The *persona* of the philosopher and the rhetorics of office in 16\textsuperscript{th} and 17\textsuperscript{th} century England.

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Through the work of writers such as Marcel Mauss, Ernst Kantorowicz and more recently Erving Goffman, notions of personae and role-play have become familiar, being used to provide organisational and explanatory models for understanding society. What is meant by a persona can however be quite variable. At one extreme, it is little more than a performed role and presupposes an inner but ultimately accessible moral and decision making agent who decides when to adopt a persona and when to put it aside. The inner ‘self’ is thus a postulated *explanans* for conduct. By the same token, we can hypothesise patterns of tension and socialised pressure when society or a group expects a persona to be adopted and so compromises the autonomy of the moral agent. As Michael Sandel has expressed it in abridging a major focus of communitarian social theory, selves are always socially situated and partially defined by the roles they play.\(^1\) Such triadic models of inner self, role and society have been taken back into the early modern world, for example, by Stephen Greenblatt in the highly influential *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* to analyze, *inter alia*, More’s ‘Dialogue of Counsel’ in *Utopia*, seen as a debate between Hythloday an unencumbered Self, and Morus, the socially constructed role-player, the point being to illustrate that the Renaissance self was fully aware of the necessities of role-play and the constraints placed upon its freedom.

At another, extreme, however, is the notion of persona as a manifestation and representative of an office, an embodiment of a moral economy. It is this that Kantorowicz explored with respect to medieval kingship. The office is a whole sphere of responsibilities, rights of action for their fulfillment, necessary attributes, skills, specific virtues, and concomitant vices and failures. The persona is an authentic type carried by a physical body. Kantorowicz’s argument was devoted to one institutionalised and
ceremonially proclaimed office; but in fact, medieval and early modern England was structured by networks of such institutionalized offices into which people were inducted with the ritual formality of oath-administering and taking. The oaths often elaborated in detail the duties defining the persona. At once, such oaths proclaimed the liberties of office given to the persona and advertised the responsibilities that justified them, thus arming others with criteria to assess conduct. Such transformative and affirmative patterns of induction into office gave a religious dimension to identity, from midwife to monarch. This was at once a blessing and a curse, should the persona abuse office.

The world of social offices has recently begun to receive the attention it deserves, although the correlate that people in office were seen morally as personae, not as individuals, or ‘selves’ has been less explored. I only wish to note two things at this point. First, a pervasive notion of office and persona gave a particular structure and character to the vocabulary of moral approbation and critique. That is, promotion of any office and persona was couched in the same general terms of defence and commendation, a positive register of rights, liberties, of duty, rule and service, to the office and often to those protected by it. Conversely, for those who were disappointed in the performance of the persona, a negative register of terms was also available, imputing neglect, oppression and tyranny. Second, then, to claim an office and thereby assume a persona was to gain access to these complementary registers and so acquire a social voice. And this went well beyond formally institutionalized social offices. These may have provided authenticating models for how people talked, and certainly, the vocabulary of institutionalized office flowed through to the less formal offices of the intellect: those of poet, rhetor and philosopher. And it may be that people assuming such personae had to work harder to assure others that there was an office and that the persona was genuinely responsible to and representative of it. This, as I will suggest has a relevance to the establishment of The Royal Society, not as a leap towards the modern world, let alone the modern self, but as an attempt to reassure a potentially suspicious society by embedding the new science in an established environment of social office.

The twin determinants of any office were its end, telos, and its limit; assertions as to end and limit thus were the axes for the definition of a persona, and the qualities that best fitted the end and recognized the limits of the office. This notion of persona as an
expression of office is, I believe, more appropriate to understanding the ancient and early modern world as a whole than is one of persona as self and role. It is also more closely related to the original notion of a persona, from the stereotypical mask worn by an actor to manifest a type, such as the slave, or warrior. Pierre Hadot has done much to alert us of the relevance of this to the philosopher in antiquity, for the philosopher, much like his intellectual companions or competitors, the rhetor or the poet, represented or manifested an activity through persona. He might not wear a mask, but like the poet or the rhetor who donned purple robes, he might well dress in a way that advertised his life form; in this way, as I will suggest, the question of wearing a beard was a semiotic aspect of a philosophical identity, as was plain or even tattered clothing.

To clarify the difference between role and office, it is worth noting that the actor was attacked as having no office, as exhibiting and encouraging the protean irresponsibility of role play. When defended, however, it was argued that he had an office. Thus it was maintained that player’s persona lay not in any specific role, but in the responsibilities to poet and audience, and these it was urged were moral, requiring judgment and specific skill. The player could be seen as not unlike the priest in having a mediator’s responsibility; and all flexibility and interpretative licence served the theatre’s ‘end...[which] is to hold, as ‘twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature...’ Role was the means of fulfilling the requirements of persona in office. Vivid representation in placing moral types before us is ‘the proper Office, and work of Plays’. These were Hamlet’s sentiments pretty exactly. Again, it is the ‘Office of the Stage to detect roguery’. The qualities of this persona might even be vices in another.

The most general notions under which the way of life of the philosopher might be understood were those of the active or contemplative lives, of negotium and otium. It has, for example, been argued that Greek philosophy was characterized by giving greater weight and prestige to the contemplative life, Roman philosophy to the vita activa. This may work as a generalization; Plato’s philosopher kings have as their reward a life of unalloyed contemplation after they have sullied their hands with the necessities of ruling. Contemplative philosophy is so important that it is doubtful if, in being kings, they can be happy, a problem for the perfect happy polis Plato set out to describe. Yet, philosophers must rule. There is an imperative of office here that renders the Republic
ambivalent in its priorities. Again, Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* is a celebration of the ultimate ideal of philosophic contemplation,—but Aristotle’s greatest praise for Socrates was that he brought philosophy down to the *agora*.

Be this as it may, the counterpoint between a contemplative and an active ideal of the philosophic office, the counterpoint, in short, between differing patterns of moral responsibility towards the end of achieving wisdom, was crucially important in medieval and early modern Europe. This, in fact, is the crux in More’s ‘Dialogue of counsel’, not a debate between a free self and a socialised role-player, but between contrasting personae claiming to represent wisdom, virtue and responsibility; the ultimately Platonic *topos* of *otium* versus *negotium*. This too, is ambivalent. For each vision of office there is a different persona, manifesting divergent qualities, as the character and physical, even semiotic differences between Hythlodaeus and Morus make clear. For the caped and bearded one, the end of true philosophy is the untrammeled pursuit of *honestas*, for Morus, *utilitas*. Each was an aspect of the ideal rhetorical synthesis in any argument. But the dramatic delineation is well served by More’s resisting a resolution between Hythlodaeus and Morus, and thus leaving in the air the question of what really is true wisdom. That indeterminacy, inviting the reader’s active engagement, however, is more congruent with the office of the rhetor whose garb the author More was wearing, than with the philosopher about whom he was writing. For the rhetor had perforce always to vary arguments according to audience and circumstances and it was, according to the ancient Quintilian and the modern Machiavelli, not always possible to argue from *honestas*, or to reconcile it with *utilitas*. The open hand of rhetoric, inviting the reader to engage and think was to be preferred to the closed and dogmatic fist of dialectic. To lose sight of this interplay between and with intellectual office is to drain the personae from the text and leave us only with individual voices and the voices of individuality.

As needs no labouring, More’s *Utopia* was an imaginative if oblique commentary on Plato’s *Republic*, but what greatly complicated matters by the time More wrote, was the entanglement of conceptions of philosophic office, with those of Christianity, which in turn informed the long-standing claims to wisdom made on behalf of rhetoric and poetry.
With respect to Christianity, true wisdom, thus true philosophy was found through Christ and the contemplative ideal and was strongly associated with the highly visible and calibrated monastic way of life. As Thomas Aquinas, that paradigm persona of the contemplative life argued, metaphysics was an office. In the Renaissance and through the Reformation then, the notion of the contemplative life was as much a matter of religion as philosophy, as well it might be, for each involved not just the dogmatics of propositional form, but offered consolation and therapy. Asserting the primacy of the active philosophic life, and denigrating, or even denying the legitimacy of the purely contemplative could be as much a matter of attacking priests and Rome as it was of renegotiating the philosophic persona. Well before The Reformation, Lorenzo Valla, for example, argued quite explicitly that, even at its purest, the contemplative life was inferior to the active. After The Reformation, Bacon wrote in the same idiom; as a Protestant as well as a philosopher; his image of the purely contemplative life, like Valla’s is that of the monk in service to God. That this is, explicitly an office, erodes the firm distinction between active and contemplative and made it easier to see all philosophy, directly or indirectly as properly aiding the commonwealth. Aristotle and then Marsilius had insisted that religion properly had this supporting function.

Additionally to all this, the Christianisation of the contemplative ideal cast the postulated human soul in the image of the inner, or even the true philosopher. The vocabulary of office was one dominant linguistic resource for hypothesizing the human soul, God and the relationship between them. If, as was sometimes said, God’s office was to rule, ruling the soul became a relationship of office, and the soul’s understanding of its subject status could be construed in terms of true wisdom, of total freedom in subjection. By the same token, metaphors of social office could re-enforce and help shape that purely conjectured inner ‘self-like’ identity. The soul could be a judge, a ruler, a philosopher, all without significant contradiction, for all were variations upon and attempts to grasp aspects of an inner office. On a range of issues then, arguments about the ends or scope of philosophy could become arguments about religious office.

I want now to turn at greater length to the relationships between poetry, rhetoric and philosophy, for each needed re-asserting as an office during the Reformation, that is needed a new religious authentication. What I want to illustrate is that a common
promotional rhetoric of office, and so the means of establishing and presenting a persona, was shared across contested intellectual activities. That is, because a persona was a manifestation of a claimed and crafted office, the semantic content of personae (the mix of moral values, skills, attitudes and aptitudes) exhibits a strong family resemblance across philosophy, poetry and rhetoric. At once this inhibited disciplinary insulation and concomitantly this means now that the differences have to be looked for in the pragmatic mix of how the shared semantic resources were employed and to what purpose.

Further, if philosophy was the love of wisdom, rhetors and poets might either claim to be superior to, or to be true philosophers. The upshot, is a little paradoxical: the one thing we don’t need is an awareness of the discipline of philosophy as it later stood or stands, to understand how people made philosophical claims. To over-extend a distinctive discipline in time (assuming it now to have a stable identity), is actually to beg the question of how such a discipline did emerge. To put the matter another way, insofar as we assume that it is the present discipline of philosophy that needs explaining historically, contexts are likely to be narrowed to matters of doctrinal content to fit the end result. This problem of what I’ve elsewhere called structural anachronism, is endemic to attempts to write the history of activities such as philosophy; but equally, to rectify the imbalance by widening our notion of context, evokes a spectre of contextual différence.

To focus on the persona and office of the philosopher — as opposed to the doctrinal content of the activity that nowadays defines the discipline, that drives the history, that narrows the context, that begs the question, that looks anachronistic — may minimize the hermeneutic difficulty. To focus on the claimed persona of the philosopher in the context of bracing but sometimes confusing competition may also help.

II

It must be stressed immediately that in touching on the literature of poetics, we are confronting a world in which, as Samuel Daniel put it, ‘of one science another may be born’. In the organized studies of the universities the parts of trivium and quadrivium were neither exhaustive nor incontestably distinct. From the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, the shifting domains of intellectual endeavor were variously mapped in order
to consolidate human knowledge. There was no certain place, for example, for mathematics which touched music, magic, natural science and the practicalities of navigation. It might be, as Galileo had put it, the language of God, but it came in competing dialects, deductive and probabilistic; in static, certain geometry and mobile, suggestive algebra. Richard Mulcaster saw logic as the grammar of mathematics, yet on the eve of Newtonian pre-eminence, John Eachard could see the two as combining no better than black pudding and anchovy sauce. Logic itself might be included and excluded from philosophy. There was no literature, but there was a crucial but variable understanding of poetics.

In post-Reformation England the poet sometimes needed defending against the ancient accusation of lying, and of being a prop to purgatory, that most self-serving of the delusions of Catholicism. Just as negatively, the poet could also be associated with undisciplined and prophetic incantation of enthusiasm. The defence of poetry and of the poet, then, frequently had a theological point or shifted into theology, or philosophy on the authority of Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Not surprisingly, the poetic also needed to be circumscribed in tension with competing claimants to human wisdom, such as history, rhetoric and philosophy. Intellectual identity might simply be assumed in re-characterizing poetry; but invocations of office were always available as introductory ploys. They became most significant when used to define the ends and limits of the activity, to proclaim a superiority over competitors; or to allay suspicion and stabilise the contours of discourse all too easily susceptible to accusations of irresponsibility.

Typically, however, the defence of poetry was a defence of its manifesting persona. This is particularly clear in a number of treatments of rhetoric and poetry and in this limited context of discussion, the two can be treated in tandem—for there was no less a theological edge given in The Reformation to suspicions of the rhetor’s irresponsible powers and bogus wisdom. In the tragedy of the poet Collingbourne gruesomely executed for his lines ‘The Cat, the Rat and Lovel our Dog/Do rule al England vnnder a Hog’, the argument is that under a tyranny the office of the poet is dangerous. If the office of rule sustains other offices, the ultimate form of misrule contaminates them. The voice of Collingbourne states that ‘The Greekes do paynt a Poetes office whole’, and he proceeds to outline the necessary qualities and responsibilities through the metaphor of
Pegasus. The poet must be chaste and virtuous, ‘nymble, free and swyft’; in a tyranny decidedly swift. Mistakenly, he had thought the poet’s ancient liberty to chastise, and correct could be pleaded at any bar ‘I had forgot howe newefound tyrannies/ Wyth ryght and freedome were at open warre’. The Liberty of any office is predictably in tension with tyranny. Yet, however circumspect, indirect or jesting the poet is advised to be, the office remains to trade in moral truths.

For all its abstract economy and emphasis on procedure, Bacon’s *Advancement of Learning* illustrates a similar point with respect to rhetoric. The principal distinctions between poetry, history and philosophy, are primarily related to, spring from, serve, or express (the relationships are not uniform) a human faculty. Poetry expresses imagination, history is memory and philosophy is reason. A well digested sense of office is there as an occasional point of reference. Throughout the text, Bacon occasionally shifts from accounts of intellectual procedure to what the practitioner, such as the musician, or poet actually does, in a way that makes clear that each has intellectual responsibilities, virtues and spheres or ends to be served. If a man, as rhetorician speaks to different people he should do so in different ways, as he should not if the discourse is purely logical. This places rhetoric, as Aristotle argued, between logic and civic knowledge. For Bacon, ‘the duty and office of Rhetoric is, to apply reason to the imagination for the better moving of the will.’ How a man should speak is a function of persona. Further, the complementary scope of each sphere of learning is a way of insisting that conversation between them makes the *vita contemplativa* as a whole an aid to the commonwealth. *The Advancement of Learning* is an elaborate defence of what George Pettie, translating Stephano Guarizzo, had put as a statement of fact: all learning must be of use, the means to which is conversation. This has its own office in the perfection of learning.

In other more clearly apologetic writers, the imagery of office and persona is persistent as a mode of justification. The conventional early modern ideal of the poet was cloaked in the authority of antiquity. In Greece poets had been associated with divine inspiration, Homer’s blindness a gift of the gods that he might see further into people and the true nature of things. Traditionally draped in purple, the poet was both a maker, or creator and a teacher whose standing Plato in particular felt the need to confront directly
in asserting the primacy of philosophy. In lowland Scots as well as English, the term maker could mean poet, and Sidney in his *Apology* and then Jonson in *Timber* drew on the philology of *poietes* to emphasise the poet’s creative capacities. Each elaborates on a pattern of responsibilities, Jonson explicitly approaching the critical ideal of a poem by detailing the qualities necessary for the poet, natural wit, a capacity to imitate nature, hard work and learning. Much the same pattern of justificatory moves is found in advancing rhetoric. As the sophists had co-opted the purple cloaks of the poets by the fifth century B.C., so there is a sort of clothes stealing between the theorists of poetry and rhetoric.

Since antiquity poetry and rhetoric alike had been associated with magic, the capacity to make and re-make social reality as the magician could re-make nature; and so to allay suspicion of the consequences of such transformatory power, the promoters of the activities laid a balancing insistence on responsibility, the primacy of decorum and service or subordination to something greater. What in a word, made something a liberty and not a licence, made transformation and invention good things, was the end of the office served and the limit observed by the persona. Even Plato (as Sidney insisted) considered the powers of poetry and rhetoric permissible if subject to the arbitration of philosophy, the love of wisdom. Cicero and Quintilian with respect to rhetoric, Longinus with respect to poetry, trod in his footsteps.

The understandings and expectations of poetry and rhetoric through medieval times and into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries continued to move within this compass. In the most general terms this was to participate in a veritable tradition of discussion of Man as *imago Dei* which perforce involved the correlates of an omnipotent voluntarist God and a responsible rational creator. Man as the image of God was wonderfully creative, but to a point or end: even in its most hyperbolic celebrations, such as that put forth by Marsilio Ficino, it was an image of office. From The Reformation, however, as I have intimated, the stress on the persona of the good rhetorician or poet, became rich with religious denominational implication and could sometimes be used to re-specify the nature and significance of theology. Thus Richard Pace on the much cited opening of Cicero’s *De inventione*: as eloquence founds cities and helps create all the arts, so its role in theology is central. The good man, rhetorician and Christian are one in creative
responsibility; Christ is the paradigm of great oratory, good rhetoric a form of *imitatio Christi*. The Protestant Thomas Wilson later made similar claims on the authority of the same Ciceronian text. The rhetor, we are persuaded, comes close to God in his capacity to make and civilise, not because of any uncontrolled and limitless power, but because he gives a wise ordering. Without him, duty, service, callings, vocations cannot be sustained. He is, in short, God-like, a microcosm of God’s own office of offices, the closer he is to God, the closer to wisdom itself. As George Puttenham also argued, reclaiming the rhetor’s purple to adorn the poet, because of the ‘high charge and function’ of poetry, it was necessary for poets to live holy lives, deep in study and contemplation. Because of their virtue, poets were fit for prophecy and were the first lawmakers and politicians (as well as being the first philosophers) keeping the commonwealth in order. The poet is an epitome of decorum, of ‘seemliness’. Comeliness, discretion, decency, Puttenham’s terms of amplification for seemliness, all imply discipline and moderation as a control on the transgressions of figurative creativity. Decorum is the courtly poet’s *sprezzatura* that makes him an honest man and not a mere cunning dissembler. This kind of argument would echo through the pages of *Paradise Lost* in which Christ is the supreme rhetorician, Lucifer the inverted parody, whose eloquence can sustain only a travesty of a properly ordered world.

Sidney’s *Apology* is perhaps the most famous encapsulation of these themes. Although an apology for poetry, his discourse is of poets, in the dissonant context of historians and philosophers. The central claim is that of these, only the poet is a second creator to ‘be counted supernatural’ and ‘ranging freely within the zodiac of his own wit’. The poet is at once an imitator and a maker. This ranging is never a matter of capricious invention or undisciplined imagination, let alone popish fantasy to serve the interests of priests. Even when trading in the comic, the poet is a figure of responsibility. He was neither eccentric nor an individual, questing after originality for its own sake. He was more of a craftsman, tied to God’s creation and in service to an ethical vision. All the intellectual arts, and poetry’s immediate competitors are, he argued, ‘serving sciences’. Their shared end is to draw us as close to perfection as possible. The poet serves this end best by providing perfect pictures that transcend the limited precepts of philosophy and the examples of history. Concomitantly, it is the
office of the poet to secure reformed religion, poetry can be an idiom of proper devotion. This ethos of creative religious responsibility established by co-opting the abstract vocabulary of office is re-enforced by reference to Cicero. Additionally, just as the informal office of the player might be buttressed by alignment with the institutionalized office of priest as a mediator and mentor, so Sidney associates the poet with the formal social offices of lawyer, physician and above all through metaphor with the monarch, in his creative and ordering duties. Poetry, he had remarked at the outset, is ‘my own elected vocation’.

In *Timber* Jonson was reflecting as much on his own chosen, or manufactured vocation of poetic critic as on poetry itself. Poetry is the queen of the arts, supreme in status, above even oratory. This standing had made sound criticism all the more important. It was Aristotle, he remarked, the greatest of philosophers, who taught the offices of proper criticism, judgment and the imitation of virtue. This ‘office of a true critic’ is no mere tinkering, nor is it a matter of dictating strict laws for poets to follow. It is rather a matter of sincere judgment of the poet and subject. Effectively the poetic critic is the mediator, the priest of the poet’s divine order.

III

I want now to turn directly to office and persona of the philosopher, because what I have so far sketched has been the use of contested resources that were employed also to promote philosophy itself as an office. This should not be surprising, for defences of poetry and rhetoric made specific claims to wisdom, and as conventionally philosophy was love of wisdom, this could be to appropriate philosophy to other intellectual domains. This tactic can be found in the writings of Sidney, Puttenham and Wilson who thus exploited the almost indiscriminate range that philosophy could have, even to the knowledge of all arts under heaven and on earth. Philosophy could quite properly refer not to any specific activity, but to the end of any of them. Philosophical eclecticism exacerbated the potential instability. The philosopher could be a hunter and gather of other people’s gems of wisdom, so adhering to no stable propositional doctrine. And, though largely filtered out of professional philosophy’s own sense of its past, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, eclecticism was pervasive. So, in another sense of
the word philosophy, it could be all the more important to establish the philosopher as someone with a specific identity, a persona of his own.

Plato had made the most ambitious claims for the ordering intellectual authority of the philosopher. Aristotle had in some ways muted them and Aquinas had argued explicitly that metaphysics in particular had an office, conceived of in virtually platonic terms as a responsibility of the highest wisdom to rule other disciplines and lesser claims to knowledge. Sidony’s poetic office had a long-standing and formidable opponent. For others, philosophy, more or less discriminately understood, offered a guide for life, the quintessence of the vita contemplativa, it could be promoted as a mentor for the vita activa in its full and varied potential. This was the case for Bacon: as the office of the stomach was to nourish the whole body, so philosophy made sense of all other professions. His was a restatement of ancient and arguments presented by Cicero, out of Plato and Aristotle, and Aquinas out of all three; it is the duty of philosophy to make other realms of duty clear. Additionally, this provided a rationale for the most eclectic of philosophers; and, as it were, modeled the office of the philosopher (like that of the rhetor or the poet) on the metaphorical projection of the office of God, to create and order all subordinate offices in the natural and human world. By the same token, it was to make philosophers kings.

Philosophical identity, then, was protean in a double sense. It had an unstable relationship with rhetoric and poetry and for some writers, it offered a vision of human potential, not unlike the picture of invention painted by the apologists of rhetoric; the most famous, and arguably misread example of this is Pico della Mirandola’s Oration on the Dignity of Man. Since Burckhardt’s search for nascent individualism in the Renaissance, Pico’s seminal image has largely, even routinely been taken as an unrestricted argument about human individuality, a celebration of Man’s protean capacity. Yet as Bill Craven has shown, Pico uses the notion of man as a metaphor for philosophic creativity. Pico claims for the philosopher what Wilson, Puttenham and Sidney would use to vindicate poets and orators; the protean nature of philosophy is to be celebrated, because the philosopher’s is an office of such significance and responsibility.

It is the shared vocabulary of office used to define differences and priorities that does so much to confuse them. The Philosopher as living the highest form of the vita
contemplativa, or as the instrument of the vita activa, persistently treads on the toes of the poet and rhetor. What is needed is constant reassurance or affirmation that the activity has an end and this gradually gets re-specified. Directly or indirectly, he serves the commonwealth, although always the immediate end of his office is the quest for truth and wisdom. For Bacon, adapting this shared rhetoric, it was by discovery and understanding that the philosopher was creative, in generating new works and eudemonia through control of nature. It was the specific means to this end that did most to give the philosopher distinction. He was obliged to pursue free and thorough enquiry and this had the attendant duty of taking nothing on authority and dismissing even the most elevated quacks of antiquity. As a corollary to this decisive liberty of office was a sceptical demeanour, and for philosophers in Bacon’s increasingly fashionable idiom, dogmatism was inimical to the office. Boyle’s Skeptical Chymist would have Carneades as its spokesman, and the true philosopher was above all eclectic. So the philosopher ranged not unlike Hobbes’s (undogmatic) spaniel over all domains of knowledge. Just as with rhetoric, however, intellectual status was tied to the reassuring display of a socialized and decorous persona, the peripatetic image of the office.

The early-modern world inherited the view that the office of the philosopher involved a way of life. If, as Harvey famously put it, Bacon wrote philosophy like a Lord Chancellor, it was in no small part because the lawyer and the philosopher were alike forms of intellectual office in service to mankind. Even for Hobbes, a most procedurally minded defender of a discipline of philosophy, there was a style of life fit to the procedural calling. In his self-defences, he claimed that he lived a life appropriate to his intellectual endeavours. ‘My Life and Writings speak one Congruous Sense’, a rough translation of ‘Nam mea vita meis non est incongrua scriptis.’ In his famous aphorism that he and fear were born twins, a central explanatory concept of Hobbesian philosophy is given a poetically autobiographical origin. Hobbes’s critics saw this unity in a different light. He was accused of arrogance, singularity and libertine atheism, and in this way, his philosophy was attacked through the persona; and Hobbes did seem to lack the modest and undogmatic disposition so often taken to be the decorous sign of philosophy—though he was at least suitably melancholic. In this light, it seems likely that Aubrey’s elaborate ‘Life’ took a cue from the asserted unity of life and doctrine, it
was itself ‘the last Office’ to his dear friend.⁵⁸ Fittingly, the ‘Life’ was a defence of philosophy through exemplification of virtuous conduct, a rebuttal of the indiscriminate accusations leveled at Hobbes by his critics. Hobbes, the philosopher of motion, had a mind, remarked Aubrey, that was never still, but the movement was neither random nor wanton. It was part of the perpetual quest to understand the causes of things. The personal qualities Aubrey attributed to his friend, his curiosity, openness, generosity and charity, his energy, enjoyment of good company, discipline, consideration and abstemiousness, were all qualities echoing those attributed to Socrates. They were all singularly appropriate to the Epicurean persona Aubrey defends. He noted in his ‘Life’ that Hobbes would not wear a beard, wanting his reputation to depend upon his wit not the self-advertising symbol of the sage.⁵⁹ This probably referred to the beard wearers derided by Lucian and alluded to by More. And Hobbes certainly made an appropriate Lucianic commitment explicit in De corpore. Although as Butler maintained, whether with Hobbes in mind or not, nowadays philosophers have to shave to maintain their reputations.⁶⁰ The symbolic manifestations of claimed office could always be decoded in opposing ways, like the Quaker’s plain dress, an expression of humility, a proof of hypocrisy. Irrespective of this, the nexus of proposition and persona helps explain the ease with which philosophers like Hobbes shifted into satire and *ad hominem* argument and could be attacked in the same fashion. Attacking a persona was hardly the irrelevance or exercise in indecorum it might now seem when the office not just the discipline was at issue.

More surprisingly, perhaps, Hobbes was capable of running poetry and philosophy together in a way that Sidney had made thoroughly familiar.⁶¹ In praising Davenant’s *Gondibert*, he discussed the poet’s office, partly by elaborating on a counterpoint between the responsibilities of the ancient and the Christian poet, and partly by stressing the dangers in the abuse of the powers of eloquence and figurative creativity. At first he distinguished the responsibilities of poetry from philosophy. He discussed fancy, imagination and wit as appropriate to the Christian poet but went on to suggest that where philosophy has failed in its own responsibilities, poetic fancy must take its place.⁶² The reference to office here is so reified that it overrides the procedures that Hobbes normally took to exclude poetry’s reliance on metaphor. At the same time that Hobbes
was writing *Leviathan*, and still pondering the strict *regulae* of the philosopher’s office that would appear in *De corpore*, he was extolling the almost primeval mystery of the poet’s calling, a voice in unison with Collingbourne, Sidney, Puttenham and Jonson, conjured and transformed from antiquity.

By the end of the seventeenth century, the philosopher and the natural philosopher were partially distinct. Daniel superficially sounds like a prophet: ‘of one science’ another was indeed ‘born’.63 There was no single or simple reason for this. Charles Schmitt, for example, has suggested in deflationary vein that it had much to do with the logistics of text-book production.64 But Bacon’s re-orientation of the office of the philosopher and the momentous work in natural philosophy by figures such as Hook, Boyle, Huygens and above all Newton, are also crucial. Their work, together with the orchestrated energies and controlled image of the Royal Society (and others of similar style and function established in France and Tuscany), could, retrospectively, be seen as vindications of Baconian procedure. Irrespective of achievements, Bacon’s insistence on natural philosophy as an inductive communal endeavor seemed to be borne out in the development of networks of scholars communicating problems, experiments and discoveries in a way that distinguished them from the more isolated and text-based work of deductive metaphysics, theology and logic. The Royal Society presented a public image that was almost a ritualized application of Baconian expectations at odds with the evidence of actual discovery, debate and proof.65 Of all people, Bacon could be taken as providing an authoritative text on the scope and value of philosophy; add to this Hobbesian excoriations of Schoolmen and his related specifications of the necessary conditions for any Baconian communal activity, and we find by the end of the century a partial change of focus from the relationships between the offices of poet, rhetor and philosopher, to those between philosopher, natural philosopher and mathematician. Part of Richard Cumberland’s critique of Hobbes was that he had wrongly relied upon deductive mathematics to delineate philosophy when the empirically attuned mathematics of probability was more relevant to understanding the world and helping with its decoding.66

Stephen Shapin has gone so far as to suggest an intimate relationship between the emerging image of natural science and the development of modern ‘selfhood’. Because
the new science was communal, public enterprise among gentlemen, it required modesty and respect for the arguments and experiments of fellows, the openness to attend to all relevant evidence and for hypotheses to be tested in a public forum, sustained by the technologies of print. He is right to stress the relationship between proposition and persona, and that the shift away from this nexus constitutes a change of ethical perspective. It is clear, however, that the construction or presentation of a persona was hardly a singular or novel achievement. In taking over the philosophical dialogue, for example, scientists like Boyle worked with canons of civility that had been characteristic of its functioning from antiquity to the Renaissance. In the Republic, even Thrasymachus is tamed. Neither was a gentlemanly preoccupation with civil conversation in any way new when Boyle emphasized its importance. It had been an aspect of aristocratic and courtly offices for sufficiently long for the dueling provoked by its breakdown to be seen as native. Boyle further adapted the aristocratic virtue of liberality to the ends of enquiry—it was an undogmatic generosity towards the work of others in the scientific community. His chastity, like that of Hobbes, was a virtue appropriate to the true Epicurean’s love of knowledge. There was also an insistently Christian dimension to this. The Pauline injunction (2.Timothy, 2, 24, 25), was a familiar text concerning heresy. Those in error should, as Hobbes had reminded his critics in an attack on dogmatism, be treated with gentleness, patience and meekness. Here are dicta of the utmost civility that are anything but the preserve of the new men of science, issuing from the mouth of one of the old, one too easily accused of incivility. In all, it is misleading to construe the continuing vitality of a register as a new ideology and to see a persona like Boyle’s as fashioning a modern self.

It seems to me altogether more helpful to posit different inflections and contextual applications of a shared and robust vocabulary, necessarily used and adapted by any who wanted to claim the legitimacy of intellectual office. By the end of the seventeenth century, natural science and philosophy might well be diverging activities, but no more than with poetry or rhetoric at the end of the sixteenth century, was one persona decisively denied the legitimating clothing of the other. Robert Boyle lived the scientific persona with conspicuous success, to be sure, and his critiques of Hobbes were an effective way of presenting the openness of eclecticism, labouring in the interests of
wisdom as an alternative to the a prioristic over-reaching of merely speculative argument. The contrast between Hobbes and Boyle on the general character of philosophy would not seem as clear as it has if it were not also informed by the knowledge that Hobbes was wrong and Boyle right about the vacuum.

Locke, went further in calling philosophy a matter of under-labouring for natural philosophy. In some ways, we have come a long way from the world of Pico and Sidney, but Locke’s image of philosophy still draws on the promotional rhetorics of office. The philosopher’s modesty is the humility of knowing an office and its limits. Locke casts his argument in the language of duty and responsibility, of ends and functions and what has impeded their fulfillment. The answer is, in general terms, cut and stitched with much the same materials of intellectual office and its abuse as Bacon and Hobbes had used: the over-reaching obfuscation of past philosophy and the delusions of rhetoric which are attacked tout court by ad hominem accounts of motivation, so stigmatizing the persona of the rhetorician as the enemy of the under-labourer.

As Locke’s under-labouring efforts amounted to an argument about what and how anything in the world can be studied and knowledge communicated, his vision of philosophy can be encompassed by Bacon’s analogy of the stomach. And for Locke also, this was not just a matter of dry doctrine or pure contemplation but of knowing enough to live as we should. In this way Locke’s revised image of philosophical responsibility is at one with Shaftsbury’s reassuring echo of Platonic eudemonia: the purpose of philosophy is to make us happy. It can never be reduced to a matter of proposition and discipline; it is tied to and is an expression of character. The nexus of doctrine and persona comprising philosophical office died hard. How relevant this is to understanding even the most academic (and so superficially familiar) philosophy of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Germany can be seen by Ian Hunter’s dramatic recapturing of the sense of office that divided the civil philosophies of writers like Pufendorf and Thomasius from Kantian metaphysics. Kant can be construed as achieving a dialectical resolution of his predecessors’ failures to reach his position only by reducing competing understandings of a way of life manifested in doctrines to a set of metaphysical propositions; we begin by seeing things on his terms, and unsurprisingly, he provides a resolution. It is a microcosm of the whole problem of writing a history of philosophy.
Office then, provided a currency of promotion, defence and critique for intellectual activity, a vocabulary of ends and limits, to be co-opted to the extent that it kept fluid or could blur substantively different intellectual endeavors. Fuller disciplinary demarcation perhaps required a diminution of the status of the language of office; or perhaps an increasing differentiation in the minutiae of practice gradually over-stretched the common resources of advocacy and demonisation. Either way, we now live in a world in which the promotional rhetoric of office has a more vicarious place and a lower threshold of plausibility when, to borrow Pufendorf’s expression, it is applied to the entia moralia of intellectual life.

2 Peter Mack, Elizabethan Rhetoric: Theory and Practice, (Cambridge: University Press, 2002) p.64; John Rainolds, Th’Overthrow of Stage-Playes, 1599, gives a sense of University disputation on the player as without or damaging to social offices; Stephen Gosson, Playes Confuted in Five Actions, 1582, B4r-v,C1; William Prynne, Histrio-Mastix, 1633, at length, but see Actus secundus, pp.34-42, (Prynne uses Gosson’s conceit of acts for chapters); Sir Richard Baker, Theatrum Triumphans, 1670, p2; it was a perception that moralists tended to be condemnatory of the stage, James Malcolm, Anecdotes of the Manners and Customs of London, London, 1811, vol.3, ch.5, pp.1-105, but the reasoning changed and was not always what it seemed. Before the Restoration hostility could be directly to religious themes enacted, after the stage could be a surrogate for attacking the court.


4 Shakespeare, Hamlet, a3. sc.2.

5 John Earl ‘A Player’, Micro-cosmographia, or a piece of the world discovered, 1633.

6 Baker, Theatrum Triumphans, p.110, 178, 133.

7 The Immorality of the Pulpit 1698, p.7

8 Butler,’ A Player’, Characters p.300


17 For example, Thomas Campion’s Observations in the Art of English Poesy 1602, or Dryden’s Essay of Dramatic Poesy 1668


20 Mirror, p. 354 line 183

21 Mirror, p.355, lines 198-200

22 Bacon, Advancement, p.209

23 George Pettie, Civil Conversation, 1586, f 15-16, esp.16r


27 Dr. John O Ward has brought to my attention a fragment of William of Chartres referring to the officium of rhetoric and its end finis, Bruges, Biblioteque de la ville, MS 553.s.xiv


34 Sidney, Apologie, p.7.

35 Sidney, Apologie, p.6

36 Sidney, Apologie, p.26, on comedy.

37 Rosemund Tuve, Elizabethan and Metaphysical Imagery, (Chicago: University Press, 1972 edn.) p245

38 Sidney, Apology, p.11, 13

38. Sidney Apology, p.12, 14, 21


41 Sidney, Apology, p.15, 21.

42 Sidney, Apology, p.2

43 Jonson, Timber in Works vol.9 p.218

44 Jonson, Timber in Works, vol.9, p.220
Jonson, Timber in Works vol.9 p. 220

Laurentius Goslicius, De optimo senatore, 1593, p.107


Bacon, Advancement 2. p.93; for a succinct discussion of Bacon’s counter claims to Sidney’s poet, see Gaukroger, Francis Bacon, p.48-57

W.G. Craven, Pico della Mirandola, Symbol of his Age (Geneva:Droz, 1981) for a valuable discussion

W.G. Craven, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Symbol of his Age : Modern interpretations of a Renaissance Philosopher (Geneva: Droz 1981), esp. ch.2

Bacon, Advancement, 229ff; Goslicius, De optimo,p.57-9

Gaukroger, Francis Bacon, p.105-110; Julian Martin, Francis Bacon, the State and the Reform of Natural Philosophy (Cambridge: University Press, 1992) p.147-150.

Robert Boyle, The Skeptical Chymist, 1661

Gaukroger, Francis Bacon, p.50-1, 44-56; Pierre Hadot, Philosophy as a Way of Life, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); Ian Hunter, Rival Enlightenments: Civil and Metaphysical Philosophy in Early Modern Germany (Cambridge: University Press, 2001), are all studies recapturing this point.

Martin, Francis Bacon, at length for a detailed study of this relationship.

Life of Mr. Thomas Hobbes of Malmsbury 1680 p.18, Thomae Hobbesii Malmesburiensis Vita 1679, p.14

Hobbes, Vita, p.2
Introduction, p. 83

Aubrey, *Brief Lives* p. 233


Answer to the Preface Before Gondibert 1651 in *English Works*, vol p.450

Daniel, *Defence*, p.63


I am indebted to Dr. John Schuster for this point.

Richard Cumberland, *De legibus naturae*, 1672


Shapin, *A Social history* e.g. p.409-10


John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 1690, Epistle

74 Lord Shaftsbury Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions and Times, 1711 2, 207

1999 edn.

75 Ian Hunter, Rival Enlightenments at length, esp.pp.364-76