

THE NAME 'EUDOXUS' IN SPENSER'S VIEW

SINCE the editors of the *Variorum* edition of Spenser's works glossed Eudoxus in *A View of the Present State of Ireland* as 'undoubtedly suggested to Spenser by Gr. εὐδόξος of good repute, honored', there has been, to my knowledge, no attempt to uncover any further meaning of the name, discover a source, or explore the connotations and resonances of the word.¹ It should be noted that in Sextus Empiricus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (c. AD 190), one of the chief sources outlining the beliefs of the Sceptics, the author refers to the travel writings of a cynic philosopher, Eudoxus of Cnidos (fl. c. 320 BC) to make a point about comparative cultural practices. Sextus' general purpose is to argue that 'since all things are relative, we shall suspend judgement as to what things are absolutely'.² He cites Eudoxus in a passage which compares the variety of habits among peoples to further this aim:

we oppose habit to the other things, as for instance to law when we say that amongst the Persians it is the habit to indulge in intercourse with males, but amongst the Romans it is forbidden by law to do so; and that, whereas with us adultery is forbidden, amongst the Massagetae it is traditionally regarded as an indifferent custom, as Eudoxus of Cnidos relates in the first book of his *Travels*; and that, whereas intercourse with a mother is forbidden in our country, in

Persia it is the general custom to form such marriages; and also among the Egyptians men marry their sisters, a thing forbidden by law amongst us. (p. 89)

It is not impossible that Spenser would have known the writings of Sextus Empiricus as they had been recently rediscovered, translated into Latin, and published, first in 1562, when the well-known French printer, Henri Estienne, produced an edition of the *Hypotyposes*, and then in 1569, when Gentian Hervet published a complete edition.³ Montaigne was greatly influenced by Sextus and had quotations from his works inscribed on the beams in his study.⁴ Sextus' writings undoubtedly reached England too, either directly or indirectly.⁵ Spenser may be half-remembering the passage cited above in using the name Eudoxus in his dialogue, which is designed to explain how England should govern Ireland and quell the substantial resistance to the forces of the crown. Eudoxus is cast as a sceptical, rational Englishman who is loath to believe the apparently wild and excessive flights of political and cultural fancy of his interlocutor, Irenius, who has just come over from Ireland. Yet, well before the end of the dialogue, he is forced to concede that Irenius is correct in his analysis and that the uncanny logic of the Irish situation challenges all that has gone before in his own political and cultural experience. Using a name from one of the principal sources of European knowledge of sceptical philosophy might have been a way of demonstrating that there was more within the political geography of the British Isles than sensible rationalists like Eudoxus had dreamed of.

Moreover, Sextus Empiricus and Eudoxus of Cnidos' relativism would, according to Spenser's Irenius, be undermined by the experience of Ireland. It was one thing to compare cultures and balance every practice against another as equally weighted; faced with the destruction of all civilized values, as

¹ Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism From Erasmus to Descartes* (Assen, 1960, rev. edn), 18.

² See Neil Rennie, *Far-Fetched Facts: The Literature of Travel and the Idea of the South Seas* (Oxford, 1995), 32. I owe my knowledge of Eudoxus of Cnidos to Rennie's book.

³ On the spread of Sextus' writings via Gian Francesco Pico della Mirandola, see Popkin, *History of Scepticism*, 17-22; Elizabeth Eistenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge, 1979), 231.

¹ Rudolf Gottfried (ed.), *Spenser's Prose Works* (Baltimore, 1949), 278.

² Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, trans. R. G. Bury (London, 1933), 79. Subsequent references to this edition in parentheses in the text.

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A View argues time and again was the danger in Ireland, the luxuries of comparative anthropology have to go by the board. Loose morality in matter sexual and familial is one of the main problems of Irish society which renders it so dangerous to English attempts to establish stable government (*View*, 110-11, 119-20).

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