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## Nature and Society in *The King's Mirror*

### Introduction

The present essay deals with the relationship between nature and society in one particular work, *The King's Mirror*, written in Norway in the mid-thirteenth century. It mainly consists of a comparison between the doctrine of nature in the first part of the work and that of society in the second and third parts. This comparison aims at showing the basic similarity between the two and the way in which the author uses nature to support his political doctrine. However, this analysis implies some other problems, which I shall treat in more or less detail.

First and most important, such an analysis concerns the relationship between intellectual history and the history of mentality or between explicit doctrines and more fundamental, implicit patterns of thought: To what extent is the similarity between nature and society the result of systematic thinking on the part of the author and to what extent is it derived from a model of the world common to most people of his age? Second, while the political doctrine of *The King's Mirror* has been subject to extensive research, very little has been done concerning its doctrine of nature. The analysis therefore requires some basic research here, not least in comparing the doctrine of *The King's Mirror* with contemporary European works. Third, the question of nature and society is intimately linked to that of the composition of *The King's Mirror*, which in my opinion has not been adequately understood. Fourth, and finally, my analysis of nature and society in *The King's Mirror*, compared to contemporary European thought on these matters, will lead to some further reflections on the difference between Norwegian political and cultural conditions and those of the rest of Europe.

## Nature and Society in European Thought in the Middle Ages

The most important contribution so far to the study of the relationship between nature and society in the Middle Ages comes from a number of German scholars, of whom August Nitschke and Wolfgang Stürner are most directly relevant to my present purpose.<sup>1</sup>

Nitschke and Stürner distinguish between three different stages in the development of medieval thought in this field:

1. In the Early Middle Ages, God was regarded as the direct cause of all that happened in nature, while the king had the same function in society.

2. With the Renaissance of the Twelfth Century, nature came to be considered partly autonomous: God is Creator and origin of the universe, but after creation, nature develops and moves according to immanent laws, which can be discovered by human reason. In political thought, society was regarded as consisting of different strata united together with the king at the top. The well-being of society depends on the harmonious cooperation of these different elements, not only on the king.

3. With the revival of Aristotle in the thirteenth century, both nature and society were explained by Aristotle's teleological thinking: Everything, nature, man and society, strives after its own particular end, which must be taken into account when explaining society as well as nature.

Nitschke and Stürner regard their analyses as attempts to uncover deeper layers of medieval mentality. Nitschke, especially, has a radical view of the total difference between medieval and modern men, which he finds expressed, not only in thought and writing but also in actual behaviour.

Particularly this aspect of their theories has been severely criticized.<sup>2</sup> Their actual description of medieval scientific thought, how-

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<sup>1</sup> A. Nitschke, *Naturerkenntnis und politisches Handeln im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart, 1967); W. Stürner, *Natur und Gesellschaft im Denken des Hoch- und Spätmittelalters* (Stuttgart, 1975). See also the very important and thorough investigation of one particular aspect of the connection between nature and society, the analogy between the state and the human body, by T. Struve, *Die Entwicklung der organologischen Staatsauffassung im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart, 1978). John of Salisbury's use of this analogy has been further analysed by M. Kerner, "Natur und Gesellschaft bei Johannes von Salisbury", *Miscellanea Medievalia* 12.1 (Berlin, 1979), pp. 179–202.

<sup>2</sup> The attitude of traditional German historiography is expressed in the extremely un-

ever, is confirmed by several other studies.<sup>3</sup> I shall therefore use this description as a point of reference for my comparison between the ideas of nature in *The King's Mirror* and contemporary European works. Although not above criticism, their general theories of medieval mentality have opened an interesting field for further research. I shall return to these problems later.

## Nature in *The King's Mirror*

*The King's Mirror* (*Konungs skuggsiá. Speculum Regale*) is formed as a dialogue between a father and his son, the son asking questions, the father answering. It is written in the vernacular, Old Norse, by an anonymous author, with royalist views and apparently belonging to the court-milieu, although he may well have been a member of the clergy.<sup>4</sup> In the prologue, the author describes his work as dealing with *siðir*, that is to say with behaviour, including both morality and what we might call professional qualities. The work accordingly is divided into three parts, on the merchant, the *hirðmaðr* (the man in the king's service) and the king,<sup>5</sup> treating the appropriate qualities of

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favourable reviews by E. Pitz, *Historische Zeitschrift* 209 (1969), pp. 390–94 (on Nitschke) and J. Ehlers, *Historische Zeitschrift* 225 (1977), pp. 690–91 (on Stürmer).

<sup>3</sup> This applies above all to works on the Twelfth Century Renaissance, e.g. W. Berges, *Die Fürstenspiegel des hohen und späten Mittelalters*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Schriften 2 (1938, repr. Stuttgart, 1952), pp. 45–47; M.-D. Chenu, "L'homme et la nature", *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age* 19 (1952), p. 59; idem, *La théologie au douzième siècle* (Paris, 1957), p. 22; S. Gagnér, *Studien zur Ideengeschichte der Gesetzgebung* (Uppsala, 1960), pp. 224–48; R. Klibansky, "The School of Chartres", *Twelfth-Century Europe and the Foundations of Modern Society*, Proceedings of a Symposium Sponsored by the Division of Humanities of the University of Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Institute for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Nov. 12–14, 1957, ed. Clagett, Post and Reynolds (Madison, 1961), pp. 6 f.

<sup>4</sup> *Konungs skuggsiá*, ed. L. Holm-Olsen (Oslo, 1945), abbreviated: *Kgs*. The English quotations in the following — when not otherwise stated — are from *The King's Mirror*, trans. by L. M. Larson (New York, 1917), abbreviated: L. Bibliography of works on *The King's Mirror* in M. Tveitane (ed.), *Studier over Konungs skuggsiá* (Bergen, 1971), pp. 188–92. For the political thought of the work, see Berges, *Fürstenspiegel*, pp. 159–85 and S. Bagge, *The Political Thought of The King's Mirror*, Medieval Scandinavia. Supplements 3 (Odense, 1987).

<sup>5</sup> This does not correspond entirely to the division of society as sketched in the prologue, where the author announces that he will deal with 1) the merchants 2) the king and his men 3) the clergy and 4) the peasants and the common people. The two latter groups are not discussed separately (see below, n. 59). The division of society in the prologue seems to be the first example of the quadripartite division of society as opposed to the more traditional tripartite one (J. Le Goff, "Les trois fonctions indo-européennes.

each of these members of society. In addition, he gives information that in some way or other may be considered relevant to their way of living. Part I, on the merchant, thus mainly deals with nature, the heavens and the seas, various countries, animals and so forth. According to the author's avowed purpose, this is partly intended as useful information for the merchant when sailing, partly as digressions to entertain. Parts II and III, dealing with the leaders of society, contain a considerable amount of information about life at court and discuss several questions of political relevance. The author thus treats both nature and society in the same work, a fact that makes it easier to compare his way of reasoning on the two subjects.

The "entertaining" digressions form the most of part I (22 out of 38 pages in the standard Old Norse edition). Here the author describes strange phenomena in the Northern Seas, such as whales and other animals; the northern lights; and the geography of Iceland, Greenland and Ireland. These parts of *The King's Mirror* are often considered its best by modern scholars. They contain vivid descriptions of natural and geographic phenomena and often give valuable information, probably derived from the author's own experience and from oral sources.<sup>6</sup> These descriptions are in all likelihood without parallels in contemporary literature. In his *explanation* of these phenomena, however, the author fits into a common European pattern.

In principle, he regards nature as rational and intelligible to man. In explaining "normal" natural phenomena, he uses two key concepts, nature (*natura*) and force (*afl*): The ice in the sea around Greenland has a strange nature, in sometimes being completely quiet and sometimes drifting away (*Kgs.* 28, lines 22–23, L 139). It is the nature and order of the northern lights to grow lighter as the night becomes

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L'historien et l'Europe féodale", *Annales ESC* 34.6 (1979), p. 1210, referring to an article by F. Graus, in Czech). The tripartite division, in warriors (king and aristocracy), clergy and peasants, seems, however, to be strongly present in the author's analysis of society. The whole question of the division of society, which has been analysed with reference to the feudal centres in Northern France by G. Duby, *Les trois ordres ou l'imaginaire du féodalisme* (Paris, 1978), no doubt deserves closer examination in a Scandinavian context.

<sup>6</sup> F. Nansen, *In Northern Mists* 2 (London, 1911), p. 242; *Konungs skuggsjá. Speculum regale*, ed. F. Jónsson (Copenhagen, 1920), Inledning, pp. 52–59. The section on Ireland forms a possible exception to this, apparently being partly derived from Gerald of Wales, *Topographia Hibernica* (Jónsson, *Inledning*, pp. 55–57; Larson, *Introduction*, pp. 22–23). This is, however, denied by K. Meyer, *The Irish Mirabilia in the Norse "Speculum Regale"*, *Eriu* 4 (1910), pp. 1–16 and J. Young, "Two of the Irish 'mirabilia' in the 'King's Mirror'", *Études Celtiques* 3 (1938), pp. 21–26, both reprinted in Tveitane, *Studier*, pp. 125–43, who think that the author used oral information even in this case.

darker and vice versa (*Kgs.* 32, lines 26–28, L 149). And it is the nature of the glacier to send off cold winds.<sup>7</sup> Whereas nature sometimes tends to be a summary of the properties that are to be explained, force is used more explicitly for explanatory purposes: In one case, the author states something like a general law: “all fire has its origin in force”.<sup>8</sup> He illustrates this by saying that force causes fire in stones, pieces of iron or winds when they clash against each other.<sup>9</sup> In describing the climate of Greenland, the author several times mentions the force of the cold, which causes ice and glaciers in the Northern countries (*Kgs.* 31, lines 33–34, L 147). This force may even be strong enough to cause light, which in the author’s opinion is the most likely explanation of the northern lights (*Kgs.* 33, lines 11–12, L 151). On the other hand, the force of the sun is strong near the centre of the earth, but in the north it is only sufficient to give light, not to give very much heat (*Kgs.* 32, lines 18–19, L 149). In some of these examples “force” appears to be a synonym for the fact that certain phenomena, like the cold, the sun or the winds, bring about changes in other objects or phenomena. Thus, this concept is very far from what we would consider a natural law. However, it may be derived from the contemporary theory of the four elements, with their particular properties (heat — cold, dryness — wetness), which work upon all they get into touch with. In any case, this concept shows the author’s interest in explaining nature and is carried further in his “serious” treatment of natural phenomena, to which I shall return later.

The clearest evidence of the author’s attempt at a rational understanding of nature appears when he reaches the limits of this way of explaining, that is, the borderline between the natural and the supernatural. His description of Ireland is divided into a “natural” and a “supernatural” part, some phenomena being explained by the “nature” of the country, others as being of a “spiritual” nature (*Kgs.* 24, lines 1–2, L 111). In discussing the volcanoes on Iceland, he explicitly poses the question as to whether this phenomenon is caused by

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<sup>7</sup> “oc værdr því nattura iaculsens at hann værpr af ser . . . kalldum gust” (*Kgs.* 34, line 11) / “For it is in the nature of the glacier to emit a cold . . . breath” (L 153).

<sup>8</sup> “af afli kiemur elldur allur” (*Kgs.* 19, lines 2 f.).

<sup>9</sup> “þar sem samann kiemur. hogg hardz steins og hardz iarns. þá kiemur þar elldur af þui iarni og afli er þau beriastr . . .” (*Kgs.* 19, lines 3–5). / “If a hard stone is stricken against hard iron, fire comes out of the iron and out of the energy force of the stroke when they clash” (L 129).

“the nature of the country itself” or “by some spiritual matter”.<sup>10</sup> Having weighed the merits of different explanations against each other, he ends up with a “spiritual” explanation: The force of the volcanoes is “dead fire”, which can burn dead matter, e.g. stone, not natural, living fire. As everything is dead in hell, this fire is most probably the fire of hell (Kgs. 18, lines 1–25, L 126–28). In this connection, the author states the general point that everything is governed through God’s providence, a doctrine that is repeated in other contexts.<sup>11</sup> This is, of course, common opinion throughout the Middle Ages. What is remarkable here, is the sharp distinction between natural and supernatural explanations, that is between what God governs indirectly, through natural laws, and what he governs directly.<sup>12</sup> In other words, in the same way as the philosophers associated with the Twelfth-Century Renaissance, the author of *The King’s Mirror* regards nature as partly autonomous and comprehensible to human reason. His key concepts, nature and force, are probably translations of *natura* and *vis/virtus*, which were used in a similar sense by Latin authors of that period.<sup>13</sup> On the other

<sup>10</sup> Huad ætli þier vm þann mikla elldz gáng er þar er ofur mikill æ þui landi huort hann mun vera af nockuri landsins nátturu. edur kann þat at vera at hann sie af andligum hlutum” (Kgs. 17, lines 38–40, L 126).

<sup>11</sup> “þuiat skiepnann og allt annat rædur sier eigi síálft. helldur verda allir hlutir eptir þui at fara er Gudlig forsiá hefur firi onduerdu skipat” (Kgs. 20, lines 10–12). / “For neither this created force nor any other governs itself; but all things are compelled to move as God’s providence has ordained from the beginning” (L 132).

<sup>12</sup> For the same distinction in twelfth-century European thought, see Pierre Abélard, *Expositio in Hexaemeron, De secunda die*, PL 178, col. 746: “Unde illa quæ per miracula fiunt magis contra vel supra naturam quam secundum naturam fieri fatemur, cum ad illud scilicet faciendum nequaquam illa rerum præparatio prior sufficere possit, nisi quaedam vim novam rebus ipsis Deus conferret, sicut et in illis sex diebus faciebat, ubi sola ejus voluntas vim naturæ obtinebat in singulis efficiendis.” / “Therefore we must acknowledge that what happens by miracle, rather happens against or above nature, as the things are not by themselves predisposed to create these effects, if God did not add a novel force to them, as He did during the six days, when solely His will maintained the force of nature in causing the different events to happen.” See also Nitschke, *Naturerkennnis*, p. 82; M.-D. Chenu, “Découverte de la nature et philosophie de l’homme à l’école de Chartres au XIIIe siècle”, *Cahiers de l’histoire mondiale* 2 (1954), p. 318; T. Gregory, *Anima mundi. La filosofia de Guglielmo de Conches e la scuola di Chartres* (Florence, 1955), p. 178; C. M. Radding, *A World Made by Men* (Chapel Hill, 1985), pp. 250 ff.; B. Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind* (Aldershot, 1987), pp. 4 ff.

<sup>13</sup> “Quando ipsa etiam natura creabatur, hoc est vis quædam conferebatur illis rebus quæ tunc fiebant. Unde ipsa postmodum ad multiplicationem sui sufficeret vel ad quoscunque effectus inde processuros vel tanquam nascituros. Quippe, ut dictum est, nihil nunc naturam aliud dicimus, nisi vim et facultatem illis operibus tunc collatam, unde ille sufficerent ad efficiendum hæc quæ postmodum inde contigerunt.” / “When nature itself was created, that is to say that a force was added to those things that then

hand, the author shows no traces of the teleological thinking characteristic of contemporary and later authors under Aristotle's influence.

It is, however, difficult to decide whether he was directly influenced by any of the twelfth-century French authors, as most of his general theories were fairly usual at the time and not easy to trace to any particular source (cf. Larsen, *Introduction*, pp. 10–20). He explicitly refers only to Gregory the Great (*Kgs.* 18, line 8, L 127), on the fire of hell in Sicily, and Isidore (*Kgs.* 31, line 25, L 147), on the five zones in the heavens and the corresponding ones on earth. Most of his statements that have European parallels are to be found in early authors like Isidore and Bede. But his whole attitude seems so close to that of the twelfth century that he is hardly likely to have received all his information from them. In addition, when referring to another and inaccessible part of the earth as inhabited (*Kgs.* 34 f., lines 41–9, L 155), he may be influenced by William of Conches, who was one of the few medieval authors to suggest this.<sup>14</sup> The author of *The King's Mirror* accepts the usual medieval compromise between the ancient doctrine of a spherical earth and the biblical one that the earth is flat, describing the inhabited part of the earth as situated on the top of the globe, forming a circle.<sup>15</sup> According to a widespread doctrine, going back to Antiquity, the earth was divided into climatic zones, corresponding to similar ones in heaven. The middle zone, according to the author of *The King's Mirror* running from east to west and following the path of the sun, was so hot as to be uninhabitable and even impossible to cross, while there were very cold zones, equally uninhabitable, at the northern and southern ends of the circle. The two temperate zones between these three were well suited for human habitation. However, because of the Christian doctrine of the creation, fall and redemption of man, the usual medieval opinion was that only one of these zones was inhabited. William of Conches is

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came into existence. Therefore, after that time, nature was able to multiply itself or to cause whatever effects to be developed or, so to speak, born. Thus, as it is said, we now understand nature as nothing else than the force and the ability given to these works [of creation], through which they were able to cause what happened in the following time" (Abélard, *Expositio in Hexaemeron. De tertia die*, PL 178, col. 749). See also Nitschke, *Naturerkenntnis*, p. 83; Gregory, *Anima mundi*, p. 178; A. C. Crombie, *Augustine to Galileo I*, 2nd ed. (London, 1961), p. 114.

<sup>14</sup> W. G. Randles, *De la terre plate au globe terrestre* (Paris, 1980), p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> *Kgs.* 31, lines 20–21, L 148; *Kgs.* 33, lines 4–6, L 150 f.; Randles, *op. cit.*, pp. 9–31. See also Simek, *Kosmographie*, pp. 102–17, 129 f.

not really at variance with this opinion. He follows "the philosophers" in describing the other temperate zone as inhabited, because this is logically possible, but referring to Christian doctrine, he explicitly denies that this is actually the case.<sup>16</sup> The author of *The King's Mirror* does not directly address the question, as his main interest is to point to the similar climatic conditions in the northern (=his own) and the southern zone. Commenting on this, he suggests that if there are men in this zone, they will get warm winds from the north in the same way as we get them from the south, and further that these people have summer while we have winter.<sup>17</sup> Thus, he may have been influenced by William's description of the southern hemisphere, as opposed to his direct statement concerning this question. *De philosophia mundi* was known in the North during this period; there is even an Old Norse translation of a part of it.<sup>18</sup> Other twelfth-century cosmographic works were also known or translated, such as *Elucidarius* and *De imagine mundi* by Honorius Augustodunensis.<sup>19</sup> Generally, the leading ecclesiastical circles in Norway had good contacts with France from the mid-twelfth century onwards<sup>20</sup>, and the author of *The King's Mirror* shows influence from

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<sup>16</sup> "Unam tamen ab omnibus inhabitari tantum credimus, nec totam. Sed quia philosophi de habitationibus utriusque, non quia ibi sunt, sed quia ibi esse possunt, loquuntur de illis, quos non credimus esse propter intellectum lectionis philosophicæ, aliquid inde dicamus". / "We believe only one [part] to be inhabited by all men, and not the whole. But since the philosophers speak of the habitations of both regions, not because they exist, but because they can exist, let us, to understand our philosophical reading, say something of what we do not believe exists" (*De philosophia mundi* 4.2-3, PL 172, cols. 85-86 — in PL wrongly attributed to Honorius Augustodunensis).

<sup>17</sup> "Oc æf mæn byggi iam nær hinum kallda væginum asydri síðo sæm grœnlændingar bua a hinnu noerðri . . . En þægar sæm sol tæcr hina ytztu rænnzlur til norðrs þa hafum ver yfrinn solargang en þeir hafa þa kalldan vætr" (*Kgs.* 34 f., lines 41-11) / "And if people live as near the cold belt on the southern side as the Greenlanders do on the northern . . . And when the sun comes to the extreme edge of its circuit to the north, we have long-continued sunshine, while they have cold winter" (L 155).

<sup>18</sup> *Alfræði Íslenzk* II, Samfund til utgivelse av gammel nordisk litteratur 41, ed. N. Beckman and Kr. Kålund (Copenhagen, 1914-16), p. 86; R. Simek, *Altnordische Kosmologie* (Berlin, 1990), p. 108. The section deals with the origin of the winds in the tides, in this connection mentioning that the northern winds cause cold in the northern hemisphere, while the southern ones do the same in the southern, but does not discuss whether the latter is inhabited. There is thus clearly a possibility of direct influence, although the author of *The King's Mirror* differs from William in regarding the winds as caused by the absence of the sun, rather than by the tides.

<sup>19</sup> See Simek, *Kosmographie*, who gives a detailed account of translations and adaptations of cosmographic texts in Norway and Iceland.

<sup>20</sup> On Norwegians studying in Paris from the second half of the twelfth century onwards, and bringing books home with them, see A. O. Johnsen, *Om Theodoricus og hans Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium* (Oslo, 1939), pp. 29-60; S. Bagge,



twelfth-century French thought in his discussion of other subjects.<sup>21</sup>

In addition to his distinction between the natural and the supernatural, two further characteristics of the author's way of thinking may be noted. First, there is a strong contrast between good and evil in his descriptions of countries and natural phenomena. Animals are classified as good or bad according to their use to man.<sup>22</sup> Countries are classified in the same way. In the geographical descriptions, there is a marked contrast between Iceland and Greenland on the one hand and Ireland on the other, the former belonging to the worst places of the world, the latter to the best. This contrast appears both on the natural and the supernatural level: Ireland has a mild, temperate climate and a fertile soil, which makes it ideally suited to human habitation, while Iceland and Greenland suffer from extreme cold and generally adverse natural conditions.<sup>23</sup> On the supernatural level, the author points out that the signs of holiness show God's particular favour with Ireland, while the fire of hell is located to Iceland. In this latter context, he even turns to a discussion of the theological problem of evil (*Kgs.* 19 f., lines 18–35, L 130–133). Although it is not uncommon to discuss this problem in connection with scientific questions, the contrast between good and evil seems more strongly pronounced in *The King's Mirror* than in the works to which Nitschke and Stürner refer. This may have to do with the fact that the author of *The King's Mirror* describes nature more from man's point of view, not giving a systematic treatment, but concentrating his attention on phenomena of particular interest to his readers. But it is also determined by the general purpose of his work, which includes scientific, as well as political and moral questions.

The second characteristic of the author's way of thinking is that goodness is to be found in the middle way between extremes and the

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"Nordic Students at Foreign Universities until 1660", *Scandinavian Journal of History* 9 (1984), pp. 2–4 and "Theodoricus Monachus — Clerical Historiography in Twelfth Century Norway", *ibid.* 14 (1989), pp. 115, 133.

<sup>21</sup> He must have known Petrus Comestor, *Historia Scholastica* (Bagge, *The Political Thought*, pp. 227 f., 232 f.). His allegory of the four daughters of God is found for the first time in Christian sources in French authors of the twelfth century, see E. Molland, "Les quatre filles de Dieu", *Epektasis, Mélanges patristiques offerts au cardinal Jean Daniélou* (Paris, 1972), pp. 155–68; M. Tveitane, "The Four Daughters of God in the Old Norse King's Mirror", *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 73.4 (Helsinki, 1972), pp. 795–804.

<sup>22</sup> *Kgs.* 15, lines 1–17, line 35, L 119–26 on whales and fishes.

<sup>23</sup> *Kgs.* 21 f., lines 29–1, L 105 f. See also the detailed description of Ireland (*Kgs.* 22–26, lines 2–41, L 106–118, and of Iceland (*Kgs.* 17–20, lines 36–35, L 126–133) and Greenland (*Kgs.* 27–33, lines 4–31, L 135–51).

harmonious mixture of opposites. Both extreme heat and extreme cold make the earth uninhabitable, whereas the temperate zones are good (*Kgs.* 34 f., lines 17–21, L 153–56). What makes Ireland the best country in the world, is its mild, temperate climate. In a similar way, the author presupposes a harmonious balance in nature when he assumes that there can be only two specimens of an enormous whale which he describes, because it needs such large quantities of food that otherwise nothing would be left to other fishes (17, lines 24–25, L 125). In other words, the order of nature assures the right balance between the species, so that all of them can survive. This way of reasoning is also to be found in other contemporary authors,<sup>24</sup> but is developed further by the author in his discussion of other subjects.

## The Allegory of the Sun and the Winds

So far, I have mainly dealt with the author's treatment of individual phenomena, using examples from the passages of his work which he himself regards as digressions. I shall now turn to the passages to which he attaches primary importance, that is to the "serious" sections in the beginning and end of part I. The serious passages dealing with nature may be divided into two, apparently quite different parts. After the first section of part I, which may be described as the real "mirror" of the merchant, giving advice as to his behaviour, his trade, and his travelling, among other things the importance of knowing the right sailing season and being able to predict weather conditions from signs in the heavens, the conversation turns to how and why the weather changes and how the sun moves. The Father gives a highly poetical description of these phenomena. Next, he turns to a very technical treatment of the movements of the sun, the moon and the tides and the divisions of time, after which the Son finds that he needs to relax, and the entertaining passages are introduced. Towards the end of the entertaining parts, the conversation gradually becomes more complicated and serious and then leads up to the second part of the "serious" passages, which is a continuation of the poetical description of the weather, dealing with the end of

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<sup>24</sup> E.g. in the doctrine that God's creation consisted in joining together the four elements, which have completely opposite properties (hot — cold, dry — wet), see for instance William of Conches, *De philosophia mundi* 1.5, PL 172, col. 44 and Stürner, *Natur und Gesellschaft*, p. 45.

the sailing season. Despite their different tenor, the two "serious" sections have a common theme, the order and regularity prevailing in nature. This is clearly implied in the technical discussions of the movements of the celestial bodies, which determines the division of time and the climate in the various regions of the earth (*Kgs.* 9–12, lines 37–39, L 92–100). In the poetical section it is directly stated as a problem in the Son's words:

"But in your discussion . . . you mentioned several things the nature of which I do not understand, though I have reflected upon your statements, namely the lights of the sky and the movements of the ocean. . . . For sometimes the ocean appears so blithe and cheerful that one would like to sport with it through an entire season: but soon it displays such fierce wrath and ill-nature that the life and property of those who have anything to do with it are endangered. Now I have thought that, although the sun completes its course according to an established law,<sup>25</sup> that fact cannot produce the unquiet of the sea. If you are disposed to explain these things further, I shall listen gladly and attentively" (L 86 f.).<sup>26</sup>

In other words, the problem is the connection between the regular movements of the sun and the apparently chaotic movements of the winds and the seas. How can the former explain the latter? Can the regularity, the "laws", that seem to govern nature, be extended so as to cover such irregularities as can be observed in the changing conditions of the weather? Although the answer to this question is formulated in a highly poetical language, the chain of causation is not difficult to discover (*Kgs.* 7, lines 26–29, line 36, L 87–92). The fundamental factor is the sun, whose "office" (*embetti*) it is to bring light and warmth to the world. On its way over the heavens, it follows a

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<sup>25</sup> "Law" is not quite exact here, the Old Norse word is *skipan*, i.e. "statute", "decision", "rule". In the thirteenth century it is often used of royal and ecclesiastical statutes, but is also found in a more general sense. The distinction is not an important one, as the medieval concept of natural laws, in contrast to the modern one, was not very far removed from that of political laws or statutes, in the sense of something that is decided, namely by God.

<sup>26</sup> En nu mæð þvi at þer gatúð . . . iýðarre röðu þeira luta sumra er mer skilz æige mæð hværium hætte fram fara. oc hæfiec þo leitt at huga mæð mer. þat er um birting loptz oc okyrleic sioar. . . . er hann syniz stunnðum isva mikkelli bliðu at mann girnir til at leica við hann heilum missærum saman. En þvi næst synir hann sva micla reiðe og illzku. at hann þrætir til fiar oc til lifs þeira er við hann skipta. Nu hugðe ec þat þo at solen fyllde raser sinar æptir firi sættri skipan at æcki munnde þat raða røereng hafsens. Nu æf yðarr er vili til at skyra þessa lute gerr firi mer þa vilde ec giarna mæð athygli til lyða" (*Kgs.* 7, lines 11–25).

course that makes it move near to and away from the different parts of the earth in turn. At daybreak it visits the Eastern parts with its warm and bright beams, and daylight opens the silvery eyebrows of the Eastern wind, who rejoices and gives signs of peace and joy to his neighbour winds. As day proceeds, the sun visits the different winds, gives them its light and makes them rejoice, and they in turn bring forth light and peace to their opposite- and neighbour-winds. When peace is established between these princes, i.e. the winds, the sea is calm, and it is possible to sail. This harmony also affects the sky and the earth: the birds build nests and beget offspring, and the earth rejoices and brings forth grass and herbs. These conditions then last as long as God wills it. In autumn, around the middle of October, the whole process is reversed: the east-wind loses his golden crown, that is: the sun disappears or loses its force, and peace is broken between the winds. Day becomes shorter and night longer, and the sea is ravaged by storms and gales. Sailing becomes impossible, and the wise merchant must stay at home until the month of April, when peace is renewed between the princes and the process described in the beginning repeats itself.

In this way, the author answers the question of the connection between apparently regular and apparently irregular movements in nature. As in other contexts, he mentions God as the “engineer” governing the whole process. But God is not directly involved in each step. Within the system as arranged by Him, the sun is the primary factor, which acts on the secondary factors, the winds, which in turn bring forth the next step in the process. In the same way as in the passages quoted above, on “nature” and “force”, nature is partly autonomous and governed by a kind of general laws, which can be discovered by man. The author’s two other points in the “entertaining” parts, the contrast between good and evil and his notion of goodness as consisting of the appropriate mixture of opposites, are also strongly underlined. Good conditions in nature depend on a very complex relationship between different factors. Changes in this relationship easily lead to disaster. And in fact, disaster occurs at regular intervals. The arrangement of nature that is laid down by God and accordingly in some way or other must be ultimately harmonious, implies a strong contrast between good and bad when seen from man’s point of view.

The author of *The King’s Mirror* may well have found inspiration for his description of the sun and the winds in the poetic-allegorical

descriptions of nature commonly associated with the twelfth-century school of Chartres.<sup>27</sup> Nor were personifications of the winds and the celestial bodies uncommon.<sup>28</sup> I have, however, found no exact parallel to this passage in other sources. One particular feature even suggests that the allegory is the author's own invention, or at least derived from northern sources: As is usual in the north, he describes eight winds, corresponding to eight directions, not twelve as in contemporary Europe.<sup>29</sup> As for the content, *The King's Mirror* differs from at least some explanations of the same phenomena, for example that of William of Conches, who explains the winds from the movements of the waters, instead of vice versa.<sup>30</sup> But in its main outlines, the author's reasoning is clearly in accordance with the general trend of twelfth- and early thirteenth-century scientific thought, both in explaining by means of general laws and in the assumption that the celestial bodies, in particular the sun, are the main factors behind changes and movements on earth.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, even the distinction between "serious" and "entertaining" sections seems to agree with this trend. According to the author's explicit statement, this distinction is based on the fact that the former is more difficult to understand and more "necessary", that is: more directly useful to the merchant, than the latter.<sup>32</sup> But the

<sup>27</sup> I am not here addressing the question whether these thinkers were actually linked to the school of Chartres, which R. W. Southern denies, see Southern, *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 61–85.

<sup>28</sup> Personifications of the winds are found in Christian art from Late Antiquity onwards, see Otto Holl, "Winde", *Lexicon der christlichen Ikonographie* 4 (Freiburg, 1972), cols. 532 f. Allegory in literature is of course common throughout the Middle Ages, but it may be worth noting that the allegorical representation of natural phenomena was very popular in the school of Chartres, see C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (Oxford, 1936), pp. 87–111.

<sup>29</sup> K. Hastrup, *Culture and History in Medieval Iceland* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 51 ff.

<sup>30</sup> *De philosophia mundi* 3.15, PL 172, cols. 81–82, cf. P. Duhem, *Le système du monde* 3 (Paris, 1915), p. 107.

<sup>31</sup> William of Conches, *De philosophia mundi* 2.26–27, PL 172, cols. 67–69, on the movements of the sun causing the different seasons, on how the warmth of the sun makes the earth bring forth fruits and herbs from its secret holes, and how the climatic changes affect the human body. See also Gregory, *Anima mundi*, pp. 182, 217 and Duhem, *Le système du monde* vol. 3, p. 107.

<sup>32</sup> "Næmðu oc vandliga birting lopz oc himin tungla gang. dœgra far oc ætta skipan oc kunn væl marca hvæsso þvæx eða fæx ukyrleicr sioar. þvi at þat er froðleicr mikell. oc þo nauðsynlect at kunna þeim er far menn vilia væra" (Kgs. 5, lines 33–35). / "Observe carefully how the sky is lighted, the course of the heavenly bodies, the groupings of the hours, and the points of the horizon. Learn also how to mark the movements of the ocean and discern how its turmoil ebbs and swells; for that is knowledge which all must possess who wish to trade abroad" (L 83).

“serious” discussion also differs from the “entertaining” one in being concerned with regular phenomena, which can be explained by “laws”, that is primarily with the heavenly bodies, whereas the “entertaining” passages mainly deal with more or less singular phenomena here on earth. This is the same distinction as the one made in scholastic philosophy between what is strictly speaking matter for science and what is not.<sup>33</sup> In remarking that there is “knowledge” in these matters, the author seems in fact to allude to such a distinction.<sup>34</sup> This point becomes clearer when we turn to the later parts of his work, which deal with man and society.

## Society in The King’s Mirror

In the middle of the second part, dealing with the *hirðmaðr*, a society affected by moral dissolution and internal strife is compared to a farm suffering from dearth (*Kgs.* 51–55, lines 1–30, L 193–205). In other words: just as he uses images from society to describe nature in the passage of the sun and the winds, the author uses images from nature to describe society in this passage, even to the extent of directly referring to this form of political and moral crisis as “dearth”. But the similarity goes beyond this. In explaining this crisis, the author uses exactly the same model as in the passage of the sun and the winds.

The image of dearth is introduced as the answer to the Son’s question: Why are there so many ill-behaved men at court? The Father answers that there can be dearth of men as well as of grain or other things, and adds that this is God’s punishment for men’s sins. When God decides to carry out this punishment, he has several means to do

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Cf. the introduction to the “entertaining” parts: “Nu með þvi at vier mæðumst j athugasamligum ræðum. þa vilium vier taka oss huijld j vorri rædu með gamansamligum spurningum . . . og vil eg bidia ydur firi dæligleika sakir þo at eg spyri nockura þeira hluta þo ecki sie suo naudsynligir sem þeir adrir er til storra nytsemda horfa. þo veiti þier mier andsuor firi” (*Kgs.* 12 f., lines 40–2). / “Now since we are wearied with profound questions and thoughtful discourse, let us rest from these for a while and turn our conversation to matters of a lighter sort. And even though I should inquire about things that are not so useful as those others, which are of the highest utility, I pray you for the sake of our intimacy to vouchsafe replies to such questions as I may ask” (L 100).

<sup>33</sup> Crombie, *Augustine to Galileo*, vol. 1, pp. 147 f.

<sup>34</sup> “En mæð þvi at þer buðut þa lute at næma oc callaðut froðleic æf numit yrðe . . .” (*Kgs.* 7, lines 14–15). / “Moreover, you urged me to learn these things and stated that there is knowledge in learning them” (L 86).

so. Three such means are mentioned, the most important of which is the election of several kings to the kingdom instead of only one. The author then goes on to describe the evil consequences of this.

1. The petty kings not only divide the kingdom in a geographical sense, they also divide the people's loyalty (*astunndan*, 52, line 37), each of them gathering his own friends and followers around him. The kings become jealous of each other and compare their position to that of their father, who ruled the whole country and controlled all its resources. This causes general rivalry and enmity in the people. Crimes like homicide, robbery and theft multiply, and if one of the petty kings wants to punish a man for his crime, the criminal runs away to another king and is protected by him, because of the rivalry between the kings.

2. When these things happen, God in his anger furthers the process by setting a turning wheel of anger where the borders between the petty kingdoms meet, so that the morals of the people break down: the laws of the country and of the Church are not respected, the common people become disobedient and rebellious against their superiors. That is to say: the conflict between the petty kings and their adherents and the protection of criminals resulting from this lead to a general break-down of law and order.

3. Having described this break-down in some detail, the author goes on to the next stage in the process: God now turns this evil against the ones who were responsible for it in the first place and creates hatred and enmity between the petty kings, from which full civil war results. This then lasts until God finds that the people have been sufficiently punished and allows it to become united under the rule of one king.

As we see, God is both the ultimate cause and is engaged in each particular step in the process. On the other hand, there is a perfectly logical development from one step to the next: Division of the kingdom leads to rivalry between the kings, which results in crimes being unpunished, which leads to general breakdown of law and order, which aggravates the rivalry between the kings, which in the end leads to full civil war. God is not really necessary to further this process. And, as we shall see, it is essential to the author's purpose to show that the process develops according to its own logic.

The author's real model of a country in crisis thus seems to be fairly similar to his model of changes in nature in the description of the sun and the winds. In both cases, God is the ultimate agent,

while the actual development takes place according to natural laws, which can be discovered by human reason. In both cases, there is a strong contrast between good and evil, between harmony and disharmony. In both cases harmony consists in a special arrangement of things: friendship and balance between the winds, friendship and balance between different regions, princes and layers of society. And above all: this harmonious balance is caused by a strong ruler, in nature the sun, which governs the winds and gives warmth to nature, in society the king, who governs the people, brings order and justice and sees that everyone is kept in his place. Even the immediate conclusions which the author draws from his two images are similar: Man has to adapt himself to changing conditions. The wise merchant stays at home during the bad season. The *hirðmaðr* cannot remain neutral, but he has no influence on the conditions under which he must live. During bad times, he must try to fight for the just cause and behave as well as possible. In both cases, it is important to know what is happening, so as to be able to make the best out of adverse conditions. In both images the author thus seems to stress the importance of knowledge for conducting one's life.

But there are also *differences*. First, God is more directly the cause of what happens in society than in nature, if not in the real logic of the development, at least in the author's narrative. The reason for this is not obvious, but I shall try to solve the problem later on. Second, though the immediate conclusions to the two passages are fairly similar, there can be no doubt that the author has a further purpose with his image of dearth: It is intended as a warning. Accordingly, the events that are described are not inevitable in the same way as the ones described in the passage of the sun and the winds.

The events causing disaster are formally regarded as the means by which God punishes a sinful people. The first two of these may in actual fact be considered means in this sense, namely a weakened aristocracy because of unfavourable division of property among heirs, and a young and immature king succeeding to the throne and choosing bad counsellors (*Kgs.* 52, lines 6–26, L 196 f.). Biological coincidences like the number of sons and daughters surviving their parents are clearly outside human control, and even though the laws of heredity are not, the author is not concerned with changing them so as to avoid unwanted consequences. Nor is he concerned with initiatives to improve the situation if a young and irresponsible king should succeed to the throne. Without explicitly stating it, he seems



to regard both these unlucky coincidences as happening according to the order of things, in the same way as phenomena in nature.

However, the third cause of disaster, division of the kingdom, belongs to a different category. The author obviously regards this as the most common and important cause of dearth, and describes the disasters as resulting from this cause, not from the two former ones. Furthermore, he does not regard division of the kingdom as the inevitable consequence of the fact that there is more than one heir. On the contrary, he explicitly refers to electing more than one king as a "bad counsel" (*illt ráð*):

"... now if a kingdom should come into such unfortunate circumstances as have been described, with several heirs at the same time, and the evil counsel is furthermore taken to give them all the royal title and dignity, then the realm must be called a rudderless ship or a decayed estate; it may be regarded almost as a ruined kingdom, for it is sown with the worst seed of famine and the grains of unpeace" (L 198).<sup>35</sup>

In fact, the whole image of dearth, as has been pointed out by several scholars,<sup>36</sup> is intended as a warning against joint rule, which had been a fairly common practice in the period before. The author regards this as the cause of the recent civil wars, which had lasted for more than a century (1130–1240, with intervals), to which he obviously refers when describing the disastrous consequences of joint rule.

He also has a second purpose with the image of dearth, which is equally important, but which has received less attention from scholars, namely to argue in favour of the system of public justice, which was being built up by the monarchy at the time.<sup>37</sup> His description of the disastrous consequences of joint rule is not simply a description of chaos and dissolution, but of another way of resolving conflicts between individual members of society than the one favoured by the author and by official policy. Instead of letting the king and his representatives judge and punish, the common people make settle-

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<sup>35</sup> "Nu æf sva illa bærr æinu hværiu riki til mæð þæssom atburðum er nu ero talder at morg ero kononga æfni ænnda værðr sva illt rað tækit at oll værða sænn skrydd konongligri tign eða nafne þa ma þat riki kalla homlu barða eða auðnar oðal oc ma þat þa naliga virðaz sæm tynnt riki. þvi at þat er þa saet mæð hino mæsta o arans fræ. oc ufridar korni" (*Kgs.* 52, lines 32–36).

<sup>36</sup> F. Paasche, *Norsk Litteraturhistorie*, 1., 2nd. ed. (Oslo, 1957), p. 483; Berges, *Fürstenspiegel*, pp. 171–72; Bagge, *The Political Thought*, pp. 49–51.

<sup>37</sup> Bagge, *The Political Thought*, pp. 71–83.

ments between themselves or take vengeance. According to the author, this has become so widespread that it is considered common custom.<sup>38</sup> In the author's opinion, the new system of public justice which the monarchy tried to introduce, was the original one, whereas the existing one was the result of joint rule leading to weak monarchy and internal disintegration. The image of dearth is therefore intended to give a historical argument for the author's view of public justice.<sup>39</sup>

Despite the close parallel between the image of dearth and the passage of the sun and the winds, the author does not, or at least not without reservations, adopt a "cyclical" model of history, according to which good and bad times succeed one another, in the same way as night changes into day, summer into winter and vice versa. Harmony and disharmony in nature are obviously outside human influence, whereas the same phenomena in society are not. When the author in spite of this draws approximately the same conclusion from the image of dearth, the reason is that it is outside the possibility of ordinary people, including individual members of the aristocracy, to prevent the disasters described there. As the Father replies to a direct question from the Son:

"I believe, however, that such misfortunes would rarely appear among the people who inhabit and till the land, if the men who govern the realm were discreet and the king himself were wise." (L 196)<sup>40</sup>

This statement is not the expression of any democratic sentiments on the author's part, preventing him from blaming the common people. Quite the contrary, they are innocent, or at least not to blame, because they are unimportant, not because they are virtuous.<sup>41</sup> The

<sup>38</sup> See in particular *Kgs.* 54, lines 2–12, L 200 f. and Bagge, *The Political Thought*, pp. 81 f. For a further comparison between the old and new systems of legal and social organization, see S. Bagge, *Society and Politics in Snorri Sturluson's Heimskringla* (Berkeley, 1991), pp. 140 ff.

<sup>39</sup> That is to say the idea of the "good, old law" was deliberately used by the contemporary Norwegian monarchy to change existing laws and customs. This idea is also found in other sources from the period, see Bagge, *The Political Thought*, pp. 81–83, 156–61.

<sup>40</sup> "... en sialldan ætla ec þo at þærs kyns haskar komi mæð upp hafi af alþyðu þeirri er vinnr lannd eða byggir æf þeir væri rað snotrir er geta skylldo oc væri konongr sialfr vitr" (*Kgs.* 52, lines 2–4).

<sup>41</sup> "mæðr þvi at allr er fioldenn mislynnðr oc ú iafngiarn hværr við annan. nema þær æiner æigi er bæðe þiggia af guðe manvit oc sannsyni en þat ero æinka mænn en æigi alþyða" (*Kgs.* 43, lines 14–16). / "For the multitude is fickle-minded and the one unfair

author's point is that if only the common people are kept in their place by a strong government, they will have no occasion to do harm, and accordingly, it does not matter whether they are virtuous or not. Consequently, the lessons which the author brings forward in this passage are not lessons for ordinary people, they are lessons for the leaders of society and above all for the king: it is their responsibility to prevent the disasters described in the image of dearth.

To some extent, it is possible to avoid disaster in society, and the means to achieve this is a strong and undivided monarchy. This idea is further developed in part III, on the king. In the introduction to his discussion of the king's duties and qualities, the author describes the king as being God's image and representative on earth and as having power over life and death — the latter referring to his duty as the supreme judge in the realm. Towards the end of his work, the author shows the king himself being judged, before God's throne, where he has to render an account of how he has administered his high office, that is to say, how he has carried out his duties as a judge. This passage is clearly intended as a warning to the *unjust* king, who abuses his power and who is condemned to hell like Saul, Herod and Nero. But is above all a warning to the *weak* king, the king's first and foremost duty being to maintain the prestige and authority of his judgement seat. Strong monarchy, which is regarded as the consequence of institutional arrangements in the image of dearth, is here presented as a moral demand, directed to the king.<sup>42</sup>

The intellectual demands made upon the king are also presented in connection with his duty as a judge. In a long series of biblical examples, the author outlines the new principles of royal justice, which are to replace the traditional ones: punishment according to the evil intention behind the crime instead of according to the damage caused or the status of the victim, the sentence depending upon the judge's discretion in weighing all relevant facts in the case against one another, instead of the fixed rules of the old regional laws.<sup>43</sup> This system of judgement requires experts, and the king is supposed to be the supreme expert. His highest virtue is therefore wisdom. As in

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toward the other, except those alone whom God has given wisdom and rectitude; but they are few only and not the mass" (L 175 f.).

Cf. also the references to the common people in the image of dearth.

<sup>42</sup> Bagge, *The Political Thought*, pp. 100 f., 161, 194 ff.

<sup>43</sup> *Kgs.* 75–91 (L 251–289) and 100–115 (L 304–339), in particular 104 f., lines 24–38 (L 313–316). See also Bagge, *The Political Thought*, pp. 53–68.

other medieval works, wisdom has many aspects, but in the author's thought, it is above all connected with the principle of harmonious balance. The king should know how to practice this principle in his capacity as a judge, and he must know the right balance in society as a whole to be able to maintain it. These aspects of wisdom are stressed or implied in both the two passages quoted above: To be able to find the right balance between rich and poor, and between strict and mild judgments, and to maintain his power intact, the king not only needs strength, but also wisdom.

This picture of the strong and wise king, who upholds the order of society intended by God, thus forms the positive counterpart to the negative picture in the image of dearth. In addition, the link between nature and society is strengthened through "Wisdom's Speech", a highly poetical passage, where Wisdom is introduced as an allegorical figure. The passage is modelled upon the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, to which it also contains several more or less direct allusions.<sup>44</sup> Wisdom opens her speech by declaring that she is sprung out from God himself and then describes her participation in the creation of the world in a free and rather elaborate paraphrase of the description in Genesis. Next, she tells that God ordered her to "oversee" (*skynia*) the beauty of the divine handiwork, and describes how she travelled all over the universe, measured the ocean and the earth and ornated and assuaged nature in different ways. In the last part of her speech, she identifies herself with Christ, describing her role in the salvation of man. Finally, she dwells upon her importance to man and society: She supports agriculture, she protects communication between men in cities and market-places, she brings forward good and beautiful things, she is the head-mistress of every school, the highest sagacity in legal assemblies, the wisest of legal experts (*logmenn*) and the supreme judge in every court.

In this way, the author describes the harmony which God's wisdom has created in the whole universe, in nature as well as among

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<sup>44</sup> Kgs. 98–107, L 300–304. The main biblical sources are Sirach ch. 24 and Proverbs ch. 8–9. In addition, there are several references to Psalms, Isaiah etc. See F. Paasche, "Om Kongespeilets forfatter", in: Tveitane, *Studier*, pp. 21–35. For parallels in European literature, see e.g. John of Salisbury, *Policraticus* 5.6. There is probably a connection between the interest in the biblical personification of Wisdom and the *nous*-philosophy of the twelfth century, see Th. Silverstein, "The Fabulous Cosmogony of Bernardus Silvestris", *Modern Philology* 46 (1948–1949) p. 110. It is, however, uncertain whether the author of *The King's Mirror* is influenced by the European wisdom literature, as I have found no evidence of direct dependence.

men and in society. In the first part of Wisdom's speech, dealing with nature, he sums up his discourses on nature of part I, pointing out the essential harmony that prevails in nature. But in accordance with his "hierarchical" scheme of composition (see below), this passage is not simply a summary of part I, it contains a further development of the ideas found there. In part I, nature is seen from below, so to speak, through the eyes of mortal man, who only imperfectly and through the greatest efforts is able to discover the laws of nature. In accordance with this limited perspective, only nature as it actually exists is considered. In Wisdom's Speech, however, nature is seen from above, through God's eyes. God's creation — according to learned opinion at the time a matter of faith, not reason<sup>45</sup> — is described, and in a short glimpse, the author gives a picture of the perfect knowledge of all nature that only God possesses. By presenting nature in this way, the author links his doctrines of nature and political thought together in an even more explicit way than in parts I and II: Wisdom's speech is intended to teach the king the order and harmony that prevails or should prevail in the whole universe, in nature as well as in society.

## The Composition of *The King's Mirror*

Having pointed out the parallel between the description of nature and that of society in *The King's Mirror*, I shall turn to the question of explanation, particularly to drawing the line between the conscious and implicit elements of the author's thought. My first step in this direction will be to make some comments on the composition of the work.

The composition of *The King's Mirror* has often been regarded as chaotic.<sup>46</sup> Although most scholars have assumed that the work was written by one single author, this allegedly loose composition has been used as an argument for multiple authorship<sup>47</sup> or for rejecting

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<sup>45</sup> Klibansky, "The School of Chartres", p. 8; Gregory, *Anima mundi*, p. 178, see also above, notes 12, 13, 21.

<sup>46</sup> See e.g. T. Damsgaard Olsen, "Høvisk literatur", in: *Norrøn Fortællekunst*, ed. H. Bekker-Nielsen, T. Damsgaard Olsen and O. Widding (Copenhagen, 1965) pp. 98 f.

<sup>47</sup> E. Vandvik, *Gåter i Kongsspejelen*, in: Tveitane, *Studier* 63–70 and "A New Approach to the Konungs skuggsjá", *ibid.* 71–79; Ian Kirby, *Bible Translation in Old Norse* (Geneva, 1986), pp. 177–181.

the authenticity of the prologue. The proponent of the latter view, Ludvig Holm-Olsen, argues that the prologue's description of the work as essentially about morality is too narrow to fit in with its actual content and that the author of the prologue has given a one-sided interpretation of the metaphor of the *speculum*, regarding it solely as an instrument for the reader to measure his own behaviour against the ideal one. The metaphor can also refer to the condensation of all kinds of knowledge in one, single book, in the manner of the contemporary *specula* of Vincent of Beauvais. This is in Holm-Olsen's opinion an equally appropriate interpretation.<sup>48</sup>

Evidently, *The King's Mirror* does not conform to modern standards of unity in scholarly or literary works. But neither do the majority of other medieval writings. If the loose composition of *The King's Mirror* is an argument for multiple authorship, not many works from the Middle Ages were written by a single author.<sup>49</sup> So far, the discussion of the composition of *The King's Mirror* has not taken into account medieval ideas of aesthetics and composition.

As may appear from the analysis of the work so far and can be further illustrated by other passages of the work,<sup>50</sup> *The King's Mirror* contains a number of long, continuous discussions, in which a problem is stated in the beginning and then gradually brought to its solution. Within or between these discussions there are then a number of digressions. Actually, part I mainly consists of a digression, which is explicitly said to be intended to entertain, after the difficult discussion of the previous passage. Eventually, however, it turns out to contain important information, which serves to underline the lesson of the more serious parts. The second story of the Fall of man in part III, which according to the author is an interpretation of the first, is to a considerable extent determined by his wish to discuss some important theological questions, although it does serve to throw light upon the main problem of the discussion, just judgements.<sup>51</sup>

However, the most striking feature of the composition of the work is the way in which a discussion is suddenly cut off, a new topic or

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<sup>48</sup> L. Holm-Olsen, "The Prologue to The King's Mirror: Did the author of the work write it?", in: *Speculum Norroenum. Norse studies in memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre* (Odense, 1981), pp. 223-41.

<sup>49</sup> See the remarks of S.T. Knight, "Some Aspects of Structure in Medieval Narrative", *Parergon* 16 (1976), pp. 3 ff.

<sup>50</sup> Bagge, *The Political Thought*, pp. 53 ff., 86 ff.

<sup>51</sup> Bagge, *The Political Thought*, pp. 57 f., 225 ff.

story introduced, and then the previous discussion continued after a shorter or longer break. The passage about the sun and the winds is divided in this way, its first and second parts being placed near the beginning and the end of part I respectively, like two halves of the same ring. The conversation evolves from the first half of the "ring" and then gradually turns back into the second half. By contrast, the image of dearth itself divides another part of the conversation, the section on manners and behaviour at court in part II. This also applies to Wisdom's speech, which is placed near the middle of part III, dividing the discussion of just judgements. There also seems to be a fairly close correspondence between the first and the last passage of part III, the former showing the king's great power and his similarity to God, the latter how he is to answer for his responsibility before God's throne after his death.<sup>52</sup>

This composition, called interlacement<sup>53</sup>, is above all associated with the French prose romances of the thirteenth century, but is also to be found in the Old Norse sagas.<sup>54</sup> Evidently, this kind of composition corresponded to contemporary literary taste. But it is hardly a question of a pure aesthetics. This composition enabled the medieval author to show inner similarities between events apparently without connection in time, space or cause in the modern sense, according to the principle of analogy,<sup>55</sup> which is again related to the allegorical or typological thinking that was widespread at the time and made men "see" connections between phenomena which seem strange or unintelligible to us.<sup>56</sup>

The relationship between composition and this kind of "hidden messages" is a complex subject which needs a more complete analysis than I can attempt here. But these particular features of the composition of *The King's Mirror* are hardly coincidental. There is every

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<sup>52</sup> Bagge, *The Political Thought*, pp. 22 ff., 90 f.

<sup>53</sup> E. Vinaver, *The Rise of Romance* (Oxford, 1971) and N. J. Lacy, *The Craft of Chrétien de Troyes* (Leiden, 1980). The term *entrelacement* was coined by Ferdinand Lot in a study from 1918 (Vinaver, *op. cit.*, p. 71; Lacy, *op. cit.*, p. 67).

<sup>54</sup> C. Clover, *The Medieval Saga* (Ithaca, 1982). See also Bagge, *Society and Politics*, p. 42.

<sup>55</sup> Vinaver, *The Rise*, pp. 33 ff., 99 ff.

<sup>56</sup> For Nordic examples of allegory and typology, see G. W. Weber, "Intellegere historiam. Typological perspectives of Nordic prehistory", in: *Tradition og historieskrivning*, ed. K. Hastrup (Århus, 1987), pp. 97-115; I. Skovgaard-Petersen, *Da tidernes herre var nær. Studier i Saxos historiesyn* (Copenhagen, 1987), pp. 87-94 and "Saxo's History of the Danes: An interpretation", *Scandinavian Journal of History*, vol. 13 (1988), pp. 87-93, and Bagge, "Theodoricus Monachus", pp. 116 ff.

reason to suppose that the author used the composition to make his readers see a parallel between the sun and the winds in part I, the image of dearth in part II and the picture of the strong king in part III. Splitting up the passage of the sun and the winds into two sections and placing them near the beginning and the end of part I clearly makes it dominate the whole of this part. The position of the image of dearth in the middle of a passage with different content, may at first sight seem to indicate minor importance rather than the opposite. However, this position is also a way of making this passage conspicuous. Both its poetic language and its contents suggest the parallel to the passage of the sun and the winds. Moreover, it forms a link with what follows. The image of dearth only shows the negative half of the picture, its positive counterpart being either the whole of part III, or its middle section, which breaks off the discussion of judgements to describe the king's duties when he wakes up in the morning and includes the king's prayer, Wisdom's speech and some lofty considerations on the exalted position of the king (*Kgs.* 92, line 1–100, line 17). The position of this passage strongly suggests that it is intended as a direct contrast to the image of dearth, but this can also be said to apply to the whole of part III.

This discussion of the composition of *The King's Mirror* confirms my conclusion of a parallel between the ideas of nature and those of society in the work. Moreover, this parallel constitutes a strong argument for the essential unity of the work, that is for its having been executed according to one single plan and thereby most probably by one author.<sup>57</sup> It also suggests that this unity is based on a moral purpose common to all parts, "moral" here taken in its wider sense, including behaviour in general, like *sidir* in Old Norse. This assumption is further confirmed by the fact that the composition shows a hierarchy, parallel to the hierarchy of society. The moral doctrine of *The King's Mirror* develops from elementary lessons on good behaviour to the merchant, via classification of the different virtues in part II, directed to the *hirðmaðr*, to insight into the highest principles behind the different ethical rules, in part III, directed to the king.<sup>58</sup> The content of the work thus corresponds perfectly to what is announced in the prologue, which again means that the

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<sup>57</sup> S. Bagge, "Forholdet mellom Kongespeilet og Stjórn. Noen bemerkninger til Ian Kirby", *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 105 (1990), pp. 79 f.

<sup>58</sup> Bagge, *The Political Thought*, pp. 87–97.



author of the latter interpreted the image of *speculum* correctly.<sup>59</sup>

For my present purpose the most important conclusion to be drawn from these observations is that the composition of the work and its thematic unity suggest that the parallel between nature and society was intended by the author. We then clearly have to do with explicit ideas. On the other hand, these ideas imply a world view or a mentality, that of analogous or typological thinking, which clearly distinguishes medieval thought from that of our own age. Thus, we are still left with the problem of drawing the borderline between the explicit and the implicit aspects of the author's thought.

### Mentality or Explicit Ideas?

Starting with the explicit aspect, it is fairly easy to explain why the author wanted to underline the parallel between nature and society. *The King's Mirror* is a work of propaganda for a particular kind of social arrangement, and it directly addresses the situation in Norway in the mid-thirteenth century. It aims at introducing royal justice instead of feuds or private arrangements between the parties and, more generally, it agitates for a hierarchical and authoritarian society governed by a strong king. These novelties are not, however, presented as such, but as the eternal order of things, while the arrangements the author wants abolished, are presented as temporary deviations from this order. In this context, the appeal to nature is likely to strengthen the author's arguments. What can be more eternal than nature? And what can have greater authority than an order which applies both to nature and society?

However, it will be superficial to stop here and simply regard the

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<sup>59</sup> This means that the prologue was in all likelihood written by the author himself. The lack of correspondence between its quadripartite division of society and the actual arrangement of the work (above n. 5) would immediately seem to suggest the opposite conclusion. However, even the most superficial glance at the work would reveal that it does not contain a separate part on the clergy and does not end with the peasants. By contrast, whoever wrote the prologue shows an excellent understanding of the work as a whole, and could not possibly have committed such a blunder. Consequently, the only reasonable explanation of this passage is that the author of the work wrote it himself, either when starting to write *The King's Mirror*—a procedure that would seem unusual—or, more likely, in connection with a revision. For evidence that *The King's Mirror* must have existed in different versions from very early on, probably in the author's lifetime, see D. Hoffmann, "Die Königspiegel-Zitate in der Stjórn", *Skandinavistik* 3, 1973, pp. 24–37.

doctrine of *The King's Mirror* as invented by a clever politician during the internal struggles in Norway. The ideology of *The King's Mirror* is unlikely to have had much political importance without a foundation in more widespread ideas and notions in the period. Nor does the picture of the completely detached and cynical politician, who freely invents the ideology that suits his purpose at the moment, seem very convincing to me. Ideology is no doubt a weapon in political struggles, but it is not likely to be effective unless it is derived from some kind of common ideas and values, in which the politicians themselves tend to believe. We therefore have to turn to the general background of the author's thought, that is, to contemporary mentality.

As mentioned above, to Nitschke and Stürner the parallels between nature and society are evidence of a medieval mentality that is radically different from our own and of fundamental changes in men's ways of perceiving "reality". However, this parallel is not specific to the Middle Ages or to traditional societies. There seems to have been a marked tendency, at least in Western thought, including our own age, towards "unity of science",<sup>60</sup> a tendency that may perhaps be explained as an attempt to give a total explanation of the world in the simplest possible way. According to Mary Douglas, this is a universal phenomenon. The human body is always a symbol of society, and the general view of the world in a given society — including our own — is determined by the way in which this society is arranged.<sup>61</sup> Thus, the parallel in question is exactly what we should expect.

Mary Douglas may exaggerate the similarity between traditional and modern societies. Without embracing the idea of a totally different way of perceiving the world in the Middle Ages, I believe that the models of nature and society and the parallel between them do indicate a way of reasoning that differs considerably from our own. These ideas are evidence of the *a priori* way of thinking in the Middle Ages and of the medieval view of the world as fundamentally constant. This view of the world is intimately linked to the structure of a

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<sup>60</sup> For examples from a later period, see the comments on Grotius and Hobbes in G. H. Sabine, *A History of Political Thought*, (3rd. ed., London, 1966), pp. 425–29, 457. Another obvious example is Darwinism in the nineteenth century.

<sup>61</sup> M. Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, (New York, 1970); *Implicit Meanings* (London, 1975), pp. ix ff. and *How Institutions Think* (London, 1987), pp. 91 ff. For an analysis of Nordic thought from a similar perspective, see Hastrup, *Culture and History*, who analyses the parallel between social structure and ideas of time and space in medieval Iceland.

traditional society, which was, if not unchanging, at least changing far less rapidly than our own, and in which the elite, whose members developed these ideas, regarded themselves as the natural leaders according to the inherent order of things and as keepers of the ancient heritage.<sup>62</sup>

This general outline of essential features of medieval thought does not exclude change, development and variation in practice. As for the concept of mentality, which is often vague, I am personally more inclined to use it in the sense of tacit knowledge or ideas that are accepted without question, than in the Freudian sense of the subconscious. This implies that no sharp borderline can be drawn between "mentality" on the one hand and explicit ideas on the other. Despite indisputable differences, I find it difficult to believe in Nitschke's and Stürner's idea of a fundamental gap between the mentality of "primitive peoples" or "traditional societies" and that of our own society.<sup>63</sup> In a historical perspective, the explicit ideas of one period often become the mentality of the next one.<sup>64</sup> Accordingly, the idea of a new mentality, asserting itself in different fields of thought, does not absolve us from the task of considering the relationship between parallel development and direct influence from one field to another. To take the case in point: The texts dealing with nature and society

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<sup>62</sup> E. Gellner, *Plough, Sword, Book* (London, 1988), pp. 70–100. On the parallel between nature and society and the concept of the hierarchy of the universe, see also A. J. Gurevich, *Les catégories de la culture médiévale* (Paris 1983), pp. 20 f., 75 ff.

<sup>63</sup> See the following remark from a working social anthropologist: "Perhaps I may put the central difficulty I find in terms of personal experience: In the course of several years living among people of 'other cultures', I have never experienced the kinds of hiatus in communication that would be the case if I and they were approaching the physical world from opposite ends". — J. Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (1977, repr. Cambr., Engl., 1978), p. 8. Goody's remark aims at the ideas of Durkheim, Lévy-Bruhl and to some extent Lévi-Strauss, of a "primitive mentality". Goody appears to be representative of a strong trend within modern social anthropology towards denying the fundamental gap between modern and "primitive" mentality; see e.g. F. G. Bailey, *Stratagems and Spoils* (Oxford, 1980) and M. Douglas, (see above n. 56), who arrive at this conclusion from very different premises. Historians of mentality, including Nitschke, have often depended on older theories of the "primitive" mentality; cf. the remarks of S. Clark, "French Historians and Early Modern Popular Culture", *Past and Present* 100 (1983), pp. 52–99. Nitschke explicitly refers to Lévy-Bruhl and Lévi-Strauss, see *Naturerkenntnis*, pp. 16, 31.

<sup>64</sup> See the remarks of Le Goff, who otherwise stresses the distance between *histoire de mentalité* and traditional history of ideas: "On saisit leur genèse et leur diffusion à partir de centres d'élaboration de milieux créateurs et vulgarisateurs . . . Le palais, le monastère, le château, les écoles, les cours sont . . . les centres où se forment les mentalités." — "Les mentalités: une histoire ambiguë", *Faire de l'histoire* 3, ed. J. Le Goff et P. Nora (Paris, 1974), pp. 87 f.

were produced by a small élite, who often tried to cover the whole body of knowledge that was available. The parallels they drew between nature and society may therefore very well have been deliberate.<sup>65</sup> Further, I think that Nitschke and Stürner have exaggerated the parallels between the two fields, and, without really cogent arguments, have ruled out the possibility of one of them having influenced the other.

The similarities they point out between nature and society are most convincing in the case of stages 1 and 3. Stage 1 may be considered “pre-scientific” in the way of regarding both nature and society, whereas in stage 3, there can be no doubt about the similarity between Aristotle’s teleological philosophy on nature and on society, nor about its acceptance by his medieval followers. As for stage 2, the parallel seems more questionable. No doubt, there is a close parallel between the independent bodies in nature and in society. In so far as these bodies move and develop according to inherent forces and principles, the parallel is perfect. But natural phenomena cannot be, and were not, explained solely in this way. They are also governed by general laws. The two main principles of these laws are the four elements, of which everything on earth is a mixture, and the movements of the celestial bodies, which follow a fixed pattern and which in turn cause changes in the sublunar sphere. These laws ultimately depend on God, the creator of the whole universe. But God is not the direct creator of everything, he has laid down the basic principles, the laws, the rest of creation being the result of the elements working together in a particular way.<sup>66</sup>

If this mode of thinking were applied to society, we should have expected to find some sort of “sociological” model, a theory of the

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<sup>65</sup> An example of this is the twelfth-century discussion of justice, *ius naturale* or *naturalis iustitia* ultimately being based upon the order of nature as created by God. See William of Conches, *In Timaeum*, quoted by Nitschke, *Naturerkenntnis*, p. 103 n. 104. For a detailed discussion of this problem, see Gagner, *Ideengeschichte*, pp. 224–48. John of Salisbury’s *Policraticus* contains several explicit parallels between nature and society, e.g. *Ioannis Sarisberiensis . . . policratici sive De nugis curialium et vestigiis philosophorum Libri VIII*, ed. C. C. I. Webb (Oxford, 1909), 4.1 and 6.26. See also Berges, *Fürstenspiegel*, pp. 45–47. The parallel becomes even more explicit in the thirteenth century, see e.g. Gilbert of Tournai, *Eruditio regum et principum*, ed. A. de Poorter, *Les philosophes Belges* 9 (Louvain, 1914) 3.1.4, p. 89 and Thomas Aquinas, *De regimine principum ad regem Cypri*, *Opuscula philosophica*, ed. R. M. Spiazzi, (Rome, 1954) 1.14.

<sup>66</sup> So e.g. in Adelard of Bath, see Stürner, *Natur und Gesellschaft*, pp. 20–24; Thierry of Chartres, see Klibansky, “The School of Chartres”, p. 8; P. Dronke, “New Approaches to the School of Chartres”, *Anuario de estudios medievales* 6 (1969/71), p. 133.

relationship between the different strata, their different competence and the institutions necessary for the whole body politic to function. Some elements of this thinking are in fact to be found. The idea of society being organized as a hierarchy, of an order in which each individual must find his place, is more prominent than in the period before. The analogy between society and the human body becomes increasingly popular,<sup>67</sup> and concepts derived from ancient political thought, in particular Roman Law, like *utilitas publica*, are found both in the mirrors of princes and in political propaganda.<sup>68</sup> Examples such as these, however, are mainly to be regarded as ornaments, not as models for explaining society similar to the ones developed to explain nature. Most of the mirrors of princes and similar political tracts until the revival of Aristotle's political thought with Thomas Aquinas' *De regno* in the 1260's are essentially concerned with individual morality, not with institutional arrangements or other impersonal forces.<sup>69</sup>

What is striking in twelfth- and thirteenth-century European thought on nature and society is therefore not the similarity between the two but the difference. Thus, the particular version of the parallel between the two in *The King's Mirror* is highly original, despite the fact that both the author's scientific and to some extent his political theories can be found elsewhere. He considers institutional arrangements crucial to the well-being of society, disaster occurring as the logical consequence of such arrangements being inadequate. That is to say, the kind of "sociological" theory which we might expect as the result of the new trends in science in the twelfth century and which did occur with the revival of Aristotle's political thought in the mid-thirteenth, is actually to be found in the image of death in *The King's Mirror*.

The nearest parallel I have found to the image of death in *The King's Mirror* before the revival of Aristotle's political thought, is a passage in John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* about conditions in the Italian cities (*Policraticus*, 4.11, Webb 274 f.). When the people there love peace and justice and avoid false oaths, they enjoy peace, but when they become unjust, they are exposed to wars and foreign inva-

<sup>67</sup> Struve, *Organologische Staatsauffassung*, pp. 123-48; Kerner, "Natur und Gesellschaft".

<sup>68</sup> Berges, *Fürstenspiegel*, pp. 48, 78, 92; G. Post, *Studies in Medieval Legal Thought* (Princeton, 1964), pp. 260-62.

<sup>69</sup> J. Catto, "Ideas and Experiences in Aquinas", *Past and Present* 71 (1976), pp. 5-8.

sions. Comparing these two passages, one is struck more by their difference than by their similarity. John's approach is essentially moralistic, evil coming from the outside, as God's punishment for men's sins, not arising as a logical consequence of the events themselves. Although the idea of dearth as God's punishments for men's sins is not absent from *The King's Mirror*, the main emphasis here lies upon dearth as the consequence of a particular institutional arrangement. In short: To John of Salisbury and the other authors of mirrors of princes, the supreme disaster that can befall a country is a bad king, to the author of *The King's Mirror* it is a weak or divided monarchy.

When describing the reasoning of the image of dearth as "sociological" and analogous to contemporary "scientific" thought, it is of course important to keep in mind the difference between medieval and modern thought, both in the scientific and the "sociological" field. The "laws" of nature referred to above do not have the same general and mechanistic character as during the scientific revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, nor the same prognostic and explanatory force. They are rather laws in the sense of general rules, which God has laid down for nature. This also means that they are *a priori* and consequently not established through empirical investigation. When applied to society, they retain their *a priori* character. The image of dearth in *The King's Mirror* is not evidence that the author envisaged a number of different ways of organizing human society and concluded through reflection or experience that a strong monarchy and sole succession were to be preferred. It is a question of an eternal order, established by God. In this way, he conforms to contemporary authors of mirrors of princes in using nature as an example for society. What distinguishes the author of *The King's Mirror* from his contemporaries is his attempt to convince other people by detailed, empirical arguments that this eternal order is also the only way of getting society to function. Implicit in his argument is an idea of society as an organized whole, in which different elements depend on one another and the idea of change in society — admittedly not "neutral" change, but decline or improvement — as a process which is primarily the result of the relationship between these elements, not the more or less moral behaviour of individuals.

Thus, both *The King's Mirror* and contemporary European works suggest some degree of independent development within our two

fields. The chronological difference may also indicate that the scientific field influenced that of politics. In the case of *The King's Mirror*, the author may easily have found his scientific, but not his political theories in contemporary sources. This general argument receives some additional support from the text of *The King's Mirror* itself, namely from the fact that God is much more prominent in the author's narrative in the image of dearth than in that of the sun and the winds. The author therefore seems to be more bound by the traditional way of regarding God as the direct cause of each particular event in the case of society than in that of nature. However, this conclusion leads to further questions: First, why was science used in this way so early in a far away corner of Europe and not in the leading intellectual milieu? And secondly, why were general laws of this kind as opposed to morality or divine intervention more likely to be applied to nature than to politics?

### Why is *The King's Mirror* Different?

To take the second problem first, it is to some extent more natural to look for general laws in nature than in society. There is a certain obvious regularity in nature, whereas the same is not necessarily the case in society. Furthermore, the religious obstacles seem to have been stronger in the case of society than in that of nature. The new approach to science was certainly regarded with some suspicion in orthodox circles, and some of the conclusions found in ancient sources were difficult to reconcile with Christianity.<sup>70</sup> Yet it could be argued, and was argued, that the new science made God's work in creating the world seem even more wonderful, and that science thus had an edifying purpose.<sup>71</sup> Besides, there was room left for direct divine intervention in nature through the doctrine of miracles. On the political level, however, the obstacles were more formidable. As an "academic discipline", politics were part of ethics, both in the Middle Ages and in Classical Antiquity. The importance of the moral choice of individuals and of divine punishment for men's sins, not only in the next world, but in this world as well, was deeply en-

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<sup>70</sup> Duhem, *Le système du monde* vol. 3, pp. 92 f.; Gregory, *Anima mundi*, pp. 235-42; Chenu, *La théologie*, pp. 25-28; T. Stiefel, "The Heresy of Science: A Twelfth-Century Conceptual Revolution", *Isis* 243 (1977), pp. 359 f.

<sup>71</sup> Stiefel, "The Heresy of Science", pp. 350-52.

grained in men's minds. A change here would mean a much more direct challenge to fundamental attitudes than a change in the concept of nature. When these obstacles were eventually overcome in the central intellectual milieu of Europe during the second half of the thirteenth century, the reason is to be found in two facts, on the theoretical level in the revival of Aristotle's political thought, and on the practical level in the growing importance of institutional arrangements in society.

Concerning Norway, we may quite confidently rule out the former explanation. It is *a priori* extremely unlikely that Aristotle's political thought should have been known earlier in this remote part of Europe than in main centres of learning, and there is actually no trace of such a knowledge, neither in *The King's Mirror*, nor in the few other extant sources that deal with this kind of problems. There is more to be said in favour of the latter explanation. The thirteenth century was a period of rapid social and political change in Norway. The earlier part of the century was a period of internal struggles (until 1240), after which a strong monarchy was established, the nobility became more strongly attached to the king, a class of royal servants, organized in a quasi-bureaucratic way, was built up, and the king asserted his power over the people in various fields, particularly in the legal one.<sup>72</sup>

It is an open question how far Norway was actually unique in this respect. A few particular features may nevertheless explain why certain aspects of the organization of society was so prominent, both in *The King's Mirror* and other sources. First, this political change took place over a relatively short period of time. And second, some of the problems which the author tried to solve might be regarded as specifically Norwegian. This applies above all to the question of sole succession, which was taken for granted in most countries at the time. Royal unction, which was a well established tradition in most countries by the mid-thirteenth century, took place in Norway for the first time in 1163, but did not become generally established until the mid-thirteenth century. The hierarchy of society was also less well established in Norway than in most other countries, no sharp dividing line being drawn between the aristocracy and the common people. As the recent introduction of sole succession and royal

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<sup>72</sup> S. Bagge, "State Building in Medieval Norway", *Forum for utvirkingsstudier* (1989), pp. 129-46.



unction also indicates, the traditional attitude to the king was a fairly "democratic" one. He had to impress people through his personal qualities and was not able to claim obedience by virtue of his office or by appealing to his position as God's representative on earth. The kings' sagas, which are not much older than *The King's Mirror*, such as *Sverris saga* (c. 1202–1230) and *Heimskringla* (c. 1230), give a vivid picture of these ideas of the king.<sup>73</sup> Admittedly, these works are mostly written by Icelanders and may reflect the attitudes of a country that was not governed by a king, but *The King's Mirror* itself indirectly gives the same impression through the Son's great difficulties in grasping the new doctrine of kingship by the grace of God.<sup>74</sup> As to public justice, the Norwegian situation had more in common with conditions elsewhere, private revenge still being common in most countries and the king trying to enforce his authority in much the same way as in Norway. But it was at least possible to maintain that the situation was different in Norway,<sup>75</sup> and compared to England, a wellknown country to contemporary Norwegians, this was certainly the case. Consequently, the author's preoccupation with these problems in contrast to his European contemporaries may be explained partly through their character as problems only in a Norwegian context, partly through the author's belief that they had been solved elsewhere. This may then lead to the more general observation that the authors of the European mirrors of princes, when showing slight interest in institutional arrangements, did not consider such arrangements unimportant, but took them for granted and consequently did not bother to attack or to defend them. When such arrangements were occasionally considered, it was exactly because they came under attack.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Bagge, *Society and Politics*, pp. 129 ff.

<sup>74</sup> Bagge, *The Political Thought*, pp. 182 ff.

<sup>75</sup> See the introduction to the "New Law", Hákon Hákonarson's revision of the *Frostuþingslóg* of 1260, in which the king complains that revenge and homicide are more common in Norway than in other countries: "... sva er þat oc svívirðlict at spyria í þau lönd er vel ero siðaðir at menn scola þann úsið her meir í veniu hafa en í engu landi öðro." ("That is also shameful to learn in the countries with good morals that men are accustomed to this vice more than in any other country"), *Norges Gamle Love*, ed. R. Keyser and P. A. Munch, vol. 1 (Christiania, 1846), p. 121. See also Bagge, *The Political Thought*, pp. 83 f.

<sup>76</sup> This applies e.g. to the doctrine of the three orders, which was not explicitly stated and defended till it came under attack, see Duby, *Les trois ordres*, pp. 25–81. Another case in point is the traditional doctrine of Monarchy and Church, in particular of royal theocracy, which was stated in a systematic way during the Investiture Contest.

However, theories are not always there when they are needed. We also have to take into account the cultural milieu and the character of intellectual life in thirteenth-century Norway. The moralistic and Christian tradition of the ecclesiastical milieu in Europe was an obstacle to the development of a "sociological" political thought in the main centres of learning in Europe. Does this mean that thirteenth-century Norway was more secular? In one sense, the answer to this question is yes. Admittedly, Christianity was firmly established in the country in the period of *The King's Mirror*, and the Church was rich and powerful — relatively richer than in most other countries, owning forty percent of the value of the land around 1300, according to modern estimates. The Church also produced a large part of the literature, mainly translations and adaptations of foreign devotional works. However, intellectual life was not dominated by ecclesiastical thought, and theology and metaphysics played an insignificant part. There was no university, and although some Norwegians had studied abroad, they were not numerous enough to form a closed intellectual élite with its own literature.<sup>77</sup>

Instead, the royal court was the centre of cultural and literary life in the thirteenth century, and the literary public accordingly consisted of people without very specialized education, the king and his family, royal counsellors, members of the military and administrative aristocracy, clergy attached to the court and so forth. The literary language was normally the vernacular, and authors had to treat subject-matter that was likely to interest this public. To judge from the extensive literature that was translated into Old Norse during this period, their range of interest was very wide.<sup>78</sup> In this milieu, practical considerations seem more likely to have been taken into account than among "professional intellectuals" in the great intellectual centres of Europe. On the other hand, this secular public was primarily an administrative class and accordingly more interested in learning and political analysis than their counterparts within the warrior aristocracy of feudal Europe.

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<sup>77</sup> On studies at foreign universities in the period, see Bagge, "Nordic Students".

<sup>78</sup> The translations include both French chivalrous and courtly literature and religious works, among the latter parts of the Old Testament. On the cultural and literary milieu at the royal court in the period, see R. Meissner, *Die Strengleikar* (Halle, 1902), pp. 111–135 and Bagge, *The Political Thought*, pp. 218–25. For a more general characterization of the cultural milieu of the North, including Iceland, see Bagge, *Society and Politics*, pp. 240–47.

Most probably the author of *The King's Mirror* was himself an example of this kind of combination of practical and intellectual life, serving the king as an administrator besides his literary activity. One should not, however, lay undue emphasis on this. After all, several of the European authors of mirrors of princes did have considerable experience from royal and ecclesiastical administration.<sup>79</sup> The difference must be sought, not so much in different experience, as in the way in which the experience was expressed in their writings, that is to say in the cultural and literary milieu of our Norwegian author as opposed to that of his European contemporaries.

If I am to point to one particular intellectual ancestor to the "sociological" thinking of *The King's Mirror*, it must be historiography. This was both an important genre and one that was highly developed, in a similar way as the political thought of *The King's Mirror*. Admittedly, this genre was Icelandic more than Norwegian. But the Icelanders often wrote about Norwegian history, and sometimes they were directly commissioned by kings to write their history. There is therefore reason to believe that this Icelandic tradition was well known at the Norwegian court and may have been one of the intellectual stimuli behind *The King's Mirror*. In this case, I shall confine myself to a short comparison between this work and the most famous of the Icelandic collections of kings' saga, Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*<sup>80</sup>, written around 1230, that is about twenty-five years before *The King's Mirror*.

From one point of view, Snorri represents ideas directly opposed to those of *The King's Mirror*. He largely takes for granted and clearly favours a loosely organized society with feuds and competition between more or less independent chieftains, a society which the author of *The King's Mirror* attacks in the image of dearth. He also shows slight interest in institutional arrangements. The basic similarity lies in his attempt at a rational and secular explanation by analysing motives and events and in organizing his narrative in a logical way. He neither represents the theological and moralistic approach of

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<sup>79</sup> This applies e.g. to John of Salisbury, Peter of Blois and Gerald of Wales, see biographies in M. Manitius, *Geschichte der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters* vol. 3 (Munich, 1931), pp. 253–55, 293 f., 622 f.

<sup>80</sup> *Heimskringla*, ed. F. Jónsson, vols. 1–4 (Copenhagen, 1893–1901); in English translation: *Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway*, by L. M. Hollander (Austin, 1967). Also in other translations. On Snorri as a historian and his views of society and human nature, see Bagge, *Society and Politics*.

the typical ecclesiastical historian, nor the preoccupation with dignity and display of the typical aristocratic one.<sup>81</sup> Men and their actions are usually the moving forces in history, although divine intervention is occasionally invoked. These human acts are linked together, the one provoking the other and leading to the great events in history: the rise and fall of dynasties, civil wars and so forth. In Snorri's case, the "model" is implied in his narrative, whereas the author of *The King's Mirror* makes it an explicit argument for his idea of how the kingdom should be governed.

Snorri is the outstanding historian within this tradition, but there is a similar tendency towards stressing human and "rational" explanations in other Norwegian-Icelandic historical works of the period.<sup>82</sup> It is reasonable to assume that the author of *The King's Mirror* knew some or all of these works, and was influenced by their general reasoning in building up his "sociological" theory of society.<sup>83</sup> In a more general way, this historiographical tradition can be taken as evidence of attitudes and intellectual orientation in his milieu, which may serve to explain the originality of his work.

## Conclusion

The analysis of *The King's Mirror* may be summed up in the following way. There is a close parallel between the description of nature in part I and that of society in parts II and III, which is particularly striking in the passages on the sun and the winds and the image of death. This parallel points to the fundamental unity of the work,

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<sup>81</sup> For a general characterization of the two genres of medieval historiography, see W. J. Brandt, *The Shape of Medieval History* (New Haven, 1966).

<sup>82</sup> E. g. *Sverris saga*, ed. G. Indrebø (Kristiania, 1920) and *Fagrskinna*, ed. F. Jónsson (Copenhagen, 1902–03). See Bagge, *Society and Politics*, pp. 232–37; idem, "Propaganda, Ideology and Political Power in Old Norse and European Historiography: A Comparative View", *L'Historiographie médiévale en Europe, Paris 29 mars – 1er avril 1989* (Éditions du CNRS), Paris 1991, and idem, "Ideology and Propaganda in *Sverris saga*", *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 108 (1993), pp. 1–18.

<sup>83</sup> There is no direct textual evidence for this assumption. But some of the sagas (*Sverris saga* and *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*) were commissioned by the king, while *Fagrskinna* was probably written in close connection with the court milieu, possibly by a Norwegian. The king at the time of *The King's Mirror*, Hákon Hákonarson, had sagas read aloud to him at his deathbed, most probably *Sverris saga* and *Fagrskinna* (*Hákonar saga*, ed. G. Vigfusson, Rolls Series 88.2, p. 354). Thus, at least part of the saga literature was well known at court, where the author of *The King's Mirror* apparently spent a considerable part of his life (Bagge, *The Political Thought*, pp. 218 ff.).

which is determined by its moral and political purpose. Further, the author uses the similarity between nature and society to argue for the introduction of a strong monarchy and public justice in the rather loosely organized Norwegian society at the time. In this respect, the picture of nature can be said to have been influenced by that of society. However, the impact of this message is dependent on a more widespread, implicit notion of the essential similarity between nature and society. Such notions can be found in most societies, including our own.

Nevertheless, the author of *The King's Mirror* shows considerable originality in the actual content of his parallel between nature and society, applying the new ideas of the Twelfth Century Renaissance of nature as a system, governed by a kind of general laws, to society in a far more direct way than his European contemporaries. The development of scientific and political thought did not proceed at the same pace in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. We may therefore infer that the author of *The King's Mirror* to some extent derived his model of society from his model of nature. When an author on the outskirts of Europe had such a model at this early date, the reason must be sought in the political situation of contemporary Norway, when the monarchy over a short period of time was trying to introduce a new social order, more in line with that of the main countries of Europe, and further, in the fairly practical and secular character of the cultural milieu of the country, more specifically in the highly developed historiographical tradition, which was familiar with seeking rational and social explanations of human behaviour.

The general relevance of this study may be summarized in two points. The first one is the importance of geography. Perhaps the common, international aspect of medieval learned culture has been too much stressed, local variations being somewhat neglected. Italy and Southern Europe are one case in point,<sup>84</sup> as is the extreme north, including Norway. This does not mean that Norway and Iceland can be regarded in isolation from the rest of Europe.<sup>85</sup> These countries

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<sup>84</sup> A notable difference here is the predominance of the practical subjects, medicine and law, at the universities. For the importance of Italy in the revival of political thought in the second half of the 13th century, see Q. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* 1, (Cambridge, Engl., 1978), pp. 3–53. For a comparison between the culture of the South with that of the extreme North, see Bagge, *Society and Politics*, pp. 242 ff.

<sup>85</sup> The question of European influence on Old Norse culture is one of the most controversial issues within this field of scholarship. The idea of the uniqueness of the

did belong to Latin Christendom in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but assimilated the common, European culture in their own way, a fact that may be explained partly by tradition, partly by historical circumstances. To study this "reflection" is both interesting in itself and may throw light upon conditions in the "central" countries as well.

The second point concerns the relationship between mentality and explicit ideas. When the *Annales* historians started to study mentality in the interwar period, they were in violent opposition to traditional intellectual history. Since then, there has been a certain gap between the two traditions, historians of mentality focusing on ordinary people, daily manners and unconscious and repetitive ways of behaviour, deriving their inspiration from social anthropology, while intellectual historians analyse the explicit ideas of medieval thinkers more or less as if they were our contemporaries. Both approaches are one-sided. I regard the inspiration from social anthropology as one of the most fruitful innovations in contemporary historiography. On the other hand, there is a limit to how much theories derived from small-scale societies and illiterate cultures can be used to explain the patterns of thought in literate culture and among highly educated intellectuals. Luckily, in recent years there has been some convergence between the two main lines of thought.<sup>86</sup> By steering a middle course between intellectual history and the history of mentality, I hope to have contributed to this convergence.

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North dominated during a long period, beside the German notion of the Nordic countries as a kind of "reservoir" of original Germanic thought and customs. In the post-war period there has been a strong reaction, particularly against the latter idea, a reaction that in my opinion has gone too far. For my own view, see *The Political Thought*, pp. 210–24 and *passim* and *Society and Politics*, pp. 14 f., 161 ff., 224 ff., 240 f. and *passim*.

<sup>86</sup> The increasing interest among the *Annales* historians in the elite culture, including theology, philosophy and courtly literature is evidence of this. See e.g. Duby, *Les trois ordres* and J. Le Goff, *La naissance du purgatoire* (Paris, 1981).