*, one book dealing with the appropriate form of *otium*, and one dealing with the inappropriate form of *negotium*. The silver lining connecting all these parts is reason, under its various forms.

Another, more subtle form, that rationality takes in John of Salisbury's works is charity. Charity is equated to reason, as no one can be truly wise without it. It is the practical embodiment of reason, without which nobody can call himself a philosopher. Charity is the main criterion for the final judgement, therefore it is mandatory for salvation. It is charity which is responsible for the social character of John of Salisbury's political thinking.

Avarice comes as the main vice opposing charity. In the case of avarice there is an inversed relationship between form and matter, man preferring matter to form, therefore the perishable earthly welfare to the salvation of the soul.

A form of charity particular to John of Salisbury is teaching. Teaching enables others to attain wisdom and therefore salvation.

Furthermore, in the context of charity friendship appears as a particular instance. For the treatment of friendship, John of Salisbury is largely indebted to Cicero, but he does not resume himself to Cicero's views, instead he employs Cicero as a starting point for developing his own conception of the term. For John, friendship is possible only among virtuous men. Moreover, there is a certain freedom of speech which occurs among friends, giving birth to a kind of permanent Saturnalia in their interactions.

Given the above points that the present thesis has reached, it can be clearly observed that John of Salisbury's works enjoy thematical unity. The concept tying them together both internally and between each other is reason.

Reason is used exploring all of God's definitions, as the way, the truth, the Word, and most importantly as love. As a result, reason is implemented as wisdom, as law, and as charity. Reason should be central in man's life, for which purpose John provides the necessary tools and methods. It should be kindled in both the active (*negotium*) and the passive (*otium*) spheres of life.

Furthermore, reason unites man to God, making salvation possible. It embitters man and regulates a harmonious relationship between the various parts of society.

The absence of reason leads to tyrannical behaviour, to an inappropriate prioritization in man's life. From here vices unavoidably spring and man heads to damnation, instead of salvation.

Moreover, the structure of the *Policraticus* in particular has been explained and a unitary theme has been proposed and arguments have been provided in this sense. It can no longer be considered fragmentary or having multiple subjects.

The division of man's life between *otium* and *negotium*, taken up from Cicero explains the division of the *Policraticus*. In addition, reason comes as both a criterion between proper and improper forms of *otium* and *negotium* and as a unifying element. For *otium*, it is reason cultivated through philosophy which should be sought. At the same time, for *negotium*, reason takes up the form of the law, sprung from divine law, and, thus, from God. Obedience to the law makes the ruler legitimate and produces a harmonious function within the state. The social character of the *Policraticus* is given by the synonymy between charity and reason. Without charity man cannot be truly wise and cannot gain salvation. Additionally, charity ensures that each part of society is taken care of and mutual aid is present in the body politic.

As a result, reason, under its various forms unites both John's corpus in general and the *Policraticus* in particular, proving that in both instances there is thematic unity.

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