Contested Knowledges: John of Salisbury’s *Metalogicon* and * Historia Pontificalis*

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John of Salisbury's *Metalogicon* is a text concerned with education, and its role in the production and maintenance of virtue in students. It defends the breadth of the Trivium against those who seek specialisation in education. This article seeks to contextualise the *Metalogicon*, and stake a claim for its intellectual import, through a reading of another of John's works, the *Historia Pontificalis*, where John uses the trial of Gilbert of Poitiers to explore similar issues.

The *Metalogicon* of John of Salisbury is a text about knowledge: how to get it; how to keep it; and how to use it properly. Its pretext is an attack on the mysterious Cornificius and his followers. The never identified Cornificius is charged with empty eloquence; he uses language superficially and without the fortification of the liberal arts. This is dangerous, according to John, as the ordered and moral world is based on an appropriate and educated use of language. The world is made with god-given language. That language must be used with caution, reverence, and discipline. John says of Cornificius ‘Although he seems to follow eloquence alone, [he] undermines all liberal studies, assails the structure of all philosophy, tears to shreds the contract of human society and destroys the means of brotherly charity and reciprocal interchange of services.’

1 John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, ed. J. B. Hall, CCCM 98, (Turnhout: Brepols, 1991), I. 1, ll. 66–69: ‘Et quamuis solam videatur eloquentiam persequi, omnia liberalia studia conueltit, omnem totius philosophiae impugnat operam, societatis humanae foedus distrahit, et nullum caritati aut vicissitudini officiorum reliquit locum.’ Translations are from D. McGarry, *The Metalogicon of John of Salisbury. A Twelfth Century Defense of the Verbal and Logical Arts of the Trivium* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1955), p. 11. I have made occasional modifications to McGarry’s translation. I am grateful to Dr Constant Mews for his advice when making those changes. I would also like to thank the anonymous readers of this paper for their generous and engaged comments, as well as their advice on translation.
The *Metalogicon* is not, then, a work of systematic theology in itself. Instead, it is a work that takes the firmament of theology, the liberal arts, and argues for their importance in the making of the world. The *Metalogicon* is a work that bridges the knowledge systems of the schools with the functioning social world. Charles Burnett notes of John’s career, ‘as far as we know, John did not put any of his opinions into action: he did not teach, he did not write any textbooks based on Aristotle’s writings, or on any other works that he admired, and he was not instrumental in drawing up curricula for the schools’. Rather, John was concerned to produce texts that straddled genre and disciplinary divisions. The *Policraticus, Historia Pontificalis*, and the *Metalogicon* are all hybrid texts, linking theological precepts to political science, history, and educational theory respectively. John was continually interested in how the abstract ideas of the schools could be applied to the social and the political.

In the *Metalogicon*, this interest manifests as an investigation into the way in which the educational system of the liberal arts organizes the use of language for appropriate purposes. Of course, dialectic, rhetoric, and grammar are tools that primarily aid the study of sacred language. In the *Metalogicon*, John shows how they do this, drawing on his own education to explicate the way in which each discipline produces and demarcates the truth and its boundaries. It is what he does next that is John’s particular novelty and insight. From delineating the process of truth-making through the liberal arts, he goes on to show how these epistemological systems must also apply to the social world. He demonstrates that the liberal arts must be applied to any situation of language, as their epistemological systems are the only guarantee against an inappropriate use of language.

It is this tendency of John’s to produce texts that flummox genre divisions which has resulted in his often confused position in the historiography of twelfth-century thought. He is not an original systematic thinker, but neither should he be derogated as merely derivative and unimportant. This, unfortunately, has often been the case. John has been utilized for historical vignettes, but not often has

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the overall position of his thought been considered.\textsuperscript{3} This point is particularly pertinent in relation to the \textit{Metalogicon}, a text well utilized for narrative information but perhaps not considered in its own right as an intellectual intervention.\textsuperscript{4} This in itself is not surprising. The genre confusion of the \textit{Metalogicon} can make for a difficult read. The author melds theology, narrative, anecdotes, and commentary in a manner that renders an overall ‘point’ or ‘project’ difficult to pin down. The evasiveness of the \textit{Metalogicon}, however, is also what makes it such a startling work. John’s preparedness to place seemingly disparate knowledge and genre systems alongside each other produces its own point, namely, how the abstract ideas and systems of the schools relate to the material world, in all of its social and political workings.

The \textit{Metalogicon} then raises the question: what is the context that produces John’s particular epistemological understanding? What impels his seemingly incongruous juxtapositions? It is clear that the text is concerned with contested knowledge; after all it is directed at a mysterious foe charged with abusing language. The \textit{Metalogicon} is a defence of one type of knowing against another; it is not concerned to make theology as much as to defend its firmament. The \textit{Metalogicon} must prove the liberal arts against those who attack them. Accordingly, in order to contextualize the \textit{Metalogicon} I propose to follow John in another text where he deals most explicitly with knowledge in contention.

In the \textit{Historia Pontificalis}, John devotes much space to detailing the trial of Gibert of Poitiers for heresy in 1148. The charges were brought by Bernard of Clairvaux and a dramatic tussle took place between the two luminaries. In John’s

\textsuperscript{3} See D. Luscombe, ‘John of Salisbury in Recent Scholarship’, in \textit{The World of John of Salisbury}, ed. C. N. L. Brooke, D. E. Luscombe, M. J. Wilks, \textit{Studies in Church History, Subsidia} 3 (Oxford, 1984), pp. 21–38 (pp. 21–27). He says particularly about the \textit{Metalogicon}, ‘Certain articles in the work, as has just been suggested, have been thoroughly scrutinized on account of the historical and biographical information that they offer. But the work as a whole, its structure, its argument, its origin and its objectives have tended to be neglected’ (p. 25). See also footnotes 2, 3, 8 to B. Hendley, ‘John of Salisbury and the Problem of Universals’, \textit{Journal of the History of Philosophy}, 8 (1970), 289–302, in which he charts the marginalisation of John as a thinker through the comments of C. J. Webb and Bertrand Russell.

\textsuperscript{4} In reference to \textit{The World of John of Salisbury}, Cary J. Nederman has written that ‘interest in the \textit{Metalogicon} as a work of philosophy, rather than as documentation of twelfth-century intellectual history, is currently waning’ (‘Knowledge, Virtue and the Path to Wisdom: The Unexamined Aristotelianism of John of Salisbury’s \textit{Metalogicon}, \textit{Mediaeval Studies}, 51 (1989), 268–86, p. 269, n. 8).
account, he charts the ebbs and flows of the trial, keenly detailing the competing truth claims of Gilbert and Bernard. This account provides a telling adjunct to the *Metalogicon* as it makes clear John’s allegiance to the schools, as well as illuminating his understanding of the need to make its ideas meaningful to the broader world. This is also very much the agenda of the *Metalogicon*. In addition, there is another aspect of the *Historia Pontificalis* that might prove fruitful in understanding the *Metalogicon*. This is John’s narration of Gilbert of Poitiers. John writes Gilbert with great sympathy, explaining his thought in great detail, defending him against the charge of heresy. John argues that Gilbert is so thoroughly fortified in the liberal arts that he cannot go wrong. From John’s description of Gilbert’s character and his learning we can see the personal stock that John placed in the liberal arts and their capacity to produce goodness and truth. John narrates Gilbert as a noble sage, and he writes in the *Metalogicon* that ‘[The liberal arts] are said to have become so efficacious amongst our ancestors, who studied them diligently, that they enabled them to comprehend everything they read, elevated their understanding to all things, and empowered them to cut through the knots of all problems possible of solution.’5 In the *Historia Pontificalis*, Gilbert embodies this approach to learning. The *Historia Pontificalis* retells many of the concerns of the *Metalogicon*, and in so doing provides a telling adjunct to the evasive *Metalogicon*.

One place to begin an attempt to understand the *Metalogicon* might be through John’s discussion of the question of universals in Chapters 17 and 20 of Book II. In these sections, John summarizes the current views of the problem and then proffers his own consideration of the issue. The question of genera and species, and the relationship of *materia* and *forma* is one of the most serious investigations within the text. It is key to John’s understanding of knowledge in the material world, as the issue of universals is about whether or not being (and thus truth) actually resides in the world.

Brian Hendley argues that John’s solution to the universals debate is directly related to his theory of knowledge. He submits that John’s theory of knowledge begins in the idea of sensation ‘which is a power of the soul excited by an external object or action’, and on the basis of these sensations the soul begins

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5 *Met*, I. 12, 4–8: ‘tantam dicuntur optinuisse efficiaciam apud maiores qui eis diligenter institerant, ut omnen aperirent lectionem, ad omnia intellectum erigerent, et omnium quaestionum quae probari possunt difficultatem sufficerent enodare’ (McGarry, p. 36).

to judge the object and makes decisions about its qualities. These decisions are stored and called back if the soul is aroused again in the same way. Of course, the soul is also capable of making different decisions about new objects, so that the memory becomes a storehouse of collections of qualities, which are recalled when the soul is confronted again with the same thing. This is how we come to comprehend – eventually we learn that certain collections of qualities might signify a thing, which is given a name, such as father. For John, then, coming to know is social. Education, the opinions of others, helps us to recognize just what these storehouses of sense impression might constitute in the world. John’s solution to the universals dispute follows this; he rejects the idea that universals are mere ‘word sounds’, but he also rejects the notion that universals are essential to things. Rather, he suggests that universals are learning tools, that knowledge of a universal is not knowledge of a form, but is the reception of the nature of a thing through various elements of that thing. John writes that:

Nothing is universal except what is found in particular things. Despite this, many have sought to find the universal, in itself, apart from the individual things. But at the end of their search, they have all come out empty handed. For the universal, apart from particular things, is not an entity, unless perhaps in the sense that truths and like meanings of combined words are entities.

The idea of the universal, Hendley argues, is simple and fundamental to John – it is that which allows us to differentiate and to discern. John writes that ‘Genera and Species are accordingly exemplars of particular things, but rather as instruments of learning, if Aristotle is right, than as essential causes of particular things.’

Kathryn Keats-Rohan takes Hendley’s telling of John’s epistemology as her starting point into John’s educational theory, writing that:

Dr B. P. Hendley has pointed out the theory of knowledge which is expounded in the Metalogicon, for instance, and I shall take this theory as my starting point for I shall be hoping to show how John’s critique of

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7 Met, II. 20, 108–12: ‘Nihil autem uniuersale est nisi quod in singularibus inuenitur; seorsum tamen a multis quaesitum est, sed tandem nihil inuenerunt omnes in manibus suis, quoniam seorsum a singularibus nihil est, nisi forte qualia sunt vera, aut similia complexorum significata sermonum’ (McGarry, p. 123).

8 Met, II. 20, 431–34: ‘Sunt itaque genera et species exemplaria singulorum, sed hoc quidem magis ad rationem doctrinae, si Aristotiles verus est, quam ad causam essentiae’ (McGarry, pp. 136–37).
contemporary education and his concomitant warning to educationalists is woven into the fabric of this theory.\(^9\)

John’s theory of knowledge forms the basis in John for a view of education as the mode to eloquence, which alone produces a civil society. The way in which John defines knowledge – the notion that the soul can be disciplined into increasingly subtle recognitions of what it perceives – is extrapolated into the idea that the education of an individual has the power to fortify him morally into making the right sort of recognitions. Education then becomes the crucial location where a consensus may be forged and reiterated. The student can be taught the categories of what can be seen in the world and what those things should be called. This then enables meaningful social intercourse, because education produces shared truth. John’s notion of truth is available to all trained in the arts of the trivium, the arts which enable relationships. This is a truth which is human, in that it is vulnerable to vicissitudes of earthly diligence:

Nothing is so strong and robust that it cannot be enfeebled by neglect, nothing so well constructed that it cannot be razed. On the other hand, diligent application can build up and preserve the lowest degree of natural talent.\(^10\)

This is the one of the bases of John’s critique of the Cornificians. John is opposed to nimiety in any form, as verbal excess has the capacity to deny the seriousness of language, and so to deny also the linguistic contracts upon which society rests: ‘Any nimiety in the exposition of these verbal arts imperils the delicate preservation of the truth about sensible reality enshrined in both the civilized complex of post-contract human society and in nature.’\(^11\)

John of Salisbury describes Bernard of Chartres as explaining that there are three types of students:

The first flies, the second creeps, the third takes the intermediate course of walking. The flying one flits about, easily learning, but just as quickly forgetting, for it lacks stability. The creeping one cannot rise, wherefore

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\(^10\) Met, I. 8, 66–69: ‘Nihil enim est tam ualidum tam robustum quod negligentia non eneuet, nihil tam erectum quod non desidiat; sicut econtra quamlibet humilem gradum cura diligens erigit, et consuerat’ (McGarry, p. 30).

it makes no progress. But the one that goes to neither extreme [and walks], both because it has its feet on the ground so it can firmly stand, and because it can climb, provides the prospect of progress and is admirably suited for philosophising'.

Could it be argued then that the liberal arts are made, not born? Is John divesting the liberal arts of the capacity to produce sacred truth? Cary Nederman argues that not to be the case. Rather, he argues that John utilizes Aristotle in a manner that allows him to recognize the sacred potential of language, whilst still conceding its social formation: ‘John’s exceptionally vast knowledge of Aristotle placed him on the cutting edge of contemporary scholarship’. John’s belief that true knowledge must be achieved through application and reiteration, and that language is the storehouse of civilized culture, is similar to the Aristotelian notion of *Habitus*. *Habitus* is the condition or disposition that pervades the nature of the knowledge of an individual. It is the capacity of the individual to produce in themselves, through assiduous application, an ‘ingrained inclination of a subject or substance to behave according to a definite principle of action’. As such, for John, the trivium is equipped to produce a moral as well as an intellectual education, for then, grammar, dialectic, and rhetoric become more than method. They become structures of the mind, reproduced in all aspects of communicative life, and as structures of the mind, they come into being. This then relates to John’s dislike of excess and his love of moderation as demonstrated by his critique of the Cornificians and his respectful narration of Bernard of Chartres classroom. John’s belief in the power of education to inculcate an appropriate *habitus* in the individual means that any excess at all, of arrogance or timidity, undermines the construction of *habitus*, for if minds are led in the wrong direction, inappropriate qualities will then be ingrained. Nederman argues that John follows Aristotle’s ‘claim that absolutely virtuous soul is characterized by the inculcation of the virtues in their proper measure.’

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14 Nederman, p. 271.

15 Nederman, p. 279.
This is not to say, however, that the *Metalogicon* is a solely Aristotelian text. John writes in the first book of the *Metalogicon* that nature ‘has thus effected, by her affectionate care and well ordered plan that, even though he is oppressed and handicapped by the burden of his earthly nature and the sluggishness of his physical body, the human may still rise to higher things’.\(^{16}\) As evident from the Augustinian inflection of the quotation, and many others like it, the *Metalogicon* cannot necessarily be said to be an Aristotelian text *per se*. John himself does not claim Aristotle’s authority in all matters. He writes that ‘one embarking upon a study of the works of peripatetics, should accept the judgement of Aristotle. Perhaps not because it is truer, but clearly because it is more suited to these studies’.\(^{17}\) The *Metalogicon* defies such taxonomies as ‘Aristotelian’ or ‘Platonic’. Rather, it relies on a distinction between ontology and semantics. On the one hand, John speaks of the inability of man to know truth fully. In the last book of the *Metalogicon*, John’s language becomes increasingly theological, lamenting the fragility of human knowledge and bemoaning post-lapsarian ignorance of the real. On the other hand, John speaks confidently of the capacity of human knowledge to be consistent and representative. He portrays a universe which is integrated and fluid.

The creative Trinity, the one true God, has so arranged the parts of the universe for the bonding of a stronger tie and for the preservation of charity, that they mutually compensate for their respective deficiencies, all things being, so to speak, ‘members of one another’. All things lack something when they are isolated, and are perfected on being united since they mutually support each other.\(^{18}\)

For John, the human subject must be aware of two levels of knowing. One level is the knowledge of the profound incapacity of the soul’s relationship to being.

\(^{16}\) *Met.* I, 13–18: ‘id agens sedulitate officiosa et lege dispositissima, ut homo qui grauadine faeculentioris naturae et molis corporeae tarditate premebatur et trahebatur ad ima, his quasi subuectus alis ad alta conscendat’ (McGarry, p. 9).

\(^{17}\) *Met.*, II. 20, 522–25: ‘sed ei qui peripaticorum libros aggreditur, magis Aristotilis sententia sequenda est. Forte non quia verior, sed plane quia his disciplinis magis accomoda est’ (McGarry, p. 140).

\(^{18}\) *Met.*, I. 1, 32–36: ‘Sic enim ad firmioris nexus compagem et caritatis custodiam universitatis partes creatrix Trinitas Deus unus et uerus ordinavit, ut alterius ope res altera indigeret, et altera defectum suppleret alterius, dum sunt singula quasi singulorum membra. Semiplena sunt ergo omnia si abinuicem dissoluantur, sed aliorum foederatione perfecta, quoniam omnia mutuis constant auxiliis’ (McGarry p. 10).
The individual is implored in the *Metalogicon* to accept humbly the limitations of human knowledge. Human knowledge, however, is for John still capable of reasoning itself into a working society. It might not be able to conceive of Truth *per se*, but it is certainly able to build its own truths, which make the world possible.

Appreciation of John’s distinction between knowledge and truth allows us to return to his solution of the universals debate. The process of categorizing individual things is important to John not for the purposes of relating to the broader ontological framework of the universe, but as a means to the organisation of the earthly world. His notion of universals as learning tools, fictions which produce knowledge of things, relates very firmly to his approximation of what humans are licensed to know. Likewise, he believes in the trivium as the means to complete inculcation of moral, social, and intellectual value. He writes that ‘In accordance with the divine plan, and in order to provide verbal intercourse, humans first of all named those things which lay before them, formed and fashioned by nature’s hand out of the four elements or from matter and form.’19 Yet, as we have seen, he theorizes the possible relativities of language. The temporal narrative of Christianity, especially that of creation and the fall, pervades the *Metalogicon*. It is within his evocations of this narrative that John marks the boundaries of human knowledge. At the same time, however, there is a parallel story which explores man’s capacity to produce culture for himself, to uncover truth through language and communication, and to fortify the world morally through learning.

As suggested earlier, one clue into the context for John’s intellectual perspective might lie in his account of the trial of Gilbert of Poitiers. The trial is concerned with the limitations of the liberal arts to produce truth. It is a confrontation between the notion that there are truths that are above language, that cannot be spoken and the idea that language (when used properly) is productive of truth. Bernard charges Gilbert with undermining the sacred unity of the Trinity. Bernard contends that Gilbert commits heresy in his explanation of the mystery of three-in-one. In John’s account he not only narrates the trial, but also reads it, launching into an excursus into the various motivations and

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interests of the participants. And the hero of his story is unquestionably Gilbert of Poitiers. So in order to read John reading the trial, and thereby provide an insight into John’s context, it is necessary to first engage with Gilbert’s thought, to understand the ideas that underpin John’s narration of the trial.

Most commentators agree that the one idea which might seem to reverberate throughout the whole of Gilbert’s writings is his distinction between *id quod* (that which is) and *id quo* (that by which a thing is). This distinction provides a key into both his epistemology and his ontology. He uses it to set up the parameters within which knowledge might be attained. It also, however, forms the basis for the way he conceives of trinitarian concerns. *Id quod* is the concrete, created thing. *Id quo* is the formal aspect of the thing. *Id quo* is that which constitutes the individuality of a thing. *Id quod* is the entity itself. At first glance it is a distinction that hardly seems startling at all, or even particularly difficult. Following Priscian, it would seem to follow the grammatical line of the time, that a noun is defined by substance and quality. Or likewise, the distinction seems another way of defining the Platonic dualism of matter and form, further emphasized by the knowledge that Gilbert does indeed use the terms *materia* and *forma*, equating them with *id quod* and *id quo* respectively. Gilbert’s distinction does, however, occupy quite different territory to the Platonic use of those terms. Gilbert’s notion of *materia* is not an inert and shapeless substance, waiting to be given life by *forma*. Rather, each formulation of *materia* or *id quod* is a thing in itself. *Id quod* is the site of ‘thingness’. The concept of *that which is* describes every thing in the world that exists. As such, it does not mean universal matter, unable to be without the injection of form. Instead, *id quod* signifies the composite things of the world – it is the site where form and matter participate in one another and create a concrete thing. *Id quo*, then, means something quite different to the idea of eternal, immutable forms. The idea of *that by which something is* is that the form

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22 *De Trinitate*, I. 2, 89.
is defined in relation to the thing that it has made. It is not defined via its unchangingness or ontological purity, but rather the idea of the form is given life in the creation of a thing. Gilbert has recast the formula with this distinction. While he maintains the crucial dualism between *materiâ* and *forma*, he locates their being only in the concept of the constructed thing. This creation is engendered by Gilbert’s notion of *participatio*. *Participatio* is the idea that each thing takes part in producing its own form, and the form then is immanent in the thing.\(^{23}\) Gilbert’s reworking of the *forma/materiâ* dualism in no way denies the dualism; instead it relocates its existence. The two ideas come into being in their union, rather than in their separation. *Id quod* gives life to *id quo* and vice versa.\(^{24}\) This is the epistemological implication of the distinction. In asserting that *id quod* and *id quo* only exist in relation to each other, he effectively asserts the unknowability of *forma* and *materiâ* as they had been defined, as universal. The implication of saying that the two concepts only exist when united in a thing is to say that separated, they fail to be, that they are mere abstractions. The effect of this demarcation is to locate existence, as it is knowable, in composite beings. As such, Gilbert delimits the potential boundaries of knowledge. *Id quo* only exists in concrete things, and thus they can only be known through things. In so doing, Gilbert asserts the capacity of inquiry to locate Truth in the world of composite things; in so doing he removes *Deus* from the scrutiny of that framework.

Gilbert’s distinction between *id quod* and *id quo* locates potential knowledge of the universal only in concrete things. Truth can only be contemplated by humans when invested in matter. We have seen how John posits a similar solution to the problem of universals. In the *Metalogicon*, he rejects an essentialist approach which would aim to categorize the difference between matter and form. Rather, John is concerned with the relationship between the two. John is interested in the way in which truth resides in the social world, and the way in which appropriate knowledges can be produced for its contemplation. He is not concerned to isolate form from matter, but rather wants to ponder their merging in particular things or words. In the same way, Gilbert is concerned with charting the relationship between *id quod* and *id quo*. This is not to say that John is a slavish follower of Gilbert. Instead, it is to point out that John’s intellectual perspective is formed

\(^{23}\) Gilbert of Poitiers, *Contra Euticen et Nestorium* I. 1, 242. and *De Trinitate*, I. 2, 82. See Neilsen, *Theology and Philosophy*, pp. 47–49 for further explanations of these concepts.

within the context of this particular type of thinking, as is evident in his support for Gilbert of Poitiers in the *Historia Pontificalis*.

John tells us that:

Master Gilbert, bishop of Poitiers, the most learned man of our day, was summoned to the court to answer the abbot of Clairvaux – a man of the greatest eloquence and highest repute ... For certain statements had been found in the bishop’s commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius and the writings of his pupils which seemed reprehensible to the learned, either because they were inconsistent with accepted beliefs or because, through novelty of expression, they seemed inconsistent.  

From the start, we are made aware that the stakes are high and that both participants are venerable in their own right.

Nonetheless, John of Salisbury implies very quickly the idea that the trial was as political as it was theological. After telling us that Gilbert’s most virulent attackers were two of his archdeacons, as well as Suger, Peter Lombard, and Robert of Melun, John says

I cannot say whether they acted out of zeal for the faith, or jealousy of his fame and merit, or a desire to propitiate the abbot, whose influence was then at its height and whose counsel was most weighty in the affairs of the church and state alike.  

John maps the stakeholders in the trial, those concerned with orthodoxy, those concerned with Gilbert’s fame, those wanting to remain in the favour of Bernard. John makes it clear that he cannot tell which are which, that the trial blends various motivations. He is also keen to induct into his account the intellectual equality of the two protagonists. According to John, the trial consists of a battle between equally venerable figures, one who embodies the possibilities of the

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25 M. Chibnall (ed. and trans.), *Historia Pontificalis* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1956), 8:15: ‘Evocatus apparebat in curia vir etate nostra litteratissimus magister Gislebertus episcopus Pictavorum, responsurus clarissime opinionis et eloquentissimo viro abbatii Clarevallensi...Nam et in commento eiusdem episcopi super Boetium de Trinitate et in scriptis discipulorum inveniebantur plura digna ut sapientibus videbatur reprehensio, vel quia non consonabant regulis, vel quia ex novitate verborum absens videbantur.’

26 *Historia Pontificalis*, 7:16: ‘Incetum habeo an zelo fidei, an emulatione nominis clarioris et meriti, an ut sic promererentur abbatem, cuius tunc summa erat auctoritas, cuius consilio tam sacerdocium quam regnum pre ceteris agebatur.’
liberal arts – he is litteratissimus – and the other, Bernard, a man defined by reputation. This distinction is important. John implies that Gilbert carries an internal gravitas. Bernard, on the other hand, is a public figure, a rhetorician. The idea, then, that Gilbert was ‘summoned’ to answer Bernard, implies that Gilbert is plucked from his world and brought into the public sphere of Bernard. The two contestants may be intellectual equals, yet John implies that the trial is held in Bernard’s space, on Bernard’s terms.

With great diplomacy then, John intimates that Bernard may be the villain of the piece. John reminds the reader about Bernard’s history with Abelard, writing that ‘he [Bernard] attacked the two men most famous for their learning – Peter Abailard and this same Gilbert – and pursued them with such zeal that he secured the condemnation of Peter and only just failed to have the other condemned’. John merges the two attempted condemnations into a sign of the same Bernardine penchant for destroying the careers of scholastic luminaries. He implies, again, that the attack on Gilbert exists to serve the interests of Bernard, rather than concern for orthodoxy. In underplaying the specificity of the Abelard case, John turns Bernard’s two attacks into symptoms of a polemical trope, rather than genuine attempts to respond to particular theological challenges.

After his introduction of Gilbert and Bernard, John then relates the meeting Bernard called with his supporters, writing:

Those present included the late Theobald archbishop of Canterbury and Geoffrey of Bordeaux and Henry of York, and the abbots Suger of St Denis and Baldwin of Chatillon-sur-Seine; and of those now living Thomas archbishop of Canterbury and Roger of York and many others whom it would be tedious to enumerate.

John describes a Bernard who bullies the other participants in the meeting into accepting the alternative headings of the Abbott. He records that many present disapproved of Bernard’s method of procuring assent, but that they feared

27 Historia Pontificalis, 8:16: ‘quod uiros in litteris famosissimos, Petrum Abaelardum et prefatum Gislebertum, tanto studio insectatus est, ut alterum Petrum scilicet condemnari fecerit, alterum adhibita omni diligentia nisus sit condemnare.’

28 Historia Pontificalis, 8:17: ‘Affuerunt enim bone memorie Theobaldus Cantuariensis at Gaufridus Burdegalensis et Henricus Eboracensis archiepiscopi, Sigerius sancti Dionisi, et Balduinus Castellionis super Secanem abbates, et qui adhuc supersunt Thomas Cantuariensis at Rogerus Eboracensis arciepiscopi at alii plurimi quos enarrare longum est.’
offending Bernard with argument.\textsuperscript{29} The tension of the meeting is diffused, according to John, by Robert de Bosco’s suggestion that the history of debates about such subject matter was fraught and that, as such, the meeting should suspend final judgement until the council.\textsuperscript{30}

The fact of the meeting is the key to John’s narrative construction of the trial. He argues that those outside the Gallic church who were present at the trial felt that Bernard was attempting to overtake correct procedure. The anger on the part of the Curia when they heard about Bernard’s meeting produced a division, as John would have it, between the Gallic church in opposition to the English church and the Curia. This, then, supports John’s inference that the conflict of the trial stood in for other tensions, political and institutional. John holds that the cardinals:

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agreed among themselves to support the cause of the bishop of Poitiers, saying that the abbot had attacked master Peter in exactly the same way; but he had not had access to the apostolic see, which was accustomed to confound schemes of this kind and snatch the weak from the clutches of the strong.\textsuperscript{31}
\end{quote}

John aligns himself firmly with the Curia in this passage. That the Curia should also elide the difference between the case of Abelard and that of Gilbert consolidates John’s prior words and places his loyalties firmly within the camp of the cardinals. It also removes Gilbert’s agency and specificity; he becomes a pawn in the personality politics occurring between the Curia and Bernard. In fact, John says explicitly that the Curia read Bernard’s attack on Gilbert as an effort to unite the Gallic and English churches against the papacy, so that the papacy would be rendered impotent, and would have to acquiesce to Bernard under the threat of schism.\textsuperscript{32} Bernard is clearly the troublemaker of John’s narrative. He is the actor around whom all must respond. As John writes it, the Curia and Gilbert are both subject to Bernard; they are responding to the energy

\textsuperscript{29} Historia Pontificalis, 8:18.
\textsuperscript{30} Historia Pontificalis, 8:19.
\textsuperscript{31} Historia Pontificalis, 9:19–20: ‘condixerunt ergo fouere causam domini Pictauensis, dicentes quod abbas arte simili magistrum Petrum agressus erat; sed ille sedis apostolice non habuerat copiam, que consueuit machinationes huiusmodi reprobare et de manu potentioris eruere pauperam.’
\textsuperscript{32} Historia Pontificalis, 9:20.
John of Salisbury’s Metalogicon and Historia Pontificalis

and the power that is Bernard. For ‘once given the chance of speaking he [Bernard] almost always made his will prevail’.  

Gilbert of Poitiers is constructed as the inverse of Bernard. John writes that:

The bishop, trusting in the support and advice of the cardinals, joined conflict with confidence, and though many men questioned him searchingly he supported his answers with such sound arguments and authorities that he could not be tripped up verbally.

Gilbert answers polemic with surety, verbal games with complete arguments. Where Bernard is rhetorical, busy, and powerful, Gilbert is rooted solidly in authority. Gilbert is the discreet hero of John’s narrative, whose armour is his high degree of literacy, his compendious erudition. John tells us that at the trial ‘I cannot recall that anyone boasted there of having read anything he had not read.’ John’s depiction of Gilbert does not illuminate the particular character and personality of Gilbert. Rather, it seems that John uses the figure of Gilbert to proffer an opposite to Bernard. He says of Gilbert that:

He was not, he said, a heretic and would never be one, for he was ready and always had been to recognise truth and respect apostolic doctrine; for it was not ignorance of truth that made a heretic, but pride of spirit giving rise to contumacy and presuming to cause disputes and schisms.

For Gilbert, according to John, heresy can reside within the smallest margins for error. In contrast to Bernard, who casts a polemical sweep through the notion of heresy, implying that all heresies are one and the same, Gilbert suggests that heresy can be subtle, and results from the twisting of authority. For Gilbert, intellectual heresy resides not so much in clear evil intent, but within the

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33 Historia Pontificalis, 10:21: ‘Nam data sibi dicendi facultate, fere persuadebat semper desiderio suo.’

34 Historia Pontificalis, 10:21: ‘Episcopus uero fretus auxilio et consilio cardinalium conflictum adiit confidenter, et de pluribus et a pluribus interrogatus, sic auctoritatibus et rationibus responsa muniebat, ut capi non potuerit in sermone.’

35 Historia Pontificalis, 10:21: ‘Non memini tamen quempiam gloriatum ibi se legisse quod ille non legerat’

36 Historia Pontificalis, 10:22: ‘Dicebat se nec esse hereticum nec futurum, qui paratus erat et semper fuerat acquiescere veritati et apostolicam sequi doctrina; hereticum namque facit non ignorantia ueri, sed mentis elatio contumatiam pariens, et in contentionies et scismatis presumptionem erumpens.’

misreading of textual traditions. In casting this distinction between two notions of heresy, John extrapolates into a broader comparison of the textual worlds of Gilbert and Bemard. He recalls Gilbert saying:

perhaps he had shared the fate of the Fathers, in that obstinate and untrained minds had read errors into his words; which, as his great favourite St Hilary says, might contain true knowledge of the faith and yet lay traps for uninstructed readers.37

Gilbert’s conceptual world, John suggests in recounting this comment, lay beyond the scope of Bernard’s hermeneutics. John’s point is to argue that Bernard simply could not understand the minutiae of Gilbert’s thought. John recalls inviting Gilbert to meet with Bernard after the trial to discuss Hilary:

He however replied that they had already disputed significantly on the matter and if the abbot wished to reach a full understanding of Hilary he should first seek further instruction in the liberal arts and in other preliminary studies.38

John implies once again, that the trial was concerned with much more than Gilbert’s thought. Gilbert’s thought was the fulcrum on which the trial rested; however it was not discussed in any depth. The headings against Gilbert merely provided the text around which Bernard could intimate the subtext, which was his confrontation with the Curia.

That John should tells us that ‘though they were both exceptionally learned and eloquent men, but with differing fields of study’ is quite pointed.39 John’s account of the trial is premised upon two contentions. One is that which was discussed earlier, that the trial served to play out political tensions that had nothing to do with the figure of Gilbert himself. The other contention that runs throughout John’s account is that the Abbot and the Bishop had mutually exclusive hermeneutics, which could not be spoken across. Their intellectual

37 Historia Pontificalis, 13:29: ‘Sibi dicebat fortasse similiter patribus prouenisse ut ingenia peruersa et minus exercitata errauerint ex verbis eius, que, sicut ait familiarissimus beatus Hylarius, habere poterant et fidei conscientam et fraudem paratam.’

38 Historia Pontificalis, 12:26: ‘Ille uero respondit iam satis esse quod hucusque contenderant, et abbatem, si plenam intelligenciam Hylarii affectaret, prius in disciplinis liberalibus et alis prediscendis pleniis instrui oportere.’

39 Historia Pontificalis, 12:26: ‘Erant tamen ambo optime litterati et admodum eloquentes sed dissimilibus studiis.’
difference, John implies, was incontrovertible. For John, then, the trial is a story of two sets of oppositions. One is the opposition between the French and English Church against the Curia. The other is the opposition between the hermeneutical strategies of Bernard and Gilbert. As John tells it, these two oppositions run parallel, with little intersection, and yet both constitute the story, the only intersection being the figure of Bernard, who stands for both the Gallic Church and monastic exegesis in the same instance. As such, John proffers an exemplum of the manner in which political and intellectual concerns met in the twelfth century, with Bernard as the confused anti-hero and Gilbert as the learned sage.

The trial of Gilbert of Poitiers is written by John as a story of contestation. It is concerned with showing that all language is necessarily social, marked by political allegiance or personal concerns. John uses the figure of Gilbert to prove the point he makes with such vigour in the *Metalogicon*, that it is only those who protect language in learning who are able to use it in an appropriate way. John writes of Gilbert in his account that ‘he held that the disciplines are interrelated, and them minister to theology, yet applied all rules strictly to their own class, and are misused whenever they are more widely applied’.40 John contends that Gilbert’s trial is an example of the linguistic confusion that can occur when the rules of language are not observed; meaning and motivation can become confused and language is thus abused.

John tells us in the *Metalogicon* that he ‘returning [to Paris] sought out Master Gilbert, whose disciple I became in dialectical and theological subjects’.41 In the *Historia Pontificalis*, John certainly displays this discipleship explicitly, to the extent of elevating Gilbert over Bernard. This is not to say that John was a Gilbertian thinker. John was a thinker, as we have seen, capable of synthesizing and applying a number of different influences and genres into his work. Instead, it is fairer to say that the example of Gilbert provides for John an important proof of his own understanding of language and truth in society. John uses Gilbert as the emblem of his own theological positioning. In so doing, he takes us back to the *Metalogicon* and reinforces his belief in the capacity of language to produce productive truth, but only when protected by reverence, erudition and discipline.

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40 *Historia Pontificalis*, 12:27.
Established in 1987, Shakespeare in Southern Africa publishes articles, commentary and reviews on all aspects of Shakespearean studies and performance, with a particular emphasis on the response to Shakespeare in southern Africa. Specialised scholarship relating, for example, to Shakespeare in other media, Shakespearean influence in visual art, music and dance, Shakespeare in popular culture, Shakespeare in education and the history of local and international Shakespearean stage production is welcomed. The journal also carries theatre and book reviews.

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