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American Presidential Candidates at the Court of Charles V: How Political *Theory* Trumped Political *Theology* in Fourteenth-Century Paris

Prologue

“Populism” has been a favorite descriptor for journalists analyzing the appeal of Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump in the presidential primary campaign of 2016. But what, exactly, does the term mean in this context? Is it rigorously descriptive, or a convenient trope? Given the exigencies of media journalism, we should not be surprised to find that it suffers the kind of distortion characteristic of political races. Either it is globalized to reflect political movements in South America, Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East, or it is localized as an expression of disaffection among certain sectors of each party.¹

There have been some valiant efforts to point out that neither Sanders nor Trump qualifies as a populist in the traditional sense of the term because they are both “working – however reluctantly – within the established order.” As William Greider noted in *The Nation* last fall, “By definition, populism requires plain people in rebellion, organizing themselves to go up against the reigning powers.” Such was the case of the “People’s Party in the last decades of the nineteenth century, which was self-organized by scattered groups of distressed farmers.” On 4 July 1892, in Omaha, Nebraska, the populists formally launched their party with a platform containing ten resolutions – of which the ninth opposed national subsidy or aid to any private corporation for any purpose, and the tenth supported the Knights of Labor’s right to organize.

James B. Weaver, the presidential candidate of the People’s Party in 1892, carried four states, gleaming him 22 electoral votes, thanks to over a million popular votes. The party itself took 11 seats in the US House of Representatives,

¹ See, for example, William Greider. “Bernie, Donald, and the Promise of Populism.” *The Nation*, 21 September 2015 (www.thenation.com/article/bernie-donald-and-the-promise-of-populism. Accessed 13 February 2018), and John Cassidy. “Bernie Sanders and the New Populism.” *The New Yorker*, 3 February 2016.

Note: My title refers to American presidential candidates in the 2016 primary campaign, while referencing Mark Twain’s 1889 novella, *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur’s Court*.

elected several governors, and attained a majority in the state legislatures of Kansas, Nebraska, and North Carolina.

As we know, however, historical accuracy is not a high priority for political journalism, so the “new populism” may continue to define the anti-establishment sentiment on the right that Trump has successfully exploited. And that’s too bad, in a way, since it is not politics that galvanizes Trump and Sanders supporters, but hope; the hope that these candidates will remedy longstanding symptoms of social disaffection. The latter is far from novel. As Robert Pippin argued some years ago,

postmodernism is a culture of dissatisfactions with the affirmative, normative claims essential to European modernization. [...] A culture of melancholy [and] profound skepticism [...] [led to] the experience of modernism as some kind of spiritual failure, of modernity as loss [...] [expressed by] images of death, loss, and failure, in a language of anxiety, unease, and mourning.²

Pippin consciously speaks of “a culture of disaffections” (in the plural) because he sees the skeptical, melancholic condition as being a recurrent trait of modernism. Like economic cycles, the culture of disaffection also waxes and wanes with periodic popular outpouring of frustration and discontent. In this, he channels Marx’s dictum: “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.”³ Unlike Marx, however, Pippin does not perceive recurrent cycles of popular discontent as “the tradition of all dead generations weighing like a nightmare on the brains of the living.”⁴ He sees them rather as a natural consequence of “modern, market-based, liberal democratic societies [...] that create straightforward practical and political problems calling for corrective or progressive action.”⁵

Philosophy, for Pippin, offers, as it has since Plato, a key to assessing such problems and to formulating just and effective proposals to correct them. Treatises of moral and political philosophy exist to redress disaffection within the

² Robert Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem: on the Dissatisfactions of European High Culture*. 2nd Edition. Oxford: Blackwell, 1999, pp. xi–xii.

³ Karl Marx. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoléon* (1852) (“Die Menschen machen ihre eigene Geschichte, aber sie machen sie nicht aus freien Stücken unter selbstgewählten, sondern unter unmittelbar vorhandenen, gegebenen und überlieferten Umständen.” *Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels Gesamtausgabe (MEGA)*, vol. I, 11. Berlin: Dietz, 1985, pp. 96–189, p. 96 f.)

⁴ “Die Tradition aller toden Geschlechter lastet wie ein Alp auf dem Gehirne der Lebenden.” (*Ibid.*, p. 97)

⁵ Pippin, *Modernism as a Philosophical Problem*, p. xiii.

social order. The problem is not the lack of a blueprint for a just society that minimizes discontent, but the ability – or desire – of the political class to adopt and implement such visions. There are precedents for such experiments in governance, however, even as far back as the Middle Ages. Perhaps no such pre-modern effort was as fascinating as the attempt by King Charles V of France (1364–1380) to implement social reform in his kingdom based on the precepts of Aristotle’s political philosophy.

Charles V and Aristotle’s *Politics*

On a deep winter’s day in 1372, an unprecedented event took place in Paris at the court of King Charles V. For the first time in French history, the king filled the office of Chancellor of France by election. The chancellorship was the second most important administrative post of the kingdom, an office so crucial that French kings traditionally entrusted it only to aristocrats. But in this case Charles summoned his council – some two hundred churchmen, aristocrats, bourgeois, and others – to his residence at the Hôtel Saint-Pol for deliberation and a vote.⁶

Charles’s decision to fill the office by election was so unusual that the writer of the *Grandes chroniques de France*, who recorded it, seems not to have known what to make of it.⁷ While qualifying it as *notable eleccion*, “a noteworthy election,” he disposed of it in a single sentence, embedded in an account of the resignation of the previous Chancellor, Cardinal Jean de Dormans, Bishop of Beauvais, and brother of the newly elected chancellor.⁸

6 “Le 21 février de cette année, Charles V convoqua en l’hôtel de Saint-Pol tous les membres de son conseil pour prendre part à l’élection d’un nouveau chancelier. Le mot conseil doit être pris ici dans le sens le plus large, puisque le greffier du Parlement évalue à deux cents environ le nombre des votants, prélats, barons, et autres.” (Siméon Luce. “De l’élection au scrutin de deux chanceliers de France sous le règne de Charles V.” *Revue historique*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1881, p. 95.)

7 “L’élection au scrutin d’un chancelier de France [...] était une nouveauté qui dut frapper vivement les contemporains.” (Ibid., p. 96.)

8 “*Item*, le samedi .xxi^e. jour de fevrier .mcccclxxi. desus dit monseigneur Jean de Dormans, Cardinal nomé de Biauvais, pour ce que il avoit esté évesque de Biauvais, lors chancelier de France, rendy au Roy les seaulx de France, et laissa l’office de chancellerie. *Et par notable eleccion fist le Roy chancelier monseigneur Guillaume de Dormans chevalier, frere germain du dit cardinal de Biauvais*. Et ainsi fut le dit cardinal de Biauvais chancelier depuis que il avoit esté cardinal par l’espace de trois ans et .iiii. mois. Car il avoit esté fait cardinal le .xxii^e. jour de septembre .mcccclxviii. et avoit [fol. 462r-a] tousjours esté chancelier depuis” (*Grandes chroniques de France*, BnF fr. 2813, fols. 461v-d–462r-a. Emphasis mine. All manuscript transcriptions and translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated.)

However puzzling the election of Guillaume de Dormans as chancellor may have been in 1372, it was a different matter a year later, when Guillaume suddenly died. This time, Charles made an even more startling departure from precedent. Not only did he again convene his council on 20 November 1373 for the purpose of electing a successor, but for the first time his choice fell on a commoner (*bourgeois*), Pierre d'Orgement. Of the 130 electors who attended Parlement, 105 voted in favor of confirming Pierre's appointment, while 25 voted against. The latter may reflect disapproval on the part of some nobles towards this unconventional nomination, a sentiment apparently strong enough for Charles to postpone announcing the results immediately. Although convinced of Pierre's superior qualifications (there *were* eligible aristocrats who didn't make the cut), Charles recognized that for Pierre to have the necessary authority to exercise his office, he would need a title. So he waited a month until the Christmas court convened, when he conferred a knighthood on him and then presented him as chancellor. In the words of the nineteenth-century historian, Siméon Luce, this dual infringement of consecrated procedure, "was a novelty that must have struck contemporaries vividly."⁹

That was certainly true for Nicolas de Villemer, who, as clerk of the Parlement (*greffier*), made the official record of the proceedings. His account emphasizes the steps taken by Charles to assure the confidentiality of the meeting. Each council member, Nicolas notes, had first to swear to vote for the most competent candidate (whether prelate or lay person); then came the vote, whose outcome was known only after counting the ballots (an indication that the election was not a foregone conclusion).¹⁰ Some of the terms Nicolas uses –

⁹ "L'élection au scrutin d'un chancelier de France [...] était une nouveauté qui dut frapper vivement les contemporains." (Luce, *Revue historique*, p. 96.)

¹⁰ "*Dimanche 20. Novembre*, le Roy nostre Sire tint son grand & general conseil au Louvre, de prelates, de princes de son lignage, barons & autres nobles, des seigneurs de parlement, des requestes de son hostel, des comptes & autres conseilliers, jusqu'au nombre de six-vingt & dix personnes, ou environ, pour eslire un Chancelier de France, pource que la chancellerie vaquoit, & en general touchant, dist le Roy nostre Sire devant tous ceuz qui là estoient, tant du conseil, comme autres, que pour ceste cause avoit-il fait assembler sondit conseil, & puis fit tout aller dehors, & après par voie de scrutine, fit chacun de ceuz de son conseil venir à luy & par serment jurer aux Saints Evangiles de Dieu (que tous touchèrent, prelaz & autres,) de luy nommer & conseiller selon leurs avis, & eslire la plus suffisante personne qu'ils scauroient nommer, fust d'Eglise, ou autre, pour estre Chancelier de France, & furent les noms & les despositions de tous escrits par moy N[icolas] de Villemer, a ce ordonné par le Roy, & en sa presence, ou estoit avec Maistre Pierre Blanchet son secretaire tant seulement, & tout ouï & escrit, fu trouvé que Maistre Pierre d'Orgemont, paravant premier President de Parlement, nés de Laigny sur Marne, par le trop plus grand nombre des esliseus, fut nommé & esleu Chancelier de France ; c'est à sçavoir, par cent & cinq desdits esliseus : Et ce dist et publia à tous le Roy nostre Sire, & crea son Chancelier de France, ledit Maistre Pierre d'Orgemont ; lequel se excusa

e.g., *eslire/elect*, *par voie de scrutine/vote by ballot*, *suffisante personne/most competent candidate* – seem normal to us, but were radical in the context of medieval monarchy. That Nicolas uses them here attests the success of Charles V in implementing electoral reforms based on a political theory derived from Aristotle’s *Politics* and *Ethics*, a work Charles commissioned the philosopher Nicole Oresme to translate into French.

For Charles, Aristotle offered an ethical, but pragmatic model of governance based on analogy with the natural world, coupled with the belief that the goal (τέλος) of the state is to assure both its autonomy and a good life for its citizens.¹¹ These concepts had the further advantage for Charles of propounding a model of secular governance at once compatible with Christian doctrine and still serving a large, heterogeneous population. As Aristotle says in Book II: “And not only does a city consist of a multitude of human beings, *it consists of human beings differing in kind*. A collection of persons all alike does not constitute a state.”¹² More cogently still, for Charles, the ideal community must have a center, a city as a focus for beneficial governance: “for the state is essentially a form of community, and it must have a common locality; a single city occupies a single site, and the *single city belongs to its citizens in common*.”¹³

Aristotle’s description fits the city of Paris in 1370 quite accurately. With a diverse population of some 300,000 inhabitants drawn from all over Europe, it was the largest city in the world west of Beijing. This meant that ruling France involved first and foremost governing three separate, increasingly complex and heterogeneous sectors of the city:

1. First, there was the ever-expanding royal court, consisting of princes of the blood and aristocrats whose sumptuous *hôtels particuliers* began to occupy

molt humblement, & supplia au Roy qu’il vousist tenir pour excusé, & y pourvoir d’aultre, car il doutait molt, qu’il ne fust pas souffisant à cé. Et le Roy l’y respondi, que il estoit tout content, & enformé de sa souffisance ; & lors ly livra les Sceaux de France [...] Il est vray qu’en ce mesmes scrutine, fust esleu un premier President en Parlement ; mais ce ne fust pas lors publié, & pour cause, déclarée le Lundy unziesme jour de Janvier ensuivant.” (François Du Chesne. *Histoire des chanceliers et Gardes des sceaux de France, Distingués par les règnes de nos monarques depuis Clovis premier Roy Chrestien, jusques à Louis le Grand XIVesme du nom, heureusement Regnant*. Paris: Du Moutier, 1680, pp. 370–371. Siméon Luce quotes this passage in the *Revue historique*, pp. 96–97, but reworks the French to accord with his own philological views.)

¹¹ Aristotle, *Politics* I.1.8 (1252b 28–36). Translated by H. Rackham. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990, pp. 8/9.

¹² *Ibid.*, II.1.4 (1261a 24–25), pp. 70/71–72/73. Emphasis added.

¹³ *Ibid.*, II.1.2 (1260b 40–1261a 1), pp. 68/69.

- more and more space on the right bank near the king's own residences, the Louvre and Hôtel de Saint-Pol.
2. Secondly, there was a growing merchant and artisan class who carried on the growing trade in and production of goods, particularly luxury items – including illuminated manuscripts – for which Paris became renowned in the fourteenth century.
 3. Thirdly, Paris had an extensive and expanding ecclesiastical domain, which included abbeys, monasteries and convents, the university and its dependencies, a vast number of churches and related institutions, as well as college foundations (such as the Collège de Navarre of which Nicole Oresme was grand master from 1356–1364).¹⁴

Two more historical facts help to explain King Charles's recognition of a need for secular and participatory governance: firstly, ongoing disruptions and tensions arising from the Hundred Years' War; and secondly, Charles's fraught experience – as dauphin – with the uprisings in Paris and the provinces in 1358 that nearly overthrew the Valois dynasty. In addition, Charles seems to have understood that, as the most complex urban body in Europe, Paris required a new model of governance. For example, the unprecedented increase in commerce necessitated by urban expansion generated a merchant class whose wealth – and influence with the king – often exceeded that of the nobility. In consequence, tensions between wealthy bourgeois and aristocrats were high, providing a strong incentive to make the royal council more representative of Parisian demographics.

Making the Council more inclusive, however, did not require Charles to take the extra step of allowing councilors to elect the chancellor. That he did so attests the king's concern to organize his administration according to rational and inclusive principles. The election of Guillaume de Dormans as Chancellor of France in 1372, and the even more radical election of a commoner, Pierre d'Orgement as Chancellor in 1373, must be viewed in this context. These events also illustrate Charles's concern to institute reforms based on a political theory that came with the authority of ancient wisdom (= medieval *auctoritas*).¹⁵ There

14 On the dynamic growth and history of Paris during this period, see my essay: "Paris." *Europe: A Literary History, 1348–1418*, edited by David Wallace. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, vol. 1, pp. 11–42.

15 As Oresme says in the prologue to his translation of Aristotle's *Ethics*, "Semblablement est il verité que savoir la science de politiques profite moult as sages qui ont a gouverner" ("In the same way, it is true that familiarity with political science proves invaluable to wise men whose task it is to govern"). "Prohème." Aristote, *Livres de Ethiques et politiques, translatez par Maistre Nichole Oresme*. Brussels, MS. KBR 9505–06, fol. 1c.

is no mystery as to the theory in question. Both elections are consonant with Aristotle's definition of the state (πόλις) as "a composite thing, in the same sense as any other of the things that are wholes but consist of many parts [...] for the state is a collection of citizens [...] and a citizen (πολίτης) is defined by nothing else so much as by the right to participate in judicial functions and in office."¹⁶ More importantly for Charles's purpose, Aristotle insists that virtue and wisdom should ideally define both citizen and ruler. Aristotle insists that if virtue (ἀρετή) and wisdom (φρόνησις) must define the good ruler, so must they motivate the citizen who participates in politics.¹⁷

There is much truth in saying that it is impossible to become a good ruler without having been a subject. And although the goodness of a ruler and that of a subject are different, the good citizen must have the knowledge and the ability both to be ruled and to rule, and the merit of the good citizen consists in having a knowledge of the government of free men on both sides.¹⁸

These virtues do not simply define the aptitude for good governance citizens must possess to entitle them to hold office. They must also demonstrate these qualities as officials. By so doing, they also actualize civic virtues which ensure that the culture of governance conduces to what Aristotle calls the good life: "any state that is truly so called and is not a state merely in name must pay attention to virtue/excellence (ἀρετή)."¹⁹ Most cogently for King Charles's reforms in the 1370s, Aristotle argues that excellence/ἀρετή is not a passive virtue, but a dynamic one that ideally underlies the behavior of elected officials, who thus demonstrate how civic virtue (πολιτική ἀρετή) can be a model for all citizens. This is roughly what Charles V means in specifying that the Chancellor of France must be a *suffisante personne*. As Aristotle puts it in the Third Book of the *Politics*: "A state is the partnership of clans and villages in full and independent life, which [...] constitutes a happy and noble life; the political fellowship must therefore be deemed to exist for the sake of *noble actions*; not merely for living in common."²⁰

This passage could easily serve as an explanation of the election of the commoner, Pierre d'Orgement, to the office of Chancellor of France.²¹ But be-

16 Aristotle, *Politics* III.1.2 (1274b 39–42), pp. 172/173.

17 *Ibid.*, III.2.5 (1277a 16–19), pp. 188/189.

18 *Ibid.*, III.2.9–10 (1277b 12–17), pp. 192/193.

19 *Ibid.*, III.5.11 (1280b 7 f.), pp. 214/215.

20 The quotation continues: "Hence *those who contribute most to such fellowship have a larger part in the state than those who are their equals or superiors in freedom and birth, but not their equals in civic virtue* [πολιτική ἀρετή], or than those who surpass them in wealth but are surpassed by them in virtue [ἀρετή]." (*Ibid.*, III.5.14–15 (1281a 1–9), pp. 218/219.) Emphasis added.

21 In the gloss to his translation of the passage corresponding to that quoted just above, Nicole Oresme echoes Aristotle's thought more closely than does his translation of the passage:

yond meritocracy as the criterion for political office, Aristotle argues the necessity of some form of participation in civic life for each citizen. Only when citizens acquire a moral sense of responsibility to the community can the state realize its goal of the good life. When discussing the concept of the value of a diverse citizenry within the state in *Politics* II, Aristotle reasons that individuals develop a sense of identification with the society by serving in whatever capacity fits their ability. “As the best state consists of different classes, its unity is secured by each citizen giving service to society and receiving in return benefits in proportion to his services [...]”²²

Collective activities, such as participating in the election of officials, figure prominently among the services envisaged for the morally informed citizenry. The rationale for accepting citizens as electors – even though the election of officials “is a task for experts”²³ – is purely pragmatic. Aristotle reasons that while the multitude might not individually have sufficient virtue (ἀρετή) and practical wisdom (φρόνησις) to rule, they can be counted on for collective wisdom:

Although each individual separately will be a worse judge than the experts, the whole of them assembled together will be better or at least as good judges, and also about some things the man who made them would not be the only nor the best judge in the case of professionals whose products also come within the knowledge of layman: to judge a house, for instance, does not belong only to the man who built it, but in fact the man who uses the house (that is the householder) will be an even better judge ...²⁴

By now it must be apparent that, if initially the elections of 1372–1373 suggested a shift of authority from the king to his council, the political theory that motivates his strategy argues just the reverse. Key details of and terms used in Nicolas de Villemer’s account indicate, as we will see, that Charles’s decision

“Ce est a dire que excès ou habundance de vertu politique et pratique laquelle est vraie prudence est a preferer en cité devant liberté et devant noblece de lignage et devant richces quant est a participer as princeys, offices, honneurs et biens publiques.” (“That is to say that abundance and excess of political and practical virtue (excellence) is true wisdom and to be prized in the city above freedom, and above noble lineage, and above wealth when it comes to serving the kingdom, public offices or honors, and public works.”) Albert D. Menut, “Maistre Nicole Oresme: Le Livre de Politiques d’Aristote, published from the text of the Avranches manuscript 223,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, New Series, Vol. 60, No. 6 (1970), Livre III, xi, p. 132.

²² Aristotle, *Politics* II.1.5 (1261a 31), pp. 170/171. See also *Nicomachean Ethics* 1132b 33: “In the interchange of services, Justice in the form of reciprocity is the bond that maintains the association: reciprocity, that is, on the basis of proportion, not on the basis of equality.”

²³ *Ibid.*, III.6.9 (1282a 8), pp. 226/227.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, III.6.10 (1282a 16–22), pp. 226/227.

to involve his council in important political decisions conforms to the king's determination to introduce political reform during his reign. Far from weakening the king's power, enfranchising his grand council by adapting rational principles of Aristotelian political theory provided a pragmatic, secular basis for royal authority, to buttress the more ethereal theological ones. More specifically, the chancellor elections of 1372–1373 conform to theories of good governance set forth by Aristotle, particularly in his *Politics*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, and *Economics*. Charles knew these works, and understood their importance for his purposes, through translations he commissioned from the fourteenth-century philosopher Nicole Oresme. But Oresme did not simply translate Aristotle, he intercalated extensive critical commentary between segments of Aristotle's text that served not only as a guide to the philosopher's thought, but also to adapt his theory to Charles's aspirations for the French monarchy.

As for the treatise on politics, it is the science [i.e. practical knowledge theory] by which one may learn to organize and perfect kingdoms and cities, and to preserve and maintain them in good order. And to reform them when necessary. But besides these things, [political science] is valuable for and helpful in making just and useful laws, in addition to aiding in understanding, interpreting, or glossing them, as well as revising, amending, or changing them, while also helping one to know when it is time to do so, and to explain the reasons for such action.

And as Aristotle shows us, this science belongs especially and principally to princes and their counselors.²⁵

This passage illustrates why Oresme's glosses are an indispensable witness to the reception of Aristotle's thought in the fourteenth century. But, even more significantly, they allow us to trace the influence of his political theory on the reforms Charles V envisaged in respect to the institutions and practitioners of state governance. Fascinating as these topics may be, however, I want to pursue a less obvious consequence of the partnership between Nicole Oresme and Charles V in the nearly decade-long project of the translation and commentary of Aristotle's *Politiques*, *Éthiques*, and *Yconomiques*. I am referring to the seis-

25 "Quant est de politiques, c'est la science par quoy l'en scet royaumes & citez et quelconques communitez commencer ordener et parfaire & en bon estat maintenir et garder. Et les reformer quant mestier est. Et avecques ce elle vault & aide a faire composer & establir lays humaines justes & profitables et a les entendre & interpreter ou gloser. Et aussi a les corriger & interpreter ou gloser. Et aussi a les corriger ou muer et a savoir quant temps en est et pour quoy & comment.

Et pour ce si comme il apparra après par Aristote cette science appartient par especial & principalement as princes & a leurs conseillers." ("Prohème." Aristote, *Livres de Ethiques et politiques*, MS. KBR 9505–06, fol. 1b.) My emphasis.

mic shift in intellectual life, literary practices, and even to the French language which was initiated by this project.

While the radical change instituted by Charles's knowledge technology – or perhaps *politics* of knowledge might be nearer the mark – encompasses much more than translations, they are the heart of the project for at least two reasons. First of all, they legitimize it by imbuing his innovations with that most medieval of imprimaturs, *auctoritas*, authority, perceived as a mantle of classical and theological decorum. Secondly, in their guise as contemporary vernacular avatars of venerated texts, they associate the king's project with a network of texts (textnet) consisting not simply of wisdom literature whose roots burrow deep into antiquity, but also with the *active practices* of text production, citation, emulation, and language renewal cultivated by extensive interaction between the textual nodes of that network.

The glosses Oresme intercalates with his translations of Aristotle illustrate his own interaction with this network of wisdom literature. He had recourse to an exceedingly wide range of classical and theological works on which to base the commentaries. There is nothing new about the practice of citation *per se*, of course. The innovation here lies in the extent, range, and acuity of his citations. In his *Livre de Politiques d'Aristote*, for example, Oresme cites some 150 separate writers and texts, ranging from ancient Greek and Latin works to relatively contemporary treatises in Latin, Old French, and Arabic.²⁶ His source for these quotations, a royal library founded by Charles V, is itself a major feature of the king's politics of knowledge.

The translation project had a major impact on the French language. Oresme enriched the vernacular with a trove of philosophical and technical terms hitherto only available in Latin.²⁷ More significantly, he did so by actually using lexical innovation to “do” philosophy. While his translations are accurate within the medieval sense of the term, he does not hesitate to “think along” with Aristotle, so that his translations adapt Aristotle's texts to the vernacular culture and context of the 1370s. Similarly, in glossing Aristotle, Oresme recasts the philosopher's points in terms consonant with Charles's policy of instilling the essence of good governance – or at least its concepts – in his subjects.

Oresme's glosses parse Aristotle to make him relevant for contemporary political and social issues, particularly those resulting from the Hundred Years' War. By the 1370s, forty years of military expenditure had bred unrest among

²⁶ Menut, “Le Livre de Politiques d'Aristote,” pp. 381–383.

²⁷ For a selected list of neologisms that Oresme introduced into French, see *ibid.*, pp. 377–380.

the people. Taxation had strained the bonds of medieval social cohesion to breaking point ... and even beyond, as attested by recurrent peasant uprisings in France and England. Charles and Oresme perceived the need for just governance, and so the majority of Oresme's interventions in Book III of *Les Politiques* concern royal power (sovereignty), desirable royal attributes, nobility, what constitutes a citizen, and what constitutes a state (*cité*).²⁸ His comments lay particular stress on the reciprocal obligations of ruler and subjects.

Nowhere was this lesson more necessary than in the realm of economics. France was suffering an economic crisis brought about by the war, chaotic monetary policy, and harsh taxation. With Charles V's support, Oresme wrote *De moneta* ("On Money"), which is considered the most sophisticated (and revolutionary) monetary theory of the period. As Guido Hulsmann argues in *The Ethics of Money Production*, "Oresme was the first theorist to present a fully worked out ethics of money, one that shows the sheer immorality of government monopoly over currency and the adverse social effects of coinage debasement."²⁹ Money is not the sole possession of the state, Oresme argues, but belongs primarily to the community and to individuals.³⁰

Citizenship is the best measure of reciprocity between state and individual on Oresme's reading of Aristotle. This becomes apparent in his précis of Book III of *Les Politiques*:³¹ "Here begins the third book of *Politics*, in which [Aristotle] pursues his purpose and gives the definition and number of [systems of] government, and in particular of the kingdom." Of particular interest for Charles's program is the first chapter with its definitions of "citizen," "state," and the relationship of the one to the other. Now, when Oresme speaks of *citoyen* "citizen," and *cité* "state," he maintains the Greek pairing of πόλις (*pólis*, city state) / πολίτης (*polítes*, citizen). He also echoes these terms in his

28 He also discusses the inadmissibility of women as rulers, wealth inequality, universal monarchy, Avignonese popes, the conciliar movement (for reforming Church governance), the mendicant movement, the election of bishops, how conflict between kings and/or kings and popes leads to fluidity of power, the appropriate size of a city, tyranny. See *ibid.*, p. 375.

29 Guido Jorg Hulsmann. *Ethics of Money Production*. Auburn: Ludwig Mises Institute, 2008.

30 Charles Johnson, *The De Moneta of Nicholas Oresme and English Mint Documents*. Auburn: Ludwig Mises Institute, 2005.

31 "Cj commence le tiers livre de Politiques ou quel il porsuit son entencion et met la distinction et le nombre de policies et determine en especial de Royaume. Et contient .xxvij. chap[itres]." (V. fol. 72r of Avranches MS. 223, or fol. 77r of Brussels, KBR MS. 11201–202. For the Bibliothèque municipale d'Avranches MS. 223, fol. 72r, see: bvmm.irht.cnrs.fr/consult/consult.php?mode=visionneuse&VUE_ID=1210308&carouselThere=false&nbVignettes=4x3&reproductionId=5628&page=7&panier=false&angle=0&zoom=petit&tailleReelle=. Accessed 13 February 2018.)

use of *policies*, from Greek πολιτεία (*politeía*, cf. Latin *politia*, form of government, citizenship, administration).³²

While names may not be destiny here, they are revealing. We do not ordinarily associate terms like “citizen” or “citizenship” with medieval vernacular discourse. But when Oresme uses *citoien* to identify members of the *cité* or *policie* (πολιτεία), he evokes a very different relationship between the individual and the state than that divinely ordained model, the medieval monarchy. There, the king, haloed with authority derived from God and buttressed (at least theoretically) by the church, rules a populace of subjects, hierarchically distributed in descending order in accord with principles of political theology. In this structure, the king is two beings in one: as a man, human with a natural and corruptible body; but as a divinely anointed monarch he symbolizes the immortal body politic. As Kantorowicz noted, the king possesses a sacred and spiritual resonance: an aura, if not of divinity, then of divine agency.³³

But when we find *citoien* linked to *cité* in Oresme’s French text, we face a very different kind of social contract from that of political theology. In place of the hierarchy of individual to auratic authority figure, citizenship (πολιτεία, *politia*) links the individual to a group identity, that of the *polis* or *cité*: “A citizen,” Aristotle notes, is “a *partner* in a community.”³⁴ Neither Charles nor Oresme can abolish medieval hierarchies, but they do propose a model that envisages citizen participation in political and community activities according to the individual’s ability. In short, they adopt Aristotle’s criterion of moral virtue (ἀρετή) as a secular equivalent of “nobility” as a condition for political participation and even political office, as we saw with the election of the commoner, Pierre d’Orgement as Chancellor in 1373. This is possible because Aristotle’s principles of cohesion for the *polis/cité* are not imposed by divine order, but inhere as moral imperatives in the sociality of the community. “Any state that is truly so called and is not a state merely in name must pay attention to virtue (ἀρετή),” says Aristotle.³⁵

32 The *Oxford English Dictionary* derives the first sense of “policy” from “Middle French *policie*, *pollicie* government, political organization, the state (c1370), (system of) political and social organization, public administration (15th cent.), conduct, comportment (15th cent.) < post-classical Latin *politia* citizenship (late 2nd cent. in Tertullian), political organization, government (4th cent.), urbanity (15th cent.), [...] already in classical Latin (as *politia*) as the title of Plato’s *Republic* (Cicero) < ancient Greek πολιτεία citizenship, government, administration, constitution, polity, form of government < πολίτης citizen.” *OED*, edited by E. S. C. Weiner and J. A. Simpson, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.

33 Ernst H. Kantorowicz. *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957, p. 84.

34 Aristotle, *Politics*, III.2.1 (1276b 22), pp. 186/187.

35 *Ibid.*, III.5.11 (1280b 7f.), pp. 214/215.

But Oresme does not simply echo Aristotle's principles for citizen franchise. His glosses constitute a running commentary on their applicability to the contemporary scene. There is a gloss to *Politics* 3, for example, where Oresme points out that Aristotle's concept of the citizen as political agent means that a citizen possesses an *inherent right* to participate in state governance. Any *citizen*, he argues, is entitled to participate in a variety of public offices, including those at the highest level. The key word here is "citizen," but it would be grossly wide of the mark to accord the term its modern connotation of universal enfranchisement succinctly voiced in the Declaration of Independence (1776 CE): "We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal [...]." Oresme parses Aristotle's political theory in ways unusual, if not revolutionary, for the fourteenth century, but universal franchise must await 1789.

Unusually for the period, however, sociopolitical hierarchy is only partially predicated on privilege. If, as he says, "lineage, birth, situation, power, or means" determine who may aspire to citizenship, they do not suffice in themselves to assure that status. On Oresme's view – and this sets his political philosophy apart from that of his time – citizenship is a right, rather than a privilege. Those with the requisite titles must earn the status of citizen by active participation – *participation de fait* is the term he uses – in some useful form of governance. In other words, for Oresme the term *citoyen* denotes a form of sociopolitical agency. Citizens are those who assure that the *cit * fulfills Aristotle's definition of the *polis*: a political structure that benefits the populace as a whole. Logically, a beneficent state requires virtuous agents.

That is why Aristotle, followed by Oresme, insists that virtue (     ) define the citizen. Since nothing is more nebulous than abstract virtue, Aristotle introduces citizen-agency, with its goal of transforming abstract potential into concrete achievement, by way of translating virtue into action. At the same time, citizen-agency qua potential for action accommodates a broad range of human capacities unified by the same goal. Here is how Aristotle explains citizen-agency:

Although the most exact definition of [each citizen's] excellence will be special to each, yet there will also be a common definition of excellence that will apply alike to all of them ... although citizens are dissimilar from one another, their business is the security of their community, and this community is the constitution, so that the goodness of a citizen must necessarily be relative to the constitution of the state.³⁶

³⁶ *Ibid.*, III.2.2 (1276b 25–32), pp. 186/187.

Turning now to the way Oresme tunes this material to accord with Charles V's reform, we see how brilliantly he glosses Aristotle's theory of the citizen agent as a secular counterpart to political theology:

Gloss: That is to say that a citizen is someone who can be a judge himself or with others, or who can be a ruler himself or with others, or who has ways of participating in elections of rulers or judges or of taking part in public councils; for all such individuals can be rulers or judges. Item, by principality [*princey*] Aristotle often means not simply sovereign dominion [i.e. monarchy], but more broadly some public post or trust or honorable public office involving the whole community or some part thereof. *A citizen is thus someone who actually participates in one or another of these kinds of public service, or has the capability to do so, by virtue of lineage or birth, of estate, of power, or means, etc.* And the reason for this is that the *cité* is the *cité* by virtue of its being ordered according to distributive justice, which is the province of princes; and according to commutative justice, which is the province of judges; or according to [political] expediency, which is the province of counselors. And so anyone who can participate in these activities is a citizen belonging to the city and nothing else. Now some people call such citizens "bourgeois," because they can be mayors, or aldermen, or counselors, or aspire to other honorable offices.³⁷

With Oresme's adaptation of citizen agency to Caroline policy we return to our starting point: the two elections for Chancellor of France in 1372–1373. Remember that the innovation took two forms: first, Charles V's recourse to *elections* by the royal council to fill the post; and, secondly, for the 1373 election, Charles's nomination of a commoner, Pierre d'Orgement. On both counts – recourse to election by the extended royal council, and the choice of a citizen candidate – these two events show Charles implementing propositions found

37 “[73d] G[lose]: Ce est à dire que celui quy est citoien quy peut ester juge sens ou / [74a] oveques autres ou quy peut ester prince sens ou oveques autre ou autres ou quy peut avoir voies en election de princes et de juges ou en conseil publiques car chascun tel participe aucunement en prince ou en jugement. *Item*, par princey Aristote entent souvent, ce semble, non pas seulement la souveraine dominacion mes generalement quelconque poste publique ou auctorité ou office publique honorable qui resgarde toute la communauté ou aucun membre de elle. *Et donques citoien est celui quy participe de fait en aucune de telles choses ou quy est habile a ce, consideré son lignage ou nativité, son estat, sa puissance, ses possessions, etc.* Et la cause est car la *cité* est *cité* et a son estre par ordenance selon justice distributive, quy appartient mesmement as princes; et selon justice commutative; quy appartient as juges, ou selon expedient, qui appartient as conseillers. Et donques celui quy peut participer en ces operacions est citoien en partie de *cité* et non autre. Et aucuns appellent telz citoiens bourgeois, car il pevent estre maires ou esquevins ou conseuls ou avoir aucunes honorables autrement nommees.” (Aristote, *Le livre de politiques*, MS BM Avranches, fol. 74a. bvmml.irht.cnrs.fr/consult/consult.php?mode=visionneuse&VUE_ID=1210311&carouselThere=false&nbVignettes=4x3&reproductionId=5628&page=7&panier=false&angle=0&zoom=petit&tailleReelle=%2F. Accessed 13 February 2018.)

in Oresme's translation and interpretation of Aristotle's *Politics*. At work here is nothing less than a new paradigm for governance: political theology yielding to (secular) political theory. In place of royal power located in the auratic authority of the haloed monarch, political events derive legitimacy from models based on political theory. But where do the models come from and why are they so persuasive?

While a partial answer to the first question lies in Oresme's adaptations of Aristotle's political, economic, and moral philosophy to French vernacular culture in the 1370s, the larger answer must be found in what, earlier in this chapter, I referred to as "a seismic shift in intellectual life, literary practices, and even to the French language." As the discussion of the link between Oresme's Aristotle and Charles V's political practice has demonstrated, the knowledge-politics at the root of the movement derives from a new status accorded to books and the theories they propound. That status is both institutional and practical. The institution enabling Oresme to make his commentary so authoritative was the royal library Charles founded when he came to the throne, and the massive translation project he undertook in the 1370s to transform ancient classical knowledge into contemporary French wisdom. The practical status of the political theory espoused by King Charles derives from a new technology of reading and composing books. The royal library meant that books acquired a kind of second-order status of power brokers, as media transmitting information deemed crucial for policy and conduct at court.

