

**A New Manuscript for New College:
Thomas Kent's 1674 curricular crib for logic, ethics, and metaphysics.**

The library has just made its first major purchase of manuscript for many a long year. This is the 'curricular crib' of one of our own, Thomas Kent, who was a student of the college in the 1670s. It is a quarto notebook in his own handwriting, containing summaries of three of the basic academic subjects of his day, logic, ethics, and metaphysics. The manuscript was brought to our attention by Maggs Brothers of London, and we leapt at the opportunity, elevating coins from down the back of the sofa, raiding otherwise lost arks, and somehow grubbing together the asking price. The manuscript is now in the college library, and has been given the shelf-mark MS 393. It needs some work done on the binding, but is otherwise in good nick.

Scholars are now comfortable that the medieval, scholastic curriculum survived in Oxford and indeed in most European universities for centuries after the 'Renaissance', and even into the eighteenth-century academe. Perhaps the best barometer for this is the market for textbooks. Aristotelian handbooks, especially in logic, remained vendible for an impressively long time, and here the pertinent example is the logic of Robert Sanderson (1587-1663), a textbook that was first printed in Oxford in 1615 – and last in 1841. Sanderson's Aristotelian *Physicæ Scientiæ Compendium* received its last printing in 1690, and is a reminder that even after Isaac Newton's *Principia* of 1687, students were taught the old ways, in physics as in logic, in ethics as in metaphysics.

The difference is that the older orthodoxies were now being taught either alongside or in combination with the newer ways of thinking, or were increasingly being simplified and relegated to the earliest stages of the academic course. This is particularly true of logic, the bedrock of the medieval experience. The scholastic curriculum may have survived in England into the Restoration but its survival came at some intellectual cost. As the leading scholar of this problem, Mordechai Feingold, has remarked, first 'the demise of public university lectures in the arts', and secondly 'the privatization of the study of logic' (and indeed several other trivial and quadrivial disciplines) changed the nature of basic instruction in the university.¹ What had been furnished by the university was now increasingly left to the colleges – and the colleges in turn were increasingly leaving the more basic aspects of the course to a kind of self-help system, of which the curricular crib is the most basic component. These break-downs of logic, metaphysics, ethics, economics, politics, physics, and mathematics, to take the most common subjects, furnished the young student with a highly traditional and so uncontroversial summary of the elementary structure and content of the B.A. degree, which the student could then supplement with more profound research derived from printed commentary. In this way a basic manuscript crib prepared the way for more complex printed sources, and the tutor, then as now, might cut down on what was seen as merely propaedeutic instruction.

This is exactly what we have here. MS 393 is a curricular crib signed by and in the hand of one John Kent: 'Jo: Kent è Coll Nov. 1673'. Kent is said by Foster in his *Alumni Oxonienses* to have been from Abingdon, matriculating 12 August 1673, aged 18; taking his B.A. in 1677, and his M.A. in early 1681. The only suitable John Kent listed by Kirby in his index of Winchester scholars was from Silhampton, Wiltshire, and Kirby's boy must be the right one, but as long as Foster got the right student if the wrong background, then this would place the commencement and probably the main use of this manuscript in Kent's first year. Kent cannot of course have composed his crib himself as an eighteen year-old fresher; he

¹ Mordechai Feingold, 'The Humanities', in *The History of the University of Oxford: The Seventeenth Century*, ed. Nicholas Tyacke (Oxford, 1997), p. 293.

must have copied it from an exemplar borrowed from a fellow student or lent to him by his tutor in his sophomore year.

Kent's manuscript commences with the Porphyrian Tree, here drawn onto the front paste-down. Most interestingly, Kent then gives his first curricular digest the title 'Elementa Logicae Nov: Coll', placed first alongside his first chapter 'de definitione', and then on the following folio on its own as a heading to the entire page, preceding 'de propositione'. The whole opening chapter (seventeen pages) is then formally concluded with 'Elementorum Nov: Coll Finis.' After a few leaves left blank, Kent then commences a 'Logicae Systema', this time keeping all versos blank. This likewise concludes 'Finis Systematis 1^{mae} partis Logicae.' After a few more blank pages, 'Systema 3^{ae} [sic] partis Logicae' commences, again only on the rectos, concluding 'Finis hac de Logica'. This is followed by an ethical and then a metaphysical system, the latter with several manuscript inserts now tucked inside the volume, and a good deal of commentary written onto the versos.

The content of the manuscript is probably of interest solely to specialists. What is immediately striking, however, is that the opening 'Elementa' are marked as specifically 'Nov: Coll.', the 'New College Elements', as if a college tutor was responsible for the text, which was then circulated within college as the 'official' version for New College students. But for those concerned with the general history of education in the university at the time, we will want to know if there is any relationship discernible between this MS and any other surviving MSS of the same type. Here the conclusions are startling.

There are other Oxonian 'curricular cribs' surviving from the same decades. The most important ones I have traced are MS Rawl. D. 1224 (owned by Humphrey Hody of Wadham College, 1676), MS Rawl. D 1442 (owned by Charles King of Magdalen Hall, 1681), and MS Eng. e. 2312 (owned by Edward Filmer of New College, 1700). All three of these MSS are in the Bodleian Library today. Comparison with these MSS demonstrates that the Kent MS, the earliest dated of these four collections, shares a common text with the two Rawlinson MSS for its systems of logic, ethics, and metaphysics. Whereas Kent's text includes only parts one and three of the 'Logicae Systema', Filmer's opens with a 'Logicae Systema Secunda Pars', and then provides a 'Tertia Pars'. Comparison again shows that these two *partes* witness to the same text as the corresponding parts in the other manuscripts, although of course Kent's text lacks the second *pars* entirely, just as Filmer's version lacks the first. And whereas Filmer provides the full third book, Kent's text by comparison evidently lacks the two opening sections.

What this shows is that young students of New College in the Restoration, and also of other colleges, were used to copying or acquiring such cribs and that by this point the text of certain of these cribs was being copied *between colleges and across generations*. Kent copied and used his curricular crib in New College before Hody or King copied or acquired their cribs. Kent's basic text is the same as that of Hody and King where there is overlap, but Kent copied out only three subjects, where Hody and King worked with a fuller curriculum. It is possible that Hody's manuscript was a source for King, but I doubt it, especially as the latter signals that he commenced his manuscript before he moved to Wadham. And whereas Hody also included a neoteric crib in his manuscript, on the fashionable physics of Pierre Gassendi (the prompt for Newtonianism), King shows no such variety. Filmer, in turn, in 1700 still had access to crib texts circulating in the 1670s, although these now appear alongside more modern, vernacular items. Filmer's own fascinating notebook is grist for another mill, but for now we can say that this new purchase for the college throws into focus an educational tradition of this college and indeed the university at large in operation for three and probably many more decades that has hitherto remained in the shade.

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