

Aphorism and the Counsel of Prudence in Early Modern Statecraft: The Curious Case of Justus Lipsius

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I: Introduction

In *Of Reformation* (1641) Milton lamented that, ‘there is no art that hath bin more canker’d in her principles, more soyl’d and slubber’d with aphorising pedantry than the art of policie’.¹ Milton further contended that it was the ‘masterpiece of the modern politician’ to mould ‘the people’ with precepts. Milton evidently questioned this development and condemned the modern tribe of ‘Aphorismers and Politicasters’ for undermining or ‘breaking a national spirit’.² The early seventeenth century, despite Milton’s disapprobation, was nevertheless very much the age of the politician. No source of aphorisms was as useful to the practice of that distinctive early modern character, the politician, than the *Politica* of Justus Lipsius. Lipsius, through his recensions of Seneca and Tacitus, and his careful selection of quotations to illustrate political and personal predicaments and the means for their prudential resolution, established, in effect, the Neostoic foundations for the evolving early modern European ‘art of policie’.³

¹ I would like to thank Cathy Curtis and the two anonymous referees for their suggestions on how to improve this essay and Dr Lesley O’Brien and Ms Lana Starkey for their editorial assistance.

² John Milton, *Of Reformation* (London, 1641). See Martin Dzelzainis, ‘Milton and the Protectorate in 1658’, in *Milton and Republicanism*, eds David Armitage, Armand Himy, and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 181–205 (p. 202).

³ For Lipsius’s influence upon English political thought see Adriana McCrae, *Constant Minds: Political Virtue and the Lipsian Paradigm* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1997); for his influence on Spanish thought see Theodore G. Corbett, ‘The Cult of Lipsius: A Leading Source of Early Modern Spanish Statecraft’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 36 (1975), 139–52; for France see Jacqueline Lagrée, *Juste Lipse et La Restauration du Stoicisme étude et Traductions de Divers Traités Stoiciens* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1994); and Jacob Soll, *The Information Master: Jean Baptiste Colbert’s Secret Intelligence System* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009); and for Germany, Gerhard Oestreich, *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 68.

This essay examines the character of Lipsian political thought, the distinctive rhetorical genre in which it was promulgated, and the political and moral implications of his prudential advice. It will evaluate Lipsius's counsel, not only in his more popular works the *Politica* (1589) and *De Constantia* (1584), but also in his less well-known later works the *Manuductionis ad Stoicam philosophiam* (1604), the *Monita et Exempla Politica* (1605), and *Physiologiae Stoicorum* (1605). The aphoristic style Lipsius pioneered in the *Politica* and the *Monita et Exempla Politica* will also be considered. This will be evaluated in the light of Eric Voegelin's claim that the 'aphoristic style' is unusually valuable for the historian of ideas, because 'here he will find ideas, which in themselves are elaborated more clearly in later systems, at the point where they begin to separate as symbols from the matrix of sentiments and where the motives that animate their creation are still visible'.⁴

Significantly, the aphorizing style that Milton dismissed, somewhat problematically given his own penchant for commonplace books, took a long time to fade. Its appeal, which suited the prevailing Counter-Reformation mode of casuistic moral and political discourse, declined only at the Enlightenment as philosophy became theoretical rather than practical and prudential. In fact, the aphoristic idiom declined as the casuistic mode of understanding gave way to an ideological cast of thought. Who, we might, therefore, initially ask, was Justus Lipsius and what exactly was the rhetorical purpose of the *Politica* and his other works of theologico-political counsel?

II. Justus Lipsius (1547–1606) and the Ambivalence of Late Northern Humanism

By the first decades of the seventeenth century, the major works in the Lipsius canon had been widely disseminated across Europe. In 1637, his Antwerp publisher, Plantin-Moretus, had published a definitive four-volume *Opera Omnia* complete with Rubens's frontispiece set by the Galle atelier.⁵ His status lay in both his apparent support of centralizing, absolutist states and his introduction of a carefully crafted, Christianized, Neostoicism to a

⁴ Eric Voegelin, *From Enlightenment to Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1975), p. 68.

⁵ Justus Lipsius, *Opera Omnia*, 4 vols (Antwerp: Plantin Moretus, 1637). For a full bibliographical description of all editions of Lipsius's works, see Ferdinand van der Haeghen and Marie-Thérèse Lenger, *Bibliotheca Belgica: bibliographie générale des Pays-Bas*, 5 vols (Brussels, 1964), III, 883–1125; for Balthasar Moretus's printing of the collected works, see Dirk Imhof, 'The Illustration of Works by Justus Lipsius published by the Plantin Press', in *Justus Lipsius Europae Lumen et Columen: Proceedings of the International Colloquium, Leuven 17–19 September 1997*, eds G. Tournoy, J. de Landtsheer, and J. Papy (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1999), pp. 67–81 (p. 78).

European elite audience. As a philological scholar, his editions of Tacitus and Seneca and his guide to Stoic thought the *Manuductio* established him as the leading Northern humanist of the late sixteenth century. His work on Stoic fortitude and his commitment to an ethic of constancy in troubled times notwithstanding, Lipsius enjoyed both a contemporary and posthumous reputation for tergiversation. More particularly, Dutch Protestants, engaged in an existential struggle for the survival of their republic after 1578, criticized Lipsius for duplicity, shape shifting and, somewhat ironically, inconstancy. This accusation reflected Lipsius's apparent willingness to change his confessional allegiance as circumstances demanded. Educated at the Cologne Jesuit college, Bursa Nova Tricoronata, in 1568 the young Joest Lips (Lipsius) entered the service of Cardinal Granvelle as his private secretary. Granvelle played a leading role in the evolving Spanish policy of repression towards its Netherlands dependencies. Subsequently, as the Dutch Calvinists resisted their Spanish masters, Lipsius sought preferment at the court of the Hapsburg emperor, Maximilian II, and found a post at the Lutheran University of Jena from 1572 to 1574. Not enjoying the most propitious political circumstances to promote a cosmopolitan humanism, Lipsius returned briefly to Louvain before taking a post at the new Protestant University of Leiden in 1578. Here he established himself both as the leading philologist of his day and as a humanist educator. He evidently conceived the latter role in terms of preparing his students for active roles in legal and civil life as citizens of high moral principle. Consequently, he was by no means indifferent to the complex political drama involved in the separation of the Netherlands Estates from Spanish rule. During his Leiden period, he enjoyed a close relationship with the politically dominant, Protestant, Leicester circle in the Dutch Republic.⁶ Subsequently, his *contubernales* of the 1590s in Louvain similarly included prominent public figures. In other words, Lipsius's pedagogic influence transcended the confessional divide.

It was during his Leiden period that he wrote his most influential works. *On Constancy* promoted a Stoic view of moral and political conduct in inauspicious circumstances, teaching subjects 'endurance and obedience', while his *Politicorum sive civilis doctrinae libri sex qui ad principatum maxime spectant* (henceforth *Politica*) provided rulers with a compendium of useful

⁶ See Jonathan Scott, *Algernon Sydney and the English Republic 1623–1677* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 18. He also maintained ties with his former student, Maurice of Nassau. See Geoffrey Parker, 'The Limits to Revolutions in Military Affairs: Maurice of Nassau, the Battle of Nieuwport (1600) and the Legacy', *Journal of Military History*, 71 (2007), 331–72.

political advice.⁷ Shortly, after its publication in 1589, the Vatican placed the *Politica* on the index of banned books. Almost simultaneously, Lipsius became embroiled in a polemical controversy with the Protestant Mennonite, Dirk Volkertsz Coornhert, over the tenor of his advice concerning heretics.⁸ His *politique* injunction that princes ‘burn and cut’ those who countermanded official religious teaching appalled the more tolerant Coornhert.⁹ In 1591, Lipsius returned to Catholic Louvain, formally reconciled with the Catholic Church ‘in the presence of Jesuits’, and assumed a key administrative and pedagogic role at the university.¹⁰ The 1596 revised edition of the *Politica*, dedicated to ‘Emperor, Kings, Princes’, was removed from the Papal index. He died in 1606, confessing his indifference to Stoicism and his commitment to the Catholic faith.

Even those who admired his scholarship and the utility of his *Politica* found such practical Machiavellianism hard to swallow. The Anglican bishop, and Carolingian state casuist, Joseph Hall observed in his satire, *The Discovery of a New World*, that in the fantasy lands of ‘Fooliana and Fickle’ the local currency, ‘had on one side, one in a gowne seeming to be of middle age, leaning his hand upon the head of a little pretty dog and holding in the left hande a book; and on the other side was a chameleon enamelled in all her altering colours and over her these words Const(antia) Lips(ius)’.¹¹

This protean character haunted Lipsius at the time and affected his posthumous reputation. Despite the seventeenth-century European audience for the *Politica*, his aphoristic style and his fatalism proved ill suited to an Enlightenment climate of progressive moral certainty.¹² From the late

⁷ One copy of this included a loose title page dedicated to the protestant prince, Maurice of Nassau. See Jan Waszink, ‘Introduction’, in Justus Lipsius, *Politica: Six Books of Politics or Political Instruction*, ed. and trans. Waszink (Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2004), pp. 3–199 (p. 114, n. 93).

⁸ Dirk Volkertsz Coornhert, *Defensio processus de non occidentis haereticis contra tria capita libri IIII Politicorum I. Lipsii: Eiusque libri adversus dialogistam confutatatio* (Hanoviae ad Moenum, 1593).

⁹ Justus Lipsius, *Politicorum sive civilis doctrinae libri sex* (Leiden, 1589), Book 4, Chapter 3. All references are from Justus Lipsius, *Politica: Six Books of Politics or Political Instruction*, ed. and trans. Waszink (Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2004), (hereafter *Politica*).

¹⁰ Violet Soen, ‘The *Clementia Lipsiana*: Political Analysis, Autobiography and Panegyric’, in *(Un)masking the Realities of Power: Justus Lipsius and the Dynamics of Political Writing in Early Modern Europe*, eds Erik de Bom, Marijke Janssens, Toon Van Houdt, and Jan Papy (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 207–32 (p. 228).

¹¹ Joseph Hall, *The Discovery of a New World* (Frankfurt, 1609), cited in Justus Lipsius, *Two Bookes of Constancie*, ed. Rudolf Kirk, trans. John Stradling (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1939), p. 12.

¹² Lipsius’s *Politica* went through 96 editions mostly before 1650 and was translated into all the major European languages. See Harro Höpfl, *Jesuit Political Thought: The Society of*

seventeenth century, his reputation, his philological work, and his style of thought fell into desuetude. Even Rudolph Kirk, in his introduction to the 1939 reprint of the first English edition of *The Two Bookes of Constance* (*On Constancy*, 1584), considered Lipsius an important scholar, but at best a man of 'variable nature' and ripe for satire.¹³

With the publication in English of Gerhard Oestreich's path-breaking re-evaluation of early modern Neostoicism, Lipsian studies have enjoyed something of a renaissance. Major studies and new editions of his *Politica* and *De Constantia* have appeared in print and a number of European colloquia addressing Lipsius and his circle have met, most notably in Belgium in 1997 celebrating the 450th anniversary of his birth.¹⁴ The two universities where he conducted his major teaching and research activity, Leiden and Louvain, have collaborated for two decades in editing and publishing his collected letters which currently stretch to fourteen volumes.¹⁵ This revival has also produced an important re-evaluation of the status of the somewhat neglected *De Monita et Exempla Politica* and the role of 'history and exemplarity' in Lipsius's writings.¹⁶ This burgeoning interest has also facilitated an evolving debate about the character and intent of the Lipsian project. More precisely, what theologico-political purpose did his most widely circulated works, the *Politica* and *On Constancy*, ultimately serve?

III. Interpreting Lipsius

Beginning with the English translation of Gerhard Oestreich's *Neostoicism, and the Early Modern State* (1982), Lipsius was associated with the theory, or to use the prevailing scholarly argot, 'ideology', of 'a strong authoritarian state supported by the army'.¹⁷ Moreover, although Lipsius regarded monarchy and

Jesus and the State c. 1540–1630 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 126, n. 59.

¹³ Lipsius, *Two Bookes of Constance*, p. 13.

¹⁴ Colloquia were held in both Belgium and Rome and their proceedings published. See Tournoy and others, eds, *Justus Lipsius Europae Lumen et Columna*; and Marc Leureys, ed., *The World of Justus Lipsius: A Contribution towards his Intellectual Biography. Proceedings of a Colloquium held under the auspices of the Belgian Historical Institute in Rome 22–24 May, 1997* (Brussels: Belgian Historical Institute, 1997).

¹⁵ The Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie van België voor Wetenschappen en Kunsten (KVAB) *Iusti Lipsi Epistolae* project has so far published 13 volumes of a proposed 20-volume collection of Lipsius's correspondence.

¹⁶ See De Bom and others, eds, *(Un)masking the Realities of Power*; and particularly, Harro Höpfl, 'History and Exemplarity in the work of Lipsius', in *ibid.*, pp. 43–72. This volume, too, was the product of a colloquium held in 2008.

¹⁷ Oestreich, *Neostoicism*, p. 68.

the personal rule of the prince ‘as the ideal form of government, the general tenor of his teaching’, Oestreich contended, ‘is bourgeois. Its principles – strict performance of duty, inspection of conscience ... had little to do with the old world of European nobility’.¹⁸

In a somewhat different, but still Neo-Stoic vein, Gilbert Tournoy, A. A. Lane, and Jacqueline Lagrée emphasize Lipsius’s preoccupation with a moral and pedagogic project to render classical Stoicism compatible with Christian political theology. A Christianized Neo-Stoicism offered, from this perspective, an important resource for inculcating a practical public morality. Lipsius, in other words, presented ‘to the Renaissance world an integrated stoicism, through which Epictetus and Seneca could plead their case publicly before the tribunal of Christianity’.¹⁹

At the same time, an English contextualist approach to early modern political thought located Lipsius’s *politique* defence of monarchical authority within a Tacitean rather than a Neo-Stoic framework of early modern theories governing political conduct. Following Giuseppe Toffanin’s identification of ‘red’ and ‘black’ Tacitism, Peter Burke, Quentin Skinner, and Richard Tuck situated Lipsius in an evolving ideological context of absolutism, or ‘black’ Tacitism, that distinguished itself both from an unprincipled Machiavellianism as well as from neo-Roman republicanism.²⁰ For Tuck, Lipsius fulfilled the critical role of transmitting, interpreting, and adapting the elusive texts of Tacitus for a sixteenth-century audience. Somewhat differently, Noel Malcolm contends that the Lipsian concern with an impersonal state authority evolved from the growing tension, in sixteenth-century official understanding, between the demands, sometimes conflicting, of *honestas* and *utilitas*.²¹ The

¹⁸ Oestreich, *Neostoicism*, pp. 63–64.

¹⁹ Lagrée, *La Restauration du Stoïcisme*, p. 16, (my translation). See also Gilbert Tournoy, ‘Justus Lipsius and Isaac Casaubon’, in *The World of Justus Lipsius*, ed. Marc Leureys, pp. 191–208 (p. 192); Jacqueline Lagrée, ‘Lipse l’ame et vertu’, in *Justus Lipsius Europae Lumen et Columen*, eds Tournoy and others, pp. 90–106 (pp. 103–06); and A. A. Long, ‘Stoicism in the Philosophical Tradition: Spinoza, Lipsius, Butler’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, ed. Brad Inwood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 365–93.

²⁰ Giuseppe Toffanin, *Machiavelli e Tacitismo* (Padova: A. Draghi, 1921); Peter Burke, *The Italian Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 162–63; Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), II, 212–18; Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, 3 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), II: *Renaissance Virtues*, Chapter 14, pp. 368–413; Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 52–55. See also Robert Bireley, *The Counter-Reformation Prince: Anti-Machiavellianism or Catholic Statecraft in Early Modern Europe* (Chapel Hill: University of Carolina Press, 1990).

²¹ Malcolm, *Reason of State, Propaganda and the Thirty Years’ War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 100.

latter term, by a process of interpretation, developed, Malcolm argues, into a notion of impersonal state interest.

From this perspective, the counsel that Tacitus offered and its Lipsian adjustment to contemporary needs provided a useful corrective to the pious moralism that informed the Christian mirrors-of-advice-for-princes literary tradition. It also offered a monarchical alternative to the Ciceronian republicanism that increasingly attracted a European elite audience from the late sixteenth century. In particular, Lipsius's presentation of Tacitus gave credibility to the idea of politics as 'a complex and ruthless' game, that required skilful counsel to ensure stability and order. The advice that could be gleaned from Tacitus's *Annals* and his *Histories* of the Julio-Claudian *Imperium* offered an important, but neglected resource. As Lipsius explained, Tacitus 'presents kings and monarchs to you, in a word, the theatre of our life today ... He should be in the hands of those in whose hands are the rudder and tiller of state'.²²

Tacitus's advice, however, lent itself to ambivalent interpretation on at least two levels: firstly, alerting the people to the dissimulation of princes; and, somewhat differently, also as a guide for rulers on how to deceive the people. At the same time, those of a prudent disposition, writing in what Malcolm terms the 'reason of state genre', could find in Tacitus a demonstration that apparent immorality and deception might, nevertheless, be compatible with an overall moral programme. Thus, while some sixteenth-century commentaries and casebooks intimated a distinction between 'good' and 'bad' *raison d'état*, Lipsius somewhat differently did not believe that it was possible to construct, even in theory, a perfectly virtuous state reason.²³ The art of ruling necessarily entailed an awareness of vice. In this context, Malcolm draws attention to Lipsius's commentary on the prudent prince's need to practise 'light' fraud rather than 'deep' deception in Book IV of the *Politica*.²⁴ Significantly, Lipsius's English disciple, Robert Dallington, observed that whereas most moralists considered 'nothing profitable that is not honest, some *politiques* had reversed this wisdom and considered nothing honest that is not profitable'.²⁵ Dallington, by contrast, following Lipsius, considered a third way between these extremes of ethical absolutism and

²² This appeared in his dedication to his 1581 edition of the *Annals*. See Mark Morford, 'Tacitean *Prudentia* and the Doctrines of Justus Lipsius' in *Tacitus and the Tacitean Tradition*, eds T. J. Luce and A. J. Woodman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 129–51 (p. 138).

²³ Malcolm, pp. 99–100.

²⁴ Malcolm, p. 100.

²⁵ Malcolm, p. 100.

Machiavellianism. ‘Wise men’, he contended had to adapt their external behaviour to the conditions and ‘the times’.²⁶

Differently again, and focusing upon the content and context of Lipsius’s *Politica*, Jan Waszink’s comprehensive introduction to his seminal annotated translation of the 1596 edition of the *Politica* further develops and reinforces the Tacitist, absolutist, and *politique* trajectory of Lipsian thought. At the same time, Waszink also explores the elusive style and complex political context which shaped the work and which affected the content and structure of its first and revised second editions of 1589 and 1596. Waszink situates the composition of both the *Constantia* and the *Politica* in the context of the internecine political strife of the 1580s. In particular, Waszink maintains that the events surrounding the Council of Utrecht and the difficulties that the Earl of Leicester encountered in his dealings with the factionalized Dutch Estates, both affected the structure of those works, his suspicion of constitutionalism, and ultimately persuaded Lipsius to abandon Leiden for Louvain.²⁷ Waszink’s detailed researches in the Vatican archive also revealed the role that the Jesuit Cardinal, Robert Bellarmine, played in the publication of the officially sanctioned 1596 revised version of the *Politica*.²⁸ Bellarmine was probably the most important Counter-Reformation strategist and controversialist of his day, largely responsible for formulating the Counter-Reformation view of the relationship between church and state.²⁹

Waszink’s detailed attention to style and context prefigured a scholarship less preoccupied with the *politique* and anti-Ciceronian dimension of the Lipsian canon and more attentive to his humanist concern with rhetoric, drama, and self presentation evident in both *On Constancy*, his Menippean satire *Somnium* (1581), and his strictures on letter writing, upon which he composed an influential *propaedeutic* and published four collections of his letters during his lifetime.³⁰

Meanwhile, Jan Papy, in his thorough examination of Peter Paul Rubens’s painting, *The Four Philosophers* (1615), reveals a symbolic system that determined the early seventeenth-century Catholic image of Lipsius as an emblem of

²⁶ Malcolm, p. 100.

²⁷ *Politica*, 2.2, pp. 24–30.

²⁸ *Politica*, 6.3, pp. 173–87.

²⁹ See Robert Bellarmine, *Disputationes de Controversiis* (Cologne, 1628); and Höpfl, *Jesuit Political Thought*, pp. 18, 41–42.

³⁰ Justus Lipsius, *Principles of Letter Writing: A Bilingual text of Justi Lipsi Epistolica Institutioni*, eds R. V. Young and M. Thomas Hester (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996).

late humanist scholarship.³¹ Thus, Lipsius's well-known affection for small dogs symbolically connoted Stoic and Platonic fortitude. Consequently, in *The Four Philosophers*, Lipsius's dog Mopsus (see Frontispiece) in the right hand corner of the painting both figuratively recalls Lipsius's preoccupation with the canine world, but also serves to suggest quintessentially Stoic values (*robur* (strength), *ingenium* (cleverness), *vigilantia* (alertness), and *fides* (loyalty)). The bust of Seneca strategically situated above the philosopher's head further reinforces these values.³² The dog, in other words, evokes both Stoic values and the dogged commitment required of humanist scholarship.³³ Significantly, while his adversaries satirized Lipsius for his sentimental *laus canes*, the Louvain network carefully orchestrated the Lipsian image in order to promulgate a pedagogic programme for a Counter-Reformation audience.

Rubens also designed the cover for the 1637 edition of the collected works. This again demonstrated an acute preoccupation with the presentation and structure of the oeuvre and an intense concern with the manner in which Lipsius might be read, together with his determining influences, namely, *Philosophia* and *Politica* personified by Seneca and Tacitus.³⁴

Somewhat differently, Mark Morford also draws attention to the shared humanistic values permeating Lipsius's scholastic and political networks. As Morford shows, his *contubernales*³⁵ constitute a classic humanist example of public servants inspired by Lipsius's inculcation of a Christianized Neo-Stoic message. Lipsius, in other words, promulgated humanistic values for the conduct of a *vita activa*. Significantly, he evinced his disappointment when his former *contubernalis*, Baldinus Junius, entered the Franciscan order, criticizing him in a published letter 'for withdrawing from the world'.³⁶

Morford further identified the *Politica* as a *cento* of quotations 'quarried from ancient authors'.³⁷ He questioned Lipsius's aphoristic application of classical *sententiae* to contemporary moral and political dilemmas. As he

³¹ Jan Papy, 'Lipsius and his Dogs: Humanist Tradition, Iconography, and Rubens's Four Philosophers', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 62 (1999), 167–98. The four philosophers in the painting were the painter's brother, Philip, the painter himself, Lipsius, and Johannes Woverius.

³² Papy, p. 179.

³³ For Plato, the dog was a philosophic creature.

³⁴ See frontispiece, T. J. Luce and A. J. Woodman, eds, *Tacitus and the Tacitean Tradition*.

³⁵ *Contubernales* were students who lodged with Lipsius and were personally tutored by him: Papy, p. 176.

³⁶ Mark Morford, 'Life and Letters in Lipsius's Teaching', in *Justus Lipsius Europae Lumen et Columen*, eds Tournoy and others, pp. 129–52 (p. 132). See also Mark Morford, *Stoics and Neostoics: Rubens and the Circle of Lipsius* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

³⁷ Morford, 'Tacitean Prudentia', p. 143.

explains, Lipsius's humanistic method is best understood by reference to his *Politica* in which he covered the whole field of politics and policy. The work skilfully wove quotations from ancient authors with his own political doctrine, giving it an impression of dogmatic authority. The 'austere imperative style', Morford observes, 'supported by the authority of the ancient texts gives the reader no alternative to the way he presented the matter'.³⁸ In this context – of *sententiae* organized around the need for princely counsel – the work followed the form of traditional advice literature. The difference and originality lay in the emphasis upon Roman authors of the late republican and early imperial period, in particular, Tacitus.

This was the period, of course, on which Lipsius was the leading scholarly authority of his day and intended his version of Tacitean political prudence to be of particular utility for contemporary counsel and monarchical rule. Lipsius considered an awareness of Tacitus incomparable 'for ... those who give advice and counsel to the helmsman'.³⁹ Tacitus accounted for 528 of the 2069 citations in the *Politica*. Lipsius acknowledges, in his *auctorum syllabus*, the centrality of Tacitean *prudentia* and the frequency and utility of aphorisms in his writing. Morford, nevertheless, criticizes Lipsius's cavalier use of Tacitus to address contemporary questions of policy, a usage Morford considers both tendentious and misleading. Thus, in illustrating the baleful consequences of civil disorder, Lipsius exemplifies the problem from Book I of the *Annals* where the tyrannical Roman Emperor Nero accused the former consul Publius Clodius Thrasea Pateus of treason. Tacitus admired Thrasea's conduct, but in the *Politica*, Lipsius deploys the words of Thrasea's accusers to justify the repression of sedition by the prince, but without acknowledging Tacitus's ironic treatment of these events.⁴⁰ In other words, Lipsius quoted Tacitus in a context that was the opposite of his intention.⁴¹

This is not the only case of Lipsian adjustment. Indeed, Milton criticized this practice in his polemical engagement with Salmasius (Claude Saumaise) in 1651, where the latter used not Tacitus but the Lipsian gloss to defend a position that Tacitus, 'a most noble writer opposed to tyranny' would have disapproved.⁴² Tacitean *prudentia*, thus, becomes the foundation for doctrines that are those of Lipsius rather than those of Tacitus. Consequently, the

³⁸ Morford, 'Life and Letters', p. 116.

³⁹ 'There is none', Lipsius added, 'who can be compared with Tacitus in the glory earned by his prudence of every sort': Morford, 'Tacitean *Prudentia*', p. 138.

⁴⁰ Morford, 'Tacitean *Prudentia*', p. 143.

⁴¹ Morford, 'Tacitean *Prudentia*', p. 143.

⁴² Dzelzainis, 'Milton and the Protectorate in 1658', p. 202. See also Waszink's carefully nuanced analysis of Lipsius's use of classical examples in *Politica*, 3.6, pp. 60–73.

'originality of the *Politica* lay not so much in the use of Tacitean aphorisms, as in the sustained thoroughness with which Lipsius subordinated the words of Tacitus to his own designs'.⁴³ Ultimately, for Morford this renders the *Politica* both problematic and limited to its time.

By contrast, both Jan Waszink and George Hugo Tucker contend that what Morford finds misleading was in fact a deliberate application of the 'non poetic' *cento* form that Lipsius effectively created.⁴⁴ Comparing Robert Burton's 'macaronic prose *cento*' *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1620–31) with Michel de Montaigne's *Essays* (1580–92) and Lipsius's *Politica*, Tucker shows that a 'formal requisite of proper *cento*-writing', entailed using the 'authority or form of preceding texts, and going beyond them, albeit through dismembering and distorting their form and meaning'.⁴⁵ Indeed, in the 'Preliminary Matter', introducing the 1596 edition of the *Politica*, Lipsius directly confronted the accusation that he had 'quoted certain things incorrectly and not in accordance with the spirit of the writer in question'. He claimed, in self-exculpation, that he was 'weaving a *Cento* ... in which these departures from the original meaning are always allowed and even praised'.⁴⁶

Differently again, Ann Moss also draws attention to the *Politica*'s elusive rhetorical strategy and its aphoristic character. Instead of an advice book or a *cento*, Moss focuses upon the *Politica* as an extended exercise in the genre of the commonplace book. This was explicit, Moss contends, in the propadeutic to the Protestant 1589 edition of the *Politica* but suppressed in the Catholic and official edition of 1596. Moss further contends that Lipsius deliberately composed in a fragmentary way to reflect the disordered times he endured. Against Morford's closed reading of the text, Moss suggests the *Politica* rarely 'constructs or closes arguments'.⁴⁷ Moss, instead, considers the *Politica* an attempt 'to perform fragmentation and division into a nexus which its readers would immediately recognize as that which structured their universe of thought and culture'.⁴⁸ Moss further, and somewhat confusingly, claims that the *Monita et Exempla* of 1605, that Lipsius actually intended to serve as

⁴³ Morford, Tacitean *Prudentia*, p. 144.

⁴⁴ As Waszink explains, Lipsius uses the fact that poets quote freely from other texts as legitimation for his own practice and indeed 'the word *Cento* when applied to a text, usually refers to a poem made up of bits from other poems'. Lipsius effectively established a 'new genre, the non-poetic *cento*': Waszink 'Introduction', *Politica*, p. 73.

⁴⁵ George Hugo Tucker, 'Justus Lipsius and the *Cento* Form', in *(Un)masking the Realities of Power*, eds De Bom and others, pp. 163–94 (p. 170).

⁴⁶ Tucker, p. 174. See also *Politica*, Preliminary Matter, p. 237.

⁴⁷ Ann Moss, 'The *Politica* of Justus Lipsius and the Commonplace-Book', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 59 (1998), 421–36 (p. 426).

⁴⁸ Moss, p. 430.

a 'discipline-focused commonplace book'⁴⁹ reinforces her view that 'the very different form of the *Politica* nevertheless confirms the status of that work as a particularly sophisticated and carefully poised political common place book'.⁵⁰

Elaborating further upon the character of the *Politica*, Halvard Leira locates Lipsius's fragmentary advice in the troubled context of the international relations of the inchoate European states of the late sixteenth century. Lipsius, Leira argues, is not only a somewhat schizophrenic figure, but also a transitional one, 'standing on the threshold of modernity'.⁵¹ His preoccupation with dignity, self-restraint, and discipline established the political foundations for the foreign policy of the absolutist prince. Thus, for Leira, Lipsian Neo-Stoicism subordinated the individual to the purposes of the state and taught the subject self-control through mastery of the passions.⁵² In Leira's account, *On Constancy* inculcated passive endurance and an emotionless, but still active engagement in public life, while the *Politica* provided the discipline necessary both for ordering society and creating the foundations of the fiscal military state.⁵³ 'Constantia, prudence, authority and discipline' were integral to the formation of the protean absolutist state and its realist conduct of foreign policy.⁵⁴

Leira's Foucauldian treatment of Lipsius as a precursor of modern governmentality, sits somewhat uncomfortably alongside John Sellars's recent reading of *On Constancy* as a Stoic spiritual exercise. Rather than inculcating a disciplinary mentality into the subjects of the emerging modern state, Lipsius, Sellars maintains, presents a reflective meditation on his own inadequacies as both a philosopher and a philologist. The work, which takes the form of a dialogue between a Stoic sage and his pupil,⁵⁵ is not an advice book, but one

⁴⁹ Ann Moss, 'Monita et Exempla Politica as Example of a Genre', in *(Un)masking the Realities of Power*, ed. De Bom and others, pp. 97–115 (p. 113).

⁵⁰ Moss, 'The *Politica* of Justus Lipsius', p. 432. Marijke Janssens has translated the *Monita et exempla politica* (1605): critical edition, translation, commentary, and introductory study' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Louvain University, 2009).

⁵¹ Halvard Leira, 'Justus Lipsius, Political Humanism and the Disciplining of 17th Century Statecraft', *Review of International Studies*, 34 (2008), 669–92 (p. 691).

⁵² Leira, p. 669.

⁵³ Leira, pp. 675–76.

⁵⁴ Leira, p. 676.

⁵⁵ John Sellars, 'Justus Lipsius *De Constantia*: A Stoic Spiritual Exercise', *Poetics Today*, 28 (2007), 339–62 (p. 339).

of moral healing. Its classical model is Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* and its psychological purpose is to dye and cleanse 'the wounded mind'.⁵⁶

In an analogous vein, Jaqueline Lagrée in her careful reading of the *On Constancy*, the *Manuductio*, and *Physiologia* reveals a humanist philosopher preoccupied with life as self-incurred exile and a journey leading to a humanist resolution, where 'the fear of exile is overcome by the knowledge that the world and not heaven is the philosopher's homeland and the company of the virtuous and the philosophical his true community'.⁵⁷ Ultimately, this Stoic programme facilitated neither governmentality or disciplinarity, but the ataraxic detachment of the sage.⁵⁸

IV. Misreading Lipsius

Somewhat problematically, what we frequently encounter in this literature is evidence of a propensity in the history of political thought to read into the past a hypothetical completion of ideas, concepts, and ideologies.⁵⁹ As Conal Condren has shown, the propensity to import into the past current predilections and ideologies has distorted our ability to read early modern discourse and its distinctive language of self understanding.⁶⁰ In the case of Lipsius, this tendency is evident both in the early work of Oestreich and the more recent post-structural studies of Leira. More precisely, when Leira advocates a 'historical turn', that 'reads history backwards' in order to confirm a prevailing explanatory model, he negates the possibility of comprehending the past in its own terms.⁶¹ Such abridgements of understanding, as Condren explains, 'are characteristically projected as an available reality, and this is used to redescribe surviving evidence, so pre-empting understanding'. Ultimately, the 'meta language of explanatory modelling is conflated with the evidence itself and the past is then easily, even inadvertently, reduced to a series of variations on the present'.⁶²

Comprehending the language of late sixteenth-century humanist thought, in other words, requires wariness about projecting twentieth-century assumptions permeated with completed ideologies of republicanism,

⁵⁶ Sellars, p. 358.

⁵⁷ Lagrée, *La Restauration du Stoïcisme*, p. 80 (my translation).

⁵⁸ Lagrée, 'Lipse, l'âme et vertu', p. 106.

⁵⁹ Conal Condren, *Argument and Authority in Early Modern England: The Presupposition of Oaths and Engagements* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 26–27.

⁶⁰ See also Condren's contribution to this Special Issue.

⁶¹ Leira, 'Justus Lipsius, political humanism', pp. 670–71.

⁶² Condren, *Argument and Authority*, p. 3.

absolutism, or international law, onto the categories of thought and modes of inquiry and debate of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. This is particularly important when we realize that Lipsius's understanding of prudence, the principal ethical concern of the rightly guided prince, was based firmly on *memoria*, and used history both to illustrate contemporary problems and demonstrate that the times had always been out of joint.

For Oestreich, Leira, and others, history is read backwards to inform contemporary ethical or ideological debates. Ultimately, this conflatory disposition, that anachronistically projects completed ideological understandings into a sixteenth-century discursive practice that did not possess the concept 'ideology' limits our capacity to understand the past in its own terms.

The consequences of this propensity to hypothetical completion for the conditions of late sixteenth-century discourse has obscured both the structure and terms of political debate and the language of self-disclosure in which it was conducted. In order to situate Lipsius's distinctive commentary upon, and remedies for, the vexations of unhappy and unfortunate Belgica,⁶³ what, then, we must ask, was the dominant mode of sixteenth-century discourse and its understanding of state right?

V. Casuistry, Reason of State, and the Case of the *Politica*

To begin this exercise in reinterpretation requires us to attend a little more closely to the casuistic framework in which Lipsius advances his understanding of monarchy and his promotion of prudence as a response to providence and necessity that 'tames and subdues all things'.⁶⁴ Prudence constituted the supreme political and human virtue in the *Politica*. More precisely, virtue consists entirely 'in Selection and Moderation. Since these cannot exist without Prudence. Virtue cannot. Just as architects cannot do their work properly without level and ruler, so cannot we without this ruling principle'.⁶⁵ Lipsius defines prudence, therefore, as 'the understanding and choosing of what is to be sought or avoided both in private and public'.⁶⁶

⁶³ As he describes it in *On Constancy*: see Justus Lipsius, *On Constancy*, ed. and intro. John Sellars (Bristol: Phoenix Press, 2006), p. 58, (hereafter, *On Constancy*).

⁶⁴ *On Constancy*, p. 58.

⁶⁵ *Politica*, 1.7, p. 283.

⁶⁶ *Politica*, 1.7, p. 283. For an interesting discussion of Lipsian prudence and its somewhat different treatment in the *Monita et Exempla Politica*, see Diana Stanciu, 'Prudence in Lipsius's *Monita et exempla politica*: Stoic Virtue, Aristotelian Virtue or not a Virtue at All', in *(Un)masking the Realities of Power*, eds De Bom and others, pp. 233–62.

The adaptation of a supervening moral code to a particular case of conscience is casuistry and Lipsius's application of prudence to a particular case of civil disorder follows this casuistic form. Casuistry, as a theologico-political practice, evolved from medieval theology into more formal moral and political guides in the course of the sixteenth century.

In the medieval church, casuistry had developed as the branch of moral theology that addressed cases of conscience. It constituted the technical method for resolving cases, 'when conscience is in a strait between two or more courses' of action.⁶⁷ In other words, casuistry evolved out of the confessional. In this development, it evinced, from the outset, a concern with prudential or practical reasoning. As Thomas Aquinas observed, although divine providence had fixed the final end of human life, the means of achieving that end were 'of manifold variety according to the variety of persons and situations'.⁶⁸ Responding to this variety, the casuist attended not only to the general rule, that, for example, 'thou shalt not kill' but also to the extenuating circumstances that might affect a particular case of homicide.⁶⁹ Even in the late nineteenth century, when casuistry had fallen into desuetude, Benjamin Jowett could still maintain that 'casuistry begins where the law ends. It goes where law refuses to go ... into the domain of morality. It weighs in the balance of precedent and authority the impalpable acts of a moral being'.⁷⁰

It was with the publication of the Spanish Augustinian canon regular, Martin Azpilcueta's (Doctor Navarrus) *Enchiridion, sive Manuale Confessariorum et Poenitentium* (1568) that casuistry achieved both ubiquity and methodological

⁶⁷ R. M. Wenley, 'Casuistry', in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. J. Hastings (Edinburgh: Kessinger, 1910), Part I, p. 239. See also Elliot Rose, *Cases of Conscience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 71; and E. Leites, ed., *Conscience and Casuistry in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

⁶⁸ Cited in Albert R. Jonsen and Stephen Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry: A History of Moral Reasoning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 130; see also T. C. Potts, *Conscience in Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

⁶⁹ Jonsen and Toulmin view casuistry as a species of situational ethics that 'pays closest attention to the specific details of particular moral cases and circumstances': *The Abuse of Casuistry*, p. 2. The case of murder and the circumstances governing it featured regularly in casebooks. Both the Jesuit casuist Escobar y Mendoza and the Anglican Joseph Hall discussed it. See J. Hall, *Resolutions and Decisions of Divers Practicall Cases of Conscience Occasionally Determined* (London, 1649); and Dwight Cathcart, *Doubting Conscience: Donne and the Poetry of Moral Argument* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1974), p. 35.

⁷⁰ Benjamin Jowett, 'Casuistry', in *Theological Essays of the late Benjamin Jowett*, ed. L. Campbell (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1906), p. 96. In an analogous vein, G. E. Moore contended casuistry attended not only to the general rule that, for example, charity is a virtue, but also attempts to discover 'the particular merits of every different form of charity': Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927), p. 4.

coherence.⁷¹ Casuistry, the regularization of confession,⁷² rhetoric, and prudence subsequently came together in a compelling theologico-political package. In this period, too, and under growing Jesuit influence, casuistry ‘applied the general principles of natural and divine law to specific cases, and merged seamlessly with theology and controversies’.⁷³ Questions of ruling, statecraft, and the nature and limits of obedience, like any other practice or activity, fell within its increasingly capacious embrace. Ultimately, casuistry involved a ‘dialectic between the principles which we bring to the consideration of particular cases and the facts of those cases as they are revealed to us through practical discernment’.⁷⁴

Moreover, despite the late sixteenth-century confessional polemics, which saw, as Condren maintains, casuistry ‘deplored in name and deployed in spirit’, the denominational divide between Catholic and Protestant case divinity ‘was deceptively negotiable’. Indeed, for Catholic and Protestant alike, ‘the rules and criteria, the meta-language used to appraise ordinary and extraordinary cases, were likely to lead to probably right and wrong courses of action, [and] hence to the notorious Jesuit doctrine of moral probabilism’.⁷⁵

However, this probabilist moral context, its relationship to an evolving climate of skepticism and doubt, and the relevance of casuist treatises as ‘carriers of political thought in the early modern period’ has been either neglected or discounted.⁷⁶ In the confused religious and political circumstances

⁷¹ Martin ab Azpilcueta Doctorus Navarrus, *Enchiridion Sive Manuali Confessoriorum et Poenitentium* (Lyons: Gulielimum Rovelimum, 1584). See also Jonsen and Toulmin, *The Abuse of Casuistry*, p. 152.

⁷² Archbishop Charles Borromeo introduced the modern confessional, ‘a box like structure usually open in front with a chair for the priest and a grille to his side on the other side of which there was a space for the penitent to kneel’ in Milan in the 1570s. See Robert Bireley, *The Refashioning of Catholicism, 1450–1700: A Reassessment of the Counter Reformation* (London: Macmillan and Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), p. 105. It gradually spread throughout Counter-Reformation Europe and confession became increasingly central to ‘disciplining society’ by the early seventeenth century. See Wietse De Boer, *The Conquest of the Soul: Confession, Discipline and Public Order in Counter-Reformation Milan* (Brill: Leiden 2001), pp. 325–27.

⁷³ Höpfl, *Jesuit Political Thought*, p. 5.

⁷⁴ M. W. F. Stone, ‘The adoption and rejection of Aristotelian moral philosophy in reformed casuistry’, in *Humanism and Early Modern Philosophy*, eds Jill Kraye and M. W. F. Stone (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 90.

⁷⁵ Condren, *Argument and Authority*, p. 174. For the argument that Protestant casuistry was less permissive or ‘casuistic’ than the Catholic variety, see also Stone, p. 60.

⁷⁶ See Wim Decock, ‘Secret Compensation: A Friendly and Lawful Alternative to Lipsius’s Political Thought’, in *(Un)masking the Realities of Power*, eds De Bom and others, pp. 263–80 (p. 263); and Mikael Hornqvist, ‘*Exempla*, Prudence, and Casuistry in Renaissance Political Discourse’, in *ibid.*, pp. 23–42 (pp. 37–39). As Rudolf Schussler observes, the

of the late sixteenth century, the doctrine that it was possible to satisfy the formal requirements of sound moral reflection by remaining in speculative doubt about the right answer to a question but believing in the permissibility of acting as if one answer were true assumed growing plausibility. By the 1570s, Bartolomeo de Medina, professor of theology at the University of Salamanca, could promulgate the view that 'if an opinion is probable it is lawful to follow it, even though the opposing opinion is more probable'.⁷⁷ This understanding, Rudolf Schussler contends, achieved 'rapid acceptance among catholic moral theologians' of the late sixteenth century.⁷⁸

The adaptation of personal and political behaviour to what the circumstances or necessity demands, therefore, makes best sense in the later part of the sixteenth century in the context of probabilist casuistry, with its somewhat mutable understanding of truth made possible by a situational moral practice.⁷⁹ It becomes particularly evident in the *Politica's* discussion of mixed prudence, which 'is in reality unstable and changeable in every respect'.⁸⁰ In Book IV, Lipsius specifically addresses the prudence he wanted 'to be in the Prince himself' which 'is hard to bind to rules' because it 'covers a wide area that is fluctuating and veiled'.⁸¹ In Book I of the *Politica*, we are told that prudence and virtue are 'the two leaders of civil life', nevertheless, it is prudence that is the rudder that ultimately guides the virtues.⁸² It possesses two branches: experience and *memoria* (history), hence the importance of historical examples. History, then, is the 'fount' from which political and prudential choosing flows. In Book IV we learn, in addition, that the way of princely prudence is notoriously difficult and unclear, its matter 'veiled in deep darkness'.⁸³

late sixteenth century was 'the heyday of scholastic probabilism. It was also the golden era of early modern scepticism': Schussler, 'On the Anatomy of Probabilism', in *Moral Philosophy on the Threshold of Modernity*, eds Jill Kraye and Risto Saarinen (Dordrecht: Springer, 2005), pp. 91–113 (p. 101).

⁷⁷ The opinion comes in the context of a discussion of whether it is better to follow a more likely or probabilior opinion or whether a less probable one might suffice. Medina found a less probable course to be morally safe. 'Certe argumenti videntur optima, sed mihi videtur quod si est opinio probabilis licita est eam sequi, licit opposite a probabilior est': Bartolomeo de Medina, *Scholastica Commentaria in D. Thomae Aquinatis Primam Secundae* (Coloniae Agrippinae: Petri Heningii, 1618), Quaestio 19, Dubio 17, pp. 464–65.

⁷⁸ Schussler, p. 101.

⁷⁹ Condren, *Argument and Authority*, p. 223

⁸⁰ *Politica*, 4.1, p. 383.

⁸¹ *Politica*, 4.1, p. 383.

⁸² *Politica*, 1.1, p. 261 and 1.7, p. 283.

⁸³ *Politica*, 4.1, p. 385.

This prompts Lipsius's interest in what he terms mixed prudence (*prudencia mixta*). Prudence, Lipsius now contends, possesses two further divisions, namely, civil and military prudence. He further subdivided the first branch into religious and worldly categories. Significantly, it was this 'dark field' that required the careful, or more accurately, casuistic adjustment of general rules to specific circumstances. This is particularly the case in worldly affairs where opinion and passion, both transitory and unpredictable, influence the masses. Popular credulity and fecklessness⁸⁴ necessarily affect the conduct of the prince who, in order to maintain the actual reality of stable and peaceful ruling',⁸⁵ must necessarily have recourse to the 'double fountain of prudence' but which Lipsius mixes 'a little, and add a bit of the sediment of deceit'.⁸⁶ This is permissible 'providing it is done moderately and with good aims'.⁸⁷

Dealing with cunning men, the prince and his counsellors had, of necessity, to mix the honourable with the useful.⁸⁸ This practice, and its differentiation between *honestas* and *utilitas* widely regarded as classic reason of state, is, in fact, essentially casuist in that the recourse to distrust and dissimulation 'departs from virtue or the laws in the interest of the King and Kingdom'.⁸⁹

This casuistic treatment of mixed prudence becomes even more apparent when we find that deceit comes in three varieties: light, middle, and grave. Light deceit entails distrust and dissimulation, the middle variety involves bribery and deception, and the grave accepts breaches of faith and injustice. Lipsius recommends the first, tolerates the second, and condemns the third.⁹⁰ Significantly, type one and two deceit mirror sixteenth-century Catholic casuist advice on equivocation or amphibology and mental reservation rather than the absolute and seemingly cynical breach with conventional or traditional morality that Machiavelli advocated. As Harro Höpfl explains in his comprehensive analysis of Jesuit political thought, 'Jesuits ... operated a two-pronged strategy. They offered general persuasives to *honestas* and *fides*. But they also explored just how far impossibly strict standards of *honestas* and

⁸⁴ *Politica*, 4.5, p. 405. The people also lack judgement and are by nature jealous and suspicious.

⁸⁵ *Politica*, 4.5, p. 401.

⁸⁶ *Politica*, 4.13, p. 507.

⁸⁷ *Politica*, 4.13, p. 509.

⁸⁸ *Politica*, 4.13, p. 509.

⁸⁹ *Politica*, 4.14, p. 513.

⁹⁰ *Politica*, 4.14, p. 513.

fides could be attenuated without undermining those virtues themselves and the good ends to which they ordinarily conduced'.⁹¹

While in both the *Politica* and the *Monita et Exempla*, Lipsius clearly struggled to bridge a burgeoning gap between the morally good and the politically useful, his argument favouring deceit, nevertheless, shared an elective affinity with Catholic and particularly Jesuit moral teaching concerning the circumstances governing mental reservation and equivocation or amphibology. The Augustinian canon lawyer, Martin Azpilcueta had first explained that it was morally permissible to respond to an interrogator ambivalently or with mixed speech (*oratio mixta*) partly in words but also with mentally reserved (*mentalis restrictio*) additions not articulated.⁹²

Medina reinforced this viewpoint with his casuistic defence of the probable rather than the more likely (*probabiliter*) course of action.⁹³ However, it was the Jesuit Tomas Sanchez (1550–1610) who took mental reservation and equivocation to a new level of sophistry when, in his discussion of the nature of the oath and its bond, he contended that:

If anyone, by himself, or before others, whether under examination or of his own accord, whether for amusement or any other purpose should swear that he has not done something else which he has not done or some way of doing it other than the way he employed or anything else that is true, he does not lie or perjure himself.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Höpfl, *Jesuit Political Thought*, p. 146.

⁹² Azpilcueta argues that reserving some of the truth from the ears of human listeners was moral if it served a greater good. In practice a respondent could answer an interrogator's question with the reply 'I know not', about a particular issue, yet silently reserve an additional phrase that only God heard 'to tell you' and still tell the truth: Martini ab Azpilcueta Navarri, *Compendium Omnium Operum* (Venice: Robertum Meietum, 1602). In particular, see the chapter 'Commentarius in cap humanae aures 22.qo5 De Veritate Responsi partina verba expressi, partum metum concepti'. In Book I (Tomus Primus) he writes, 'Humanae aures verba nostra talia indicant, qualia foris sonant. Divina vero iudicia talia esse audiunt qualia ex intimis preferuntur', p. 407.

⁹³ '[O]pinio probabilis ex eo dicitur probabilis quod possumus eam sequi sine reprehensione et vituperatione ergo implicit contradictionem quod sit probabilis et quod non possumus eam licite': Medina, *Scholastice Commentaria*, pp. 464–65.

⁹⁴ 'Ut si quis vel solus vel coram aliis sive interrogates sive propria sponte sive recreationis gratia sive quocumque alio fine, iurat se non fecesse aliquid quod re vera fecit intelligendo intra se aliquid aliud quod non fecit vel aliam diem ab ea, in qua fecit, vel quoduis aliud additum tum verum, re vera non mentitur nec est periurus, sed tantum non dicerat unam veritatem determinam quam audientes concipiunt, ac verba illa ex se significant sed aliam veritatem dispositam': Tomas Sanchez, *Opus Morale In Praecepta Decalogi* (Madrid: Ludovicum Sanchez, 1613), Liber Tertius, 6.15, pp. 648–49. The argument occurs in the context of a general discussion of the nature of the oath: *De Iuramento*, pp. 607–11.

Such dissimulation was of no mere academic interest. The Jesuits, Robert Persons, Edmund Campion, Robert Southwell, and Henry Garnet, who participated in the Jesuit mission to Elizabethan England after 1580, all used and defended the tactical recourse to ‘oratio mixta’ to evade capture by a hostile government. In fact, Garnet wrote *A Treatise of Equivocation* (1598) defending, *inter alia*, the recourse to ‘mixed propositions’.⁹⁵

Significantly, it was the Jesuits who taught the young Lipsius and reconciled him with the faith in 1591. His close friends and advisers in Louvain included the Jesuit casuists Martin Delrio and Leonardus Lessius who wrote a posthumous defence of Lipsius’s work.⁹⁶ Interestingly, they also advised Southwell and Garnet.⁹⁷

It is not surprising, given the Jesuit preference for monarchy and hierarchy, that Lipsius favoured monarchical over republican forms and calibrated his prudential advice to protect a hierarchical moral and political order.⁹⁸ Lipsius further follows Jesuit precedent in condemning breaches of faith and treaty breaking. Similarly, in his approach to simulation and dissimulation in political matters, Lipsius applied a Jesuit inspired, casuistic discrimination between tutorist, probabiliorist, and probabilist treatments of difficult moral and political cases. Tutorism contended that where conscience was in doubt it was safer to follow the law. Probabilism maintained that a course of action might be followed ‘if any authority had defended it’, or if it was probable.⁹⁹ Probabiliorism, by contrast, held it was not lawful to act on the less-safe opinion unless it was more probable than the safe opinion. While probabilism favoured liberty (*lex dubia non obligat*), probabiliorism held that where there

⁹⁵ ‘When being demanded whether John at Style be in such a place, I knowing that he is there indeed, do say nevertheless “I know not” – reserving or understanding within myself these other words “to th’ end for to tell you”. Here is a mixed proposition containing all this. “I know not to th’ end for to tell you”. And yet part of it is expressed, part reserved in the mind’: Henry Garnet, *A Treatise of Equivocation* (1598), in *Early Modern Catholicism: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Robert S. Miola (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 86. Reservation did Garnet little good. He was executed in 1606 for his alleged role in the Gunpowder treason of 1605. Both Campion and Southwell were martyred for being Catholic priests in 1581 and 1595 respectively.

⁹⁶ See J. de Landtsheer, ‘Le Retour de Just Lipse de Leyden a Louvain selon sa correspondance (1591–94)’, in *Juste Lipse (1547–1606) et son temps*, ed. C. Mouchel (Paris: Vrin, 1997), pp. 347–68; Soen, ‘*Clementia Lipsiana*’, p. 228.

⁹⁷ Garnet was evidently influenced by the casuistry of Martin Delrio, and Southwell was taught by Leonardus Lessius.

⁹⁸ Höpfl, *Jesuit Political Thought*, pp. 22–53.

⁹⁹ See Eliot Rose, *Cases of Conscience: Alternatives Open to Recusants and Puritans under Elizabeth I and James I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 72.

are two opinions, one supporting liberty and the other favouring the law, if the latter is the more probable one, it must be followed.¹⁰⁰

Lipsius's treatment of mixed prudence charted a Jesuit probabilist course. He advised that the nature of politics required the prince to dissimulate or equivocate. Indeed, 'he who knows not how to dissimulate, knows not how to reign'.¹⁰¹ Moving to more difficult cases, and 'the middle degree of deceit', the prince also needed to know when and how to lie. Thus, quoting Plutarch, Lipsius contended that while 'truth is better than falsehood ... Experience shows the dignity and qualities of both'.¹⁰² For a 'good Prince', in difficult times, 'has almost no other means to defend himself and his environment against so many conspirators. And for this reason too I have said that this middle sort of deceit is tolerated by me'.¹⁰³ Princely conduct in a particular case might therefore 'depart slightly from human laws, but only in order to preserve his position never to extend it. For *Necessity, being a great defender of the weakness of man, breaks every law*'.¹⁰⁴

This casuistic interpretation of what civil prudence might require also recognized how the advice to and practice of monarchy functioned within an evolving sensitivity to the state and its right, often misleadingly termed *raison d'état*. Such an understanding should not be confused with an incipient absolutist ideology and certainly not with a defence of tyranny, which Lipsius considered a regime not to be countenanced by a prudent ruler, although a Stoic subject, as the *On Constancy* advised, might have to endure it.¹⁰⁵

Here, once more, the prevailing scholarship's propensity to treat *raison d'état* thinking as innovating and eventually completing a radical ideological departure from the practice of political and moral casuistry has served only to obscure the framework in which Lipsius sought to mobilize his view of what authority and obedience entailed, in circumstances where authority faced political subversion. In his rationale for the work, Lipsius makes clear that his advice was not for the multitude but for the prince, or more precisely his counsel 'to lead and direct' the prince 'to that great goal that is the common good'.¹⁰⁶ The counsellor, in this context, performs the office of a state casuist

¹⁰⁰ J. Hastings, 'Probabiliorism', *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, eds James Hastings, John A. Selbie, and Louis H. Gray, 24 vols (repr. Edinburgh: Kessinger Publishing, 2003), XIX, eds Hastings and Selbie (1908), p. 348.

¹⁰¹ *Politica*, 4.14, p. 517.

¹⁰² *Politica*, 4.14, p. 523.

¹⁰³ *Politica*, 4.14, p. 523.

¹⁰⁴ *Politica*, 4.14, p. 531 (italics in original). The source of the advice is Seneca.

¹⁰⁵ Waszink, 'Introduction', *Politica*, pp. 44–46.

¹⁰⁶ *Politica*, Preliminary Matter, p. 229.

in order to direct policy towards the common good. As Lipsius explains in Book III, the good prince requires counsellors and he sees it 'as the first task of a king's prudence to find wise ones'. Such counsel offers 'insights in peace or war'.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, 'deservedly to be praised are the Wise whose task it is, then as now, to light the way of the ruler with the torch of beneficial advice'.¹⁰⁸ This advice necessarily required cultivating a differential political morality, where the prudence practised by the Prince, his counsellors and ministers, differed from the injunction to patient obedience inculcated in the monarch's good subjects in order to maintain public order and advance the common good.

The work of selection 'out of myriad parts' for the *Politica*, therefore, is designed both for usefulness and practice. It is not so much a work in the genre of a mirror-for-princes as a political guidebook tailored to the office of counsellor to the prince. Tacitus was particularly useful in this advisory context because, as Lipsius explained, 'this writer deals with princely courts, with the inner life of princes, their plans, commands and actions and he teaches us, who have noticed the similarity in many respects with our own time, that the same effects may come from the same causes'.¹⁰⁹

Given its casuistic framework, the *Politica* is not really a commonplace book, a genre Lipsius used more particularly in his pedagogy.¹¹⁰ The commonplaces in the work are, for the most part, confined to the somewhat neglected, unfinished sequel to the *Politica*, the *Monita et Exempla Politica libri duo* (1605). This commonplace book provides warnings and illustrative examples designed to allay criticism of the, sometimes ambiguous, character of the advice offered in the *Politica*.¹¹¹ However, as it was unfinished, the examples and admonitions only cover the advice offered in Books I and II.

The *Monita* opens with a dialogue between a student (*auditor*) and Lipsius. The student expresses concern over the misinterpretation of the advice proffered in the *Politica* and asks the master for further examples in order to clarify and 'strew' its benefits more widely amongst his countrymen.¹¹² Lipsius expresses reservation, skeptically observing that more examples

¹⁰⁷ *Politica*, 3.3, pp. 353–55.

¹⁰⁸ *On Constancy*, p. 227.

¹⁰⁹ Justus Lipsius, *C. Cornelii Taciti Opera quae exstant I. Lipsius quartum recensuit* (Antwerp, 1588), fol. 4. Translated and cited in Jan Papy, 'Justus Lipsius and the German Republic of Letters', *Index Actorum symposii (Leitseite Kongress)* (Munich, 2002), §2. Available at <<http://www.phil-hum-ren.uni-muenchen.de/GermLat/Acta/Papy.htm>>.

¹¹⁰ Papy, 'Lipsius and his Dogs', p. 177.

¹¹¹ See Moss, 'Monita et Exempla Politica as Example of a Genre'.

¹¹² Justus Lipsius, *Monita et Exempla Politica libri duo qui virtutes et vitia principum spectant* (Amsterdam, 1668), p. 9.

might in fact spread further misunderstanding.¹¹³ Eventually persuaded by his student's exhortations, Lipsius proceeds to offer a variety of examples to clarify the prudential counsel offered in Books I and II of the *Politica*. The examples are grouped under two broad headings: in Part I, religion and its conduct and in Part II, monarchy and its ends. These headings are subsequently subdivided into a series of topics. Thus religion begins with the universality of religion. Here Lipsius provides illustrative examples from pagan and Christian experience before moving on to discuss the problem of superstition, impiety, and the place of conscience, fate, and prudence in ethical as well as political conduct.¹¹⁴ Part II, by contrast, exemplifies the utility of monarchy, considers the problems of election and hereditary succession, and provides examples and warnings concerning the use of force and fraud in establishing principalities before turning to the ends of monarchy and the official purpose of the prince, namely, to maintain the public good.¹¹⁵ These examples and warnings reinforce the claims made in the opening books of the *Politica* for the necessity of hierarchy and order.

Lipsius evidently conceived the *Politica* differently from the *Monita*. It was, he observed, in the 'preliminary matter' introducing the book, a 'curious kind of genre' where the authorial voice was deliberately obscured, so much so, that, '*omnia nostra esse et nihil*'.¹¹⁶ It was, moreover, a cryptic work intended to be read more than once¹¹⁷ and would, Lipsius anticipated, 'be subject to misreading as ill witted and clever men will claim that I thought and wrote things which I have not thought or written in my dreams'.¹¹⁸

VI. Deliberation, Presentation, and Lipsian Casuistry

Ultimately, the casuist, humanist advice literature that Lipsius takes in a distinctively aphoristic direction via its *Cento* form needs to be situated in the context of the political predicament that sixteenth-century policy makers and their state casuists confronted, and the manner in which they deliberated upon their policy options. 'Politics', as Kenneth Minogue has observed, and as Lipsius clearly recognized, 'is mostly about words and these words are

¹¹³ Lipsius, *Monita et Exempla Politica*, pp. 9–10.

¹¹⁴ Lipsius, *Monita et Exempla Politica*, pp. 10–93.

¹¹⁵ Lipsius, *Monita et Exempla Politica*, see particularly cap. VII, 'De Fine Principatus', pp. 163–66, where Lipsius, following Seneca, indicates it is the office and not the person that rules.

¹¹⁶ '[E]verything is mine and nothing': *Politica*, Preliminary Matter, p. 233.

¹¹⁷ *Politica*, Preliminary Matter, p. 235.

¹¹⁸ *Politica*, Preliminary Matter, p. 241.

used to persuade people to take up attitudes to what is happening'.¹¹⁹ Every political actor seeks to persuade their audience to view their acts in one way rather than another. This justificatory dimension of rule might be termed presentation and it draws upon the dominant legitimating ideas available at the time. In seventeenth-century discourse, these would include justice, authority, law, right, virtue, utility, honour, the true faith, the common good, conscience, and obligation or duty.

Justificatory presentation in the controversies that attempted to define the contested religious and political circumstances of the 1580s and 1590s established the discursive conditions for a counter-presentation using the same set of ideas but organized in a different or opposed configuration or alignment. Lipsius, as the leading humanist of his day, and who had, at various times, offered his counsel to both Protestant princes and Catholic monarchs would have been acutely conscious of this predicament of presentation and the casuistry necessary to shape rhetorically the presentation of a particular policy option.

This predicament must be carefully distinguished from the separate and very different process of deliberation that political actors followed in making particular decisions like, for example, making war, pacifying Ghent, burning heretics, or raising taxes. As Minogue again notes, 'reasons for actions that feature in deliberation do not have the same weight in presentation and may be suppressed'.¹²⁰

The test of successful presentation is whether the audience to which it is addressed finds it convincing. The conflict between presentation and counter-presentation will typically occur over a political act depicted in idealist or normative terms (the justice or rightness of the act), while the counter-move will accuse the presenter of self-interest, hypocrisy, and illegitimacy.

In France, the Netherlands, and England in the period 1580–1650, political actors, attempting to present themselves in excessively idealistic terms, could, as a consequence, lose credibility. More particularly, in the context of the debate over religion and the treatment of heretics that engaged Lipsius in bitter polemical exchanges, the presentation and counter-presentation of a policy expressed in terms of competing moral justifications for action could undermine its effectiveness. This was especially the case where patriotism and compassion for a *patria* wracked by civil war might be redescribed by a *politique* Stoic like Lipsius in *On Constancy* as misguided pity,

¹¹⁹ K. R. Minogue, 'Remarks on the Relation between Social Contract and Reason of State in Machiavelli and Hobbes', in *Staatsräson Studien zur Gesichte einen Politischen Begriffs*, ed. Roman Schnur (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot, 1975), pp. 259–73 (p. 269).

¹²⁰ Minogue, p. 270.

the most delusive of 'affections', a mask of self-interest facilitating moral, social, and political chaos, and an 'utter' enemy 'to this, our Constancy'.¹²¹ Similarly, in the *Politica* he recognizes how 'the pretence of religion' has ignited 'the fires of strife' across Europe.¹²²

In such circumstances, conflict over presentation generated the conditions for two further possibilities. First, the recourse to a more vigorous reassertion of a single standard of rightness and the identification of cunning or misguided men as morally corrupt, duplicitous, and vicious.

The alternative response is to distinguish between different spheres of human life, allowing each a limited rightness of its own. This strategy is often associated, in accounts of its seventeenth-century development, with Machiavelli. In fact, this response is more properly viewed as the work of later *raison d'état* thinkers functioning within a casuist framework influenced by the evolving sixteenth-century interest in Tacitus, Seneca, and a view of politics that the philological exegesis of Lipsius, together with his philosophic representation of Neostoic and Tacitean advice on prudence, politics, and constancy, to some extent, crystallized.

As Richard Tuck shows, by the first decade of the seventeenth century, *étatist* thinkers sought to distance themselves, with reservation, from Machiavelli. The Florentine delighted too much in the shock value of demonstrating the utility of amoral political action in extreme circumstances.¹²³ The cooler humanist style of the later sixteenth century preferred, instead, the mixed prudential application of the material of deliberation to the requirements of presentation.¹²⁴ In this developing idiom of political self-disclosure, which Lipsius skilfully practised, while, at the same time recognizing the particular 'genius' of Machiavelli, political acts may now be represented in terms more powerfully persuasive than goodness or morality, namely, those of necessity and prudence.¹²⁵ This, of course, is the

¹²¹ *On Constancy*, pp. 52–53.

¹²² It occurs in the context of a casuist discussion of whether dissenters 'must always be punished, and all of them. It is not Curiosity which drives me to this question, but the Common Interest, and the present state of Europe, which I cannot behold but in tears': *Politica*, 3.3, p. 391.

¹²³ Tuck, *Philosophy and Government*, pp. 55–56.

¹²⁴ In the adjustment of casuistry to the counsel of the Prince, there is a clear affinity between Lipsius's *Politica* and Giovanni Botero's *Della Ragion di Stato* (1589), especially their concern with prudence and their shared desire to secure and expand the state. See G. Botero, *The Reason of State*, trans. P. J. and D. P. Waley (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956), especially Chapter 2, pp. 34–72. Like Lipsius, Botero had close links with the Jesuits. See Bireley, *Refashioning of Catholicism*, pp. 182–86.

¹²⁵ Lipsius, Preliminary Matter, *Politica*, p. 231: 'Machiavelli whose genius I do not despise, sharp, subtle and fiery as it is'. Again in Book IV's discussion of deceit, Lipsius notes that

core message that the *Politica* transmits. Ultimately, a prince, ‘in very troubled and difficult cases, *must do not what is beautiful to say, but what is necessary in practice*’.¹²⁶

Necessity and prudence, the latter itself a form of practical reason, recognized and accepted the potential for the dissolution of Christian living into different and sometimes competing spheres of life, as the *On Constancy* shows and seeks to resolve through the practice of philosophical constancy. Analogously, because of its pejorative characterization as preoccupied entirely with the deliberations of government and its darker arts, this approach to rule, evident in both the *Politica* and the *Monita et Exempla* is frequently misunderstood.

As J. H. Hexter observed, the English phrase, reason of state, is an inadequate translation of the French *raison* and Italian *ragioni*. This is unfortunate, because it obscures the fact that in French and Italian the phrase implies a guiding concern with the actual *right* of the state, in Lipsius’s case conceived exclusively in monarchical terms, as most suitable to maintaining, preserving, and sustaining the common interest.¹²⁷

This right may be expressed in terms of both the right of the state’s survival as well as the conditions for preserving or developing civic virtue. Applying these contextual considerations to Lipsius’s writings suggests that they demonstrate an acute concern both with the presentation of policy that reflects the prevailing casuistic conventions, together with a less obvious concern with the deliberation amongst the prince’s counsellors directed to the maintenance of the state’s ‘right’ and its capacity to facilitate a condition of civic order and public morality. This concern is particularly evident in Book III of the *Politica* devoted as it is to the quality and character of counsel.

‘the Italian reprobate must not be so categorically condemned’, *ibid.*, p. 511. Lipsius’s *Politica* devoted four of its six books to prudence. Milton, although evidently interested in the Neo-Stoic view, had little time for Machiavelli, Lipsius, or his epigoni’s aphoristic manner of presenting classic Stoic ideas. See John Milton, ‘The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates’, in *Milton Political Writings*, ed. Martin Dzelzainis, trans. Claire Gruzelier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 67; and Paul A. Rahe, *Against Throne and Altar: Machiavelli and Political Theory under the English Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), especially Chapter 1, pp. 22–55.

¹²⁶ *Politica*, 4.14, p. 531 (italics in original).

¹²⁷ See J. H. Hexter, *The Vision of Politics on the Eve of the Reformation* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 168. See also Bireley, *Refashioning of Catholicism*, p. 183. Bireley writes of Botero, ‘the term *reason* carried a particular implication for him. He argued that the ruler who sought a powerful state did best to seek the well-being of his subjects in a fashion that was moral and so reasonable’.

VII. Lipsius's Moral Philosophy and the Cryptic Presentation of Advice

A further consideration, therefore, in terms of interpreting the particularity of Lipsius's aphoristic advice to counsellors and its always contingently circumstantial character, hostage to destiny, fate, and providence, required Lipsius not only to adjust the advice to the circumstances but also adjust the rhetorical style to its audience. The symbolic preoccupations evident in Rubens's painting, *The Four Philosophers*, as well as Rubens's frontispiece for the 1637 edition of the *Opera Omnia*, suggest that Lipsius and his Louvain network recognized that his writings functioned on a number of levels, philologically, politically, and philosophically, addressed to different audiences and readerships in different states, subject to different confessional regimes.

As we have observed in his preliminary advice to reading the *Politica*, the work is consciously cryptic. It is also carefully designed in terms of its format and notes for reading and its broader concern to inculcate a differential political morality applied by an aristocratic elite of political *cognoscenti*. In this hermeneutic context, as Leo Strauss has observed, the distinction between 'exoteric (public) and esoteric (secret) teaching is not at present considered to be of any significance for the understanding of the thought of the past'.¹²⁸ As Strauss subsequently explains, it was exactly this distinction that was well known and important to classical authors. It was also increasingly important for their sixteenth-century humanist admirers, who were attracted to hermetic or occult teaching and what that might entail for a 'reform programme' and a more 'powerful Christian philosophy'.¹²⁹ More precisely, such a nuanced approach to teaching and moral practice would particularly appeal to a philologically aware humanist scholar of the early Roman Empire like Lipsius and his Louvain circle, held together as they were by the Christian Stoic ties of the *familia charitatis* that published his oeuvre.

Lipsius's exoteric and esoteric teaching, moreover, had nothing to do with mysticism. It did, however, have something to do with the mystery of rule or *arcana imperii*. Indeed, as Peter Donaldson observes, Renaissance humanism evinced an evolving interest in 'ancient secret traditions'. More particularly, those working within the post-Machiavellian reason of state

¹²⁸ Leo Strauss, 'Exoteric Teaching', in *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss*, intro. Thomas L. Pangle (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1985), pp. 59–71 (p. 63).

¹²⁹ Strauss's understanding of esoteric thinking has evident affinities with the work of Frances Amelia Yates on Christian neo-Platonism and the hermetic tradition. See Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London: Routledge, 2001), esp. 'The Occult Philosophy in the Italian Renaissance: Pico Della Mirandola', pp. 19–26 (p. 19).

‘discourse’ treated Machiavelli ambiguously, condemning his extremism while acknowledging his role as an ‘unmasker of the mystery of state’ and the political arcana.¹³⁰ Through the device of *arcana imperii*, it was possible to acknowledge the necessity of morally questionable behaviour while simultaneously maintaining the virtue of monarchy for preserving and advancing the common interest. Although Machiavelli might be seen as revising this understanding for a Renaissance audience, its classical origin lay in Tacitus’s discussion of the ‘secrets of imperial policy’.¹³¹

Lipsius considered Tacitus’s *sententiae* particularly applicable to the predicament of monarchy in the late sixteenth century.¹³² Tacitus articulated a political vision where the prince had to make realist choices in an imperfect world. Books III and IV of the *Politica* therefore sought to synthesize Tacitus with a moderate Machiavellianism effectively linking reason of state to ancient traditions of thought and secret counsel. It had the additional effect of emphasizing the mysterious and numinous character of the morally problematic tactics necessarily employed by the good prince. As Lipsius observes in his *Notae* to Book I of the *Politica*, Tacitus is the leading Latin historian because he deals ‘truthfully and briefly’ with prudence and good judgement. Nevertheless, he still ‘seems rugged and obscure to some’. Indeed, ‘he is an amazing writer in every respect who thoroughly discusses even that which he does not discuss’.¹³³

‘Discussing what he does not discuss’ is paradoxical and draws our attention not only to the mystery of kingship but the plausibility of esoteric and exoteric interpretations of the text. As Lipsius makes clear in the preliminary matter, the *Politica* is not for everyone. It excludes the common people, and those insufficiently experienced in the art of ruling. It is designed instead for the ‘mild and bright’ reader¹³⁴ and a narrower group of princes and their counsellors ‘to equip those who rule for ruling’.¹³⁵ In the transmission of this

¹³⁰ Peter S. Donaldson, *Machiavelli and Mystery of State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 9; see also Ernst Kantorowicz, ‘Mysteries of State: An Absolutist Concept and its Late Medieval Origins’, *Harvard Theological Review*, 48 (1955), 65–91.

¹³¹ Tacitus, *Annals*, trans. Alfred John Church and William John Brodribb (New York: Random House, 1942), 2.59.

¹³² Lipsius makes this point in the dedication to his 1574 edition of Tacitus: Waszink, ‘Introduction’, *Politica*, pp. 94–95.

¹³³ Waszink, ‘Introduction’, *Politica*, p. 97 and *Politica*, Appendix 2, *Notae to the Politica*, p. 733.

¹³⁴ *Politica*, Preliminary Matter, p. 241.

¹³⁵ *Politica*, Preliminary Matter, p. 231.

secret knowledge, the counsellor now assumes a role very different from what it had entailed in the Middle Ages.¹³⁶

Discussing and explaining the role and its textual transmission requires, then, a rhetorical strategy of caution and prudence in the pursuit of a philosophic truth that only the philosophically conscious have the resilience to handle. Indeed, as Gothold Ephraim Lessing, the last philosopher to comment upon esoteric teaching observed, this cryptic approach was a necessary consequence of philosophic prudence.¹³⁷ Lipsius, the consummate humanist philosopher, thus embraced this classic principle and the necessity of a differential political and moral rationality that he would have become familiar with in the work of Cicero, Seneca, and most particularly Tacitus.¹³⁸

This esoteric concern reinforces a casuistic sensitivity to the terms of presentation and deliberation, exoteric presentations of the truth make use of statements that are considered by the philosopher not as statements of facts but of possibilities. They are made by the philosopher for reasons of prudence and expediency sometimes addressed to the morally inferior whom the writer intends to warn or frighten with useful examples.¹³⁹ The practice further assumes that certain truths must necessarily be concealed, notably, for example, that the best political constitution would still be imperfect and that the theoretical or philosophical life is ultimately superior to the political or practical life. From this perspective and, in Lipsius's case, following the Stoic and Tacitean tradition, there is always a distinction between the knowledge of the beginner and the knowledge of the philosopher. Accordingly, Lipsius presented a politically edifying teaching that could be grasped by 'mild and bright' readers, and another esoteric teaching wrapped in enigma and paradox that would have quite another meaning for the philosopher-in-training or humanist counsellor.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ See Donaldson's discussion of the shift in the counsellor ruler relationship implied by what he considers reason of state texts: *Machiavelli and the Mystery of State*, p. xi and Chapter 4.

¹³⁷ Strauss, 'Exoteric Teaching', p. 45.

¹³⁸ On differential political rationality, see Paul A. Rahe's provocative account of its influence over sixteenth- and seventeenth-century thought: Rahe, *Against Throne and Altar: Machiavelli and Political Theory under the English Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), especially Chapter 2.

¹³⁹ As would be more particularly the case with the *Monita et Exempla Politica* which was designed for this purpose.

¹⁴⁰ This form of words follows Steven B. Smith's discussion of Leo Strauss's 'Maimonidean Turn' in Smith, *Reading Leo Strauss Politics, Philosophy, Judaism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2006), p. 37.

This perspective also sheds an interesting light upon Lipsius's discussion of the characters of the philosopher and the philologist. As Lipsius observed in *On Constancy*, inculcating constancy required a judicious combination of both philosophy and philology. As Lipsius's interlocutor, Langius, in the dialogue *On Constancy* explains, 'I am a philosopher, Lipsius, not a fiddler: my purpose is to teach, not to entice you; to profit not to please you; to make you blush, rather than smile; and to make you penitent, not insolent'.¹⁴¹

Ultimately the school of the philosopher was 'as a physician's shop', where 'we must repair for health not for pleasure'.¹⁴² Health is constancy, 'a right and immovable strength of the mind neither lifted up nor pressed down with external or causal accidents'. By strength Lipsius understood not 'steadfastness' based on mutable opinion, but judgement 'regulated by the rule of right reason'.¹⁴³

This school was not for everyone. Thus, to inculcate wisdom more effectively, Lipsius recognized the need to reach a wider audience and 'descend from that craggy hill of philosophy leading you awhile in the pleasant fields of philology. And that not so much for your recreation as for your health'. By philology, Lipsius understood the prudential recourse to 'impart some historical and delectable matters, but yet sauced with a secret liquor of wisdom'.¹⁴⁴ Hence the necessary recourse to a prudent use of historical warnings and examples, for as Lipsius asks rhetorically, 'what matter is it which way we attempt curing of a sick body, so long as we secure him to perfect health?'¹⁴⁵ Indeed, he boasted in 1603 that he had, in fact, turned philology into philosophy.¹⁴⁶

VIII. Conclusion

Despite his shifts in confessional allegiance, Lipsius ultimately held steadfast to an ideal of philosophical reason central to his conception of the constancy necessary both for personal virtue and the conduct of moral rule by an intellectual virtuocracy. Indeed, his continuing association with scholars, *contubernales*, and aristocratic elites in Germany, Holland, and England intimates a shared engagement with a philosophical ideal that transcended

¹⁴¹ *On Constancy*, p. 47.

¹⁴² *On Constancy*, p. 47.

¹⁴³ *On Constancy*, p. 37.

¹⁴⁴ *On Constancy*, p. 37.

¹⁴⁵ *On Constancy*, p. 112.

¹⁴⁶ 'Ego e Philosophia Philogiam fecit [sic]', Letter to Woverius, 3 November 1603. Cited in Höpfl, 'History and Exemplarity', p. 49, n. 27.

the confessional divide.¹⁴⁷ This engagement required a casuistic awareness of providence and necessity but recognized a common scholarly interest in the pursuit of wisdom rather than passion, religious enthusiasm, and opinion.

The modern predilection to read the controversies that consumed Lipsius and his contemporaries through an ideological framework that assumes fixed and antithetical confessional positions imposes a hypothetical completion upon a theologico-political engagement that was mutable, contested, and by no means completed at the time Lipsius was composing his major contributions to this casuistic conversation.

Finally, returning to Eric Voeglin's claim that the aphoristic style disclosed ideas that are at the point where they begin to separate as symbols from the matrix of sentiment that surround them, we can observe those ideas only by listening carefully to Lipsius's advice. Ultimately, the Lipsian preoccupation with prudence and *utilitas* at the expense of *honestas* does nevertheless intimate the evolving predicament that the early modern (as well as the modern) politician faced, namely, the problem of deliberating and presenting controversial policies in contingent circumstances of change and uncertainty.

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¹⁴⁷ See Papy, 'Justus Lipsius and the German Republic of Letters', p. 5.