Chapter 2

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Making Chess Politically and Socially Relevant in Times of Trouble in the *Schacktavelslek*

Schacktavelslek was probably written in the 1460s but the extant manuscripts are somewhat younger. It is not a translation of Jacobus de Cessolis' *Liber de ludo scaccorum* (ca. 1300) in the modern sense of the term, but rather a paraphrase or a free reworking of Jacobus de Cessoli's Latin version and some of the chess allegories in German, such as *Meister Stephans Schachbuch*, and some moralizing pieces from *De septem sapientibus*.[1] The original features of *Schacktavelslek* are the use of *knittelvers* (Germ. Knüttelvers; Engl. doggerel verse) and the Swedish author's omissions and additions with respect to his exemplars. The omissions are from the parts that deal with the pawns (only four pawns are mentioned, and those only in brief) and the didactic materials that are clearly judged as otiose, but unfortunately the technical rules of the game are also omitted. The additions, which take up between 20% and 25% of the Swedish text, deal with Swedish events for which the author provides commentaries.[2]

In her recent study of Jacobus' work, Jenny Adams argues that chess allegories contain "encoded anxieties about political organization, civic community,

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1 Gunnar Blomqvist, *Schacktavelslek och Sju vise mästare. De ludo scaccorum. De septem sapientibus. Studier i medeltidens litteraturhistoria* (Stockholm: Hugo Gebers, 1941), 106, 110–131. *Schacktavelslek* is edited by Gustaf Edward Klemming, *Svenska medeltids dikter och rim*. Samlingar utg. av Svenska Fornskriftsällskapet, Bd 25 (Stockholm, 1881–1882), 200–312.

2 Blomqvist, Schacktavelslek, 228–30 (see note 1); Olle Ferm, "Schacktavelslek. An international Bestseller and its Adaption into Swedish," *Chess and Allegory in the Middle Ages. A Collection of Essays*. ed. Olle Ferm and Volker Honemann. Scripta minora, 12 (Stockholm: Sällskapet Runica et Mediævalia 2005), 281–328; here 282–83.

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economic exchange and individual autonomy." Further, she claims that Jacobus breaks with the picture of the body politic as an organism the parts of which are held together by biological necessity, while the body politic in Jacobus's imagined world is compiled by autonomous groups who have particular rules of behaviour. The body politic and the civic community are thus maintained by contractual obligations and not by biological functions. Inasmuch as the pieces represent separate status and professional functions, individuals and groups can see their civic obligations and rights.[3] To a certain degree, *Schacktavelslek* accords with Jenny Adams's model as its author articulates his "anxieties about political organization" and the "civic community", but his concern is first and foremost with the kingdom, emphasizing the interdependence and obligations within a hierarchical social order, and links groups and individuals together through their formal oaths. In this way, *Schacktavelslek* shares something in common with an exceptional feature of Cessoli´s *Liber*, as indicated by Adams. Both works diverge from the traditional view of the body politic as a biological organism, and instead, they develop a contractual perspective of the body politic and the civic community. In this ordering of society, laws, rules and oaths regulate social interaction. This common feature should not obscure the difference between the two works. The author of *Schacktavelslek* sees before him the agrarian society of feudal Sweden, while Cessoli contemplates the sophisticated urban society of Northern Italy, where trade and skilled crafts played a completely different role.

The Underlying Idea of *Schacktavelslek*

The author of *Schacktavelslek* develops the idea that chess can be used as an allegory to show individuals and groups how to live virtuously. The board and its pieces have parallels in society, and just as the game has rules that have to be followed to avoid defeat, so too, there are rules for social interaction so that society may be upheld and prosper.

The allegorical reading which a social and political understanding of the game presupposes is indicated in the introduction:

> tha fan han aa tässa liist,
> skaftauels lek och thz war wist
> han gewfer j leken tässa läre
> hurw man skal lefua mz ärä /…/
> hurw the mz ära skulo sik haalla
> som märkis mz leksens tauil /.../

[3] Jenny Adams, *Power Play. The Literature and Politics of Chess in the Late Middle Ages*. The Middle Ages Series. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 2–4, 19–22, 33–43, 47–55.

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the skulo och framdelis ath förstaa
huat finnor tekna aa taflit gaa. (vv. 42–45, 49–50, 70–71)

[Then he (= Xerxes) invented this cunning game,/ the chess game, and it was wise. Through this game he teaches, how one should live with honour /.../, how they (=kings, women, laymen and clerks) should act with honour/, which is made clear on the board /.../, they (=the king´s councillors) should also henceforth understand, how the chess pieces move on the board.]

Xerxes, or Jacobus, as he is also called, is praised for inventing the game. Human beings are by nature receptive to what is new, and in this case the novelty is a tool of moral and social instruction. The author supports his view with a classical authority: "Aristotelse giffwer os thessa lära/ At naturligt är höra ok lära nymära" (vv. 229–30) ["Aristotle gives us this doctrine that it is natural to hear and learn new things"], a paraphrase of the opening of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: "Omnes homines natura scire desiderant."[4]

The author's message is aimed both at individuals and the representative groups in society, and his has an ideological thrust. He wants to teach how the Swedish kingdom should be organised for it to be strong and prosperous. His message is a pressing concern because of the precarious historical situation in Sweden at the time. The kingdom is threatened to the core by internal conflict and external threats. The ultimate responsibility for unrest lies with those at the top of the social hierarchy, especially those upholding positions within the institutional framework of the state. It is these people that are the focus of the author's attention.[5]

The Crisis: Views on the Government of the Realm

In 15th century Sweden the institutional framework of the state was upheld by the king, the bishops, the nobility and the gentry. The bishops and the nobility recruited the "king's council" (*kungens råd* or *riksrådet*), while both the nobility and gentry recruited the larger assembly called the "council and men of the

4 Aristoteles, *Metaphysica.* Recensio et translatio Guillelmi de Moerbeka, ed. Gudrun Vuillemin-Diem New York et al. Aristoteles Latinus XXV, 3.2 (Leiden, New York, 1995), I *1.*

5 The two extant manuscripts of *Schacktavelslek* belonged to aristocratic women. *Cod. Holm. D 3* "Fru Elins bok" (National Library, Stockholm), produced in 1487/8, was owned by Elin Gustavsdotter (of the family Sture), widow of the knight Erik Axelsson (of the family Tott), who twice had been "Supervisor of the realm"(*riksföreståndare*). *Codex Askabyensis*" (M 191 folio, Den Arnamagnaeanske Samling. Köpenhamn), produced in 1492, was in the hands of Gunilla Johansdotter (of the family Bese) and written by the guardian of the Askeby abbey. See David Kornhall, *Den fornsvenska sagan om Karl Magnus. Handskrifter och texthistoria* (Lund: GWK Gleemp 1959), 32–80; Patrik Åström, "The Manuscripts of *Skemptan*." *Master Golyas and Sweden. The Transformation of a Clerical Satire,* ed. Olle Ferm and Bridget Morris. Scripta minora, 3 (Stockholm: Sällskapet Runica et Mediaevalia, 1996), 235–56. See also Per Axel Wiktorsson, *Äktenskapsvisan. En lustig visa om samgåendets vedermödor*. Lectiones 6 (Stockholm: Sällskapet Runica et Mediaevalia, 2007), 5–7, 13–15.

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realm" (*rikets råd och män*), which was irregularly gathered into diets (*herredagar*), consisting of the officers of state, such as fief holders, reeves and judges of the public courts. Even townspeople and peasants were present at these diets. However, high politics was the foremost concern of the king and his council.[6]

There is no perfect match between the institutions and offices and the pieces on the chessboard, but it is obvious that the author is constantly mindful of them. The exception is the bishops who never enter the game. Nobility and gentry are referred to as *herrskap*, *herrar* ("lordship, "lords"), *riddare och svenner* ("knights and squires"), and they equate with the "knights", defined as "all those who fight with a sword" (*mz riddarom alla som fäcta mz suärde*). The king's council is referred to simply as "his council" or "the council of the realm", while the rook (*rokkin*) refers to the *marsk* and the *drots*, who are next to the king in rank and the leading representatives of the council. The "council and men of the realm" is described as *mena rikins men* ("the common men of the realm"). *Ollin* is the piece that in Latin was called *alfinus* or *aphiles* (the bishop in modern chess). It signifies the judges (*domare lärde*) in *Schacktavelslek* in their various judicial capacities.

This fabric of institutions and offices is never questioned by the author who undoubtedly considered them a given. What he does scrutinize critically is the bad manners and immoral behavior of those in power, and in so doing engages in the hierarchy of the game and its counterpart in the kingdom.

The King's Moral Shortcomings

The author laments the fate of the Swedish kings, who are frequently driven into exile. When the king is overthrown and driven away, he loses not only his "power" (*väldet*), that is, his authority over the Swedish realm and the resources attached to his office, but also his honour: "thy drifs opta konungen til skoghen / och mister landh och konungx ära" (vv. 63–64) [therefore the king is often driven into the forest/ and he looses land and the honour of being king]. The underlying issue here is the low morals of kings. The author makes it clear that exile is the final outcome of a king's bad behaviour.

Several sins and vices are highlighted, but the predominant one is greed, a despicable and socially detrimental vice. Contempt for the greedy king is

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6 The definition of state is in this context broader than what is common in Swedish historiography, but is very close to what Thomas Aquinas claimed. *Principatus*, that is government or governance, is "the holding and exercising of the whole range of authority—and in a broad sense executive—appropriate for securing justice and peace" the main objective of governance and public authority. See John Finnis, *Aquinas. Moral, Political, and Legal Theory*. Founders of Modern Political and Social Thought (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 258. Concerning the Swedish terminology, see Herman Schück, *Rikets råd och män*. Historiska serien, 23 (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, 2000), 96–122.

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expressed in many ways. He exploits his subjects "without restraint" (*wtan matta*) by sucking the farmers dry in taxation, and depriving his knights of their properties, thus arousing the hatred of his subjects (vv. 911–14, 921–25, 933, 1003–12 et passim).

The author declares that the king "wil ey wara godher" (v. 919) ["does not want to be good"], and that "rätuisonna wäg han ekke finder" (v. 1006) ["he does not find the path of justice"]. There is a philosophical link between these two statements. Thomas Aquinas and others argued that moral goodness on a social level is the will to act according to the demands of justice.[7] This lack of moral goodness is a severe shortcoming. The realm and its subjects suffer from it. Furthermore, it is a sin against God and his creation as the will to moral goodness is every man´s essential aim and duty.

A catalogue of sins and vices or the lack of virtues is readily apparent: Swedish kings yield not only to greed and unjustice but also to intemperance, anger (Latin *ira*), mental weariness (Latin *acedia*). To adopt a scholastic term, the Swedish kings lack a developed "moral habitus" which would incline them to act in a morally exemplary fashion, and this affects the country and the people. Thomas Aquinas is unambiguous about this: good rule presupposes moral understanding.[8]

The Kings Violate National Law

Further accusations are put forward. Not only do the Swedish kings violate Christian norms, but they also violate their royal oath of allegiance, as stipulated in the national law. They should uphold justice and truth, live off ordinary taxes and crown property and they should not deprive their subjects of their property without legal justification, nor should they exploit their peasants by excessive taxation.[9]

The author does not, however, claim openly that revolt against an unjust king is legitimite. This would have been a step too far. What he does say is that a

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7 George Dougherty, *The Moral Basis of Social Order according to Saint Thomas*. Philosophical Studies, 63 (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America, 1941), 5–55; Antoine Verpalen, *Der Begriff des Gemeinwohls bei Thomas von Aquin. Ein Beitrag zum Problem des Personalismus*. Sammlung Politeia, Bd. VI (Heidelberg, 1954), 67–76; Finnis, *Aquinas*, 222–39 (see note 6).

8 Finnis, *Aquinas*, 232–34 (see note 6).

9 This oath states e.g. that the king should 1) be a guardian of justice and truth, 2) be true to his people, protect them from violent men, whether of native or foreign origin, and not take anyone's property except according to the law and legal judgment, 3) live off ordinary taxes and crown property and only impose extra taxes, when extraordinary circumstances dictate. *Magnus Erikssons landslag* (henceforth MEL), ed. Åke Holmbäck and Elias Wessén. Rättshistoriskt bibliotek, 6 (Stockholm: Institutet för Rättshistorisk forskning, 1962), 4–6.

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king, who "wil ey wara godher/ tha standa han han ith annat glas til rodher" (vv.919–920) ["does not have the will to be good, will pay for that"], adding that no one should be surprised if people begin to hate an unjust king and rise up against him: "Sa fa the til konung hätiskhet/ ok driffwa honom j fatig ham/ vt af sin landh j fendens nampn" (vv. 926–28) ["They begin to hate the king/ and drive him away to a poor harbour/ out of their land in the name of enmity"].

The right to revolt was much discussed in the middle ages, and political philosophers, including Thomas Aquinas, advocated it as a last resort.[10] In Sweden, revolt, which by the 15th century had had a long history, was legitimized by reference to the national law and the royal oath. When the king broke his oath, his subjects were no longer bound to obey him.[11] The author openly refers to this fact: "thy händer opte konnwngenom falle/ mot sin edh och moth sin eghin allmoghe" (v. 61–62) ["For it often happens that the king is overthrown because he acts against his oath and his own people"].

Moral Defects in the King's Immediate Circle

Not only does the king do wrong, as the author is quick to point out, but the knights, the king's council, and its most distinguished members and leaders, the "drots" and the "marsk", are also prone to wrongdoing. Even in the introduction, where the author presents the chess pieces and their counterparts in society, we are told that the leaders not infrequently betray the king whom they ought to serve as best they can: "J blandh them finnas opta falske" (vv. 55–57) ["Among them (=the knights, the "drots", the "marsk") are often treacherous ones"].

The reason for their failings is "för giri skuldh och andra begära" (v. 59) ["greed and other desires"]. One such desire, "ambition" (Latin *ambitio*), and the striving for power and social position, is identifiable in the verse: "Ja herre mon the wara alle" (v. 60) ["Indeed, they all want to be lords"]. One effect of this ambition is stated twice in the same context: "thy händer opte konnwngenom falle" (v. 61) ["It often happens that the king is overthrown"]

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10 David Luscombe, "The State of Nature and the Origin of State." *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny & Jan Pinborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 768–70; J. H. Burns, ed. *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c. 350–c. 1450* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 135–36, 142–43, 163, 211–12, 217, 246–48, 326–29, 438–39, 462–64, 493–95.

11 A distinguished example is St. Birgitta, who referred to both national and divine law when she legitimized a revolt against king Magnus ca. 1360. See Olle Ferm, "La incitazione a rivolta." *Santa Brigida, Napoli, l'Italia. Atti del convegno di studi italo-svedese*, ed. Olle Ferm, Alessandra Perricioli, and Marcello Rotili (Napoli: Arte Tipografica Editrice, 2009), 11 –22.

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and that "drifs opta konungen til skoghen" (v. 63) ["the king is often driven into the forest"]. Yet the specific meaning of the phrase ("they all want to be lords") is ambiguous. Most obviously, it means that the leaders compete to make themselves king.

Ambitio is closely allied to *superbia*, pride, as unvirtuous behaviour: not to see one's place in society but to strive after what is inappropriate is a sign of pride. The author indirectly links pride to greed, however, for pride is made manifest by the absence of humility. In an exemplary tale, the author declares that "gyrughe män äre siellan blydhe" (v. 959) ["greedy men are seldom humble"]. The three vices are thus linked and complement each other.

The king is also accused of bad electoral policies because they contribute to an unhappy order, at least in part. He has elevated "rogues" ("skalkar," v. 923) as his councillors, and overlooked "knights and squires" ("riddare och svenner," v. 924). Judging by the context, rogues only exist in the lower echelons of society, which is confirmed elsewhere, where there is comment upon the king's policy for promotion. The author makes an addition, saying that the unworthy who are promoted are in fact doubly afflicted, being "poor and of illegimate birth" ("arme och onäcta"), while those who ought to be promoted are characterised by a contrasting wordpair "noble and of legitimate birth" ("the ädla och äkta," v. 1008). Thus priority of rank combined with true birth and breeding should apply by the latter group's to prestigious positions. This means, if the verse is taken literally, that not all knights and squires are worthy of high positions.

The king's ill-fated election policy is repeated *mutatis mutandis* by the knight class in that its representatives try to further their own family interests at the expense of other more worthy candidates. It is especially ill-fated when they promote blood-relatives to judicial posts and bypass those who are better qualified, for social harmony can only be maintained if the law is upheld and justice allowed to prevail (vv. 1741–46, 2155–56).

The "drots" and "marsk", and the king´s direct representatives, therefore "skula thenna lagh vp halla" (v. 1804) ["should uphold this law" (=the national law)] and have a particular responsibility by punishing "thom som gör illa/ ok them som wilia fridhhin spilla" (vv. 1781–82) ["those who act badly and those who want to destroy peace"]. But unfortunately they neglect their duties by becoming greedy in the exercise of their office, with disastrous effects. When justice is disregarded, discord and conflict arise: "sa wexer thom giri, ok forgaas retwisa/ sa komber ofredh ok omilhet" (vv. 1806–07) ["so they grow greedy and justice will perish, then unrest and harshness will follow"].

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Constitutional Criticism

The author associates a range of unvirtuous qualities and behaviour with the political elite, describing them as unrighteous, gready, arrogant, dishonest, rebellious and selfish. As with the king, the author has a constitutional basis for his criticism, namely the national law and the oaths of allegiance that the law contains. The broken oaths of the king's council are referred to several times in the introduction (v. 66) and subsequently. Because of the sworn oaths, good counsel is unconditional, in the author's eyes, no matter what attitude the king shows: "j skollen honom rät raada thz är eder edher/ ä huad han waare glader älla wreder" (vv. 1019–20) ["You should advise him correctly, as you have sworn to do, whether he is happy or angry"]. The oath of the king's council was enshrined in the code on kings in the national law, and consisted of three articles: 1) The councillors should give the king useful advice, and be non-partisan and ignore all other considerations, such as patronage on the basis of family or friendship. 2) They should help the king to strengthen the law of the kingdom, so that he upholds his oath and the people uphold theirs. 3) They should guard what the king wishes kept secret, so that nothing is disclosed that might harm the king or the kingdom.[12]

The accusations suggest that the councillors violate the first article of the council's oath in two ways. First, they give the king bad advice, which is detrimental both to the king and the kingdom, and second, they promote family interests when exercising power. In other words, they are disposed to injustice and falsehood, and consequently they are unsuitable for assisting the king in upholding the law of the realm. Thus they also violate the second article. The accusation about falsehood can be linked not only to the third article but to all three articles. Councillors who are dishonest and treacherous cannot be trusted in matters of state.

Several times "oaths" (*eder*) occurs in the plural form, which might be a concession to the demands of meter, since the word rhymes, for example, with "vreder" and "wreder", but it might also refer to two different oaths, those of the king's council and the common oath which the adult population had to swear at the king's accession. As the king's councillors, they did not have the freedom to obtain a dispensation from the common oath, for it applied to all subjects. It was prescribed in the national law, and stated that the subjects of the realm should obey and serve the king, which is hardly the case for a rebel.[13] As indicated above, both the concillors and the subjects in general are accused of being rebellious.

12 MEL, 8 (see note 9).
13 MEL, 6–7 (see note 9).

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It may be added that the common oath is explicitly referred to in the oath of the king's council. In the second article it is stated that the king's council shall ensure not only that the king upholds his oath but also that the people uphold theirs. This means that the king's council is given a key position between the king and the people in that it has both a mediating and a controlling function in relation to the king and the people. In fact, the concillors seem to have forgotten this obligation too.

The Impending Cataclysm: *Anomie*

When the rules are not followed, not only the game, but also the society, ceases to function, and complete chaos ensues. This is the condition that Emile Durkheim called *anomie*, a breakdown of social order due to the dissolution of common norms.[14] Although things have not gone quite so far in Sweden, the effects of bad morals on society are destructive. Lawlessness and disloyalty prevail, and when the oaths that bind one group to another and to the realm are not upheld, the inevitable outcome is social unrest: "Jnghen lagh ok ingen troo/ Jngha eedher ok ingen roo" (vv. 2015–16) ["No law and no allegiance/ no oaths and no rest"].

The author also identifies a lack of rational insight among his fellow citizens. Everything has turned topsy-turvy: injustice has turned to justice, evil acts are seen as good, irrationality is perceived as rationality: "Alth thz han gör illa skall hetha rätt" (v. 1321)["All wrong he does will be called right"], and "then som mest forradha kan/ Han heter nw een godher man" (vv. 2009–10) ["he who can betray the most, he is now called a good man"]. This kind of foolishness is a poor proverb, according to the author, declaring that unreason is not wisdom but folly: "Then mz ofornofth wil werwa prijs/ Han är galin ok ekke wijs" (vv.1259–60) ["He who wants to gain glory by unreason/ is foolish and not wise"]. It might be added that "he" in these quotations is used as an impersonal general reference.

Social and moral disorder, closely connected to each other, have disastrous effects. In the long run, a great danger threatens, namely the downfall of the realm. The parallel with the chess game is obvious. Just as the game has its own rules which have to be cleverly used so as not to lose the game, so within the kingdom the rules of reason must be followed to promote good morals and strengthen the rule of law. It is clear from the outset that the game is a fight with an enemy: "ho som thz lära wil/ han skal stadelig tenkia oppa/ hwar hans fiende sta eller ga/ ok tagha sith folk wel til wara" (vv. 243–45) ["he who will learn it (=the game), should always have in mind where his enemy is and take good care of his people"]. The author alludes to Sweden's precarious position

[14] See Ian Craib, *Classical Social Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 31.

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within the Scandinavian Union where the policies of the Danish king towards Sweden were a continual provocation and led to armed conflict and internal division. To withstand enemy powers, internal unity is needed. To give expression to his fears, the author refers to Mark 3, 24: "gud han haffwer thz sileffwer sakt/ "thz rike forgaas som haffwer twädraäkt" (vv. 1455–58) ["God himself has said it: 'the realm that is haunted by discord will perish'"].

The author provides tangible historical examples about how bad social morals, the outcome of which is social disorder, can lead to the downfall of even the most powerful nations. The foremost case is the Roman Empire. As long as concord and harmony prevailed, the Romans ruled the world: "the hafdo thz för tera endräkt/ öwer alla wärdena herskap och makth" (vv. 985–86) ["Thanks to their concord/ they ruled over the whole world"]. But once greed was admitted, then discord, hatred and murder followed, and Rome's resources were destroyed. The present-day ruins of Rome still bear witness to this. Yet Rome is not a unique case, and there are many parallels to exemplify greed and its devastating consequences, one of them being Sweden: "ty är wärra/ man finder manga roma like/ sök ekke länger än här i suergis rike" (vv. 998–1000) ["Unfortunately one finds many who are like Rome/. Look no further than here in Sweden"].

The contemporary aristocrats whom the author addresses must surely have seen another parallel. Ruined castles suggest Rome's former greatness and fall, according to the author. Such castles were not specific to Roman history, as would have been known to the recipients of *Schacktavelslek*, for in Sweden there were many ruined or decaying castles and fortresses after the Engelbrekt uprising of the 1430s.

The Other Side of the Coin: Government for the "Common Good"

Good government can be described in negative terms: circumstances should be the complete the opposite of those that pertain. Nevertheless, *Schacktavelslek* provides some positive fixed points for what the rulers should strive towards.

A strategic concept is the "common good", which is phrased *allmänna bästa* or *mena bästa*, better known in Latin usage as *bonum commune*. Although the concept "common good" is not strictly defined in *Schacktavelslek*, its general meaning is that the community as a whole should be served, which in this case is the realm and its subjects. A closer examination of the context reveals more.

If the rulers have the common good as a guiding principle for their exercise of power, then the general welfare of society will follow, and both rich and poor will benefit, because low desires such as greed and selfishness do not influence the actions of those in power. It was once like this in the Swedish realm:

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thz lagdo the alt ther oppa
thz mena besta regera saa
at almoghen ok rike badha
skulle wara j fridh ok nadhe
the fikto ey epther rikedoma
ok ekke epther sin egen froma (vv. 2373–78)

[They gave everything they had/ to rule for the *common good* so/ that both the common people and the wealthy/ would be in a state of peace and grace./They neither hankered after wealth nor their own good.]

To work for the common good means that justice must prevail and that oaths must be observed even if it sometimes means that friendship ties must be set aside: "Thw merk ok thetta mot retwisa/ skalt tw ey swa wenskap prisa/ eller mot retta edher eller menoga besta" (vv. 2849–51) ["Remember also this: you shall not praise friendship over justice or against proper oaths or the common good"].

The common good is contrasted with injustice and partiality, and unvirtuous impulses like greed and selfishness, and their beneficial effects, are described in social terms: social unrest and discord do not occur. Putting it in positive terms, the common good is linked to a defense of the order of justice as codified in the national law, and with a defense of oaths of allegiance. Then things will go well: all is well in the kingdom, which means that "peace and grace" prevail.

The concept of the "common good" comes originally from Greek philosophy. Thomas Aquinas made it his own by substantially elaborating on it and giving it several complementary definitions.[15] The concept is also central to Giles of Rome´s *De regimine principum*, a work that was strongly influenced by Thomas's thought and in the early 14th paraphrased in Swedish with the title *Konungastyrelsen* ("The Royal Rule").[16]

At a general level there are similarities between these works and *Schacktavelslek*. Thomas Aquinas argues, for instance, for the importance of the rule of social order, which implies that justice rules and that the different groups of society strive in concord for the common good.[17] In Thomistic thinking, justice has nothing to do with the equal distribution of material

15 Thomas Aquinas comments on the concept in different contexts. Ludwig Schütz, Thomas-Lexikon (Stuttgart: sec. ed. 1895, repr. 1958) bonus, col.,: 25–26. Thomas Aquinas borrowed the concept from Aristotle, e.g. Politics, 1279a, but it is a strategic concept in Plato's political philosophy, e.g. Republic, 506b, 508e.

16 Lennart Moberg, *Konungastyrelsen. En filologisk undersökning*, Samlingar utgivna av Svenska fornskrift-sällskapet, Bd 69:2 (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell 1984), 11–16, 106–107, 219–28. Corinne Peneau, "Um styrilsi konunga ok höfdinga, un miroir inspiré de Gilles de Rome dans la Suède de la première moitié du XIVe siècle," *Le prince au miroir de la littérature politique de l´Antiquité aux Lumières*, ed. F. Lachaud et L. Scordia (Mont-Saint-Aignan: Publications des Universités de Rouen et du Havre, 2007), 191–216.

17 Dougherty, *Moral Basis*, 35–55 (see note 7).

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resources or social rights and obligations. As people are different and therefore contribute in different ways to the common good, it is quite natural that they have different positions in society and that some are more privileged than others.[18] This view is largely in line with the hierarchic perspective on society that we find in *Schacktavelslek* and the other chess allegories.

Although all citizens should contribute to the common good, Giles of Rome emphasized the special obligation of the "partes principales" in this endeavor. The "partes principales" may be identified with representatives of the princely families and members of the nobility and ecclesiastical hierarchy:

> Nam sicut sanitas corporis naturalis dependet ex sanitate omnium membrorum et maxime ex sanitate cordis et membrorum principalium, eo quod cor et principalia membra habent influere in alia et rectificare ipsa: sic bonitas regni dependet ex bonitate omnium ciuium; maxime tamen ex iis qui principantur et dominantur in regno.[19]
>
> [Just as the health of the natural body is dependent on the health of all members and especially on the health of the heart and of the principal members, since the heart and the principal members are ordained to influence on and correct the other members: thus the health of the realm is dependent on the health of all members but especially on those who rule and govern the realm.]

In *Schacktavelslek* the concept of the common good is strongly related to power groups (what Giles of Rome called "partes principales"), that is, the king and his councillors, the nobility and, in addition, the court scribes, as servants of power.[20] The peasants are not included, not because they do not contribute to the common good,[21] but because the author is addressing the privileged groups and those in power who must be reminded that they have a special responsibility for the state of the kingdom.

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18 Justice is in thomistic philosophy based on two principles, one commutative, and the other distributive. Commutative justice is there to guarantee each and every individual certain rights necessary for his or her moral perfection, whilst distributive justice concerns the distribution of rights in proportion to the importance that an individual holds within society.

19 Egidio Colonna (Aegidius Romanus), *De regimine principum Libri III* (Darmstadt: Scientia Verlag Aalen. Neudruck der Ausgabe Rom 1607, 1967), II, II, 2 (p. 290).

20 Although these examples of "bonum commune" have their direct or indirect correspondence in Jacobus's Liber and Meister Stefan's German version, the link to the idea of "bonum commune" is lacking in these texts, and only exists in *Schacktavelslek*. In other words, they form part of the Swedish author's additions. The term "bonum commune" is referred to once in Jacobus's Liber, where the seventh pawn (*Custodes /civitatis/ decet esse solicitos, oculatos et zelatores boni communis*.) is discussed, although with a different meaning. See Ernst Köpke, *Iacobus de Cessolis*. Mitteilungen aus den Handschriften der Ritter-Akademie zu Brandenburg (Brandenburg, 1879), 27; Ferdinand Vetter, *Das Schachzabelbuch Kunrats von Ammenhausen nebst den Schackbüchern des Jacob von Cessole und des Jacob Mennel*. Bibliothek älterer Schriftwerke der deutschen Schweiz (Frauenfeld: J. Huber, 1892), col., 665–66.

21 Finnis, *Aquinas*, 234–38 (see note 8).

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Institutional aspects

Schacktavelslek lacks a consistent institutional perspective on political government. It preaches morals, but the author alludes in particular to an institutional framework that promotes political decision-making in the service of the common good and explicitly includes the order of succession and the acceptance of new laws.

Concerning the succession, the author outlines four positions (vv. 289–94, 452–74 et passim).

1. Kings should be of royal birth.
2. Kingship inheritance is better than elective kingship.
3. Primogeniture is to be preferred at the succession.
4. A native king is preferable to a foreign king.

His arguments in favour of these positions are closely connected and sometimes almost identical. A central premise is that conflict must be avoided. Conflicts commonly occur at the election of king, and many promote their own candidates for selfish ends and without consideration of the common good. Even if the choice is restricted to those of royal blood, it might occur that several candidates are presented. For this reason primogeniture should be observed in a line of succession. Moreover, the future king can be prepared as best possible for his future role. He will receive a sound upbringing, especially if his parents are good. In addition, his subjects will get accustomed to him and be more inclined to show allegiance to a candidate whom they know and who has been shaped for his future task. For this reason a king should not be brought in from another country.

But the pleading for a native king can also be seen against the background of political events in Sweden and the country´s harsh experience with foreign rulers. Sweden had not seen a native-born king for 100 years, with the exception of the years 1448–1457 when the Swedish nobleman Karl Knutsson (Bonde) was king, although his regime did not bring good fortune either. Much of the criticism of the king in *Schacktavelslek* seems to be directed at Karl Knutsson in particular. He was driven into exile in 1457, but returned twice in the 1460s.[22] The author declares that exiled kings sometimes return which is to no avail if he is "worthless" (*usel*). He will not alter his behaviour but carry on as before: "jak radher allom se for sik/ som han giorde för, saa gör han tik" (vv. 2013–14) ["I advise everyone to be on the alert: as he has done in the past, he will do to you"]. Clearly, Karl Knutsson lacked something that the author thought essential: an upbringing within a royal family and an adequate

[22] Blomqvist, *Schacktavelslek*, 111–29.

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preparation for office. In respect of this, the author confronts an obvious dilemma, for no-one could provide for such preparation in Sweden at that time.

When pleading for hereditary kingship the author of *Schacktavelslek* argues against constitutional tradition in Sweden. The old regional laws and the national laws of Magnus Eriksson and Christopher of Bavaria defined Sweden as an elective monarchy, and the author would of course have been well aware of this. Therefore, his opinion must have been based on other sources, but a specific source is hard to find. It might be *Konungastyrelsen* ("The Royal rule") whose author is in favour of hereditary kingship. Election procedures might cause devastating effects, it is argued, because electors might try to favour their own relatives**.** However, they disagree in other respects.[23]

The king is the highest protector of justice, as codified in the national law, and this is repeatedly stated in the text. Since the king cannot uphold justice by himself, he is supported in his task of upholding the law by the "drots" and "marsk" and by the judges. In this task they judges must follow the law and they may not introduce new laws or customs (*seder*), if the nation as a whole does not request it. This position is underlined by a well-known legal-philosophical maxim: "thy thz skal them allom röra/ thz skule ok alle samtykka ok höra (vv. 1789–90) ["For that which concerns everyone,/ shall also be agreed upon by everyone"]. The formulation is better known in Latin: *Quod omnes tangit, ab omnibus debet approbari*, which originates in Roman law.[24]

The process of making new laws is a common concern, according to the quotation. In this case, the inhabitants of the kingdom should propose new laws, and that the king and the "common council of the realm" affirm the legal proposals made by his subjects: "tha skal thz ske medh konungx nadh/ ok alt hans mena rikins raad" (vv. 1785–86) ["Then it shall occur by the grace of the king, and all the common council of the realm"]. This is very much in accordance with king Christoffer´s promulgation of the common law of the kingdom in 1442.

The concept of the "common council of the realm" does not refer to the "king's council" but to the larger political grouping which in the fifteenth-century diplomas is referred to as the "council and men of the realm" (*rikets råd och män*). The author does not unambiguosly claim that they should only have an affirmative role in the legal process. It is certainly within this group that proposals for new laws should be made. As indicated above, this group consisted of about one hundred noblemen with authority to represent the inhabitants of realm, and they were resident in different parts of the

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23 Robert Geete, *Um styrilsi kununga ok höfthinga. Normaliserad upplaga* (Stockholm: Nordstedt, 1878), 10–12; Olle Ferm, "Schacktavelslek. An International Bestseller", 312–13 (see note 2).

24 *Corpus Iuris Civilis II,* ed. Paulus Krüger (Berlin: Weidmann, 1959), Codex 5.59.5.2. See also Stig Strömholm, "Quod omnes tangit- en rättsprincips väg till Sverige." *De lege. Eftersyn och eftertanke,* ed. Petter Asp (Uppsala: Iustus Förlag, 2007), 295–304.

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kingdom where they were periodically called to political meetings, "diets" (*dagar*, *herredagar*).

This reference to the greater assembly fits with the author's warning against government by a few influential advisers. Oligarchy should be avoided, and consequently the author advocates considering advice from several people whose different viewpoints can be weighed up against each other, thus avoiding the council of a few dominant and strong-minded people, who "drunkna stundom j sinom wisdom" (v. 1800) ["sometimes drown in their own wisdom".]

In short, the ideal form of government is what political philosophers called *regimen politicum*, when the ruler has, according to Thomas Aquinas, *potestatem coarctatam secundum leges aliquas leges civitatis* ["power, which is limited by certain laws of the state"].[25] This might be called constitutional government. In the *Schacktavelslek*, it means that political rule must be based on national law and national political institutions, and that *regimen regale*, i.e. royal autocracy, when the ruler has what Thomas Aquinas calls "plenary power" (*potestas plenaria*), is rejected.[26] The constititutional line had been advocated in Swedish quarters against the Danish Union kings since the beginning of the fifteenth century.[27]

Remedy: Moral Education

Schacktavelslek does not claim to be a political tract, nor is it one. Although there are elements to suggest that some institutions are preferable to others, the central theme is social morality and the education towards virtues and away from vices, in a social perspective. If only low desires, which promote vice, can be kept in check, then interaction between people will be improved and in the long run the community as a whole will benefit. This opinion is not specific to *Schacktavelslek*; Thomas Aquinas and other philosophers thought of social relations as moral relations.[28]

"Moral virtue" (*virtus moralis*) is the ideal. In medieval discourse it is not given by nature but must be learned and made to become a part of the

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25 S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Sententia Libri Politicorum*. *Opera omnia* 4. Curante Roberto Busa (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1980), I. I n.5.

26 S. Thomae Aquinatis I. I n. 5. 7 (see note 25). See David Luscombe, "The State of Nature and the Origin of State," *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny and Jan Pinborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 765–66 and Finnis, *Aquinas*, 258–66 (see note 8).

27 Erik Lönnroth, "Sverige och Kalmarunionen 1434–1457," Ph.D. diss., Göteborg University, 1934, analysed the ideological conflict in late medieval Sweden by means of these concepts: the Swedes argued in favour of *regimen politicum* and the Danish Union monarch was the proponent of *regimen regale*.

28 Dogherty, *Moral Basis*, 22 (see note 7) and Finnis, *Aquinas*, 226–30 (see note 8).

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personality, one's *habitus*, and it can be achieved by practice or in the repetition of good deeds.[29] In *Schacktavelslek* this view is well expressed by the generous use of exempla and didactic stories which exemplify good behaviour in different situations. However, since all situations cannot be foreseen and illustrated with examples, moral behaviour has presupposed a reasoned insight about what is morally good. This insight is supported by two faculties, one theoretical, *sapientia*, and one practical, *prudentia*.[30] *Schacktavelslek* discusses what it is to be "wise" (*vis*) and "clever/ prudent" (*klok*), that is, *sapiens* and *prudens* respectively. However, a clear distinction between the two terms cannot be made, and the author sometimes also refers to the term *snille* which can mean both "wisdom" and "cleverness" and "reason". The emphasis, judging by the context, is on *prudentia*,[31] which implies that a person by rational reasoning can perform the correct action in a given situation. If reason plays an important part for virtuous deeds, the same is true for the will, for without a firm desire for moral virtue good is not achieved.

The basis of a moral habitus, the developed ability to make moral choices and act in accordance with them, is established in childhood through a good upbringing. Great responsibility therefore falls on parents: "ther haffua forälra optha skuldh/ Ath barnen äro odygda full" (vv. 1295–96) ["often it is the fault of the parents that children are full of mischief"]. Although upbringing evidently is a shared responsibility, gender plays a distinctive role. Judging by what is said about the queen, the woman is set a special task: she is in charge of the moral education of her children, and should bring them up lovingly, so that "swa at the lära tokt ok snille" (v. 489) ["they learn morality and wisdom"]. The king should also get a formal education: if he does not learn *dygd ok konster* ("virtue and arts") people will consider him stupid, *ena asnakrono werdh* (v. 852) ["worthy of the crown of an ass"].

For the knight class an educational programme is outlined, which includes specified formal studies (the basics of *artes* studies), which indisputably promote a disposition to be prudent in battle and combat and in office to strengthen the rule of law (vv. 1277–82). Perhaps the author is naïve (at least by our modern standards) about the salutary moral outcome of formal studies, but this is an appeal to his audience, the nobility, to improve in learning so as to be better able to perform their official duties as judges or as the king's councillors.

It takes time to become wise and prudent. Therefore, young upstarts must not be given free hand, and older, wise men should lead them: "thy bör wisom

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29 *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Bd. 3 Hrsg. Joachim Ritter (Basel: Schwabe & Co, 1974), col., 1120–1123 [*Hexis (habitus)*].

30 Finnis, *Aquinas*, 119 et passim (see note 8).

31 Vv. 6, 43, 73, 141, 143, 282, 363, 390, 489, 506, 1260, 1280, 1325, 1327, 1800 et passim.

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regera thz spiill" (vv. 1261–66) ["Therefore the wise should govern the game"]. This phrase seems to be inspired by Aristotle's much-quoted dictum: *Sapientis est ordinare* ["The wise man knows how to keep things in order"]. Thomas Aquinas refers to it in the first chapter of *Summa contra Gentiles*, the title of which is: *Quod sit officium sapientis* ["The task of the wise man"].[32] Unfortunately, the author of *Schacktavelslek* suggests that the opposite is the case in his day. Even twelve-year old boys want to marry and receive fiefs from the Crown; and thus it is particularly unfortunate if a very young boy is elected king, since he lacks the wisdom and knowledge necessary for good rule and government (vv.1284–94, 1312).

But, in the end, no one will ever reach moral perfection. Therefore the desire for virtue should last a lifetime. This point is made when the author develops his views on the duties of the queen, whose role is not only to nurture her children but also to mollify the king´s anger and teach those in her household–men as well as women–good morals and wisdom (vv. 479–89). The queen as chess piece of course stands for women in general as the author explicitly declares in his introduction. This means that the author has in mind not only the queen and the royal court but also married women at aristocratic manor-houses.

Conclusion

The message of Schacktavelselek is aimed at the aristocracy, the group that bears the greatest responsibility for the wretched situation in which Sweden finds herself. The emphasis placed on the exemplary moral role of the social elite indicates a Platonic perspective in the work. However, the author's moral appeal is also influenced overall by a rational code of virtue along Aristotelean-Thomist lines, as well as by the national law and a feudal code of conduct. The Bible – significantly – is cited only rarely. Politically, the author makes a case for national kingship and constitutional government, and in so doing he is probably inspired by *Konungastyrelsen* ("The Royal rule", a Swedish reworking of Giles of Rome´s *De regimine principum*). In particular, he takes a position against the autocratic rule of the Danish regents and the Swedish king, Karl Knutsson, who were the cause of many conflicts in the 15th century. He is troubled by the growing political and social instability that he sees as a threat to the very survival of Sweden. His concern comes not only from the gradual

[32] Aristoteles, *Metaphysica.* Recensio et translatio Guillelmi de Moerbeka, ed. Gudrun Vuillemin-Diem. Aristoteles Latinus, XXV 3.2 (New York and Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995). I 2. S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa contra Gentiles, Opera omnia*, 2. Curante Roberto Busa (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog 1980): I, cp.1, n.2.

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breakdown of social patterns internally, but also from the desire for political hegemony among the Danish regents of the Nordic Union. Calamity can only be avoided if both politicians and citizens mobilize around core principles. They must recognize "the common good" which brings about peace and justice and is achievable if they withstand the common vices of greed, pride, disloyalty, and nepotism.

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