

**A New Manuscript for New College:
Thoma logic, ethics, and metaphysics.**

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

Scholars are now comfortable that the medieval, scholastic curriculum survived in Oxford and even into the eighteenth-century academe. Perhaps the best barometer for this is the market for textbooks. Aristotelian handbooks, especially in logic, remained vendible for an impressively long time, and here the pertinent example is the logic of Robert Sanderson (1587-1663), a textbook that was first printed in Oxford in 1615 and last in 1841.

Physicæ Scientiæ Compendium received its last printing in 1690, and is a reminder that even after Isaac *Principia* of 1687, students were taught the old ways, in physics as in logic, in ethics as in metaphysics.

The difference is that the older orthodoxies were now being taught either alongside or in combination with the newer ways of thinking, or were increasingly being simplified and relegated to the earliest stages of the academic course. This is particularly true of logic, the bedrock of the medieval experience. The scholastic curriculum may have survived in England into the Restoration but its survival came at some intellectual cost. As the leading scholar of this problem, Mordechai Feingold, has remarked, first

other trivial and quadrivial disciplines) changed the nature of basic instruction in the university.¹ What had been furnished by the university was now increasingly left to the colleges and the colleges in turn were increasingly leaving the more basic aspects of the course to a kind of self-help system, of which the curricular crib is the most basic component. These break-downs of logic, metaphysics, ethics, economics, politics, physics, and mathematics, to take the most common subjects, furnished the young student with a highly traditional and so uncontroversial summary of the elementary structure and content of the B.A. degree, which the student could then supplement with more profound research derived from printed commentary. In this way a basic manuscript crib prepared the way for more complex printed sources, and the tutor, then as now, might cut down on what was seen as merely propaedeutic instruction.

This is exactly what we have here. MS 393 is a curricular crib signed by and in the hand of one _____ in his *Alumni Oxonienses* to have been from Abingdon, matriculating 12 August 1673, aged 18; taking his B.A. in 1677, and his M.A. in early 1681. The only suitable John Kent listed by Kirby in his

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

paste-down. Most interestingly, Kent then gives his first curricular dig

whole opening chapter (seventeen pages) is t

m

Fellow Librarian