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# Tommaso Campanella

*The Book and the Body of Nature*



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more dangerous when virtue hides itself, fearing the tyrant, because when the opportunity comes such virtue will arm itself against the prince, as Brutus and other wise men did. One must always put courage in the limelight, for the hidden fire does more harm.<sup>16</sup>

*The Body Politic: The City of the Sun*

Some three years after the fateful events of Calabria, it took Campanella six months to recover from the damage done to his health by the tortures he had suffered, and he was now in a state of mind of renewed hope after having managed to save his life by overcoming such terrible ordeals. He immediately started writing his most famous work, the short poetical dialogue which he called *The City of the Sun* (*Città del Sole*).

As has been acutely said, the work presented itself as both the program for a failed insurrection and its philosophical idealization.<sup>17</sup> In giving it to the press in 1623 (when it appeared, in Latin, as an appendix to the *Politica*), Tobias Adami – struck by its purity and luminosity – defined it as a precious stone and identified the superiority of this ideal community with respect to the models proposed by Plato in antiquity and by Thomas More in recent times insofar as it had been inspired by the great model of nature. In fact, the references to nature, understood as an expression of an intrinsic divine art, and the critique of society, as it then existed (unhappy and unjust precisely because it was distant from that natural model, or because it did not imitate it in the right way), are the keys to a more simple and more persuasive reading of Campanella's utopia. In other political works, Campanella analyzed (often in a completely disenchanted manner) the harsh reality of his time and suggested remedies for correcting and holding in check the worst ills. In *The City of the Sun*, he adopted a different point of view. On a blank slate he sketched a map at once simple and detailed of a city that did not exist – 'a philosophical idea of a republic' and 'a poetical dialogue' – so as to suggest the criteria and the norms of a possible community in which men might live a more just and harmonious life. Aristotle himself, while emphasizing the differences between poetry and history, had pointed out that while history relates the particular as it happened, poetry deals with the universal and with what might happen.<sup>18</sup>

The city would be more united and happy the more it was a 'political body.' In proposing a new model of knowledge (based on direct investigation of

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 129, pp. 134–135.

<sup>17</sup> Norberto Bobbio, introduction to his own edition of the *Città del Sole* (Turin, 1941), pp. 31–34. There is a bibliography of the various editions of the work in Margherita Palumbo, *La Città del Sole. Bibliografia delle edizioni. 1623–2002* (Pisa-Rome, 2004).

<sup>18</sup> Aristotle, *Poëtica*, IX, 1451b.

nature and not only on the books of philosophers), Campanella often recalled the image of the ‘book of nature.’ When he dealt with political association he made use of another great naturalistic image – that of the ‘body,’ apt to communicate a multiplicity of significations. The ‘republic’ is a living organism that ought to aim at preserving and improving its own health (including its physical health). Like all organisms, it is made up of multiple members that are differentiated by duty and function. Yet they are all working towards the well-being of the whole, a well-being that was the condition and horizon of the well-being of the individual parts.

Protected and defended by seven circles of walls, in which the dwelling places are incorporated, the city is located in a place with an ideal climate that is favorable to its physical well-being on the slopes of a hill so that the air is lighter and more pure. One of the most important aspects of this community is the conception and distribution of work. Once again, Campanella explicitly criticized Aristotle, who excluded artisans, peasants, and anyone who worked at manual labor from both the class of citizens who enjoyed full rights and also the highest levels of virtue. In the *Syntagma*, Campanella urged ‘diligent consultation with painters, dyers, blacksmiths, jewelers, goldsmiths, peasants, soldiers, artillerymen, weavers, distillers, and other artisans,’ so that in their workshops and in their activities there would exist ‘a philosophy more real and true than in the schools of philosophy.’<sup>19</sup> For the Solarians, no activity is vile or base and everyone has equal dignity. In fact, those from whom greater labors are required (such as the blacksmith and the builder) are more praiseworthy. Everyone learns every trade and then each one practices that for which he shows the greatest aptitude. Even those who have physical disabilities contribute according to their capabilities. The Solarians have no slaves. They can fulfill their own needs, and no service is held to be undignified: ‘no one holds it a dishonor to serve in the dining hall, in the kitchen or elsewhere; instead they call it learning, and they say that just so it is an honor to walk on one’s feet and equally an honor to see with one’s eyes.’ They find laziness alone despicable, coming thereby to privilege the dignity of work and to overturn an absurd notion of nobility, bound up with inactivity and vice. Thus, ‘he is held to be the greatest noble, who learns the most trades, or does them better. For this reason, the Solarians mock us for calling artisans ignoble and for describing as noble those who learn no skill, are lazy, and hold so many servants in a sloth and lasciviousness that ruins the republic.’<sup>20</sup>

Owing to the equal division of labor, it is sufficient that each person dedicates him or herself to work activities for four hours a day. But it is imperative

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<sup>19</sup> *Syntagma*, II, 5, p. 78.

<sup>20</sup> *Città del Sole*, pp. 23, 13.

that everyone work, because the laziness of some would have repercussions for the exploitation and labor of others. This imperative follows from the most resentful observation in the dialogue, in which the outside world with all its injustice and suffering erupts violently into the serene atmosphere of the City of the Sun:

There are three hundred thousand souls in Naples; yet barely fifty thousand of them are working; and these fifty thousand struggle with a quantity of work that is enough to kill them. The others become prey to idleness, avarice, lasciviousness and usury, and corrupt people by holding them in servitude and poverty.<sup>21</sup>

With regard to possessions and property, the Solarians own nothing. Everything is communal – from the meals to the houses, from the learning of the sciences to the exercising of political functions, from honors to entertainment, from women to children. There is an official who is charged with the distribution of all things and who makes sure that this happens in accordance with justice, but no one is permitted to appropriate anything. According to the Solarians, the possession of a house and of a family cannot but reinforce the ‘love of self,’ with all the sad consequences that this generates: ‘they say that all property derives from making a house apart and taking children and wives for oneself, whence comes the love of self, which – so as to raise a child to riches and titles, and leave an heir to wealth – makes everyone either a public bird of prey (if, being strong, he has no fear) or avaricious and scheming and hypocritical (if he is weak).’ They have chosen community, ‘living philosophically together,’ also because they are aware of the negative repercussions, both moral and social, of an unequal distribution of wealth: ‘they also say that great poverty makes men vile, cunning, thieves, scheming, outlaws, liars, false witnesses; and that riches make men insolent, arrogant, ignorant, treacherous, disillusioned, and presumptuous about things they do not understand. Yet the community there makes everyone both rich and poor: rich, because they have and possess everything; poor, because they do not become attached to serving things, but instead let things serve them.’<sup>22</sup>

One of the most spectacular and imaginative features of *The City of the Sun*, which immediately strikes its readers, is the description of the painted walls. The seven walls are not only circles for enclosing and protecting the city. They are also the wings of an extraordinary theater and the pages of an illustrated encyclopedia of knowledge. Among the promises listed in his

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23–24.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

letters, Campanella made a commitment to build ‘a city admirable to the King, healthy and impregnable, which would impart all the sciences historically just by looking at it.’<sup>23</sup> The external walls of the buildings are decorated with images of all the arts and sciences.

Starting with the wall supporting the columns of the temple and all the way down the various circuits of walls (in a manner parallel to the order of the planets from Mercury to Saturn), we encounter the representation of the heavens and of the stars, of mathematical figures, of every country of the earth ‘with its rites, customs, and laws.’ After that we come across all the wonders and secrets of the mineral, vegetable, and animal worlds and eventually reach men: on the internal wall of the sixth circle are represented ‘all the mechanical arts and their inventors.’ Campanella expressed the greatest interest in every ingenious discovery and in the city he provided many examples of his curious devices – from vessels capable of sailing without wind to carts with sails to stirrups that permit one to guide horses using only one’s feet, thereby leaving the hands free. On the external wall of the same circle are represented ‘all the inventors of laws and sciences and arms.’ And it is here that the Genoese sailor of Columbus – who is one of the interlocutors of the dialogue, together with the Hospitaller<sup>24</sup> – recognizes Christ and the twelve apostles, in ‘a place of high esteem’ (alongside Moses, Osiris, Jupiter, Mercury, and Muhammad).

Knowledge is not closed up in books kept in separate spaces like libraries. Instead, it is displayed before the eyes of all. Visualization favors a more rapid reception of things and so the Solarians would learn in one year what among us is learnt in the course of ten or fifteen years. Visualization renders learning easier and more effective, in that it is connected to the art of memory, which insists on the evocative and emotive force of images. From a very tender age, children experience this theater of knowledge with appropriate guidance and according to a suitable rhythm and itinerary, and they learn with joy, as if playing, without effort or pain. The Metaphysician, the political and spiritual leader, ought to be the wisest of all. To the possible objection of the incompatibility between politics and philosophy (‘he who attends to the sciences cannot know how to govern’), the Solarians reply that it is always better to entrust oneself to a wise man who, even if not an expert, will not be malicious, unlike ‘you who suffer the ignorant, thinking that they are well-suited because they are born lords or are elected by powerful factions.’ But

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<sup>23</sup> *Lettere*, p. 28.

<sup>24</sup> A knight of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, also known as the Order of Malta. On the character of Hospitaller, see Jean-Paul De Lucca, ‘Prophetic Representation and Political Allegorisation: the Hospitaller in Campanella’s *The City of the Sun*,’ *B&C*, 15 (2009), pp. 387–405.

the real response emphasizes the different conception of knowledge held by the Solarians, who do not hold that 'he is wise who knows most grammar and logic from Aristotle (or any other author), in which case one only needs a servile memory, whence man makes himself inert, because he does not contemplate things but rather books, and abases his soul in those dead things.' The Metaphysician is 'swift of mind in all things.' He knows 'all the histories of the peoples and rites and sacrifices and republics and inventors of laws and arts.' He knows all the mechanical arts and all the sciences. And above all it is important that he be a 'metaphysician and theologian, who knows well the source and proof of all the arts and sciences, together with the similarities and differences of things.'<sup>25</sup>

Beyond the sharing of possessions and the painted walls, another aspect distinguishes the City of the Sun. It is a problematic and disconcerting point, one that Campanella himself presented as 'difficult and arduous' – namely, the sharing of women. The solution adopted by the Solarians addressed a specific problem: reproduction. Echoing the Pythagorean teachings of Ocellus of Lucania, Campanella said that the Solarians 'laugh at those of us who concern ourselves with the breeding of dogs and horses while neglecting our own.'<sup>26</sup> Reproduction is a basic problem for the city, and as such 'it is regulated religiously for the public and not the private good.' The reproductive act carries with it a great responsibility on the part of he who reproduces, and if that responsibility is exercised in an incorrect way it can give rise to a long chain of sufferings. Moreover, there is a tight connection between natural 'complexion' (which is primordial and not modifiable) and moral virtue, which in order to take root and prosper requires suitable terrain: 'they say that the purity of the complexion, out of which virtues develop, cannot be acquired by art and that only with difficulty can moral virtue take root without a natural disposition. They also say that men of an evil nature act well out of fear of the law and, in the absence of that, they destroy the republic both openly and secretly.'<sup>27</sup> For that reason, reproduction will have to respect precise norms, and should neither be entrusted to chance, nor to individual feelings. Indeed, the Solarians distinguish between love and the exercising of sexuality. The attraction between men and women (which is founded on friendship and respect more than 'ardent concupiscence') is expressed honorably and with a considerable gentleness that is very distant from sexuality. If 'a man falls in love with a woman, it is licit for them to speak to each other, to write poems, and to exchange jokes and floral arrangements.' In the evening, after dinner,

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<sup>25</sup> *Città del Sole*, p. 13.

<sup>26</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 10; *Quaestio quarta politica*, art. 3, note 10, in *Città del Sole* (1996) p. 155.

<sup>27</sup> *Città del Sole*, p. 21.

when ‘hymns of love, wisdom, and of every other virtue are being sung,’ ‘each man takes the woman that he loves the most, and they dance under the beautiful cloisters.’<sup>28</sup> Reproductive sexuality has to respect an entire series of conditions, concerning above all the arrangement of ‘judicious mating’ with respect to physical and moral endowments and with respect to the choice of the right time (set by astrology, which in the City of the Sun plays a fundamental role, in that it is a kind of cosmic watch that indicates the best times for putting human events in agreement with the requisite celestial configurations).<sup>29</sup> Some of the most curious stipulations concern philosophers and priests, who are not permitted to reproduce ‘if they do not fulfill a number of other conditions for many days.’ Aristotle had already observed that the children of great men are often of limited value, and Campanella explained that wise men have weak animal spirits. Given that they are always engrossed in contemplation, during the sexual act they hold back the finest and most noble spirits of the brain, releasing only those lowest spirits: ‘on account of the large amount of speculation, they are weak in animal spirits and they do not release the valuable spirits of the head, because they are always thinking about something, and because of this they make unfortunate progeny.’<sup>30</sup> In the City of the Sun, mating happens in a rarefied and cold atmosphere, in a context of precisely calculated astral positions: the union is not the expression of a personal relationship, and it is completely devoid of affective or passionate drives other than those of the social responsibility involved in generation and love for the collective.

Beyond the role of reproducers, women have an important function in the City of the Sun. Freed from the burden of raising and educating children individually, they engage in the same practical activities as the men – avoiding only the most tiring. They learn the speculative sciences and they can dedicate themselves to the arts, such as painting or music. Nor did Campanella exclude women from an auxiliary and defensive military role. Recalling the example of the ancient Amazons and of modern warrior-maidens defending the African empire of Monopotapa, he rejected the criticisms of Aristotle and of his Telesian friend Giacomo di Gaeta, who held that the use of arms was unnatural for women and incompatible with their natural role as mothers. The beauty of the Solarian women is an expression of the energy and health that derive from appropriate physical exercise. It is on this account that the inhabitants are banned from wearing clothes and shoes that render them clumsy, and they punish the use of make-up severely. On other occasions too, Campanella did not fail to deplore the use of female make-up, with which women

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 45.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 22.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20–21.

are forced to mask the paleness that comes from a lazy and unhealthy lifestyle that is damaging to one's health and therefore to future off-spring.<sup>31</sup>

The Solarian religion (which recognizes fundamental Christian principles such as the immortality of the soul and divine providence) is a natural religion that sets up a kind of osmosis between the heavens and the stars. The temple is open and not closed in with walls; in a poem Campanella promised that 'I will make a temple out of the sky, with the stars as an altar.' In the prose commentary that accompanied the poem, he explained that 'God ought to be adored *in spiritu et veritate* (in spirit and in truth), and not under roofs of mud that lightning bolts and even the nests of birds put to shame.'<sup>32</sup>

On the inner surface of the cupola of the temple, the stars are represented with their correspondences to terrestrial entities. There is only one altar, in the form of the sun, and on it are placed, side by side, the two globes of the heavens and the earth. Prayers are addressed to the sky. The function of the twenty-four priests that live in cells located in the highest part of the temple (which is also a kind of astronomical observatory) is that 'of watching the stars and noting all their movements with astrolabes and the effects that they produce.' They 'stipulate the times for reproduction and the days for sowing and harvesting, and they serve as mediators between God and men.'<sup>33</sup>

Notwithstanding the undoubted affinities between the Calabrian initiative of 1599 and the subsequent utopia, unscrupulous heterodox doctrines are completely absent in the pages of *The City of the Sun*. Instead, a chaste naturalism dominates Campanella's dialogue, which possesses no polemical or aggressive tone. Even if in the course of years the text would be subjected to a process of attenuation, there was nothing from the first version that was not later taken up again and explained by the author. Already in these pages Campanella had embarked upon the road that he would continue to travel, communicating the intuition that he would later develop and perfect: between nature and religion there is no conflict or antagonism, but instead continuity and harmony. Nature is not presented as a weapon with which to unmask religious imposture. Religion

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<sup>31</sup> See ch. 10, p. 183. See *Città del Sole* (1996), note 46, p. 58; note 73, p. 64; *Quaestio quarta politica*, art. 3, note 5, *ibid.*, p. 149. On the persistence of more traditional attitudes towards women, see Lina Bolzoni, 'Tommaso Campanella e le donne: fascino e negazione della differenza,' *Annali d'Italianistica*, 7 (1989), pp. 193–216; on the role of women in Campanella, see also Margherita Isnardi Parente, 'Tommaso Campanella e la Repubblica di Platone,' *Archivio Storico per la Calabria e la Lucania*, 46 (1999), pp. 93–111; Jean-Louis Fournel, 'Le contrôle des mariages et des naissance dans la pensée politique de Campanella,' *B&C*, 7 (2001), pp. 209–220; Germana Ernst, 'donna,' in *Enciclopedia*, vol. 2 (forthcoming).

<sup>32</sup> *Poesie*, p. 327.

<sup>33</sup> *Città del Sole*, p. 44.



is a divine art and a divine reason, and it is bound up in every last fiber of nature. The more delicate problem has to do with the relationship between Christianity and natural religion. In this regard too, Campanella did not hesitate to affirm that there exists no tension. Christianity, the expression of a divine rationality, cannot but coincide with natural religion. The addition of dogmas and sacraments does not aim at destroying nature, but rather at perfecting it. And this is without doubt one of the most subtle, difficult, and elusive passages in Campanella's thought. This depiction of Christianity as the highest and most complete expression of rationality and of natural religion is, more than the affirmation of an existing reality, an implicit exhortation and an indication of the road to be taken, of the task to be realized.

The Solarians live according to the pure law of nature, prior to revelation. The result of such a condition is that they would have no difficulty in completing the passage to Christianity: 'when they come to know the living truth of Christianity, proven with miracles, they will consent to it, because that truth is most sweet.'<sup>34</sup> If between natural religion and Christianity there is no hiatus or break (and there ought not to be, because there is no reason for it), the consensus of the 'very sweet' Solarians contains a warning to Christians. It exhorts them to agree with this serene faith in nature, which offers itself spontaneously to the perfecting influence of revelation, and to become aware that the unifying power of Christianity resides precisely in pursuing a reconciliation and harmony with nature. Christianity offers itself as a vehicle of natural and rational values: 'if these people, who follow only the law of nature, are so close to Christianity, that nothing is to be added to natural law except the sacraments, I take from this relationship the argument that the true law is the Christian law and that, once its abuses are removed, it will be mistress of the world.'<sup>35</sup>

Campanella discussed various aspects of his political theory in four *quaestiones* that appeared in the Paris edition of his *Philosophia realis*. In the fourth question, titled *De optima republica*, he addressed the problems and objections that had been raised against the proposed model for an ideal city. The first of the three articles deals with general problems such as that of the very possibility of discussing a city that had never been seen and that probably would never be seen, so as to reassert the legitimacy of sketching an ideal model independently of its practical realizability. It also deals with more specific objections, regarding the place and climate of the city, or the isolation and the excessive austerity of the life of its inhabitants. The other two articles deal with two of the dialogue's more controversial points: the sharing of possessions and women. Regarding the first issue, Campanella made use of patristic

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

and scholastic sources to argue (against theologians of the time such as the Spanish Dominican Domingo de Soto) for the superiority and importance of sharing possessions. Such sharing took its foundation from the original right of nature, while division and private ownership had historical origins and took shape as a concession and a lesser evil arising from human law. Regarding the other controversial and harder to defend aspect of the dialogue (namely, the sharing of women), Campanella, in order to avoid misunderstandings, reaffirmed that it concerned the norms that regulate reproduction, which was one of the basic issues in the city and ought as such to be ‘observed strictly for the public good, and not the private.’ Aiming at good reproduction that avoids the damages and the sufferings (for individuals and for the city) that derive from unfortunate offspring, such unions have nothing in common with unregulated and promiscuous unions, or with the practices of certain heretical sects, modern or ancient. The sharing of women, understood correctly, is also, like the sharing of possessions, completely in tune with the law of nature, in the light of which the only criterion for the licitness of sexuality is reproduction. Sexuality becomes illicit only when it becomes prohibited, for pragmatic reasons, by prescriptions of positive law.<sup>36</sup>

Questions have often been raised about the origin of the work’s title and several possible sources have been highlighted. Beyond the verse from Isaiah 19.18 – ‘there will be five cities in Egypt ... and one of these will be called the city of the sun’ – the image of the sun is very present in the sixteenth century, in various authors and contexts. Authors well known to Campanella had spoken about it – such as Marsilio Ficino, who, in the context of resurgent interest in Platonism and Hermeticism, exalted the sun as the most appropriate image of the good and of divine goodness, because its extremely pure light penetrated everything, giving life and movement to all things.<sup>37</sup> Likewise, travel accounts and descriptions of distant lands that spoke of astral cults in Africa and in the New World had emphasized the image of the sun. Girolamo Benzoni spoke of how Atabalipa, the last king of Peru, responded to a speech of the Dominican Vincenzo de Valverde that exhorted him to submit and convert. He said that ‘regarding the subject of religion ... he would never leave his own religion, because if they believed in Christ (who had died on the cross), he believed in the sun, which had never died.’<sup>38</sup> Likewise, the scholar Girolamo Ruscelli, while speaking of the emblem of Philip II of Spain, warmly praised the sun that was represented on it:

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<sup>36</sup> *Quaestio quarta politica*, in *Città del Sole* (1996) p. 145ff.

<sup>37</sup> *Liber de Sole*, in *Marsilii Ficini Opera* (Basel, 1576), I, p. 966; Italian translation in Marsilio Ficino, *Scritti sull’astrologia*, ed. O. Pompeo Faracovi (Milan, 1999), pp. 187–188.

<sup>38</sup> Girolamo Benzoni, *La istoria del mondo nuovo* (Venice, 1565), p. 121.

It opens the pores of the earth, nourishes bodies, renews plants, reinvigorates grass, instills natural understanding in men, moderates and tempers the other planets. Whence it is not without reason that the philosophers, theologians, and poets came to refer to the sun now as the eye of the world, now as the king of nature, now as the beauty of the day, now as the measure of time, now as light, ornament, and heart of the heavens, now as father, fount, and bestower of the sciences, of the virtues, and of divine glories.<sup>39</sup>

Without doubt Campanella was well aware of these and other echoes. But it is the Solarians themselves who remind us that the sun is the effigy of God, whom ‘they served ... under the sign of the sun, which is the sign and the face of God, from whom comes light and heat and everything else.’ The Solarians say that ‘God displayed his own beauty in the heavens and in the sun, as his trophy and image.’ The elegy that concludes the *Scelta* of Campanella’s poems is titled *Al Sole (To the Sun)*. The author is conscious of the emotive contrast between the return to life (in spring, of waters, plants, and animals, which thanks to the sun throw off their wintry sleep), and his own painful situation, which made him envy the reawakening of vipers and worms. Yet, he could not help writing a hymn full of admiration to the star that is the face of God and the emblem of his own philosophy:

You are a living temple, a statue and revered face  
Of the true God, the supreme pomp and torch.  
Father of nature and blessed ruler of the stars,  
Life, soul, and sense of all secondary things,  
Under your auspices an admirable school  
I erected for the Supreme Intellect through my philosophy.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Girolamo Ruscelli, *Le imprese illustri* (Venice, 1584), p. 191.

<sup>40</sup>*Poesie*, n. 89, vv. 39–44, p. 455: ‘Tempio vivo sei, statua e venerabile volto,/del verace Dio pompa e suprema face./Padre di natura e degli astri rege beato,/vita, anima e senso d’ogni seconda cosa;/sotto gli auspici di cui, ammirabile scola/al Primo Senno filosofando fei.’