

little doubt that much can be learnt about how European history ties in with the rest of the world – and as the world gets smaller it provides more opportunity for broadening our pupils’ horizons. So, if you think that packing your pupils off to an expensive ski resort for a week is time that could be better spent, jump on a cheap flight to Fes, which is just an hour up the road from Meknes and, incidentally, home to the oldest degree-granting university, founded in 859; but whether they indulged in the classics you’ll have to find out for yourself...

Ed Gibbons teaches English with the British Council in Rabat.



CLASSICS AND GLOBAL WARMING

A common question nowadays for Heads of Department to ponder is “what contribution does your subject make to an understanding of environmental issues?” This has always struck me as a tricky one for Classics teachers to answer. After all, recycling and carbon footprints do not have any clear

parallel in the ancient world. Before the advent of Christianity, to the extent that they thought about it at all, people probably assumed (as Aristotle did) that the world would keep going whatever human beings did. Even those who believed that the world was periodically being engulfed in flames (the Stoics) did not see this as the result of human activity.

A Classicist trying to engage with environmental issues could consult Alexander of Aphrodisias, who discusses global warming in his treatise *On Providence*. Alexander held the Imperial Chair of Aristotelian Philosophy at Athens at the end of the second century C.E. From this position he particularly relished the opportunity to attack what he saw as the inadequacies of his philosophical rivals in the Epicurean and Stoic schools.

THEN AND NOW

The work in question, which survives only in an Arabic translation, addresses the question of whether divine providence exists.¹ This is a question that still has resonance: one of this year’s candidates for the U.S. Presidency, Mike Huckabee, is on record as saying that divine providence was responsible for his recent surge in the polls in Iowa. He is not that far from the Stoic view which regarded all that occurs in the universe as taking place under God’s guidance and control. As Alexander puts it, for the Stoics “everything is full of God”. In contrast with this position the ancient atomists and the Epicureans regarded everything that happens as the work of pure chance. That view also has a

modern counterpart in the views of today's evolutionists for whom the emergence of natural species has come about as a result of genetic mutations over millions of years.

Alexander presents himself as taking a sensible middle course between these extremes. The Stoics are right, he says, to believe that the world is divinely ordered. One only has to consider the amazing regularity and order on display in the natural world. But they are wrong to attribute everything in the world to the divine hand. It would be absurd to imagine that God is concerned with the various events that come about in relation to each individual on earth, the Iowa caucus included. What happens here on earth is the result of the divine order evident in the heavens (for which God is responsible) but this goes no further than securing the eternal existence of the various species on earth.

A QUESTION OF BALANCE

To support his claim that there is nevertheless some intelligent design in the universe he considers the constancy of the earth's life-enhancing climate: if the sun were any nearer it would heat up the area of the earth closest to it and create desert regions bereft of animal and plant life. By a similar reasoning, if the sun were too far away conditions on earth would be too cold to support life. He quotes the character of the Sun addressing Phaethon in Euripides' play of that name: "O Phaethon! Zeus has ordered me: 'do not go further than this from the earth so that people do not die because of

the great freeze, and do not drop or approach the earth, since people will die in the great heat wave and the melting.' "

Thus, in Alexander's view, environmental disaster on the scale that threatens the survival of the human species is inconceivable given that the universe is the well-ordered effect of divine providence. This point of view will seem to many to be too left-field for the current environmental debate which values conformity and social cohesion above independence of thought. It seems, after all, to be a feature of current debates on global warming that the science that underlies it is taken on trust. Even religious bodies, who one might have expected to challenge the science, do no such thing. The American National Association of Evangelicals is whole-heartedly endorsing the science, one official even talking of "a conversion experience on the climate issue not unlike my conversion to Christ." ⁱⁱ

Similarly, the Church of England takes the line that "no one now seriously doubts that climate change is a serious global threat." ⁱⁱⁱ

Alexander's view therefore provides a fresh and independent perspective. The existence of an all-powerful God who exercises providence over our planet is not on the face of it compatible with the idea that the planet's very survival in the future is a matter of good luck. If churches ignore this aspect of the debate one may well want to ask them how serious is their faith in God.

Alexander, as befits a Greek philosopher, gets straight to the point. This directness of approach is characteristic of Greek thought and something that makes the study of Classics so attractive in a world where so much that is written is concealed by pious platitudes and political spin. There is a case to answer on the compatibility of environmentalism and theism. Recognising this may even help activists by reminding them of the challenges that lie ahead in convincing the rest of the world to put their trust in science rather than God.

Alan Towey

Homewood House School

⁽ⁱ⁾There is no English translation currently available. My citations are based on Silvia Fazzo and Mauro Zonta, *La provvidenza ; Questioni sulla provvidenza / Alessandro di Afrodisia ; a cura di Silvia Fazzo, traduzione dal greco di Silvia Fazzo ; traduzione dall'arabo di Mauro Zonta.* Milan : Rizzoli, 1999.

⁽ⁱⁱ⁾Quoted in an editorial in the St. Petersburg Times dated 15 October 2005, available at http://www.sptimes.com/2005/10/15/news_pf/Opinion/God.

⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾From the Church of England Briefing Paper "Towards a Post Kyoto Climate Treaty for Climate Justice" available at <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/>.

STUDYING CLASSICS – WHY OH WHY DO I?

How can a Classics degree be useful in the 'real' world? This challenge is often hurled at me (and many other Classicists, no doubt) and the monotony of the repeated questioning serves only to help me fine-tune my answer!

I will readily echo the benefits so often quoted as a by-product of studying Classics: problem-solving skills, attention to details and logic. These kinds of skills are often quoted by us Classicists as evidence that Classics is a good, rounded education and that employers should be – and are – snapping us up. The only problem with this kind of reply is that it is fairly abstract to a student deciding whether to extend his or her Latin studies to GCSE, A-Level or beyond.

When I was a Classics student myself, I studied for the love of the subject but could not possibly imagine that my studies would be of direct use to me in a future career since I was sure that I did not want to be a Classics teacher. But how wrong I was! Now I believe strongly that we need to add to our body of evidence some more specific, concrete examples of how Classics helps us more directly in our everyday jobs.

My varied career to date has taken me through various branches of marketing, via the Civil Service, to speech and language therapy. I can honestly say that my classical