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Electronic version
URL: http://journals.openedition.org/crm/12965
ISSN: 2273-0893

Publisher
Classiques Garnier

Electronic reference
Stephen H. Rigby, « The Body Politic in the Social and Political Thought of Christine de Pizan (Unabridged Version) », Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes [Online], Christine de Pizan Studies, Online since 12 March 2013, connection on 19 April 2019. URL : http://journals.openedition.org/crm/12965

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AUTHOR’S NOTE

The version of this article which appears in the electronic version of CRMH is substantially longer than that which is published (in two parts) in printed form in the journal and, in particular, includes more detailed references to primary sources and to the secondary literature on Christine’s social and political theory. In writing this article, I have benefitted greatly from the generosity of Tracy Adams, who commented on a previous version of it, and from the guidance provided by Craig Taylor and Sigbørn Sønnesyn. As always, I am indebted to Robert Nash for the many stylistic and structural improvements which he suggested to my work. I am particularly grateful to Angus Kennedy for his comments and advice and, above all, to Rosalind Brown-Grant for sharing her expertise on Christine de Pizan with me.

1 In recent years, many medievalists, whether motivated by an aspiration to establish a tradition of radical political thought across the centuries or by an understandable scholarly desire to highlight the variety of different viewpoints to be found within medieval culture, have sought to show how medieval intellectuals challenged or subverted the conventional ideas of their own time and so were able to arrive at views which continue to have a resonance for modern audiences. As a result, rather than adopting a Robertsonian or Jaussian emphasis on the alterity of medieval culture as the basis of its interest for us today, many historians and literary critics have attempted to show how philosophers and poets of the Middle Ages put forward views whose radical or egalitarian implications are more attractive to modern readers than the emphasis on
hierarchy and obedience which typified the “dominant” – or “official” – ideology of the day.\(^1\) In particular, given the status of Christine de Pizan (c.1364-c.1430) as France’s first “woman of letters” and the fame of her defence of women against misogyny, it is hardly surprising that modern scholars should have been keen to demonstrate the continuing “relevance” and “significance” of her thought so that her works are not simply seen as the product of a particular historical situation or cultural epoch but are read so that they may also “continue to speak to us” now as the expression of the views of a writer who was “remarkably enlightened for her times”.\(^2\) Certainly, the rise of women’s history and of feminist literary criticism since the 1970s has meant that Christine’s work has come to enjoy a central place in the canon of late medieval literature.\(^3\) At first, given the context in which this most recent revival of interest in her work took place, scholars were most interested in those of her texts, such as the *Livre de la cité des dames* (1405) and the *Livre des trois vertus* (1405), in which Christine offered a defence of women against the misogyny of her time, and in those of her writings, such as the *Livre de l’advision Cristine* (1405), which could be read autobiographically.\(^4\) However, in recent years, increasing attention has been paid to those aspects of Christine’s work which had originally attracted the notice of 19th- and early 20th-century scholars, namely her political theory and her engagement with contemporary political events.\(^5\) In one sense, as Zimmermann points out, a “political consciousness” is a “constant” of Christine’s entire output.\(^6\) Nevertheless, Christine set out the underlying principles of her political philosophy with particular clarity in the *Livre des fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V*, (1404) a eulogy of the late French king which Christine wrote at the request of his brother, Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy; in the *Livre du corps de policie* (c.1404-07), which addresses all the classes in French society about their duties; and in the *Livre de paix* (1412-13), which celebrated the signing of the Treaty of Auxerre (1412) between the warring Armagnac and Burgundian factions within France and its renewal in the following year. It is these texts which are our main concern here.

Nevertheless, despite (or perhaps because of) the attention which it has received in recent years, the nature and originality of Christine’s thought has been the source of much controversy with the debate about her social and political theory in many ways paralleling the debate which has taken place amongst critics about the nature of her feminism.\(^7\) For some scholars, such as Jeanine Quillet, Charity Cannon Willard and Sheila Delany, Christine’s outlook was similar to that found in the earlier works of political philosophy with particular clarity in the *Livre des fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V*, (1404) a eulogy of the late French king which Christine wrote at the request of his brother, Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy; in the *Livre du corps de policie* (c.1404-07), which addresses all the classes in French society about their duties; and in the *Livre de paix* (1412-13), which celebrated the signing of the Treaty of Auxerre (1412) between the warring Armagnac and Burgundian factions within France and its renewal in the following year. It is these texts which are our main concern here.

For some scholars, such as Jeanine Quillet, Charity Cannon Willard and Sheila Delany, Christine’s outlook was similar to that found in the earlier works of political philosophy which she drew upon and, as a result, her views are interpreted as being “consistently conservative” in their emphasis on hierarchy within the community as a precondition of social and political order.\(^8\) Similarly, for Françoise Autrand, Christine was a pro-monarchical thinker who actually favoured fewer constraints on the power of the king than did her contemporaries such as Philippe de Mézières or Jean Gerson.\(^9\) By contrast, others such as Christine Reno, have characterized Christine’s political theory in very different terms, portraying it as highlighting the “democratic currents” which were present in the France of Christine’s own day.\(^10\) If Christine’s defence of women is interpreted as involving a vision of power relations that are based on “inclusion rather than exclusion and on equality rather than on privilege and violence”, Christine’s political theory has been seen by scholars such as Earl Jeffrey Richards as being consistent with her feminism in its advocacy of “involving the people in government” and in offering an expansion of the political realm as “a solution to the problem posed by tyranny”.\(^11\) In this approach, the stress is on the originality of Christine’s political philosophy, either in its foreshadowing of the work of later major thinkers, such as
Machiavelli or Erasmus, or as an anticipation of modern political values in being inclusive, proto-democratic, pacifist, anti-clerical, secular and egalitarian.

In particular, the view of Christine’s political theory as being characterised by its inclusivity has been set out in a number of important articles by Cary J. Nederman, who has argued that Christine’s work should be read as part of a broader shift in 14th- and 15th-century political philosophy away from a stress on the need for political hierarchy and strict inequality towards a more reciprocal and egalitarian notion of how the political community should be organized. Central to this interpretation is the claim that the later middle ages saw the rise of a new understanding of the “body politic”, the metaphor which, as Mervyn James put it, provided the “pre-eminent symbol in terms of which society was conceived” in medieval thought. Traditionally, the organic analogy has been understood as providing a model of the divinely-ordained inequality which was said to be required in order for the social and political community to remain healthy and functional, with the obedience of the members of the body to its head being invoked to justify the need for monarchical authority within the polity and, more generally, to demonstrate the need for hierarchy, deference and subordination within the social order.

For Nederman, by contrast, a new conception of the body politic emerged in the later middle ages with thinkers such as Marsilius of Padua, Nicholas of Cusa, Nicole Oresme and John Fortescue now emphasising the accountability of rulers to the political community and presenting rulers as being constrained by the same laws which bound their subjects. The orthodox “head-orientated conception” of the body politic was now replaced with the idea that “there is a natural equilibrium within the body – a sort of equitable harmony – that must be maintained for the sake of the health and well-being of the organism. Equalization means that no part of the entity can legitimately lay stake to a disproportionate amount of common resources and/or refuse to share what it possesses when required for the common good. No part (not even the clergy) is greater than the whole. The operation of the body is thus a homeostatic process, in which a premium is placed on intercommunication and exchange among the various limbs and organs themselves, as a result of which the head (or ruler) is treated as a servant of the whole rather than as a commander”. As Archambault argued, while the metaphor of the body politic was often used to justify the need for hierarchy and for obedience to the ruler, it could also be invoked in order to argue for the restraint of the king’s exercise of power – or at least to ask him to restrain it himself – by reminding him that he was an integral part of the body of which he was head, not separate from it.

For Nederman, the political theory of Christine de Pizan, in particular her Livre du corps de police, can be seen as part of this new conception of the body politic, developing the “emphasis on equilibrium” previously found in Nicole Oresme’s work so as to produce an “inclusive, reciprocal, and interdependent conception of the community”. Christine is thus said to insist on the “inescapable reciprocity” involved in the relationship between the French people and their kings and to express her “deep concern about the needs and interests” of women, city-dwellers and the poor, discussing in detail “the humbler orders within the realm” rather than simply focusing on the education and behaviour of the king and nobility. She values the contribution to society made by the members of the common people – the merchants, artisans and peasants who are the belly, legs and feet of the body politic – and defends them against the disdain with which they were often regarded by their social superiors. She expresses her sympathy for the sufferings of the poor and insists on the duty of the king to consider the impact of his policies upon them.
Nederman also sees Christine as developing the organic metaphor in a “noticeably anti-clerical” way, allowing the king to adopt a “corrective role” in relation to sinful clerics, seeing “the priestly function as essentially a civil office”, and refusing to draw upon “standard medieval depictions of the supremacy of the Church over the temporal sphere” or of the clergy as constituting the soul of the body politic. Christine therefore “extends the more equitable line of organic thinking” that she may have inherited from Nicole Oresme towards an emphasis on the need for the government to frame its policies with consideration for their impact on all the members of society and especially upon those who are “most vulnerable to the use of power and least able to protect themselves”.  

Christine’s political theory has therefore proved to be a contentious topic. Indeed, these disagreements about the originality and inclusiveness of Christine’s political vision even find expression within the views of individual scholars as when Forhan presents Christine as both subverting the conventional wisdom of the “mirror for princes” genre whilst also offering a defence of strong and authoritative monarchy which was similar to that which had been set out over a century earlier by Giles of Rome. So, how original was Christine’s political theory? Did her work form part of a contemporary shift away from an emphasis on hierarchy and strict inequality within the body politic towards a more reciprocal or equal vision of the political community? How were Christine’s political views related to her conception of the social order as a whole? Here it is argued that in order to assess the nature and originality of Christine’s political theory we need to compare it in detail with the work of her predecessors, in French and perhaps also in Latin, to which she had access in the French royal library. A key source for Christine’s views was John of Salisbury’s *Policraticus* (1159), a work with which she knew in the form of the French translation by Denis Foulechat (1372). Equally important to her was Giles of Rome’s *De regimine principum* (c. 1280), a work she may have known in its original Latin version and which she had certainly read in its French translation by Henri de Gauchy (c. 1282). When we compare Christine’s political theory to the work of writers such as John of Salisbury and Giles of Rome (as in section I, below), we find that the basic principles underlying her political philosophy (as well as much of the detail of her arguments) were in accord with those found in the earlier works of medieval political theory with which she was familiar. In particular, as section II shows, the Aristotelian concept of “distributive justice”, which had previously been expounded by philosophers such as Thomas Aquinas and Giles of Rome, allowed Christine to reconcile her teachings about the inevitability of social and political hierarchy and the benefits which it brought for everyone within society with her insistence on “equity” and justice. The originality of Christine’s achievement lies not so much in her having arrived at a new political outlook but rather, as section III argues, is to be found in the novel means which she found with which to present afresh to her readers views with which they were already extremely familiar.

I. Christine’s Political Theory

I.i. Reciprocity within the body politic

Did Christine de Pizan’s work, in particular her application of the metaphor of the body to the political community and her focus on the reciprocity that should exist between its parts, form part of a wider contemporary shift away from the principles on which medieval
political theory had traditionally been based? It is certainly true that, as Nederman points out, Christine’s work devotes more attention to the situation of the lower orders of society than do many medieval mirrors for princes. In particular, the Livre du corps de police not only focuses on the behaviour expected of a prince, having been originally written, as Christine tells us in her later Livre de paix, for the French Dauphin, Louis de Guayenne (d. 1415), but also, like a medieval sermon ad status, addresses nobles and knights about their duties and offers estate-specific advice to “l’université de tout le peuple” (BBP: I (p. 3); II (p. 58); III (p. 90); LCP: I: (p. 1), II (p. 57), III (p. 91); BP: III: 37). Developing an image of the body politic with which she was familiar from John of Salisbury’s Policraticus (Pol: I: 1 (p. 4)) and from the glossed translation of Valerius Maximus’s Memorable Doings and Sayings produced by Simon de Hesdin and Nicolas de Gonesse between 1375 and 1401, Christine employs the organic analogy to insist that, just as the belly, legs and feet of the body are necessary if the whole is to be perfect and healthy, so the common people, who “support and have the burden of all the rest of the body”, are indispensable for the health and functioning of society. Without merchants, for instance, who provide “things proper and necessary for human beings to live”, then “neither the estate of kings and princes nor even the polities of cities and countries could exist”. Provided they trade without fraud and are pious and charitable, their work within the social division of labour is legal, meritorious and “accepted by God”. Similarly, the body politic “cannot do without” the services provided by artisans without whose labour it “could not sustain itself” while those who till the earth are the “most necessary” of all the estates since they “feed and nourish” their fellows and without their efforts “the world would end in little time” (BBP/LCP: I: 1; III: 1; III: 8-10).

Christine not only emphasises the indispensability of the services provided for society by those who work with their hands but also shows an awareness of the sufferings experienced by the common people of France in her own day. For instance, like Gerson in his sermon Vivat Rex (1405), she sympathises with those who suffered at the hands of the king’s own soldiers who, for lack of pay, cruelly pillaged and despoiled their fellow countrymen, taking provisions without paying for them so that “short of killing them or setting their houses on fire, their enemies could do no worse”. She thus describes France as a land where the tears and moans of the poor, driven to starvation and to selling off their possessions by the burden of taxation, go unheeded (LCP: I: 9 (p. 14-15); I: 11 (p. 17-18); III: 10 (p. 108); BP: I: 9 (p. 16-17); I: 11 (p. 20); III: 10 (p. 109); BDAC I: XIV (p. 41); III: VII (p. 152). In her Livre des trois vertus, which offers guidance on how the women of each social class should conduct themselves, she advises princesses not to permit their officials “to take anything from the people against their will or at an unfair price” and to ensure that “the poor people of the villages and other places” are paid promptly for their produce (TCL: I: 19; I: 22; LTV: I: 20; I: 23). In her Livre de paix, Christine stresses the need for the king to make sure that justice is provided by his officials to the “poor and simple” and argues that princes had been established on earth to aid widows, orphans or anyone else with a just cause (BP: II: 6, 9, 22). Christine’s biography of Charles V, in which the king is set up as a model for the good prince, praises him for his willingness to provide justice to widows, even those wronged by his own officials, but also for being a protector of women in general and for his ability to display the magnificence expected of a king whilst not over-burdening his subjects with taxation (LFBM I: 62, 83, 133). Similarly, in her Lamentacion sur les maux de la France (1410) – also known as the Lamentacion Christine de Pizan and the Lamentacion sur les maux de la guerre civile – Christine appealed to the Duke of Berry to prevent civil war and so prove himself a defender of all in the realm including...
“noble ladies, widows and orphans” (LMF: 184-5; LWF: 308), while her Livre des fais d’armes et de la chevalerie (1410) sees the defence of widows and orphans as one of the reasons why a prince may justly engage in warfare (BDAC: I: IV).

Nevertheless, the fact that Christine included the commons as indispensable members of society and that she sympathized with the plight of the poor and the powerless is not enough to require us to characterize her political theory or social outlook as being either original or anti-hierarchical. After all, political thinkers such as John of Salisbury had long taught that the members of society who should be “advanced most” by the prince are “those who can do least for themselves” and that it was particularly necessary for the “head” of the body politic to look after the peasants whose position as the “feet” of society meant that they were most likely to come into peril and who, since they maintained the rest of the body, were “justly owed shelter and support”. John reminded the prince of the words of the Book of Job (Job 29: 12-13; 31: 16-40) as a warning about the sorry fate of those who failed to give charity to the poor, to widows and to orphans or who have been guilty of eating “the fruits of the land without payment and have assaulted the livelihood of the peasant” (agricola/”laboureur”). He taught that rulers should exalt the humble and be generous to the destitute, denounced the unwise prince who brings ruin to his people (Ecclesiasticus 10: 3), and bemoaned the fate of the poor who are “oppressed with injuries, enfeebled by exactions, [and] despoiled by extensive pillaging”. The ruler’s officers should therefore prevent the powerful from assailing the humble and should “prohibit the introduction of exactions and acts of violence and sales extorted out of fear and pledges of security without price or payment” (Pol: IV: 2 (p. 31); IV: 5 (p. 40); V: 2 (p. 67); V: 6-7 (p. 71, 74-6); V: 8 (p. 80-1); V: 15 (p. 95); V: 17 (p. 101); VI: 26 (p. 141); VII: 25 (p. 175-6); VIII: 12 (p. 183); VIII: 22 (p. 214)). Similarly, Giles of Rome argued that while a “true” king would defend the community, a tyrant, while pretending to do the same, would actually pillage and steal from his subjects. He thus followed Hippodamus (as explicated in Aristotle’s Politics) in recommending that the virtuous prince, unlike a tyrant, should care for widows and orphans but explained that by “orphans” was meant all those who lacked the power to defend themselves (GKP: 20, 317, 338; LGR: 17, 294, 317). Here, however, he was hardly being original: from the 7th-century Pseudo-Cyprian De duodecim abusivis saeculi and Jonas of Orleans’ 9th-century De institutione regia through to the later middle ages, it was, following Exodus 22: 22 (see also Isaias 1: 17; Jermias 7: 6; Job 29: 25), a commonplace of Christian political theory that ruler and knights should defend the rights of orphans and widows.

Thus, when Christine taught that superiors should not disdain their inferiors and that rulers should protect the most vulnerable in society, such as widows and peasants, she was, rather than being part of a new shift in political thought, actually repeating arguments to be found in John of Salisbury’s mid-12th-century Poliraticus and Giles of Rome’s 13th-century De regimine principium. Indeed, far from being a late medieval innovation on the part of writers such as Christine de Pizan or Nicole Oresme, a stress on reciprocity was inherent in the very notion of the body politic and had always been one of the main aspects of the social and political order which the organic analogy had been meant to express. In using the human body as a model of how society should be organized, medieval philosophers such as John of Salisbury and Giles of Rome were adopting the traditional Platonic and Stoic conception of nature as a model of how a divinely-ordained and rational order is constituted and as a pattern for how human virtue should be exercised (Pol: I: 2 (p. 10); VI: 21 (p. 127); GKP: 77, 161, 190, 330, 367, 372,
Christine herself quoted Seneca to this effect: virtue is identical with reason and, in turn, reason “follows nature” (BP: I: 5). The body thus functioned as a recurrent metaphor for the “harmonious unity in plurality” which medieval metaphysics inherited as its ontological ideal from the ancient world. Following St Paul and Augustine, and in line with Aristotle’s stress on the superiority of diversity over simply unity, thinkers such as Aquinas and Giles of Rome argued that the perfection of the world required the existence of diverse kinds of things each of which performed its own particular task for the benefit of the wider whole of which it is a part, with the body being a classic case in point (GKP: 59, 193, 234, 285, 295, 297-301; LGR: 167, 213, 266, 271).

When applied to human communities – whether to the “Church” in general, which was comprised of the ranks of the clergy and the laity, or to particular kingdoms – the organic analogy was inevitably used to highlight the need for a variety of estates and occupations, all of which, like the body’s limbs, members and organs, had to fulfill their own particular functions and to co-exist harmoniously with their fellows, with each reciprocally exchanging its services with those of the others. These ties of interdependence and reciprocity constrained even the head of the body politic, which meant that, far from being a late medieval innovation, the notion of the ruler as the servant of the community was a traditional political commonplace. As John of Salisbury argued, if the ruler’s position of command over his subjects entitled him to “great privileges”, he should also seek the “utility” of all within the community, placing his will at the “service” of those beneath him, seeking the “optimal condition” of the body politic so that “everyone is a member of the others” and putting the public welfare even before that of his own children. He even claimed that “while it is expedient for the king to be extremely wealthy, still he must count his wealth as the people’s. He does not therefore truly own that which he possesses in the name of someone else, nor are the goods of the fisc, which are conceded to be public, his own private property. Nor is this a surprise, since he is not his own person but that of his subjects”. He should be the “slave of justice and right” and the “servant of equity” and should not disdain to imitate the example of Christ who had himself assumed “the form of a servant”. In seeking to teach a moral lesson to princes, the authors of medieval mirrors for princes had more need to remind the powerful of their moral duties and social obligations than to set out their powers and privileges. John thus taught that the superior members of the body politic “should devote themselves to the inferiors” and even argued that Plutarch’s supposed Institutio Trajani (from which he claimed to have taken the metaphor of the body politic, although most modern scholars see this work as actually being John’s own invention) had taught that, in public policy, “what is to the advantage of the humbler people, that is, the multitude, is to be followed; for the fewer always submit to the more numerous” (Pol: III: 15 (p. 25); IV: 1 (p. 28); IV: 5 (p. 40); IV: 6 (p. 41); IV: 11 (p. 58–9); VI: 20 (p. 126)).

Such traditional teachings about the need for rulers to devote themselves to the welfare of the poor, humble and weak were associated with a more general obligation for them to pursue the common good of all their subjects. Thus, even before the translation of Aristotle’s Politics into Latin, the influence of Cicero’s De officiis meant that it was a political commonplace that the ruler should devote himself to the common good of his subjects and that such virtue provided the touchstone of legitimate government. John of Salisbury, for instance, had differentiated between the true prince and the tyrant partly on the basis of whether or not the ruler put himself “at the service” of his people and so looked after the “entire community” (although he also stressed the issue of whether or
not the ruler was obedient to the law or ruled by his own will) (Pol: IV: 1 (p. 28); VIII: 17 (190-1)). From the 13th century onwards, this idea was frequently expressed in terms of the Aristotelian distinction between the three “true” forms of government (monarchy, aristocracy and “constitutional government”), where the rulers pursued the “common interest” of the community, and the three “perverted” forms (tyranny, oligarchy and democracy) in which the rulers sought their own “private interest”. While a thinker such as Giles of Rome defended the superiority of monarchical government, he also stressed the primacy of the common good over the singular good and followed Aristotle in making the pursuit of the common profit of all citizens into the touchstone of legitimate law and authority (GKP: 20, 55, 309, 325, 328, 372; LGR: 17, 43, 300-2, 347). Thus, rather than medieval notions of authority and power being based on a conception of antagonistic, independent individuals competitively seeking to impose power on each other, a conception which Christine supposedly transcended with a vision of “interdependence and cooperation”, reciprocity and cooperation within a hierarchical division of labour were actually the conventional ideals of medieval social and political ideology as set out in mirrors for princes, even if, inevitably, the reality was very different from the ideal.

I.ii. Hierarchy within the body politic

Yet, if Christine, like earlier political theorists, used the metaphor of the body politic to teach the prince a ruler about the need to use his prudence to rule for the common good of his subjects and to show that all members of society, from top to bottom, should perform their services for the benefit of their fellows, there was no reason why this emphasis on cooperation and mutuality should have precluded an understanding of the polity which was based on inequality and on the exclusion of most members of society from an active political role within it. In other words, while we today might see an emphasis on political “mutuality and interdependence” as being at odds with “hierarchy and subordination” for medieval thinkers, including Christine, these principles were perfectly compatible. After all, since theologians and philosophers such as Augustine, Aquinas and Giles of Rome had traditionally presented equality as being synonymous with simple uniformity, it followed that they saw the self-evident need for diversity within the body – and within the body politic – as also implying the need for inequality between its members (DRP: III, i: viii-ix; GKP: 59, 193, 234, 285, 295, 297-301, 411; LGR: 46, 167, 213, 271, 391).

This hierarchical understanding of the body (and of its application to society) had a number of sources. One was the Pauline idea of Christ as the “head” of the Church and of the Church as the members of His body (Ephesians 1: 22-23, 4: 15-16; Colossians 1: 18, 2: 10, 19). This metaphor was then developed by early Christian writers such as Ambrose and Isidore of Seville, by public documents and theological works of the Carolingian period, and by 11th- and 12th-century writers such as Honorian Augustodunensis and Hugh of St Victor. It continued to be used in the later middle ages, even after it had also started to be applied to particular political communities such as kingdoms or cities. Equally familiar were the Pauline texts teaching that “the head of every man is Christ”, “the head of the woman is the man” and that the husband is “the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church” (1 Corinthians 11: 3; Ephesians 5: 23). Another source for the conception of the members of the body as being hierarchically related was ancient and medieval physiology and medicine where although the bladder, anus and intestines might be seen as “principal” members of
the body in the sense that they are indispensable to its operations, this did not mean that they could usurp pride of place from the more “noble” or “spiritual” members such as the head or heart. Medieval writers also inherited a hierarchical conception of the body and of its application to society from Aristotle who had taught that the rule of the soul and of reason over the body and the passions was “natural and expedient whereas the equality of the two or the rule of the inferior is always hurtful”, and who had used this mutually beneficial but unequal relationship as an analogy with which to justify the superiority of humans over animals, of men over women, and of masters over their slaves. Indeed, as Forhan points out, medieval commentators on Aristotle, such as Nicole Oresme, were so familiar with the metaphor of the body politic and its hierarchical conception of the prince as its head that they tended to assume that this metaphor underlay Aristotle’s thought even when the Philosopher himself had not explicitly referred to it or had made little of it.

Moreover, despite the centrality of the organic analogy in medieval social and political theory, for medieval philosophers, the hierarchical nature of the human body provided simply one instance of the much broader Aristotelian metaphysical principle that, as Giles of Rome argued, rightful order could only be maintained within any object made up of diverse elements when a hierarchical ordering was found between its parts and, in particular, when one chief part exercised an overall control (GKP: 193, 278, 280, 327; LGR: 167, 257–8, 260, 302–3). This principle was held to apply to all creation, from the cosmos in its entirety down to any individual compound object within it which, in being a whole made up of diverse elements, constituted a microcosm of the macrocosm of the universe, a central idea of medieval cosmography. Thus any compound object, even one which lacks a soul, contain a “master element” which, like the soul within the body, rules and holds together all of its component parts, controls its movement, and propels it towards its own rightful place in the world. For instance, in any body made of mixed materials, the heavy element of earth has a mastery which means that the object naturally moves downwards, towards the centre of the Earth; similarly, within the cosmos, the rotation of the primus mobile rules the movements of all the rest of the heavens (GKP: 175, 273-4, 327; LGR: 251-3, 302-3). Christine describes Heaven itself in terms of such harmonious hierarchy, with the orders of angels being ranked according to “leurs offices et degrez” and each soul accepting in its place in prefect charity and love (EPVH: XI). When this hierarchical understanding of the universe was applied to the body politic, it was inevitably used to demonstrate that just as the parts of the human body were ranked in terms of their “honour” and of the degree of control which they exercised over the other members, so it was inevitable that, despite their interdependence and reciprocity, the different estates within society would be ranked hierarchically in terms of their economic, political and social status. As John Lydgate’s translation (1426) of the second recension of Guillaume de Deguileville’s The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man (1355) put it, just as it was absurd that the foot should be as good as the head, so it would be wrong for all men to be of one social condition. As John of Salisbury argued, just as nature has ordained that the members of the body should be subject to the head in order that “all of them may move correctly provided that the will of a sound head is followed”, so the prince, as head of the body politic, has “power over all his subjects”, enjoying such a primacy that he constitutes “a certain image on earth of the divine majesty” (Pol: IV: 1 (p. 28), VI: 25 (p. 137)).

Thus, while John of Salisbury anticipated Christine de Pizan in his concern for the poor, his stress on the need for the ruler to provide protection for his subjects and his presentation of each member of society as being “reciprocally” linked to all the others, he nonetheless
remained wedded to a head-orientated conception of the body politic (Pol: VI: 20 (p. 126); VI: 25 (p. 137)). Whilst preaching against the sins of pride and haughtiness on the part of the ruler, he also warned the prince and his officials about the dangers of excessive familiarity with those whom they governed since contempt for the dignity of their office “is born out of social intercourse”. While it is the duty of the “superior members” of the body politic to devote themselves to the well-being of their inferiors and to seek what is to the advantage of the humble, inferiors, in their turn, “must serve superiors” and respect their supremacy and all the members of the body must “subject themselves to the head”, i.e., to the prince, who is “a sort of deity on earth”, or at least an “image of the deity”, who should be “loved, venerated and respected” so that an attack on him is like an act of sacrilege. The members owe obedience to the head and “the excellence of the head must always flourish because the health of the whole body depends upon it”. Since superiors had the duty of providing “all necessary protection to their inferiors”, the distinction between superior and inferior could not be done away with but rather was actually to the benefit of both. It was not that the idea of the head as the commander of the rest of the body was necessarily at odds with its being the body’s servant but rather that the head served the rest of the body precisely by carrying out its function of commanding the body’s movements and operations (Pol: IV: 7 (p. 48-9); V: 15 (p. 96); VI: 20 (p. 126); VI: 25 (p. 137); VI: 26 (p. 140); VI: 28 (p. 142); VIII: 17 (p. 191)). The exemplum which John used to illustrate this point was that of the fable ascribed by Livy to Menenius Agrippa, consul of Rome in 503 B.C., even though John himself credited this story to his friend Pope Adrian IV (Nicholas Breakspear). Here, the members of the body rebel against the stomach (whose demands John of Salisbury equated with those the ruler required from his subjects), which they regard as living parasitically off their labours but, having denied food to the stomach, inevitably come to realize that their own strength and health depend upon it, just as, in turn, the stomach relies upon them to provide for it (Pol: VI: 24 (p. 135-6)).

In other words, when Christine de Pizan insisted that the poor should be paid for their produce, that they should not be disdained by their superiors, that all the members of the body politic were bound by reciprocal duties, and that the function of the prince was to serve the interests of his subjects, she was neither being original nor breaking with the hierarchical conception of the body politic. Rather, she was rehearsing opinions which had been expressed 250 years previously by John of Salisbury in a work which provides “perhaps the quintessential medieval statement” of the organic analogy. Indeed, Christine herself cites the story of how the belly and the limbs of the body each complained of each other (one with which she was familiar from John of Salisbury and from the translation of Valerius Maximus by Hesdin and Gonesse) in order not only to warn the prince of the troubles which would result if he demanded more from his subjects than they could bear but also to depict the evils which arise when subjects do not show “love, reverence and obedience” to their prince: “In such discord, they all perish together” (BBP/LCP: III: 1). As Cicero had said, if each limb sought to grow strong at the expense of its neighbour, “the whole body would weaken and die”. Accordingly, while demanding obedience on the part of the subject, Christine, like John of Salisbury and Giles of Rome, reminded princes of the negative consequences to them of their own moral failings. It might seem to princes and princesses that it was not their duty to court the good-will of their subjects and that they had the right to command their subjects and to expect them to obey. Yet, in practice, “although the prince may be lord and master of his subjects, the subjects nevertheless make the lord and not the lord the subjects” in the sense that if they overthrew him, they could more easily find a new lord than he could find new subjects and because he could not overcome them if they all
rebelled against him. “There is no true lord of a land who is hated by his men” and the love
of his subjects provides the ruler with a better defence than any fortress. If he wishes “to
reign long in peace and glory”, the prince should ensure that he is loved by his subjects and
by his people since, as Seneca had pointed out, while it is “good for everyone to practise
kindness, it is especially advisable for the prince to exercise it towards his subjects”.\(^{56}\) Similarly, the wise princess should seek to be on good terms with all within society,
obtaining the good-will not just of the nobles and barons but also of the clergy, the middle
classes “and even the common people”, making sure to receive them all warmly into her
presence, including “even some of the most respectable artisans” (TCL: I: 7; I: 16; LTV: I: 8; I:
17). It was not that Christine advocated reciprocity despite her stress on social subordination
but rather that she justified subordination precisely in terms of the reciprocal benefits which
it brought, in terms of justice and protection, to those who deferentially accepted their place
in the social hierarchy.\(^{57}\) After all, if ideology offered only a one-sided obedience and patient
suffering on the part of the ruled, it would hardly have functioned very effectively as a
justification of the existing social order in the first place.

That Christine, like her predecessors, saw no necessary tension between reciprocity and
inequality within the body politic is evident in her \emph{Livre du corps de polici\'e}, a work which is
unambiguously pro-hierarchical in its political theory and in its use of the organic analogy.
Just as John of Salisbury had done, Christine here equates the prince with the head of the
body because he is “or should be sovereign” and so should direct the “external deeds” of the
limbs of the body. Whilst the prince should love his subjects, be gentle and kind to them, and
ensure that they receive justice, he should also be “obeyed and feared by right and reason”,
as is appropriate to the majesty of a prince, there being no “true justice” where a prince is
not feared (BBP/LCP: I: 1; I: 12; I: 16; I: 19; I: 21; III: 1). While Christine does not follow those
medieval philosophers and poets, including John of Salisbury (Pol: VI: 25 (p. 137); VI: 26
(p. 142); VIII: 17 (p.191)), who described the prince as being an “image” or “likeness” of God,
she nonetheless argued that the prince had been chosen by God for the burden of office, one
in which he was, as in the title traditionally reserved for emperors but which Charles VI had
adopted in 1385, “vicar of God” on earth (BBP/LCP: I: 7; TCL: I: 6; LTV: I: 7).\(^{58}\) Accordingly, she
taught that everyone should be obedient not only to God’s commandments but also to the
laws of the land and to the commands of their sovereign. While, in her \emph{Livre des trois vertus}
Christine advised the princess to intercede with her husband on behalf of his people if they
complained to her of excessive taxation or if they wished to have some favour or privilege
granted by him, she also counseled the princess to remind her husband’s subjects of the need
“always to be loyal, good and obedient towards their lord”. Similarly, if some of the barons
committed a crime against the king’s majesty, the princess should try to make peace
between them and her husband but should also reproach the rebels sharply and urge them
to atone for their fault. Likewise, a wife, even one who is a princess, should humble herself in
word and deed to her husband who is “her lord”, obeying him “without complaint”, while
nuns should obey their abbesses and prioreses, and servants and labourers should faithfully
serve their masters, mistresses and employers (TCL: I: 7-8; I: 8; II: 13; III: 9; III: 12; LTV: I: 8-9;
II: 13; III; 9; III: 12). Christine’s outlook thus formed part of a long tradition of medieval
political thought, from Jonas of Orleans through Aquinas and Giles of Rome to Jean Gerson
and Thomas Hoccleve, in which obedience was seen not in terms of servile subordination but
as an aspect of individual virtue and of rightful order in society (DRP: III, ii: xxxiv; GKP: 387-9;
LGR: 364-6).\(^{59}\)
However, Christine not only recommended subjects and inferiors to be patient and obedient towards their rulers and superiors as a matter of individual virtue but also, in the *Livre du corps de police*, explicitly advocated hierarchical rule and rejected egalitarian or popular government on the grounds of constitutional principle. While recognizing the diversity of political institutions and customs to be found in different lands, including elected emperors, hereditary kings, and a variety of types of elected rulers, she argued, on the supposed authority of Aristotle’s *Politics*, that “the polity of one is best, that is governance and rule by one. Rule by a few is still good ... but rule by the many is too large to be good, because of the diversity of opinions and desires”. Where rulers were elected by the people, the choice was often made “more by will than by reason”, with the rulers being chosen and then deposed “by caprice”. For Christine, such government was “not beneficial where it is the custom, as in Italy in many places”. While in some cities “the common people govern and each year a number of persons are installed from each trade”, Christine argued that “such governance is not profitable at all for the republic and also it does not last very long once begun, nor is there peace in and around it”, citing Bologna (her father’s native city) as an instance of the evils which resulted from such popular government.

France, by contrast, was “very happy” in having been, “from its foundations by the descendants of the Trojans”, governed “not by foreign princes” but by its own, native hereditary monarchs. Indeed, writing in 1406-7, Christine even claimed that “there are no more benign and humane princes than in France” so that, even if its people feel themselves to be “grieved and burdened, they should not believe that other places are less so” but should remember that they live in a country where the people are the most fortunate in all of Christendom because of the “benevolence” of its princes and the “amiability” of its people (BBP/LCP: III: 2; III: 7; see also AB: XLIX). Christine’s preference for rule by the one, rather than by the few or the many, can also be seen in her *Chemin de long estude* (1402-3), which concluded with a vision of world government by a single, wise (French) king which would end the conflict between multiple rulers and so bring order to the entire world (CLE: 3031-66) and in her *Livre de l’advision Cristine* which includes a prophecy of a prince “full of valour and wisdom” who would rule after Christine’s death and who would wish that he had known someone who was as wise as her (LAC/VCP: II: 22). Her work thus stands in a long tradition of medieval political theory which presented peace as being brought about by a universal monarch ruling over the world, a tradition with which Christine may have been familiar from Dante’s *De monarchia* and which, more specifically, was associated with contemporary prophecies that Charles VI would conquer Europe, be crowned as emperor and then lead a crusade to Jerusalem, prophecies which were also invoked in the work of Philippe de Mézières and Honoré Bouvet.

Given her view of monarchy as the best form of government, Christine inevitably stressed the need for prudence and virtue on the part of the prince if the common good was to be achieved. Like Brunetto Latini, Jacobus de Cessolis, John of Wales, Walter of Milemete, Honoré Bouvet, Philippe de Mézières, Jean Gerson and the authors of *De quadripartita regis specie* and of the *Liber judiciorum*, Christine agreed that, in order to rule effectively, kings and princes needed the wisdom that came from learning “good sciences and doctrines”, whether this was the wisdom which was offered by these writers themselves or that which was to be found in the works of a Boethius or an Aristotle, and that tyrants were the enemies of learning and wisdom (GKP: 341; LGR: 319). Although medieval authors were not familiar with Plato’s *Republic* at first hand, they were – like Christine (BDAC: I: V (p. 19)) – certainly aware, via the works of writers such Jerome, Lactantius and Valerius Maximus, of Plato’s...
teaching that “the world would be happy when and only when wise men started to rule or rulers to be wise”, this wisdom necessarily having to be translated into practice by those in positions of authority. As Delogu has shown, for Christine, the ruler did not just require abstract learning or philosophical wisdom but rather needed the prudence which allowed such wisdom to be applied to the realities of government, prudence being located, as Christine said, in the part of the human soul from which “advient pratique, qui appartient aux choses ouvrables” (LFBM II : 21). However, Christine’s stress on the ruler’s need for “applied wisdom” by no means involved a re-invention or re-imagining of the reinventing or reimagining of the notion of the ideal sovereign. On the contrary, a very similar ideal of kingly prudence had been set out by Aristotelian political theorists long before Christine’s day. Indeed, Christine’s discussion of prudence in the Livre des fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V is very similar to Giles of Rome’s account of this virtue in the De regimine principum including his location of prudence in the intellectus practicus within the soul and his emphasis on the need for the ruler’s wisdom to find its application in actual practice, the art of government being related to the actual deeds and works of men (LFBM II : 21 ; GKP : 6-8, 25, 37, 51-3, 117-20, 149, 256, 328-9, 332, 340-51, 390-1 ; LGR : 4-5, 21, 39-41, 98-101, 133, 233, 302-3, 310, 319-28, 368-9). Aristotle himself had classified knowledge as “theoretical”, “poetical” and “practical” and had further sub-divided practical knowledge into ethics, economics and politics, i.e., rule of the self, of the household and of the polity, and his categories were adopted by medieval Aristotelians such as Latini and Gower. Far from Christine’s account of the practicality which was involved in princely prudence being original, as early as the 12th century, William of Malmesbury had cited Plato's aphorism about wise rulers in order to praise Henry I not just for his learning but also for his ability to apply this learning ad regandum scientiae. Given Christine’s definition of princely prudence as a means of achieving the common good, it would thus be wrong to see her work as anticipating Machiavelli in appealing “not to a ruler’s vision of the good life but to his self-interest” and so as providing a contrast with the views of earlier writers, such as John of Salisbury and Giles of Rome, for whom the pursuit of self-interest had been the hallmark of the tyrant. In fact, Christine’s awareness of the need for pragmatism on the part of the prince was hardly original, nor did it lead to a Machiavellian amorality. Giles of Rome, for instance, had followed Seneca and John of Salisbury (Pol : III : 3 (p. 17)) in recognizing that, by nature, humans are inclined to love themselves and to seek their own benefit profit and good. He therefore objected not to humans seeking their own singular profit but rather to those who had an immoderate and excessive love of self and who sought their own individual profit at the expense of the common good: it was this failing, not the pursuit of one’s own interests per se which distinguished the tyrant from the virtuous ruler (GKP : 20, 55, 70, 76, 100, 119-20, 309, 325, 328, 330, 372 ; LGR : 17, 43, 61, 100, 300-1, 304, 307, 347). Similarly, while emphasising that prudence was, like ethics and “economics”, a form of “practique” – since some men were learned or erudite but were not prudent or truly wise – Christine also associated it with discretion and virtue since it was grounded in the human capability to “distinguish good and evil” and was a means of achieving justice and reason: virtue and competence were thus one (BP : I : 4-7; BBP/LCP : I : 6; MF : 7721-83). Christine’s thought can thus be located within the mainstream of medieval political theory in which good government was regarded as the product of the personal morality (or self-rule) of the ruler rather than as the outcome of the reform of political institutions. Accordingly, political theorists sought to offer to young princes an education in virtue of the kind which Aristotle was believed to have provided for Alexander in the Secretum secretorum (MF : 5827-46) and which, in the Livre des fais et bonnes
meurs du sage roy Charles V, the Livre du corps de policie and the Livre de paix, Christine herself sought to make available to the princes of the French royal family. In such works, she sought not simply to engage in abstract moralizing but to address the pressing issues of the day. Nonetheless, her practical concerns by no means led to an amoral pragmatism since she, like other contemporary commentators, conceived of social and political problems in moral terms and thus as requiring moral solutions.

If Christine’s hierarchical political outlook is evident in her defence of rule by a virtuous prince as the best form of polity, it is equally prominent in her discussion in the Livre du corps de policie of the government of individual towns within the realm. Here she argues that burghers (old city families with a surname and family coat of arms) and wealthy merchants should ensure the good government of the town whereas the “humble people” (“le menu peuple”) who “do not commonly have great prudence in words or even in deeds that concern politics ... should not meddle in the ordinances established by princes”. If the common people are aggrieved in some way with the prince or the burdens which he imposes on them, the burghers, wealthy citizens and merchants should “not allow them to do anything” for themselves, “for that leads to the destruction of cities and of countries”, but should send some of the “wisest and most discreet” from amongst themselves to make the popular grievances known to the prince or his council. They should, however, beware of “foolishly complaining” about the policies of the prince and his council and instead should assume the “good intentions” of their rulers even when their purposes are not apparent. The “wise should teach the simple and ignorant to keep quiet about those things which are not their domains and from which great danger can come and no benefit”. Appealing to the authority of the Book of Exodus, where it is commanded that “you will not complain about great rulers nor curse the princes of the people” (Exodus 22: 28), and to Solomon’s warning to subjects not to “betray the king in your thought” (Ecclesiastes 10: 20), Christine concludes that “no subject ought to conspire against his lord” (BBP/LCP: III: 6-7).

In the light of these passages from the Livre du corps de policie, it is difficult to interpret Christine’s political thought in this work as representing an anti-hierarchical shift in political theory, as exhibiting any egalitarian sensibility, or as involving a view of the ruler as simply being the servant rather than the commander of his people. On the contrary, this work was explicitly unsympathetic to the “many” enjoying any active or autonomous role in political life, let alone to them becoming the dominant element within the polity or backing up their case by armed force. Christine’s attitude to the poor was been a mixture of compassion and fear: compassion when they suffered, but fear when they acted on their own initiative to do anything about it. If the people enjoyed a “primacy” in Christine’s definition of good government, they did so in their capacity as the object of the ruler’s actions in his defence of the common good rather than as active political agents in their own right.

Given this outlook, it is not surprising to find that, after the experience of the Burgundian-backed Cabochian Revolt of 1413, a Parisian rising involving popular violence in which Armagnac nobles were killed or imprisoned and ordinances restricting royal privileges were issued, Christine’s Livre de paix seems “obsessed by the dangers of popular rule”. However, her outlook here did not so much represent a shift from the views which she had previously expressed in the Livre du corps de policie as their logical conclusion. Indeed, well before the Livre de paix, in the Mutacion de fortune (1403) and the Livre de l’advision Cristine, Christine had attacked those in the lower orders who would not know their place as troublemakers, as the “worms of the earth”, an “abominable, poisonous mass of vermin”, and as like a “plague” on the land (MF: 4071-4128; LAC/VCP: I: 10). Nevertheless, if this anti-populist outlook was not
new in the Livre de paix, Christine certainly develops it at length here when she describes the common people as “changeable” and as “led on by sensuality and scarcely checked by reason”. If human nature “is in itself inclined toward all the vices, when discretion and reason do not intervene”, such reason was particularly weak in the common people “because they do not receive much instruction in virtue or in how to tell good from evil” so that many of them are “little better than beasts, as far as reason is concerned” and have “ever been, through their very nature, inclined to go astray through foolish credulity and bad counsel” with even poverty, “for the most part”, failing to remove their pride. Yet, while characterizing the people as irrational, Christine still attempted to teach “reason” to them, preaching that it would be “madness” if, for whatever cause, they should “rise up in rebellion against their superiors”. Since God “dislikes dissension by subjects against their superiors and princes” and has regularly punished the pride of those who “want to climb higher than they should”, he has ordained that the people of all nations should be “humble” beneath the rule of their “superiors”. Such humility on the part of the ruled was particularly appropriate on the part of the people of France who had always been “treated very gently and without tyranny, and sincerely loved” by their kings and so had even less reason to “act, speak or plot, in public or private, against respect for royal majesty”. As was shown by God’s punishment of those who were guilty of “murmuring and sedition” against Moses, which included killing “fourteen thousand men on the spot” (Numbers 16: 41-9), it was “always a bad course for the people to conspire against their rulers or their royal estate”. Confronted with popular insurrection, even warring kings would be likely to make peace with one another “so they would not be destroyed” when their subjects rebelled ((BP: III: 2, 7, 10, 11, 21).

In general, then, while noting that the people’s “trade and labour are necessary to the realm” and reminding the prince that it was not God’s will that his subjects should be “downtrodden or unreasonably burdened”, Christine remained suspicious of allowing the people any political role: lacking in reflection, they were prone to hastiness, to “commotion and tumult” and to claiming that they were “badly governed and would be better so”. They should not be elevated to responsibility or rank greater than that which belonged to them: “They should not have authority of any office, nor prerogative of any government of city or town – things that belong to worthy burgers from old families”. Men of the artisan class who had done nothing but work by their hands could scarcely be expected to have acquired the knowledge which made people “fit to be placed in government”. They would not have “mixed with jurists or experts in matters of law and justice”, they would not have “seen honour”, “know what intelligence is” nor “have learnt how to speak in ordered way with fine and clear arguments” (BP: III: 2, 7, 10, 11).

Writing in the Lamentation sur les maux de la France, Christine herself had warned that civil war and factional strife within France’s ruling elite would lead to rebellion in the countryside and to subversion in the cities where the people would rise up against the “outrageous taxes” demanded from them (LMF: 180; LWF: 305). Nevertheless, when confronted with the recent Cabochian uprising in Paris, Christine described those of lower class who aspired to have a role in government as “fools” and as a “base rabble” which was more suited to spending time in “low taverns” than to governing others. She attacked the cruelties and destruction which had accompanied the “pride of the vile and wretched people” and the “mad government of the low born and bestial rabble” and mocked the perversity, foolishness, evil and wilfulness of their “diabolical” assemblies: if they followed each other like sheep, they also became worse than wild boars in their fury,
showing no respect for prince or princess, lord or master as they murder and pillage. The leaders of such evildoing should not be spared but punished according to the law (BP: II: 1; II: 2; III: 7, 11). Christine’s imagery here is reminiscent of that in John Gower’s Vox clamantis where the English Peasants’ Revolt of 1381 is similarly portrayed as bestial and as diabolically inspired.80

While allowing that, “even among simple artisans”, there were “very good people who would never participate in such disturbances”, Christine concluded once more that “civic office is not suitable for the populace”. Appealing once more to the example of Bologna, Christine argued that rule by the people in the contemporary world did not lead to good government or to peace. In opposition to those who cited the examples of ancient Rome or the Venice of her own day as praiseworthy instances of government by the common people “without a lord”, she claimed that these were actually examples of rule by what were, in effect, “nobles” since these cities were governed by “ancient lineages of worthy burghers” who would “by no means admit any of the common people to their councils”.81 As in her Livre du corps de policié, Christine once more invoked the authority of Aristotle to buttress her claim that no wise man would approve of “government by the common people” with the Philosopher having affirmed that rule by the many in a country or city “is a confused thing”. Similarly Cataline had shown that “the poor – the common people – always envy the rich and because of this they are quick to rise up and exalt the wicked, wanting new lords and revolutions. Since they are never satisfied no matter how good their rulers are, they constantly want the city’s government changed”. Likewise, the Cabochian rising had demonstrated that the poor desired civil war so as to be able to “overrun the rich”. To give authority to such people would thus be “no different from giving licence to robbers and murderers” (BP: III: 12).

In particular, Christine argues that it would be great foolishness for the prince “to allow the common people to arm themselves”. Although she does not refer to Giles of Rome by name, Christine alluded to his contention that a virtuous ruler would rely on his own subjects as men-at-arms, unlike the tyrant, who does not trust his own subjects (GKP: 334, 342; LGR: 312, 321).82 However, she then qualified Giles’s views by arguing that, in the absence of sufficient men-at-arms from his own country, a prince should employ foreign mercenaries since not only were they skilled in war but their employment would mean that the prince did not have to arm the common people amongst whom there was “no stability or security” and who were good only for pillaging (BP: III: 12; BDAC I: X (p. 27-8); III: VII (p. 152-3)). Christine did not, however, apply the same caution when it came to allowing the nobles to bear arms even though she admitted that it was they who had recently been engaged in a civil war whose mutual “slaughter and confusion” were reminiscent of the actions of the madman who tore at his own flesh with his teeth and whose feet sought to kick his own eyes, “if that were possible”, with the “whole body thrashing in furious movement against itself”.83 On the contrary, she urged that the nobles should be trained and armed for war while also reminding them of the need to refrain from the internal quarrels which gave the “diabolical common people” the chance to arm themselves (BP: III: 13-14). It is hard to see these passages from the third book of the Livre de paix as exhibiting a “‘populist’ orientation”, as involving a “careful and subtle focus” on “the people” as part of an attempt to incorporate them “into the political decision-making process”, or as advocating “the expansion of the political realm to the people”.84 Thus, while Christine was certainly willing to criticise all the classes in the France of her day, from the very top of society to the bottom, her specific criticism of the princes and the nobles was that they were failing to carry out
their political duties whereas her criticism of the lower orders was that they presumed to have a political role in the first place.

I.iii. Resistance to the tyrant

If, as Christine argued, the establishment of peace within the political community depended upon the actions of a prince who was individually virtuous and who was willing to attend to the counsel of the wise, this inevitably posed the question of what should happen if, in practice, the prince lacked the virtue which was required of him or if he refused to listen to good counsel. Indeed, this enforcement dilemma was a problem which confronted all those political thinkers who saw good government as depending on the morality of the individual ruler. There was a tradition of political thought, one which can be traced back through John of Salisbury (Pol: VIII: 18-21) to Cicero, which taught that it was “lawful and glorious” to resist tyrants. Certainly, Aquinas, Engelbert of Admont, John of Paris, Boccaccio, Nicholas Oresme, Jean Gerson and others all argued that, if necessary, a tyrant could be opposed or overthrown. Even Giles of Rome, who did not positively advocate the deposition of tyrants, had still maintained that since tyranny was illegitimate and unnatural it would not be willingly endured by anyone for long and that a tyrant was likely to face the opposition of the excellent and noble men whom he had sought to destroy (GKP: 25, 117-20, 328-9, 332-8, 340-9; LGR: 21, 99-101, 310-16, 319-27).

When judged against this tradition, Christine’s own attitude to tyranny, at least as it appears in the Livre du corps de police, actually seems rather acquiescent. Thus, in arguing that subjects should be “humble” and “readily obedient to their lords and rulers”, she cited the words of St Paul, who had taught that the powers that princes enjoy have been ordained by God so that he who resists their power “is recalcitrant or rebellious against the command of God”. Similarly, she invoked the authority of St Peter who had commanded that subjects and servants should be obedient to their princes and masters (Romans 13: 1-2; Titus 3: 1; 1 Peter 2: 13-18). Likewise, Christ himself, in teaching that subjects should “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s” and pay the taxes required from them, had commanded that, in deed and in word, we should “revere and obey lords and princes” (Matthew 17: 24-6; 22: 21). Anticipating the objection that the command to obey superior powers rulers only applied in those cases where princes were “good”, Christine paraphrased St Peter as saying that even when princes were bad (“feussent mauvais”), people should still subject themselves to them “for the love of God” (1 Peter 2: 13-14, 180; BBP/LCP: III: 3) Just as Chaucer’s “Knight’s Tale” saw the “cherles rebelllyng” as an expression of the malign influence of Saturn in human affairs, alongside treason and plague, so, in her Chemin de long estude, Christine includes rebellion alongside famine, earthquakes, pestilence and other disasters amongst the ills which befall the sublunary world (CLE: 2149-63). Similarly, in the Livre de l’advision Cristine, Christine characterises the deposition of Richard II of England as a “dure pestilence” which the king and his realm had suffered. Whereas the removal of Richard was justified by his opponents in what amounted to a systematic accusation of tyranny, Christine described Richard as England’s “rightful lord”, one whose crown had been “stolen” by his successor (LAC/VCP: III: 11). Far from seeing Richard as a tyrant who was worthy of deposition, Christine saw him as a “good king”, one who had been betrayed by his “changeable people”, and characterised Henry Bolingbroke as false, disloyal and treacherous (LFBM: I: 147-8, 171; AB: XXII).
However, while Christine’s *Livre du corps de policie* advocates unconditional submission to the ruler, even a bad one, her *Livre de paix* seems to adopt a different position. Here, while still teaching that popular rebellion against the prince or the nobles “offends God”, Christine does seem to allow that subjects have some right of resistance against a tyrant and his abuses of power. As she said, in defending the rights of lords and superiors, she did not seek to “trample” on those who were subject to their power (BP: III: 4, 7, 10). In general, Christine’s discussion of the evils that result from tyranny – not least those which befall the tyrant himself – is intended more as a warning to the would-be tyrant rather than as an encouragement to the potential tyrannicide. As a result, much of her discussion focuses on the punishment which God sends directly to evil princes, such as the “bitter torments of the inner parts” and stinking worm-filled sores with which He afflicted the proud Antiochus (2 Macabees 9: 1-28). She also stressed the suffering which tyrants inflict upon themselves, with those who seek to make the world tremble themselves enduring a living hell of fear and apprehension: as Ovid had said, “It is a type of death to live badly”.

Nonetheless, Christine does also refer approvingly to those instances where God worked to punish tyrants indirectly, via human agency. Even here, however, many of the cases she cites are actually of those who opposed proud, foreign invaders, as when Judith killed Holofernes, the Assyrian general (Judith 1: 5; 2: 3-4; 3: 13; 6: 2) or when Judas Maccabeus defeated the Syrian leader Seron (1 Maccabees 3: 13, 23-4) with, such resistance to external aggression constituting a much less controversial issue for medieval thinkers than rebellion by subjects against their own lord ([BP: II: 4; III: 1, 4-5, 19-21]).

Nevertheless, Christine does also refer to the wretched end of a tyrant such as Nero who was overthrown by his own subjects. After all, following Aristotle and Cicero, it was a commonplace of medieval political theorists, including Giles of Rome, that, in provoking opposition from those whom he has wronged, the rule of the tyrant would inevitably be the most short-lived form of government (GKP: 25, 118-20, 332-8, 340-9; LGR: 21, 99-101, 310-16, 319-27). Christine herself emphasized the “transitory” nature of the tyrant’s rule. As she says, confronted with a ruler who is guilty of extorting wrongful taxes, who is cruel and unjust and who murders people, disinherit them and destroys the realm, it would hardly be surprising if “le peuple” and “toute gent” rebelled against him. Indeed, “such rebellion would not be sufficient punishment” for him (BP: II: 4; III: 1, 4-5, 19-21). One of the manuscripts of the *Livre de paix* even asks whether it would be unexpected if such a lord was not only exiled from his land but was also killed by his subjects and offers a far more bitter criticism of the tyrant than that which appears in the manuscript which forms the basis of the text of the most recent edition of this work. In allowing subjects the right, as a last resort, to overthrow a tyrannical ruler, Christine’s position in the *Livre de paix* seems to provide a contrast not only with that of a pro-monarchical thinker such as Jean Juvénal des Ursins who, in his *Tres Crestien, tres hault, tres puissant roy* (1444), was to teach that the king’s will “est repute pour loy et raison” and that the king “n’a juge que Dieu”, but also with the quietist views which she herself had previously set out in the *Livre du corps de policie*. Christine’s work can thus be cited as evidence that she was advocate of both of the two opposed responses to royal misrule – submission or resistance – which were proposed by the political theorists of late medieval France. Significantly, it was in the *Livre du corps de policie*, when she was developing the organic analogy in detail, that Christine’s political theory was at its most hierarchical.
At first sight, it may seem surprising that Christine should have been more sympathetic to resistance to tyranny at the time that she was writing *Livre de paix* than she had been in the *Livre du corps de policie*. After all, while tyrannicide was always likely to be a sensitive issue, it became even more controversial following the assassination, in 1407, of Louis of Orléans, brother of Charles VI, on the orders of his cousin, John the Fearless, Duke of Burgundy, an act for which the duke was pardoned by the king in the following year, the murder having been defended in a treatise by Jean Petit as an act of tyrannicide. In such circumstances, one might have expected Christine to have been more cautious in her views about the right of resistance to tyrants in the *Livre de paix* (1412–13) than she had been in the *Livre du corps de policie*, which had been completed before Louis’s assassination, rather than more forthright. In fact, as Autrand has argued, Christine’s new stance on tyranny may have been the result of her hostile response to Louis’s assassination and to the Burgundian-backed Cabochian rising so that, ironically, the duke of Burgundy, having justified his actions on the grounds of tyrannicide, was now himself implicitly cast by Christine in the role of the tyrant who could legitimately be opposed. It would thus seem that political partisanship led Christine to abandon the principle of submission even to the bad prince which she had set out at length in the *Livre du corps de policie*, demonstrating that, as Wallace has argued, rather than being concerned to produce a timeless statement of principle, works of medieval political theory were also often intended “to intervene in the specific struggle of a specific secular or religious ruler against a specific enemy at a particular moment”. Nevertheless, although Christine may have adopted a new theoretical stance on tyranny in the *Livre de paix*, she once more went out of her way, as she had in the *Livre du corps de policie*, to remind the people of contemporary France that, in practice, they themselves did not have any grounds for rebelling against their rulers. On the contrary, they should be grateful that they had always been governed by hereditary French kings, rather than by oppressive foreign princes, and that they had benefited from the rule of monarchs who had treated them gently and lovingly and who had governed “without tyranny” (BBP/LCP: III: 2; BP: III: 10; see also AB: XLIX).

I.iv. “Ascending”, “descending” and “mixed” forms of authority

For Christine, as for John of Salisbury or Giles of Rome, the opposite form of government to tyranny was not one which was egalitarian or democratic but rather one which was based on the rule of a prince who was individually wise and virtuous. Indeed, given her emphasis on the evils of popular government in the *Livre du corps de policie* and the *Livre de paix* (BBP/LCP: III: 2; BP: III: 11-12), Christine seems even more committed to the necessity of an hierarchical system than were some of the other exponents of what Ullmann characterized as a “descending” or “theocratic” concept of political authority, in which power flows downwards, ultimately from God, let alone when she is compared to those who favoured an “ascending” or “populist” conception of political authority in which the ruler was seen as responsible to the political community which could restrain his power and might even elect him to office. While Ullmann’s typology can be criticised for its broad-brush approach, for its weaknesses when applied to any particular medieval thinker (see below) and for its claim that the impact of Aristotle’s *Politics* was crucial in bringing about a shift from a descending to an ascending outlook, the basic distinction which he drew between those medieval theorists who emphasised the constraints placed on the ruler by his subjects and those who saw the ruler as superior to the political community does remain a useful one. Giles of
Rome, for instance, expressed this distinction in terms of the contrast between “regal” rule, in which the king takes counsel from others but makes the laws according to his own will, and “political” government, where the ruler is subject to law made by the citizens (GKP: 190-1, 213, 326; LGR: 165-6, 190-1, 301). Giles himself favoured “regal” rule and was particularly suspicious of the political role of the “common people” whom he regarded as being prone to pursuing sensual pleasures rather than the true felicity of virtue. Yet even the pro-monarchical Giles still followed the Philosopher and Aquinas in seeing not only government by the one or by the few (“monarchy” and “aristocracy”) as being rightful forms of rule but also government by the many (the *policia*), contrasting these with their three corresponding evil or perverted forms of rule (“tyranny”, “oligarchy” and “democracy”). As Aristotle had argued, while it may be more difficult for many people to attain moral excellence than it is for one man or for a few, rule by the many (such as that found in the case of the Italian city-states in which the people chose the rulers, officials and judges and had the right to assent to laws so that there were “as many lords as there are people”) was nonetheless a valid form of government provided that, as in any virtuous polity, the rulers pursued “the common good of all” rather than their own private interests (GKP: 190-1, 325-9; LGR: 165-6, 300-6).

By contrast, while Christine, in lecturing the artisan class about the need to be “more sober and less licentious” and to eschew “lechery in taverns and the luxuries [‘friandises’] they use in Paris”, echoed Giles of Rome’s comments about the tendency of the common people to value the delectation of the senses rather than the felicity of the soul, she was, in her rejection of the legitimacy of government by the many as “too large to be good”, actually even less open than this arch-proponent of the “descending” view of political authority had been to the possibility of rule by the many (GKP: 16, 281; LGR: 262; BBP/LCP: III: 2; III: 9).

Inevitably, if Christine was less sympathetic to popular government than a pro-monarchical writer such as Giles of Rome, the nature of her outlook seem even more clear-cut when set against the views of those medieval theorists who developed an “ascending” concept of political authority. For instance, Brunetto Latini noted the varieties of lordship which existed in the world, including hereditary kingship, elected office for life (like the papacy), appointment to office from above for a set term, and election to office for a set term by the “wise men” of a city, and explicitly defended the latter as one of the forms of government which enjoyed divine approval and which provided a means of obtaining the common good of the community. Likewise, whereas Christine cited Bologna as an instance of the evils of popular government, Ptolemy of Lucca’s preferred mode of government in his *De regimine principum* (c. 1300) seems to be based on that found in contemporary Italian city-states. Here the rulers are elected for short periods of time, are constrained by the laws which the community lays down and are subject to some form of popular scrutiny. Similarly, Marsilius of Padua, saw the authority of the ruler as being derived from the “legislator”, i.e., from “the whole body of the citizens, or the weightier part thereof”, with the citizens having the power to make laws, to correct the ruler “and even to depose him, if this be expedient for the common benefit”. He defended the superiority of elected monarchy over hereditary succession and so while, like Giles of Rome, he accepted the Aristotelian claim that nature itself showed the need for a single source of authority within the body politic, he argued that this hierarchical necessity did not entail the need for rule by a single individual. Christine de Pizan’s antipathy towards government by “the many” and her particular interpretation of the metaphor of the body politic were thus not only hierarchical by
modern standards but were actually less egalitarian than those of a number of other medieval political theorists, whether “ascending” or “descending” in their outlook. However, even if Ullmann’s “ascending” and “descending” concepts of authority are retained as labels for two “ideal types” or basic principles within medieval political theory, it should be emphasized that, in practice, these two perspectives were not necessarily mutually exclusive but rather could be combined to differing degrees within the work of any individual writer. Thus, while many thinkers, from Aquinas to Fortescue, followed Aristotle in arguing that the “monarchy of the perfect man” was the ideal form of government in principle, they also conceded that, in reality, given the frailties of human nature, the best type of polity may be one with a “mixed” constitution which combines the virtues – or at least limits the vices – of the different forms of government. As a result, late medieval political theory did not simply take the form of an antithesis between the “ascending” and “descending” conceptions of political power but rather constituted a spectrum of different positions between the two poles in which the authority of the ruler was constrained to differing degrees by the power of the community. Christine herself has been seen as advocating a form of “mixed” constitution in her stress on the need for rulers to take advice from the wise, learned and experienced and her view of political society as a “web of intercession and intervention” by both groups and individuals. Certainly, Christine took it for granted that, in order to be able to act with prudence, the prince required the advice of wise counsellors although, when judged by this criterion, it is difficult to think of any medieval political theorist, however pro-monarchical his or her views were, who could not be described as an advocate of a “mixed” form of government. Like John of Salisbury and Giles of Rome, Christine taught that the ruler should rely on older counsellors who, in general, tended to be more discerning and virtuous than the young (Pol: V: 6 (p. 70); GKP: 53; BP: I: 9-12). However, she was more inclusive in her list of those who should counsel the prince than Giles, who had simply stressed the need for the ruler to rely on “wise barons that love the realm” (GKP: 53; LGR: 41). She thus recommended the prince to select counsellors from a variety of different estates so as to be able to draw upon a range of different areas of expertise (BBP/LCP: I: 22). Christine’s Livre de paix lists four groups who might counsel the king. Firstly, he should call upon knights and esquires who have demonstrated their expertise in the use of arms “to advise on matters of war”. Secondly, as Giles had said, he should rely on older knights and nobles for advice on the management of his royal estate. Such men should “reside close” to the prince and should be appointed as officers of the royal household. Thirdly, the prince should also rely on jurists, “whether prelates or not”, to “advise on the administration of justice”, men of this “legal estate” also being suitable to be made “chancellor, provosts and bailiffs of other large jurisdictions” or to hold other such offices. Finally, he should call upon “worthy gentlemen of good condition”, who are “versed in finance and accounts” who can counsel the prince on how to manage his finances. Only in a passing remark does Christine say that the prince can also consult “aucun du peuple” as the case requires (BP: I: 10). Christine’s Livre des fais d’armes et de la chevalerie (c. 1410) offers a slightly different list of those whom the wise prince should consult before going to war. Here she lists older nobles, clerks learned in war, the burghers who would have the responsibility of fortifying towns and of persuading the common people to help their lord, and finally “some representatives of the craftsmen” who should be “carefully approached” so that they would be “more inclined to help the
lord financially”. As an example of this, she cited Charles V who had summoned these four “estates” to his “parlement in Paris” before renewing war against England (BDAC: I: 5 (p. 20-1)). Similarly, both the Livre de paix and the Livre des fais et bonnes meurs praise Charles V for calling upon the counsel of the “bourgeois de ses bonnes villes” and “meismement des moyenes gens, et de celz du commun”. However, Christine’s main emphasis here, following Aristotle and Giles of Rome, is not so much on the need to call upon the counsel of the lesser commons but rather to show the benefits for social harmony of the existence of a large middle class (the “moyenes gens”) whose position between the rich and the poor helps reduce the conflict and alienation between the two extremes within society with the poor, in particular, otherwise being prone to seeking to despoil their social opposites (BP: III: 6, 18; LFBM II: 28-30; GKP: 385-7; LGR: 363-4; DRP: III, ii: xxxiii).

Moreover, while Christine saw it as both morally virtuous and pragmatically sensible for the ruler to take advice from others, she did not present him as being obliged or legally constrained to do so. Likewise, while teaching that counsellors should speak truthfully to the prince and even be willing to “censure” and “reprimand” him if necessary (in contrast with the flatterers who attend on the tyrant), she did not present the prince as being in any sense formally bound by the counsel he received. Approaching the issue of counsel from the viewpoint of the prince, rather than as a matter of the right of representation of the people, she thus had to depend on the prince’s magnanimity and good sense to ensure that he would first “call on” wise counsellors and then have the prudence to follow their advice – or to choose wisely between conflicting counsels. (BP: I: 9-12). As she says in her biography of Charles V: the king, out of wisdom and good-will, summoned people to counsel him notwithstanding the fact that “de sa seigneurie et autorité”, he could “faire et ordener de tout à son bon plaisir” (LFBM II: 28-30). There may be an echo of here of the Roman law teaching that “What pleases the prince has force of law”, a maxim which was a commonplace amongst those medieval political theorists who sought to defend monarchical authority. While we might expect Christine’s eulogistic account of the life of Charles V to focus on the king as the architect whose overall vision guided the generals and officials whom he used as his instruments, what is striking is that her account of the body politic in her Livre du corps de poliecie is similarly head-orientated. For instance, unlike the Policraticus, where John of Salisbury has “Plutarch” refer to the “senate” as the “heart” of the body politic, the Livre du corps de poliecie makes no mention of any formal assembly in its vision of the ideal body politic, even though Christine was familiar with the Roman Senate and its conciliar functions. Similarly, she equated the Roman consuls with “princes and dukes” of her own time and with the “leader of a great army” rather than with elected officials (Pol: V: 9 (p. 81); BBP/ LCP: I: 7; I: 29; II: 4-5; II: 10; II: 13-14). Equally significant is what she omits from her body politic in the Livre du corps de poliecie, i.e., any mention of the representative local or national assemblies or forms of popular association that were found in the France of the 14th and 15th centuries. Nor, in contrast to her focus on the individual morality of the prince, did she show any interest in the detail of the nature of the assemblies or of the forms of counsel which the king might rely on.

Thus, while Christine taught that the prince should make himself accessible to his subjects so as to be able to provide justice to them, that he should listen to their petitions, and that he should respond to their legitimate complaints (while, as the Secretum secretorum had advised, avoiding the excessive familiarity which would diminish his
majesty), this teaching was very different from a theory of political “representation” in which subjects had some degree of ability to restrain their rulers (BP: II: 14; III: 1, 18). Thus whilst, as Ullmann emphasised, the rediscovery of Aristotle’s *Politics* and *Ethics* in the Latin West in the late 12th and 13th centuries had the potential to encourage a shift away from a “descending” view of political authority and towards an “ascending” or “populist” conception of the body politic, this was by no means the only position which his political and ethical theory could be invoked to support. In practice, like most philosophical systems, Aristotle’s work did not so much constitute a set of deductive premises from which particular conclusions necessarily flowed as provide a rather elastic rhetoric with which a variety of different (and even contradictory) viewpoints could be legitimated. The Philosopher could therefore be appealed to not only by those who, like Marsilius of Padua, stressed the authority of the community as a whole but also by those, such as Giles of Rome and Christine de Pizan, who sought to bolster royal power and who stressed the primacy of the monarchical head within the body politic even though they never lost sight of the reciprocal obligations which bound the head and the other parts of the body. As Christine put it in her *Chemin de long estude*, explicitly referring to the metaphor of the body politic as it appeared in Plutarch’s supposed letter to Trajan: “Of which body is the prince head,/By which all members will be led,/For as the head is over all,/The members must await his call/Which governs all the rest at will/Giving commands which then fulfil/The senses which control the rest” (CLE: 5493-5504).

If Christine it so be seen as an advocate of a “mixed” constitution, then the fact that, like many other political writers of the time, she saw a strong and authoritative monarchy as the answer to the internal disorder and external menaces which threatened France meant that, on the spectrum from “descending” to “ascending” views of political authority, she herself stood well towards the hierarchical or “descending” end of scale.

II. Christine’s social theory

II.i. The social orders: reciprocity and hierarchy

Part One of this article argued that although many scholars have emphasized the originality and inclusivity of Christine de Pizan’s political outlook, her political theory was actually, in offering an account of the body politic in terms of both reciprocity and inequality, very similar in its basic principles (and even in much of its detail) to that found in the works of earlier political philosophers, such as John of Salisbury and Giles of Rome, with which she was familiar. However, as we shall see below, this political philosophy was, in turn, only one expression of a much broader social outlook, one which, like her political philosophy, combined the ideals of unity and mutuality within society with the need for hierarchy and deference. To what extent did Christine’s social theory, in particular her account of the worth and social role of particular estates, including the peasants, nobles, townspeople, the clergy and women, differ from that of earlier thinkers? How was she able to reconcile a belief in social equity and justice with the need for hierarchy and obedience?

In many ways, Christine’s social outlook was an extremely traditional one, being based on the principle that everyone within society should work hard at their calling for the good of the whole.

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pursuing their studies and performing divine service, the merchants attending “to their
merchandise, the artisan to their craft [and] the labourers to the cultivation of the earth”,
this latter task being the “most necessary” of any of the members of the body politic
(BBP/LCP: I: 10-11; II: 1; III: 8; III: 10). Once society was organized in this way, “everything
will be in its proper place, without anything encroaching unreasonably upon anything
else” (BP: II: 1; III: 10, 40). Like Theseus in his famous “First Mover” speech at the end of
Chaucer’s “Knight’s Tale” and Gerson in his sermon Vivat Rex, Christine follows Boethius
in citing the divinely-ordained harmony of the universe as a model for the love that
should exist within the human community: the people of France would thus be blessed if
their relations were governed “by the love that holds up the heavens and without which
nothing is stable” and should seek the “good proportion, concord and peace” by which
the movement of the stars is governed. (BP: III: 2, 6, 9). As a result, while people should
not seek to rise above their station in life, neither should they be degraded below it.
Rather the estates are “honoured” when they are maintained “in their degree” with all
the members of the body politic recognizing “one single head: the King” and taking
“pains to persevere” in their rightful place (BBP/LCP: I: 1; III: 1; III: 8-10).

Thus, rather than seeing labour and toil as simply a punishment with which mankind had
been cursed after its expulsion from Paradise (Genesis 3: 17), Christine taught that the
office of labour was “acceptable” to God, and that even before the Fall, God had put Adam
in the Garden of Eden “to work, cultivate and take care of it” (Genesis 2: 15). Similarly,
Noah, the second father of all mankind, was also a labourer who had tilled the land and
planted a vineyard (Genesis 9: 20) whilst many of the Old Testament patriarchs were
“cultivators of the earth and shepherds of beasts”. True happiness was to be found in
sufficiency rather than in the possession of wealth which brought only “a lot of concerns
and a plenitude of fear and worries” including the fear of “being betrayed, poisoned,
robbed or envied”. While the members of all the social estates could achieve salvation, it
was “more difficult” to do so when one enjoyed the temptations of earthly wealth
whereas the estate of the poor included “many good and worthy persons in purity of life”
(BBP/LCP: I: 1; III: 1; III: 8-10). Indeed, in the Mutacion de Fortune (1403), while Christine
condemns virtually every social group, from the dissipated and luxurious nobles, through
corrupt officials and merchants who are rarely kind, to the urban commons who lack
sobriety, the hard-working villagers (although not, as we shall see, those peasants who
impatiently refuse to accept their lot in life) seem to remain relatively blameless (MF:
4071-4128, 5131-6580). Once more, Christine’s emphasis on the need to respect each
estate so long as it performed its function for the social whole was hardly new, having
long been the basis of medieval social theory. As John of Salisbury had said, it is wrong
to despise the poor and the enslaved since “the whole race of men upon the earth arose
from the same origin, consists of and is sustained by the same elements, draws the same
breath from the same source, delights in the same heavens, lives the same, and dies the
same” whilst, in general, “the road to salvation is safest for whoever is free of riches and
other material possessions” (PoL: VIII: 12 (p. 183)).

The ordered hierarchy which was Christine’s social ideal was, as we have seen, exactly the
model of social organization which the organic analogy, with its equation of the rightful
structure of society with the naturally-given hierarchical ordering of the body, was
traditionally supposed to convey. Thus, it was not particularly significant that Christine’s
equation of particular orders of society with specific bodily members sometimes diverged
from that of other medieval thinkers, amongst whom there was certainly no unanimity
on such matters. For instance, whereas John of Salisbury equated the eyes of the body politic with the “governors of provinces” (Pol: V:2 (p. 66-7); V: 11 (p. 91-2)), the early 15th-century Middle English poem *The Descryvyng of Mannes Membres* described the eyes as an aspect of the rule of the prince himself as head of the body politic. Alternatively, the mid-14th-century *Avis au roys* depicted the eyes and ears as representing the king’s officials, Gerson presented the clerks of the University of Paris as the eyes of the realm, while Guillaume Signel (1413) cast the ‘princes’ of the realm, the king’s natural advisers, in this role. Christine’s own accounts of the body politic differ from text to text in the details of which estate should be associated with which bodily limb or member. Thus, while her *Livre du corps de policie* equates the arms and hands of the body with the nobles and knights, and likens the burghers and the merchants to its belly, her *Livre de paix* compares the princes and lords to the shoulders and upper parts of the body, the knights with the arms, the loins and belly with the burghers, and the merchants with the thighs; only the parallel of the prince with the head and of the common people with the legs and feet remained the same in both works (BBP/LCP: I: 1; II: 1; III: 1; III: 9; BP: III: 6). In practice, such differences in the detail of how the metaphor of the body politic was employed were not particularly important since the main purpose of the organic analogy was not empirical description but rather normative prescription. The analogy with the body was not intended to illustrate how society was actually structured but rather to teach a lesson about the principles by which it should ideally be arranged and, in particular, about the need for a reciprocal interdependence of all its members if the health of the whole was to be maintained.

However, while Christine saw an inequality of “degree” as being as essential to a stable polity, she also recognized that Christ’s teaching that the kingdom of heaven belongs to the poor, who are blessed “in spirit”, and his claim that “a rich man can no more enter paradise than a laden camel can go through the eye of a needle” (Matthew 5: 3; 19: 24) could be interpreted as a critique of such inequality and of the privileges enjoyed by the rich and powerful. Anticipating this objection, Christine responded that Christ’s words did not mean that it was impossible for the rich person to be saved but rather that they applied only to the “person who has riches without virtues and who does not distribute his riches in alms and in good deeds”. If someone is virtuous, he or she becomes “poor of spirit and will possess the Kingdom of Heaven”. After all, was there not a “great host of kings and princes in heaven”, such as St Louis of France, who had enjoyed wealth, honour and power in this world? “At every level of society, anyone who wants can be saved for the rank does not cause damnation but rather not knowing how to use it wisely”. Therefore, Christine did not teach that wealth “can be obtained only at the expense of others” or that possessing worldly riches in itself renders salvation inherently problematic but rather condemned those who love such riches excessively. Accordingly, she urged peasant women to remind their husbands that when they are working for someone else, they should labour “as well and as faithfully as if they were doing it for themselves”. They should not defraud their masters when they pay their rents, cut down timber from somebody else’s forest without permission or deceive their masters about their rightful pay since if they do such things “they will be damned”. Similarly, while noblewomen should be compassionate to the poor, they should also ensure, when supervising their estates, that they are not tricked by their tenants and labourers but should supervise their workers so that they do not slacken, whilst in the winter-time they should take advantage of the fact that labour is less in demand and so “is cheap”. For Christine, social unity could be achieved, despite the social divisions.
created by the diversity of ranks and of occupations, by the rich supporting the poor through bearing their share of taxation and through giving charity to the needy, and by the labourers working truly to support the body politic of which they were the feet. She thus advises charity on the part of the rich whilst enjoining patience on the part of those who suffer poverty on Earth so that they may achieve the joy of salvation in the next world. Those who suffered from temporary hunger in this world should remember that one day “the merit of poverty patiently borne” would mean that they would forever be “seated on high” at the Lord’s table. Those living in “a poor and uncomfortable dwelling” and who lack the necessities of life should remember that this “present misery is not permanent” and that one day they would have a “beautiful and delightful” dwelling in Paradise where they would “lack for nothing” (TCL: I: 3; I: 5-6; I: 9; I: 11; I: 16; I: 18; I: 22; II: 10; III: 1; III: 3; III: 12-13; LTV: I: 4; I: 6-7; I: 10; I: 12; I: 17; I: 19; I: 23; II: 10; III: 1; III: 3; III: 12-13; BP: III: 26, 45). As Christine had argued in Boethian fashion in her Livre de l’advision-Cristine, our sufferings and sorrows are actually blessings in disguise since through them we acquire self-knowledge and are helped on the path to eternal happiness (LAC/VCP: III: 15-26). Once more, for Christine, the virtues of reciprocity and interdependence within society also went hand in hand with the need for inequality and hierarchy as part of the order that God has established within the world.

Indeed, Christine not only argues that members of the nobility can achieve salvation but, at times, even seems to argue for their moral superiority. In the Livre de paix, Christine began from the orthodox Christian premise that all humans are “equal in terms of creation and birth” and that it is better to be humble but virtuous than to be of noble birth and yet act basely. Nevertheless, she then went on to argue, as had Giles of Rome, that, in fact, God has willed that there should be those marked out by their noble lineage amongst whom, “by long habit of difference in rank, the practice of a distinct kind of greatness of spirit from that found in others becomes second nature. Or it should do so, for those who fail in this regard dishonour their ancestry. This is shown by the beasts and birds: some are noble and others not” (GKP: 280-2; 333: LGR: 261-3; 310; BP: III: 10). It is striking how Christine’s arguments here, as elsewhere, are tailored so adeptly to suit her own immediate didactic and rhetorical aims – something she had in common with other medieval political and social theorists. Thus, when seeking to defend the poor from contempt, she had highlighted their goodness and greater likelihood of salvation; when pointing to the advantages for social harmony of a large middle class, she had argued that the richest and poorest in society are less reasonable than those who are ranked between them; here, when defending the privileges of the nobility, she presents this group as possessing a superior “greatness of spirit”. As a result of this superiority, the other social orders should defer to them, being “humble” beneath the rule of their superiors and working hard in their estate (BP: II: 1; III: 10, 40). Doubtless, when selecting a constable to lead his army, a king should pay more attention to a man’s skill at arms and character than to his lineage or blood but, nevertheless, “if both were found in the same person, it would be very useful” since “the nobler the blood, the greater the esteem in which he would be held... a quality necessary to every leader” (BDAC: I: VII (p. 24)). Similarly, in her plea to Queen Isabeau to act as a mediator in France’s civil strife, Christine again takes for granted the moral superiority of those of noble blood when she argues that if pity, charity and clemency are virtues natural to women, “they must reasonably be the more abundant in a noble lady” (ERF: 76).
The crux of the traditional case by which the nobility’s high status was justified was their monopoly of the chivalric virtues and their ability to defend the community in time of war. In this respect, in bemoaning the miseries suffered by a France torn apart by civil war in the *Lamentacion sur les maux de la France*, Christine has been seen as offering a “radical redefinition” of the chivalric concepts of victory, glory and renown as they relate to the estate of the “chevaliers”, as questioning the contemporary “system of masculine values”, and as concluding that “every form of war contradicts divine will”\(^{137}\). Yet while Christine certainly lamented the failure of the nobles to live up to their own chivalric ideals in the context of a civil war in which they treated their fellow countrymen as “mortal enemies”, she did not necessarily reject these ideals *per se* (LMF: 180-5; LWF: 304-8). Thus, in her *Livre de l’advision Cristine* and in her *Livre des fais d’armes et de la chevalerie*, a manual of the art of warfare written around the same time as the *Lamentacion*, Christine offers a traditional medieval defence of the just war and explicitly argues that while warfare often involves many great wrongs, extortions, grievous deeds, rapine, killing and arson, nonetheless, “wars undertaken for a just cause are permitted by God”\(^{138}\).

Indeed, whilst the way of Christ was “always peaceful and in no way warlike”, the Bible itself also showed in a number of places how God Himself, who is the “Lord and Governor of Hosts and battles” had “told the leaders of armies what they should do against their enemies”, even showing them the wiles which they should use to overcome their opponents (Josue 8: 2). When crimes are committed in time of war, they are not, therefore, the product of war in itself but are rather the outcome of the “misuse” of war by men of evil will. Princes are not only allowed to wage war so as to maintain law and justice (for instance to defend the Church, widows and orphans), to counteract evildoers and to obtain the restitution of what has been wrongfully stolen or usurped but, since war can be “the proper execution of justice” are positively “obliged to do so” (BCAD: I: II (p. 14; I: IV (p. 16-17); III: III (p. 146); III: XIII (p. 163); LAC/VCP: II: 19).

Thus, as Christine argues in her *Livre de paix*, whilst peace, particularly internal peace as opposed to the madness of civil war, may be the most delightful and joyful thing in the world, nevertheless the prince, like Charles V, must know how to “carry on his wars well” and ensure that his nobility are at all times trained and well-equipped so that they are ready for any summons to arms (BP: II: 1-2; I: 10; II: 17; III: 3; III: 13-14). If Christine believed in peace then it was peace through strength. Indeed, far from questioning “masculine” values, her *Livre du corps de police* cites, as a cautionary tale about the consequences of luxury, the example of the King of Persia who subjugated the people of Lydia by giving them a life of ease so that instead of being “powerful and brave in arms”, they became “as soft and dainty as women” (BBP/LCP: I: 28).\(^{139}\) Similarly, in her *Autres Ballades*, she calls upon the women of France to honour those French knights who, by their brave deeds, had discomfited the English (AB: XXIX-XXXI). Rather than rejecting all forms of war, Christine argued that the pursuit of arms and chivalry, which is the estate duty of the nobles in their capacity as the “arms and hands of the body politic”, is a “most honourable office”, one in which they should be trained from their youth onwards. The nobility’s performance of this function increases and defends the “public welfare” of the community and is a task for which they should honoured and rewarded (BCAD I: I (p. 12); I: IX (p. 29-32); III: I (p. 144); BBP/LCP: I: 1; I: 28-29; II: 2-21).\(^{140}\) Likewise, in her *Cent Ballades*, Christine calls upon France’s knights to use their deeds of arms to defend the Church, orphans and women and to maintain order and justice (CB: LXIV). Her *Epistre sur la prison de vie humaine* (1418) thus consoles the women of France who have suffered the
loss of their husbands and relatives at Agincourt and elsewhere with the thought that those who had fallen in battle were not cruel or wicked but had been judged by God as “good and of good renown” and so would obtain a place in Paradise (EPVH: III, IX).  

Some scholars have seen Christine’s view of the body politic as being more comprehensive than that of John of Salisbury and Giles of Rome in its inclusion of the classes of merchants and labourers, or have argued that Christine’s view that increasing the wealth of a country was one of the duties of the ruler was part of a “new ideal” of kingship, one which contrasts with that of earlier political theorists who saw the ruler’s functions as “promoting moral and political rectitude” and seeking the eternal salvation of himself and his subjects. Yet, in fact, while it is true that townspeople are not explicitly included in the description of the body politic in those passages which John of Salisbury claimed to have taken from Plutarch, elsewhere in the *Policraticus* he shows himself to be well aware of the existence of townspeople, artisans and traders, explicitly noting the activities of those engaged in “the many types of weaving and the mechanical arts, which pertain to wood, iron, bronze and the various metals” as well as many others which he found too numerous to list but from which “the corporate community of the republic derives benefit” (Pol: VI: 2 (p. 110-11); VI: 20 (p. 126)). Similarly, Giles of Rome had extolled the virtues of the division of labour between particular industries and between different towns, with trade and money facilitating such specialisation, as one of the means of meeting the needs of the community. He included the provision of the things necessary for life, as well as those needed for security and for the achievement of virtue, as being one of the purposes of life in the “city” (i.e., in the political community) and taught that the ruler had a duty to ensure the provision of such material necessities (GKP: 59, 160-3, 169, 265-7, 323-4, 336-9, 383-4; LGR: 145-8, 245-7, 298-300, 314-9, 361-3). Indeed, one of the chief advantages of the metaphor of the body politic over the traditional medieval division of society into those who pray, those who fight and those who work was that it allowed for the existence of a wider variety of status-groups, professions and occupations than the traditional tripartite conception while still preaching a similar message about the need for both hierarchy and interdependence within society. Thus, while Christine’s emphasis on the ruler’s duty to promote his subjects’ physical and material welfare as well as their moral and spiritual well-being has been as evidence that she was seen “in step” with the work of writers such as Brunetto Latini and Giles of Rome, she was actually rehearsing their arguments more than a century later than them. Far from challenging the “simplicity” or “naïveté” of medieval thought about the things of this world, her view of material prosperity and profit as being goals worthy of pursuit within a “complex and diverse social and economic order” fitted harmoniously within the mainstream of medieval thought with its Aristotelian view of humans as social and political animals, a view which was set out by clerical writers such as Aquinas and Giles of Rome (GKP: 13, 59, 98, 161-4, 176, 226, 289-94, 383-4; LGR: 10, 86-7, 145-50, 152, 203, 269-73, 361-2) and which could even be rehearsed in sermons by preachers such as Thomas of Wimbledon.

If Christine’s views about the need for rulers to promote the material prosperity of their subjects did not distinguish her from earlier political theorists then how original was her account of the place of the clergy within the body politic? Did she, as some scholars have argued, develop the organic analogy in a “noticeably anti-clerical” way, dropping John of Salisbury’s equation of the clergy in the *Policraticus* with the “soul” of the body (Pol: V: 2 (p. 67)), allowing the king to adopt a “corrective role” in relation to sinful clerics,
disregarding the Church’s claims for its supremacy over the temporal power, and adopting a more secular outlook than John of Salisbury for whom the purpose of life and of society was “essentially religious”? It is certainly true that Christine did not follow John of Salisbury in drawing a parallel between the role of the clergy within society and that of the soul within the body. Indeed, in her biography of Charles V, she argues that, in sustaining the health of the kingdom, it is the role of the prince within society – not the Church – that resembles the function of the soul in directing, protecting and sustaining the body (LFBM: II: 31-2). Yet, Christine’s employment of this metaphor here does not necessarily mean that she was adopting a more secular attitude than that found in her sources. After all, although John of Salisbury had portrayed the clergy as the “soul” of the body politic, even his use of the metaphor of the body politic has been seen as secular in its separation of the soul from the rest of the body and his insistence that the prince should be “preferred” before the body’s other members (Pol: V: 2 (p. 67); V: 6 (p. 69)). Indeed, in equating the prince with the soul, Christine actually seems to be following Giles of Rome (who in turn had adopted the analogy from Aristotle) who, in his De regimine principum had claimed that just as the soul is the salvation and life of the body which it rules and holds together, so a rightful king is the salvation and life of his realm although he also likened the primacy of the prince within the polity to that of the heart – or alternatively of the head – within the body (GKP: 59, 212, 327, 388; LGR: 46, 190, 303, 365).

By contrast, in his later De ecclesiastica potestate (1302), written in the context of the conflict between Philip IV of France and Pope Boniface VIII, Giles was to argue that “royal power should be subject to priestly power”, particularly to that of the pope, since rightful kingship was instituted through the priesthood, an office which predated and was superior to that of kings. When judged by the standards of the De ecclesiastica potestate – if not those of the De regimine principum, which fails to make any mention of the role of the clergy within the body politic – Christine was certainly far less hierocratic in her outlook than Giles. Thus, in the Livre du corps de policie, she seems to equate the clergy (along with the merchants and burghers) with the belly of the body politic whilst in her Livre de paix she presents the clerics as the flanks of the body (with the burghers cast as the loins and belly and the merchants as the body’s thighs) and thus as enjoying a less principal or honourable place than the nobles (the arms or shoulders), let alone than the prince (the head) himself. Indeed, rather than ascribing to the clergy the social primacy which they enjoyed in traditional versions of the tripartite theory, the Livre du corps de policie explicitly included the clergy (although they are defined here as the students of the University of Paris and elsewhere) within the “third estate” of the realm, although they did enjoy pride of place within it (BBP/LCP: III: 4). Nonetheless, as Forhan stresses, Christine did still see regard the clergy as important members of the body politic with their position being “high, noble and worthy of honour amongst the others”. For instance, in order to acquire virtue, the young prince should be taught by theologians and other churchmen about “what one ought to hold and believe as a Christian”. Just as nobles should devote themselves to warfare and politics, merchants to trading honestly and artisans and labourers to their work, so the clergy should concentrate on “laws and learning” (BBP/LCP: I: 4; I: 6-7; I: 10; III: 1; III: 4; BP: II: 1; III: 6).

It is certainly true that Christine was critical of the clergy of her own day, saying that many of the bishops and priests were “truly devils” and that promotion in the church was often granted to those whose lifestyle did not merit it since they were guilty of greed and
luxury, although, when her purpose was to stress the need for social unity, she could also praise France’s “distinguished clergy” who were “active in all kinds of scholarship” (BBP/LCP: I: 7; BP: III: 6). However, in criticising the morality of individual clerics, Christine was hardly being anti-clerical since such attacks on the morality of the clergy (as opposed to challenging their actual estate-function or privileges) were commonplace throughout the Middle Ages, usually being the work of reforming clerics themselves. Indeed, in comparison with the critique of the clergy, from the pope downwards, which John of Salisbury mounted in the Policlaticus, where his denunciation of many of the clergy of his day as being – like the Pharisees attacked by Christ – hypocritical wolves in sheep’s clothing (Matthew 7: 15) adopts the imagery which was commonly invoked to criticise the failings of the clergy, Christine’s own condemnation of immoral clerics is relatively mild (Pol: VI: 24 (p. 133-5); VII: 20-21 (p. 164-74)). Moreover, despite her criticism of the lack of piety and morality of many of the contemporary clergy, it is problematic to claim that Christine wished the prince to adopt a “corrective” role in relation to the Church so that, in effect, the priesthood became like a “civil office”. In fact, as Forhan has emphasised, Christine explicitly says that “correction [la correction] of people in the church is not his [i.e., the good prince’s] to undertake” (BP: I: 7 (p. 13-14); LCP: I: 7 (p. 11)). Certainly, in principle, French clergymen of this period were “immune from lay jurisdiction” even in criminal cases and, at their coronations, French kings swore to uphold clerical liberties and immunities although, in practice, Charles V himself, despite his personal piety, was keen to maintain the royal prerogative against the Church’s temporal claims. Christine herself praised the “very true Christian” and “very devout and catholic” Charles V for “respecting the clergy’s rights and privileges” as part of his achievement in bringing order and happiness to the realm and for reminding the Dauphin of his duty to “care with all his heart for the welfare of the Church” and to come to its aid if it was “oppressed or trampled by a tyrant” (LFBM I: 94; BP: I: 6; III: 22). Yet, while explicitly defending the rights of the Church, Christine, as so often, was also able to have it both ways. As she says, if the king did not enjoy the de jure right to “correct” the clergy then, in practice, he did have a de facto ability to take them to task since, when confronted with the authority of the ruler, no prelate or cleric is “so great that he will dare withstand or complain’ about him if his prince “reproves him [lereprent] for his manifest sin or vice” (BBP/LCP: I: 7).

What is perhaps most striking in Christine’s references to the role of the clergy within the body politic is its abstraction and consequent failure to engage with the sharp controversies of the day about the role of the Gallican Church and of the papacy within the body politic. Thus, while it was easy to be in favour of defending the liberties of the Church in general, it was more difficult to specify what the liberties of the French Church actually were, either in relation to the Crown (for instance, its liability to royal taxation) or to the papacy (such as the extent of the pope’s right of provision to benefices in France and his ability to tax the French Church). Such questions had been a source of conflict since the 13th century but became particularly marked after the start of the Great Schism in 1378. Indeed, in 1398, the French Church had, in effect, declared its autonomy from the papacy when it renounced its obedience to the Avignon pope, Benedict XIII, a decision overturned in 1403 but then renewed in February 1407. Yet, although Christine seems to have been writing the Livre du corps de polcie in 1406-7, she makes no mention of these debates. Nevertheless, if Christine devoted little attention to the role of the Church within the body politic and simply took for granted the existence of the Church as a privileged corporation within the French polity, this does not mean that she had adopted a new “secular” outlook. On the contrary, just as John of Salisbury had attacked the...
glories and riches of this world as filth when they became impediments to salvation (Pol: V: 11 (p. 94); V: 17 (p. 101); VIII: 16 (p. 189-90); VIII: 17 (p. 196)) and Giles of Rome had stressed that earthly fame and wealth were insignificant when compared to the fate of one’s immortal soul (GKP: 24, 28-9; LGR: 20, 22-4) so Christine urged the prince to learn that “the grandeur of lordship” is only transitory, that worldly goods and honours are short-lived, and that one day he will have to account for his deeds, on peril of losing eternal salvation (BBP/LCP: I: 6-7).

Given Christine’s modern fame for her systematic defence of women against their clerkly detractors, it is not surprising to find that, while she herself stood firmly in the Aristotelian tradition in both her metaphysics and her general approach to political theory, where she diverged most radically from the Philosopher and his medieval followers was on the issue of women’s intelligence, rationality and ability to exercise political authority.

Aristotle himself had taught that “the male is by nature fitter for command than the female, just as the elder and full-grown is superior to the younger and more immature”. Thus, while both men and women can achieve a moral excellence, for instance by being courageous, “the courage of a man is shown in commanding, of a woman in obeying”. In this perspective, women were regarded as unsuitable for the exercise of political power. As Giles of Rome said, the superiority of male reason and the tendency of women to be more intemperate and unstable in their desire and will meant that a husband should be “master” and “lord” over his wife. For the same reason, he argued that rulers should not rely on the counsel of women since, in general, that provided by men was “more perfect” (GKP: 192-209, 275; LGR: 162-86, 253). Similarly, John of Salisbury took it for granted that men were the “noble sex” and women the “weaker” one and cited the story of Dido, Queen of Carthage, and Aeneas as an instance of what would result from the “rulership of women and the effeminate”. Although such government “may have a foundation in virtue, it could by no means devise a course towards subsequent prosperity”, leading instead to “lewdness and to the abandonment of the city to flames and to a perpetual reason for hostility” (Pol: V: 10 (p. 90); VI: 22 (p. 131). VII: 25 (p. 176)). Even Nicole Oresme, who taught that men’s superiority did not mean that women were inherently bad but simply that they were “less good”, still argued against the succession of women to the throne, citing the polity of the Amazons, with its female rulers, as “une chose hors nature”.

For Christine, by contrast, women’s minds were just as sharp as men’s, they were just as able to distinguish between right and wrong, and they were perfectly capable of understanding the law and, indeed, of excelling in much more demanding disciplines. As a result, women were certainly not unable to “govern wisely or to establish good customs”. On the contrary, history provided many examples of women who mastered these arts such as the Empress Nicaula, ruler of Arabia, Egypt and Ethiopia, who governed her lands with “exemplary skill” and “established just laws by which to rule her people”, not to mention the many noblewomen who had ruled their territories or estates with prudence and justice. Similarly, while women were not, in general, as strong and courageous as men, Christine cited many examples of individual women whose “courage, strength and bravery” matched that of men, including the Amazons whose military prowess meant that they were feared by the Greeks more than any other race in the world (BCL/CD: I: 11; I: 13-26; I: 43). Certainly, given her own desire to offer counsel to the Dauphin in works such as the Livre de paix, Christine could hardly do otherwise than claim a right for women to speak out on political matters, a right which she explicitly asserts,
Traditionally, mirrors for princes had neglected the part played by women in public life (although this is also true of Christine's own *Livre du corps de policie*) but a positive role for women was available to Christine from the scriptures, chronicles and imaginative literature: that of the merciful intercessor. Following the models of the Virgin Mary and the Old Testament Esther - both of whom Christine herself invoked (ERF: 76, 78) – real and fictional queens had traditionally been cast in this role, as when Froissart famously portrayed Queen Philippa throwing herself on her knees before Edward III on behalf of the six burghers of Calais in 1347. Even Giles of Rome, who was able to find very few positive things to say about the female sex, regarded women as capable of providing a model for male rulers in their tendency to be tender-hearted and merciful to others (GKP: 198-9; LGR: 173). Given Christine's view of men as not only being “more courageous”, “more hot-headed” and more vengeful than women by nature, and so as being more ready to go to war, and of women as being “by nature more timid and also of a sweeter disposition” than men, it was natural for her to cast women in the role of peacemakers. While she called upon men to bring peace to the realm, as in her appeal to the Duke de Berry in her *Lamentation sur les maux de la France* (LMF: 182-5), and praised men who made peace, as when the Dauphin seemed to have reconciled the Burgundians and the Armagnacs in 1412 and again in 1413, she nonetheless presented women's gentle nature as “the best means of pacifying men”. Her *Livre des trois vertus* therefore urged the “princess” (meaning also an empress, queen or duchess) to mediate between the prince and those with whom he had come into conflict, whether this be foreign enemies, his barons, or his “rebellious people”, doing all that she can “to find a way of peace” by reconciling the ruler and his enemies, gladly going “to some trouble” in urging her husband to be reconciled with his subjects provided that they will admit their fault and their willingness to atone for it (BP: I: 2; II: 2; TCL: I: 8; II: 9; LTV: I: 9; II: 9).

However, Christine did not only defend women in their capacity as peacemakers and intercessors but also saw their intelligence and virtue as being demonstrated in their role as deputies during the absence of their husbands or as widows who enjoyed the position of regents or guardians when their children were minors. As Taylor puts it, Christine she was writing in a “world full of women who held effective political power as regents and guardians”.

As Adams has emphasised, Christine's use of these exempla of female prudence were not simply part of a general defence of women. Rather, in the context of Charles VI's recurrent episodes...
of madness and at a time when his wife, Isabeau of Bavaria, was playing a prominent role as a member, and even president, of the council which ruled in his place, her arguments also had an immediate and practical political significance.\textsuperscript{170} Thus, Christine’s \textit{Epistre a la royne de France} (1405) therefore urges Isabeau to use the pity, charity and clemency which were natural to women and so to prove herself as the remedy for the ills of the kingdom of France, which was being torn apart by the conflict between the dukes of Orleans and Burgundy. She should thus be moved by the misery of her people and act to bring about peace (ERF: 70, 76, 78; see also LMF: 181; LWF: 305-6). In fact, as Adams points out, when Christine wrote her letter to Isabeau, the queen was already active as a peacemaker and almost immediately after Christine’s plea was instructed by the king to “continue to serve as mediator in the conflict”.\textsuperscript{171} Thus, while the role which Christine proposed for women as intercessors and mediators was far more active than the one which they were usually assigned in works of medieval political theory, it did not go beyond that which they already occupied in the reality of late medieval political life.

Similarly, while Christine praised women who acted as regents and took it for granted that a princess could be given “great powers to govern” and enjoy “great authority”, for instance, as head of a council, she also stressed that this would only be the case during the minority of an heir or when the prince himself was occupied elsewhere. Likewise, while Christine assumed that noblewomen whose husbands were away at court or on campaign would need to know how to run an estate, how to defend her family’s landed interests at law and even how to launch attacks or to defend against military assaults from others (responsibilities which late medieval noblewomen certainly carried out in reality), she once more presupposed that they would only perform such tasks in the absence of, and on behalf of, their husbands who had delegated “the responsibility and authority to govern” to them and that, in so doing, they would be guided by the counsel of “wise old men” (TCL: I: 11; II: 9-10; I: 12, II: 9-10).\textsuperscript{172} Thus, if Christine saw women as men’s equals in terms of their potential to act rationally or morally, she did not conclude from these egalitarian premises that, in actual practice, the political realm required the input of men and women on an “equal footing”.\textsuperscript{173} Even though women have the ethical capability and intellectual qualities needed to be brave warriors or wise rulers, their capabilities would be best put to use within their own sphere of life: “It’s not necessary for the public good for women to go around doing what men are supposed to do”. Rather God “has endowed each sex with qualities and attributes which they need to perform the tasks for which they are cut out”. Women should not, therefore, neglect their own work but should apply themselves diligently to “the tasks for which they are fitted”, as when Christine interprets the tendency of daughters to “stay closer to home” than sons as one of the benefits of female offspring to parents (BCL/CD: I: 11; I: 13).\textsuperscript{174} “Just as a wise and prudent lord organizes his household into different domains and operates a strict division of labour among his workforce, so God created man and woman to serve Him in different ways and to help and comfort one another, according to a similar division of labour”. For instance, “God gave men strong, powerful bodies to stride about and to speak boldly, which explains why it is men who learn law and maintain the rule of justice”, even though women have the innate intelligence to master the law. Similarly, despite the examples which Christine gives of women who have been brave and strong, she concedes that, in general, women are not as strong and courageous as men (although they may compensate for this by their greater virtue) and so concludes that when someone refuses to obey the law, “men must enforce it through the use of arms and physical strength, which women clearly could not do” (BCL/CD: I: 11; I: 13). Accordingly,
in the *Livre de paix*, Christine argues that when confronted with a tyrant, women, “who otherwise could not harm him, ought to pray devoutly to the blessed soul of the good lady Judith that she beg God to deliver his people from this cursed Holofornes” (BP: III: 5). While Christine’s *Ditié de Jehanne d’Arc* (1429) did praise a woman for overcoming France’s enemies in time of war and cited Joan’s victories as evidence for God’s approval of the female sex in general, Christine did not present her as a role model whose example should be followed by other women. Rather she saw Joan as an instrument through whom God worked His “miracles”, her status as the heaven-sent saviour of the nation being demonstrated precisely by her exceptionality rather than by her social or moral exemplarity (JDA: 97-104, 217-27, 265-6). As a result, although Christine’s views involved a rejection of Aristotle’s specific claims about the intellectual inferiority of women, the Philosopher’s more general view of humans as “social animals” who survived by specialism and exchange remained the basis of her view of the traditional separation of men and women’s social roles (BP: II: 14).

Thus, while the allegorical “City of Ladies” which Christine constructed as a defence of women in the *Livre de la cité des dames* lacks the class inequalities and the specialisation and division of labour which were the foundation of conventional medieval visions of the good society, the account of how social reality should be organized which she offered in the *Livre du corps de policie* and the *Livre des trois vertus* was based on precisely these principles. Christine by no means sought to replace the contemporary social inequalities of power, wealth, class or sex with a vision of hierarchy that was instead predicated on individual virtue; on the contrary, she defined individual virtue precisely in terms of people’s fulfilment of their roles within the existing social order.

II.ii. Social hierarchy and distributive justice

As we have seen, both Christine’s political theory and her social philosophy were premised on the inevitability of inequality and on the desirability of obedience and deference on the part of the common people. Thus, despite presenting the “simples laboureux” who tilled the earth as the “most necessary” of all the members of the body politic, she did not conclude that this indispensability meant that those who fed the rest of society should be the most highly rewarded group within it (BBP/LCP: III: 10). Instead, Christine argued that it was the nobles and knights who were “wise in government and diligent in chivalrous pursuits” who were particularly owed “love, honour and great reward” by the prince. Indeed, given that they defended the prince and his subjects and risked their lives for the public good, society would be hard-pressed to reward them sufficiently, however much praise or “expensive provisions” they were provided with. Christine even claimed that such nobles were “scarce rewarded according to their own merits” in the France of her own day and that, if they were “honoured as they were due, 100 more would follow in their steps” (BBP/LCP: I: 29; see also BP: II: 3). As a result, she did not object that nobles received “among the highest and most exalted honours in this world” but simply demanded that those who enjoyed such honour should, by their deeds, live up to their noble name (BBP/LCP: II: 13). How, then, did Christine justify such unequal social and political arrangements?

In arguing for an unequal allocation of wealth, power and social honour to the different social estates, Christine implicitly relied upon the Aristotelian principle of “distributive justice”, one with which she was probably familiar from Henri de Gauchy’s translation of...
Aristotle had explicated various meanings of the word “justice”, one key sense being that which is “equal or fair”, so that everyone receives his due (a definition of justice that came to be particularly associated in the Middle Ages with Cicero), whereas injustice is that which is unequal or unfair and where someone receives too much or too little of that to which he is entitled. However, this definition of justice simply posed the question of how one is to establish what is equal or fair and of how what one is rightly due is to be determined. In answering this question, Aristotle had distinguished between various types of justice. One, which Aristotle defined as a specific form of “corrective” justice and which Aquinas called “commutative justice”, is that involved in voluntary exchanges between individuals (or, as Aquinas put it, between the separate parts of a whole) such as buying and selling. Here, £10 worth of corn should be exchanged for £10 of cloth, there being an equitable quid pro quo or “arithmetic” proportionality of things given to things received, and the law treats the two parties to the exchange as equals. A second form of justice is that which Aristotle called “distributive” justice and which Aquinas defined as dealing with the relationship between the whole and its parts since it is concerned with the “distribution of a community’s goods to its members”. Here there is not the simple equality of commutative exchange. Rather, as Aristotle said, while this form of justice requires equality for those who are equals it also involves inequality for those who are unequal, debate then being likely to arise within the political community about the criterion (e.g., wealth, legal status, noble birth, virtue) by which people are to be defined as equals in the first place. In such cases there is a “geometric” proportionality between the different people and the share of society’s common goods (such as honour, power and wealth) which is allocated to them. As Aristotle put it, “if persons are not equal, they will not have equal shares”. Here inequality is taken for granted so that it is not inequality per se which creates a sense of injustice within people but rather the allocation of unequal shares to equals or of equal rewards to those who are unequal. For Aquinas, the principle of distributive justice thus required the allocation of a community’s goods to its members in proportion to their hierarchical “worth” or “status”. Giles of Rome invoked this idea in order to explicate how both the members of the body and the different parts of the body politic should be related. He argued that while the individual members of the human body, such as the eye or the foot, should exist in a relationship of commutative justice in which each needs the services of the others, the continued survival of the body also required that its parts should be related in terms of distributive justice. Thus, the heart, as the prime source of life, should rule over the rest of the body and impart life and movement to all its members according to their hierarchical “dignity”, such hierarchy being characteristic of all natural things. Likewise, rightful order within the body politic requires the existence of the distributive justice by which rewards are granted to the members of the community according to their dignity or worth. Giles argued that if justice is the virtue which assigns everyone his due then social justice required the “proportionate equality”, i.e., the inequality, in which men receive their deserts according to their unequal dignitas. The common goods of society, such as wealth, honour and power should therefore be distributed according to the status of the person who receives them (GKP: 54-60, 187, 193, 254-5, 301: LGR: 43-5, 162, 232, 275). It was precisely because each man was entitled to receive his due that, as Aquinas, Giles and other thinkers argued, subjects should render their rulers the reverence and obedience which were their right: justice here meant obedience.
As we have seen, Platonic, Aristotelian and Stoic philosophers – and those theologians who were influenced by them – were united in seeing nature as a guide to how human social, political and ethical life should be conducted. Within the Aristotelian tradition, nature itself was seen as working according to the concept of the rightful “mean”, so that nothing within it is marred by any excess or deficiency. Accordingly, since human ethics should follow nature, it followed that, as Aristotle himself had famously said, human virtue itself constituted a mean between two vices. Christine herself gave a stock instance of this when she defined liberality as the virtue which constitutes the mean between, on the one hand, the insufficiency that is avarice and, on the other, the excess that is foolish prodigality (GKP: 42, 63, 68, 74, 193; LGR: 50, 55, 60, 166-7; BP: III: 5, 23-4). More generally, this outlook could also be used in order to defend a social distribution of wealth, power and status that was unequal and yet which could still be presented as measured, proportionate and moderate. Indeed, even before the translation of Aristotle’s Ethics into Latin, John of Salisbury, who, as Nederman has emphasised, was familiar with Aristotle’s doctrine of the mean through the Organon, had argued against a “disproportionate” allocation of resources to any particular member of the body politic whilst simultaneously emphasising the need for hierarchy, inequality and deference within it. Thus, on the one hand, John presented the body politic as being “driven by the command of the highest equity” and cited the authority of Plato for the claim that when a ruler oppresses his subjects this is “just as if the head of the body had swollen up so that it is impossible for the members of the body to endure it”. On the other hand, while the head is useless to the members unless it “faithfully coheres with them”, the reciprocity or equity involved in such social relations did not imply strict or simple equality but rather meant that while superiors should “devote themselves” to those below them, inferiors should “respond likewise to the rights of their superiors” (Pol: V: 2 (p. 66); V: 7 (p. 76); VI: 20 (p. 126)). Similarly, while Giles of Rome sought to justify the existence of private property and the need for inequality in the distribution of wealth, he did not seek to defend the limitless or disproportionate pursuit of individual riches. Against such greed, nature teaches a different lesson: whilst a bird in an egg is nourished by its yolk or a young mammal is fed with its mother’s milk, nature does not need to provide them with endless nourishment. Likewise, rather than seeking endless wealth, each man should be rewarded with the wealth needed to maintain his rank or estate (Latin: status) (GKP: 70, 76, 100, 252-4, 264-5, 271-3, 301-6, 311-5, 330; LGR: 55, 61, 89, 232-3, 243-5, 249-51, 275-9, 285-90, 307; DRP: II, iii: xii).

Thus, while the idea that there is a “natural equilibrium within the body” and that no part of the body is entitled to a “disproportionate” allocation of society’s common resources has been seen as a late medieval innovation which “stretched” or “subverted” conventional social and political doctrines, this doctrine was actually quite compatible with – indeed, was explicitly linked to – the traditional, hierarchical and “head-orientated conception” of the body politic of writers such as John of Salisbury and Giles of Rome. After all, given the customary definition of justice as each man receiving his “due”, the belief that no-one could claim a disproportionate share of the common goods of the community was a virtual tautology. Similarly, the idea that no part of the body politic was “greater than the whole” did not constitute a new idea in the later middle ages but had actually been one of the central features of the organic analogy from the very beginning. However, the fact that no part of the body could claim to be greater than the whole did not mean that no part of the body enjoyed a primacy within the whole: being against
excessive inequality did not entail being in favour of egalitarianism. Since the purpose of ideology is usually to “have it both ways”, rather than being used to buttress a single point about the need for social and political authority, the metaphor of the body was commonly invoked in order to illustrate a nuanced argument about how diversity within the body politic was compatible with unity and how reciprocity could be reconciled with hierarchy and subordination.

Although, like John of Salisbury’s *Policraticus*, Christine’s *Livre du corps de police* does not explicitly use the term “distributive justice”, it is precisely this principle which implicitly underlies the hierarchical social and political order which she, like John, saw as being necessary and rightful within the body politic. Thus, having set out the definition of justice as “a measure which renders to each man his due”, (i.e., “son droit” or “ce qui lui appartient”), one which was familiar to late medieval thinkers not only from Aristotle and Cicero but also from Roman civil law and Christian theology, Christine follows John of Salisbury and Giles of Rome in arguing that this “due” is not necessarily an equal one when she argues that the prince himself receives “ce qui lui est deu” when he is obeyed and feared by his subjects. If, as Christine later claimed in her *Livre de paix*, “the role of Reason is to distribute all things equally”, so that the good are rewarded and the bad are punished, then, as the *Livre du corps de police* makes clear, “equity” itself demands that people’s rewards, in terms of their allocation of honour, authority and wealth from the common goods of the community, should themselves be unequal (BBP/LCP: I: 19; I: 21; I: 29; BP: I: 5; LFBM I: 63). More broadly, if no-one should be guilty of “extortion” or of “overcharging” for the services which they render to their fellows, each man is nonetheless entitled to receive that which is necessary to “live properly” in his own particular place within the social hierarchy. The prince should therefore exercise measure and moderation and receive only that which it is “reasonable to collect” from his subjects when he has a good cause, such as defending his country against external enemies, but should do so “without gnawing to the bone his poor commoners”. Developing here, as elsewhere, the metaphor of the ruler as a “good shepherd” to his subjects, Christine repeated the words which Valerius Maximus attributed to the Emperor Tiberias: “the good shepherd shears his sheep only once a year; he does not fleece them all the time, nor skin them so that he draws blood” (BBP/LCP: I: 9-11; see also BP: III: 15).

In the *Livre de paix*, Christine explicitly links this concept of social justice with the metaphor of the body politic, repeating a claim previously made by Gerson in *Vivat Rex* in arguing that when the prince, or anyone else, seeks to enrich himself at the expense of other people this is like one part of the body seeking “to draw to itself the blood, health and substance of its neighbouring limb”, thus causing the weakness and deterioration of the whole body (BP: III: 25). It is this notion of justice as each person receiving his or her rightful if unequal due which explains why, in the *Livre de la cité des dames*, Christine depicts the personified Justice carrying a measuring vessel (BCL/CD: I: 6) since, as she puts it in the *Epistre Othea*, in a maxim she ascribed to Aristotle on the basis of her source, *Les fleurs de toutes vertues*: “Justice is a measure that God has established on earth to limit all things” (EO: 208). As she says in her *Livre de paix*, “the wise man, who knows what goodness is, wants to have enough and no more, in order to do good” (BP: III: 25).

That, for Christine, a just and equitable distribution of society’s goods would be achieved by taking into account each person’s particular – and unequal – social estate can be seen in her approving description of the “triumphs” granted to the generals of ancient Rome in which the victor was greeted by the citizens “dressed in rich robes, according to their
rank” and in her advice to the prince to show his magnanimity by welcoming each man “according to his degree” (BBP/LCP: I: 29; BP: II: 13). Similarly, when a prince (or other powerful person) gives a gift to someone as a “reward for something well done”, the value of the gift should be in line with the merit which has occasioned it whereas when gifts are made from pure generosity on the part of the prince he can give “small ones to poor and indigent persons”, so that each person is rewarded “according to his rank”. Even the way that people speak should be related to their own social class (a “grand style is not fitting for everyone”) and to the status of the people whom they are addressing, with each person being addressed “according to their rank and station” (BBP/LCP: I: 14; BP: III: 29; III: 33). A very similar approach to the hierarchical distribution of honour, power and wealth in society is taken in Christine’s *Livre des trois vertus*. Here she explicitly notes that although all temporal wealth and social rank come to us from God, He “has not divided the wealth equally” or given equal honour to each social position. However, this does not at all mean that God’s distribution of wealth is “unjust”. Rather, by giving more to some than to others He has offered them the chance to show their virtue by providing charity to the poor while simultaneously giving the poor man the chance to be “crowned with the diadem of patience” in return for his “long suffering”. Accordingly, “there is nothing wrong with the princess or great lady amassing treasure of money from revenue or a pension provided that she receives it lawfully and without committing extortion”. While such a lady has a duty to be charitable, the Word of God does not require her to give “everything to the poor if she does not wish to. She can legitimately keep it for the necessities of her rank and to pay servants” and for her expenses in giving gifts, buying provisions and repaying debts. Christine emphasises that although a princess should not be “puffed up with pride”, it is nonetheless “appropriate to the rank of her husband and of her class that she should receive honours”. If it is wrong for a princess or great lady to have “unnecessary or extravagant” clothing she can nonetheless be “richly adorned” in her dress, ornaments and jewels in accordance with “her station in life” and her revenues and can enjoy “a great court with courtiers and much ceremony” in line with the “position where God has placed her”, provided that she does not adopt “more magnificence than is reasonable”. Similarly, at meals, she should be “served in a manner befitting her rank”, with her ladies and others seated “according to their position at court”. Good “public order” requires that each person should be “satisfied with his social standing” so that duchesses do “not wear the gowns of queens, nor countesses those of duchesses, nor ordinary ladies those of countesses”. Likewise, explicitly invoking the “golden mean” as the “most civilized and the most pleasing course” of action, Christine followed Giles of Rome in arguing that while it is right that “each woman should wear such clothing as indicates her husband’s and her rank”, a townsman should not “desire to dress above her station” and seek to dress like a noblewoman. The rank of merchants is “fine and good” in itself and so the women of this class should “wear their rightful clothing, each woman according to her position” (TCL: I: 7; I: 9; I: 10; I: 11; I: 18; II: 9; II: 11; III: 2; III: 3; LTV: I: 8; I:10; I: 12; I: 19; II: 9; II: 11; III: 2; III: 3 DRP: II, i: xxi; GKP: 203-5; LGR: 179-81).\(^{192}\) Given this outlook, Christine did not only regard dressing above one’s place in society as being wicked in itself but, more generally, saw it as symbolizing the broader disruption and breakdown of status distinctions, and the rejection by individuals of the place which they had been assigned within the divinely-ordained social hierarchy, which she presented as central to the moral and social disorder of her own day.\(^{193}\)

\(^{63}\) Christine’s expectation that rank would be demonstrated by appearance and her equation of such social hierarchy with rightful order and justice is also evident in her description
of Charles V’s magnificence in the Livre des fais et bonnes meurs and in the Livre de paix. Here, when the king rode out with his nobles, he is described as being set apart from the rest of his company by his royal array so that, despite the rich dress of his nobles and gentlemen and the “measure” of the king’s own clothing, everyone would still recognize which of them enjoyed a royal pre-eminence. Similarly, when the king greeted the Emperor Charles IV on his visit to Paris in 1378, he made sure that, despite the honours which were lavished on his royal guest, the emperor did not ride on a white horse, as he was accustomed to do when he entered towns under his own power, in case this should be taken as a “signe de dominacion” within the kingdom of France (LFBM: I: 50-1; II: 97; see also BP: I: 8; III: 30). Thus, while praising Charles V’s humility, Christine also noted the splendour of his court, with its ceremonial and feasts, of his building works and of his clothing and jewels which included “the richest crown France had ever seen, which cost an extraordinary amount from the treasury”. But whereas in a tyrant such spending would have been based on the extortion and impoverishment of his subjects, Charles’s Solomonic glory, one unparalleled in a French king since the time of Charlemagne, was an expression of the king’s wisdom and led to the prosperity of the artisan and merchants from whom such works and luxury goods were commissioned (BP: I: 7; III: 27-8, 30). As the pseudo-Aristotelian Secretum secretorum said, it was appropriate for a king to exceed all others in the richness of his clothing and that he should enjoy a “prerogative of array” whereby his rank would be demonstrated and the reverence due to it was received.

If it is the function of ideology to eternalise the social order in the realm of thought and to stress the essential harmony of the different groups which make up any particular society then, from John of Salisbury through to Christine de Pizan and beyond, the metaphor of the body and the conception of the “distributive justice” which supposedly existed between its unequal parts was ideal for conveying a view of the contemporary social and political order as being inevitable, natural and divinely ordained and as being constituted in the universal interests of all its members. In general, ideology works by investing positive but indeterminate abstractions, such as “justice” or “equality”, with an historically-specific and socially-loaded content. As a result, rather than deciding whether Christine’s political vision was “egalitarian” or not, it may be more useful, as we have attempted to do here, to examine the particular sense which she herself ascribed to the notion of “equality”. It would seem that Christine, like other political theorists in the Aristotelian tradition, did indeed believe that everyone had an equal right to receive his or her “due” – it was simply that this due, in terms of wealth, power and status, was itself a profoundly unequal one.

III. Conclusion

As we have seen, recent interpretations of Christine de Pizan’s political theory, and in particular of her use of the metaphor of the body politic, have often stressed its intellectual originality and its social inclusivity. Yet, when we examine the basic principles on which her work is based, Christine’s political and social outlook, with its stress on the need to reconcile co-operation and interdependence within the community with the existence of hierarchy and inequality, seems strikingly similar to that found in the writings of earlier thinkers, such as John of Salisbury and Giles of Rome, whom she took as her sources. In general, her political philosophy was in line with the orthodoxy of medieval Aristotelianism and, indeed, at times embodied a particularly hierarchical
understanding of that tradition. However, a recognition of how much Christine’s political outlook owed to the work of earlier theorists does not entail a denial of any originality to her political writings. Firstly, the obvious exception to Christine’s agreement with previous authorities was her defence of female virtue, rationality and prudence and of women’s ability to participate in political life. Even though she did not conclude that women’s intelligence required them to play an equal part in public life with men, she did express in theoretical terms a defence of the political role which medieval women already enjoyed in practice, a role which her contemporary, male theorists systematically neglected.

More generally, where the content of Christine’s political philosophy can often be seen as innovative is not in the basic principles which underlay it but rather in her application of these principles to particular situations, this ability to put wisdom into practice being Aristotle’s – and Christine’s – own definition of prudence. ([LFBM II: 21]. For instance, while it was a commonplace of medieval political theory that kings should be learned – it being proverbial that an illiterate king is like a crowned ass (Pol: IV: 6 (p. 44)) – Christine was able to demonstrate the intellectual and practical wisdom of Charles V in her biography of the king in a very specific way when she praised his commissioning of translations of the Bible along with works by Augustine, Aristotle, John of Salisbury and many others ([LFBM II: 42-4]. In this sense, Christine’s originality in her *Livre des fais et bonnes meurs* lay not in its underlying principles but rather in converting the detail of Charles V’s actions into *exempla* to be used as a model for his successors and in expressing his political practice in a systematic form and within a general theoretical framework which she drew from works such as the *Policraticus* and Giles’s *De regimine principum*. As a result, Christine did not so much ‘transform’ her sources, as creatively apply their ideas to particular situations. If her work involved a reimagining or reinvention of kingship then the novel idea which it embodied was the king’s own self-representation as a wise and majestic ruler, one whose Solomonic wisdom was hailed not only by Christine but also by writers such as Philippe de Mézières, Jean Golein, Raoul de Presles, Denis de Foulechat and Nicole Oresme.

Finally, the originality of Christine’s output is often to be found not so much in her basic political ideas but, above all, in her use of fresh imagery so as to de-familiarise these commonplace ideas in order to present them to her readers afresh. As Kennedy has argued, Christine’s works of political philosophy are both didactic treatises and works of artistic creation. Seen in this perspective, much of their inventiveness lay not in their political content but rather in the artistry of the form in which this content was expressed. For instance, in the *Livre des fais et bonnes meurs*, perhaps inspired by the Platonic tradition of writers such as Alan of Lille and John of Salisbury in which God himself was portrayed as the “choice architect of the universe” and “master artisan” of Creation (Pol: VII: 5) and, more specifically, drawing on Nicole Oresme’s description of the prince as being like the master of the building work that was carried out in his name and so as exercising an “architectonique” rule, Christine compares the earthly ruler to an architect who is responsible for the planning and direction of a building project even though he does not perform all the work himself. She then gives specific examples of this in Charles V’s delegation of responsibility to others, such as the generals who fought battles on his behalf, the craftsmen who carried out his building work or the translators who turned works of Latin into French at his command ([LFBM I: 131-33; LFBM II: 33-46, 181]). In this work, Christine also compares herself to an architect in defending her own
borrowings from previous writers: the author is like an architect who directs the construction of building even if he himself does not make the stones from which the building is constructed (LFBM: I: 191).

Christine thus brought the traditional stereotype of the ideal prince to life by demonstrating how the conventional virtues which Charles V possessed found expression in very particular ways – such as his commissioning of learned translations or the construction of a canal linking the Loire to the Seine (LFBM II: 26).

We can also see this de-familiarisation of commonplace ideas at work in the *Livre du corps de police* when Christine adopts the conventional analogy of the state with the human body but then proceeds to do something new with this extremely familiar raw material. Thus, rather than merely rehashing this hackneyed metaphor, her *Livre du corps de police* turned the idea of the “body politic” into the unifying image of the entire book – being the first work of medieval political theory to do so. Then, in her own individual fashion, Christine combined the idea of the body politic with a number of other images, thereby generating a whole series of related metaphors of health and sickness, of growth and decay, and of balance and imbalance, even though her fundamental point – the similarity between the ideal state and the human body and the need for each member of the body or each social class to contribute to the well-being of the whole – could hardly have been less original. Thus, the fact that some scholars may have denied any novelty to Christine’s work on the basis of their own suspect political motives does not mean that we should go the opposite extreme and lay claim to an originality for her work where it does not actually exist. After all, Christine’s aim in writing a work such as the *Livre du corps de police* during the years 1404-7, when France was on the brink of civil war – was neither to demonstrate her intellectual originality nor to claim a place for herself in the canon of political philosophy but rather to make a practical intervention, as “un auteur ‘engagé’”, in a time of profound political crisis.

As Delany has pointed out, modern scholars have often been unwilling to admit that their own favoured authors from the past – with Christine de Pizan being a prime example – may have held opinions which seem unpalatable to modern audiences. Here, by contrast, it has been argued that, disappointing though it may be to us as modern readers, the political theory of Christine de Pizan should not be understood as subverting the traditional connotations of the idea of the body politic. Rather, her political theory was profoundly hierarchical rather than egalitarian, with the Aristotelian notion of “distributive justice” allowing her to reconcile a conception of the members of the body as being involved in a reciprocal and “equitable” relationship with one which emphasised the inevitability, necessity and benefits to all of social and political inequality. There were, as we have seen, medieval political theorists such as Ptolemy of Lucca and Marsilius of Padua whose work, in developing an “ascending” notion of political authority in which the ruler was responsible to, constrained by, and even chosen by the political community, does provide a contrast with the focus on the need for hierarchical subordination of the members of the body politic to its monarchical head which was found in the political philosophy of a John of Salisbury or a Giles of Rome. However, Christine de Pizan, with her emphasis on the desirability of royal government, on the dangers of rule by the many, and on the need for hierarchy and inequality within the social and political order, should not be included amongst their ranks.
NOTES


8. For references, see Brown-Grant, Christine de Pizan and the Moral Defence of Women, p. 2, n. 6-7.


11. C. Reno, “Christine de Pizan: ‘At Best a Contradictory Figure’?”, in Brabant, Politics, Gender and Genre, p. 172-91, at p. 174-5.

Turnhout, Brepols, 2005, p. 81-97, at p. 96-7; M. Brabant and M. Brint, “Identity and Difference in Christine de Pizan’s Cité des dames”, in Brabant, Politics, Gender and Genre, p. 207-22, at p. 217.


48. Aturand, Christine de Pizan, p. 431.


Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes, Études christiniennes
55. Cicero, On Duties, III: 22 (p. 108); see also ibid., I: 85 (p. 33), III: 32 (p. 111). As the early 15th-century Middle English poem The Descryvyng of Mannes Membres said, if a man’s limbs should “debate” with the others, their own sickness would inevitably result (“The Descryvyng of Mannes Membres”, Twenty-Six Political and Other Poems From the Oxford MSS, Digby 102 and Douce 322, Part I, ed. J. Kail, (Early English Text Society, o.s., 124, 1904, l. 121-8 (p 68)).


61. It is not clear which specific episode in the city’s turbulent history Christine had in mind. For references, see C. Lansing, “Bologna”, Medieval Italy: an Encyclopedia, Volume I, ed. C. Kleinhenz,


69. Gower, “Confessio Amantis”, VII: 23-202, 1522-44, 1641-99, and see the notes to these lines; Latini, *The Book of the Treasure*, p. x-xi, 2-5. Latini actually divides knowledge into three forms: theoretical, practical (including ethics, economics and politics) and logic.


80. Gower, “*Vox clamantis*”, Book I.

82. Gerson, “Pour la réforme du royaume”, p. 1158.
83. Christine here seems to feel no need for recourse to a 'veiled' critique of the nobility (Adams, 'The Political Significance of Christine de Pizan’s Love Poetry', p. 356, 361, 371).
84. Richards, “Bartolo da Sassaferrato as a Possible Source for Christine’s Livre de paix”, p. 84, 88, 96-7.
92. On Richard II, see also MF: 4541-4554, 23501-23511.
95. Christine gives the story of Judith in her Livre de la cité des dames (BCL: II: 31) and see her view of Joan of Arc as a new (and even greater) Judith in the Ditié de Jehanne d’Arc (DJA: 217-24). See also Pol: VIII: 20 (p. 207-9).

100. The duke’s pardon was later withdrawn and Petit’s work was publicly burned although this occurred after the writing of the *Livre de paix* (R. Vaughan, *John the Fearless: the Growth of Burgundian Power*, London, Longmans, 1966, p. 44-8, 69-74, 196, 210-12; Autrand, *Charles VI*, p. 349-66).

101. Christine herself never explicitly refers to the assassination in any of her works (Autrand, *Christine de Pizan*, p. 285).


112. Forhan, The Political Theory of Christine de Pizan, p. 75; but see also Ibid., p. 96.


117. See also Gerson, “Pour la réforme du royaume”, p. 1165.


126. Translation from Willard, Christine de Pizan, p. 178. See also Autrand, Christine de Pizan, p. 344-6.


139. See also Gerson, “Pour la réforme du royaume”, p. 1167-8.


141. Autrand, Christine de Pizan, p. 310-11.


143. See also Ptolemy of Lucca, On the Government of Rulers, 2: 3-4, 12-15, 4:2.

144. Duby, The Three Orders, passim; Constable, Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought, p. 324.

145. Delogu, Theorizing the Ideal Sovereign, p. 158-9, 175-6. For the 12th-century origins of this outlook, see Nederman, Lineages of European Political Thought, p. 201-21.


151. Forhan, “Polycracy, Obligation and Revolt”, p. 45.


160. Hindman, Christine de Pizan’s Epistre Othéa, p. 179.
172. Rigby, English Society in the Later Middle Ages, p. 262-70; Autrand, Christine de Pizan, p. 392, 422.
179. Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, V, v: 17-18; Cicero, On Duties, I: 15, 17, 20; Wood, Cicero’s Social and Political Thought, p. 74, 76, 149; Augustine, City of God, XIX:21 (p. 882); The Etymologies of


182. See Part I of this article, note 31.


188. Forhan, The Political Theory of Christine de Pizan, p. 113, 121, 145.


192. See also Gerson, “Pour la réforme du royaume”, p. 1178.


196. Secretum secretorum, p. 48-50, 185, 293-4; See also Dante Alighieri, Il convivio, ed. B. Cordati, Torino, Loescher, 1968, IV, xxv: 5-6; Jacobus de Cessolis, Game of Chess, I: 3; Dudash, ‘Prudence and chevalerie dans Le livre des fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V’, p. 231.


ABSTRACTS

While some scholars have seen the political theory of Christine de Pizan as being very like that of her sources in its presentation of hierarchy as the basis of rightful order, others have stressed the originality of her thought and have judged her conception of society to be more inclusive and egalitarian than that found in traditional conceptions of the body politic. Here it is argued that while Christine stressed the importance of reciprocity and mutuality within the political community, she also emphasised the need for hierarchy and deference and that, even by medieval standards, she was profoundly suspicious of popular involvement in political life. Part II of this article argues that this political theory was simply one expression of a much broader social outlook, one which relied on the Aristotelian notion of “distributive justice” in order to reconcile the ideals of hierarchy and obedience with the achievement of justice and equity.

AUTHOR

STEPHEN H. RIGBY

University of Manchester