

From Lost Laughter to Latin Philosophy: The Humanist Movement in Quattrocento Naples

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The humanist movement had a major impact on early modern culture. Humanists introduced new languages, literary canons, and styles of inquiry to the arts and sciences, and shifted their coordinates within society and politics. In the case of Naples, humanism arrived in two different moments in the kingdom, the first embodied in the figure of Petrarch, who entered into an intellectual exchange with King Robert of Anjou and his court in the early 1340s, the other by a coterie of humanists who became part of the Aragonese court after Alfonso the Magnanimous's conquest of the kingdom in 1442. As regards Petrarch's pioneering engagement, it certainly had a "galvanising character" and marked the inception of "royal humanism," as Peter Stacey has argued.² Nonetheless, it seems to have elicited a rather limited reaction within the Neapolitan setting itself. Falling into an early stage of the humanist movement, Petrarch's "conquest" of Naples hinged more on his personal authority than on any institutionalized structures.³

The Quattrocento phase of Neapolitan humanism differed significantly from this episode. The humanist culture at the Aragonese court did not depend on a single, emblematic figure like Petrarch, but on a group of humanists who put down roots at court and in the royal administration. Moreover, the second "conquest" of Naples could rely on a new humanist culture that had formed in the first decades of the century. At the same time, the arrival of this humanist culture in Naples contributed to its transformation. Therefore, the question arises how to place Neapolitan humanism into the development of the humanist movement in Italy as a whole. This article does not presume to find an answer to this difficult question. However, it aims at a better grasp of it, firstly by surveying the critical literature on Neapolitan humanism, and secondly by taking a closer look at the heterogeneous composition of the group of humanists that constituted the phenomenon of Neapolitan humanism.

In the first part (I-III), then, I consider some of the reconstructions of Neapolitan humanism that have been proposed by eminent scholars such as Eberhard Gothein in Germany, Francesco Tateo and Mario Santoro in Italy, and Jerry Bentley in the United States. Here, my principal argument will be that they have circumscribed the character of Neapolitan humanism mainly by adopting paradigms developed in the context of Northern Italian, and especially Florentine humanism.

¹ This essay is based on parts of my doctoral thesis, *Mercury in Naples: The Moral and Political Thought of Giovanni Pontano* (Florence: The Europea University Institute, 2009). It goes back to a paper I presented at the RSA annual meeting in Venice, 2010. I thank organizers and editors John Marino and Carlo Vecce. I am also grateful to the two anonymous reviewers for their comments and helpful suggestions. All remaining errors are my own.

² Peter Stacey, *Roman Monarchy and the Renaissance Prince* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 119. On Petrarch's role in shaping royal humanism, see *ibid.* 119-144, and the concise remarks in Stacey's "Hispania and royal humanism in Alfonso Naples," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 23, No. 1 (2011), 51-65.

³ Giuseppe Billanovich likens Petrarch's "conquest" of contemporary culture to the military and political conquest of Alexander the Great. At the same time, he describes Naples as Petrarch's "feudo." Giuseppe Billanovich, *Petrarca e il Primo Umanesimo* (Padua: Antenore, 1996), 459. The article was first published "Pietro Piccolo da Monteforte tra il Petrarca e il Boccaccio," *Medioevo e Rinascimento. Studi in onore di Bruno Nardi* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1955), 1-76. As Billanovich notes, the situation changes after King Robert's death in 1343. Petrarch gives up any plans to remain in the kingdom, although he keeps contact with some chosen members of the court.

In the second part, I maintain that Neapolitan humanism was molded rather by conflicts among the humanists than by a stance common to all of them (IV). Therefore, the key problem is not the Neapolitan “brand” of humanism, but the direction Neapolitan humanism took during these conflicts. I will illustrate my point by sketching some of the controversies in the 1430s and 1440s (V-VII). These controversies involved the first generation of humanists at court, namely Antonio Beccadelli (1394-1471), known as Panormita, Bartolomeo Facio (c. 1400-1457) and Lorenzo Valla (c. 1405-1457). Their struggles heavily influenced the intellectual outlook and philosophical style of Giovanni Pontano (1428-1503), the key figure of Neapolitan humanism in the second half of the fifteenth century (VIII). I conclude with some tentative remarks on the changes Neapolitan humanism brought to the humanist movement as a whole (IX).

I

Traditionally, Neapolitan humanism was judged in a negative way. As Jacob Burckhardt asserts in his *Civilization of the Renaissance* (1860), “the better and nobler features of the Italian despotisms” were absent in the Aragonese rulers of Naples, affirming that “all that they possessed of the art and culture of their time served the purposes of luxury and display.”⁴ Although Burckhardt’s classical account of the Renaissance begins in the South with the figure of Frederick II, there is little appreciation for the fifteenth-century developments in the Kingdom of Naples, even if he admits that the “great Alfonso” was of “another kind than his real or alleged descendants.”⁵

Burckhardt’s work inspired a whole generation of young scholars. One of them was Eberhard Gothein (1853-1923), who had studied in Breslau (where he had heard Wilhelm Dilthey lecture) and in Heidelberg. He was a sociologist as well as a historian, and in later years he would become Max Weber’s successor in Heidelberg.⁶ As a young man, Gothein became interested in the cultural history of the Renaissance through the works of Burckhardt. After travel to Italy in the early 1880s that took him to Naples and many cities of the South, he began to write a history of the Renaissance in Southern Italy.⁷ His book, planned as a kind of complementary study to Burckhardt’s *Civilization*, was published in 1886.⁸

Given Gothein’s reverence for Burckhardt, it is hardly surprising that his work did not as much revise as confirm the ideas of the Basel historian. As Gothein writes in the foreword to his book, in writing his history he “had no higher aim than to take a special case and to trace in it the lineaments typical for the picture Burckhardt had drawn.”⁹ When Edgar Salin republished

⁴ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S.G.C. Middlemore (London: Penguin, 1990), 41. The original reads: “Die bessern, lebendigen Züge des damaligen Tyrannentums muß man bei diesen Fürsten nicht suchen; was sie von der damaligen Kunst und Bildung an sich nehmen, ist Luxus oder Schein.” Quoted from Jacob Burckhardt, *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien*, ed. Horst Günther (Frankfurt a.M.: Insel, 1997), 44-45. Burckhardt’s classic study was first published as *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien: ein Versuch*. (Basel: Schweighauser, 1860). The work was soon translated into English and Italian.

⁵ Burckhardt, *Die Kultur der Renaissance*, 44. Translation from Burckhardt, *Civilization*, 41.

⁶ For an intellectual biography of Gothein, see Michael Maurer, *Eberhard Gothein (1853-1923): Leben und Werk zwischen Kulturgeschichte und Nationalökonomie* (Köln, Weimar: Böhlau, 2007).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 36-48.

⁸ Eberhard Gothein, *Die Kulturentwicklung Süd-Italiens in Einzel-Darstellungen* (Breslau: Koenig, 1886). An Italian translation became available as early as in 1915, *Il rinascimento nell’Italia meridionale*, trans. Tommaso Persico (Firenze: Sansoni, 1915).

⁹ “als ich sie [die Geschichte der Renaissance] began, kannte ich noch keinen höheren Ehrgeiz als an einem

Gothein's book in the 1920s, he accordingly saw it first and foremost as an expansion of the *Civilization*—an expansion that in its “self-assured modesty” remained firmly within the Burckhardtian framework.¹⁰

Nevertheless, Gothein's rich and detailed account of the Renaissance in Southern Italy had to depart from Burckhardt on at least one important point. As Gothein himself put it, he was to place more emphasis on the genesis of humanism in the South: “First and foremost I had to demonstrate how the culture of the Renaissance developed and established itself under circumstances that stood in stark contrast to those in the rest of Italy.”¹¹ Humanism had to conquer Naples, explains Gothein. Different from Florence, Rome, or Venice, it was not a movement from within society, but had to be introduced from outside by a “gifted” king, Alfonso of Aragon (1394-1458).¹²

Under these circumstances, the main challenge for humanists in the South was to “widen their horizon” as humanists.¹³ Within this perspective, the culture of Renaissance Naples did not serve the sole purpose of luxury and display, as Burckhardt had maintained. Rather, the Neapolitans attempted to shift and to challenge the humanist movement in its previous form. Although Gothein was aware that this attempt did not succeed on all levels, he did not dismiss it as a failure or a pastiche. By contrast, he was convinced that the peculiarities of Southern life added a certain “color” to the works of the Neapolitan humanists—works from which their contemporaries in Rome or Venice profited early on.¹⁴

Similarly, Gothein redefined the role of the Aragonese monarchy. As I have said, Burckhardt himself had never questioned the importance of the “great Alfonso,” while he inveighed all the more against his “bastard son” Ferrante (1423-1494), the “most terrible of Italy's rulers,” and his grandson Alfonso II (1448-1495).¹⁵ Gothein is more cautious in his characterization of the Aragonese and especially of Ferrante. Even if he still portrays Ferrante as duplicitous and in stark contrast to Alfonso, as does Burckhardt, Gothein concedes that Ferrante avoided some of the errors of his father. He calls him a “complicated character,” possessing many virtues befitting a ruler, but few befitting a man.¹⁶ Even more than Burckhardt, Gothein emphasizes the cold scheming of Ferrante. “Apart from Cesare Borgia,” he writes, “no other Italian has anticipated in practice what Machiavelli would later formulate in theory.”¹⁷

Under Ferrante, the tasks of the humanists changed, too. As Gothein dryly remarks, they swiftly turned from poets and authors of eulogies into politically effective collaborators, as the king needed skilled diplomats and bureaucrats.¹⁸ Still, the Neapolitan humanists had no less freedom under Ferrante than under the “civic tyranny of the Medici,” he argues.¹⁹ According to him, the political chores of the Neapolitan humanists throw a different light on their works,

besonderen Fall die Züge des typischen Bildes zu verfolgen, wie es Jacob Burckhardt gezeichnet hatte.” Eberhard Gothein, *Die Kulturentwicklung Süd-Italiens*, iv. Quoted in Maurer 2007, 43.

¹⁰ Edgar Salin, afterword to *Die Renaissance in Süditalien* by Eberhard Gothein (München: Duncker & Humblot, 1924), 269.

¹¹ Eberhard Gothein, *Die Kulturentwicklung Süd-Italiens*, iv. Quoted in Maurer 2007, 43-44.

¹² Gothein 1924, 3.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁵ Burckhardt, *Die Kultur der Renaissance*, 44-45.

¹⁶ Gothein 1924, 174-175.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 179. “So rasch fanden die Verfasser der Prunkreden den Übergang zur wirklich staatsmännischen Wirksamkeit.”

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 189.

revealing them as attempts to reflect political reality, even if they did not reach the same level of reflection as Machiavelli.²⁰

In many respects, then, Gothein's description of Neapolitan humanism goes beyond the succinct remarks in the *Civilization*. It contains long passages on important figures like Antonio Beccadelli and Giovanni Pontano and was less dismissive and more accurate than Burckhardt's. His account of the genesis of Neapolitan humanism as an imported movement remained mandatory for all following generations of scholars. Moreover, his portrait of Ferrante seems to have had a profound influence on later historians such as Friedrich Meinecke.²¹ Finally, Gothein's book anticipates an argumentative structure typical for studies on the Renaissance in southern Italy, basing its interpretation of Neapolitan humanism on interpretative schemes developed in the ambiance of Florentine humanism.

II

The tendency to read Neapolitan Renaissance culture through the lens of Florentine humanism and to adjust this view to local peculiarities was strong in Italian studies, too. For Antonio Altamura, writing in the 1940s, Neapolitan humanism was characterized by a single aspect: "If humanist writing in Florence, Rome, Venice, and Milan was especially erudite and critical in character, in Naples it was eminently poetical." According to Altamura, humanism had already developed into its mature form when it reached the kingdom of Naples. Therefore its originality did not show in "pedagogical" works, but in poetry.²²

A younger generation of scholars, most notably Mario Santoro and Francesco Tateo, opened up Altamura's rather narrow description of Neapolitan humanism. It was in their works that Eugenio Garin's theses on the humanists' influence on civic life and their conception of *humanitas* were transferred into the ambiance of Neapolitan humanism. Thus Santoro emphasizes the "plurality of experiences and interests" of Neapolitan humanism.²³ In a similar vein, Tateo sees Pontano and other Neapolitan humanists as a part of the "philosophical culture" of the Renaissance.²⁴

Both scholars underscore the liveliness and concrete character of humanist studies in Naples, with Giovanni Pontano as their key witness. Following Garin's historicist approach, Tateo emphasizes that Pontano's philosophical works could "be traced back to the liveliness of his human experience and the development of his personality" when set in their historical

²⁰ Ibid., 196.

²¹ Gothein's analysis resounds in Friedrich Meinecke's famous remark about Ferrante's first secretary, Pontano. Meinecke argued that although Pontano, chancellor of Ferdinand of Aragon, one of the most notorious rulers of the Renaissance, "saw clearly the dark side of the new statecraft," and indeed was "prepared to permit cunning and deception when it was for the good of the community," in the end he "fell back once more on the formal pattern of the figure of the Prince, filled in with classic phrases." Friedrich Meinecke, *Machiavellism. The Doctrine of Raison d'État and Its Place in Modern History*, trans. Douglas Scott (New Brunswick, London: Transaction Publishers, 1998), 38. See also Friedrich Meinecke, *Die Idee der Staatsräson in der neueren Geschichte*, 2nd ed. (München: Oldenbourg, 1960), 45.

²² Antonio Altamura, "Orientamenti Bibliografici Sull'Umanesimo Nel Sud-Italia," *Italica* 24, No. 4 (1947), 328.

²³ Mario Santoro, "La cultura umanistica," in *Storia di Napoli*, Vol. 4.2 (Napoli: Società editrice Storia di Napoli, 1974). Id., "Humanism in Naples," in *Renaissance Humanism. Foundations, Forms, and Legacy*, vol. 1, ed. Albert Rabil, Jr. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 296-331.

²⁴ See Francesco Tateo, *L'umanesimo meridionale* (Bari: Laterza, 1972), 5-73.

context.²⁵ Mario Santoro concludes that Pontano proposed the “concrete ideal” of the *vir prudens* in his moral treatises based on a “realistic interpretation of human existence” that was apt to be “realized” in relation “to different layers” of human experience.²⁶ With Tateo and Santoro, the disregard for Pontano’s philosophical writings, epitomized in Giuseppe Saitta’s remark that the “real” Pontano showed only in his poetical works, came to an end.²⁷

III

In the meantime, Anglo-American scholars became infatuated with the political and intellectual power of Florentine humanism as analyzed in the works of Hans Baron. Baron depicted the humanists as fervent defenders of Republican ideals, actively engaged in the “republican” policies of Florence against the Milanese “tyranny.”²⁸ His magisterial account inspired generations of researchers. However, it also led to “a neglect or outright condemnation of *signorial* regimes, imagined as Renaissance equivalents of twentieth-century dictatorships, relics of a retrograde, antimodern past,” as Anthony Molho writes.²⁹ The kingdom of Naples lent itself perfectly well to this description; the barons of the kingdom especially could be seen as such relics.³⁰

When American historians rediscovered the courts of the Italian Renaissance, Naples was among the last to earn itself a monograph. In 1987, Jerry Bentley published his study on politics and culture in Renaissance Naples.³¹ In his book he offers a lively picture of the interplay between Neapolitan humanism and Neapolitan politics, describing the Neapolitan humanists’ careers in the ambiance of the Aragonese administration and the king’s court, serving as scribes, secretaries, counsellors, diplomats, courtiers and educators. Not unlike Gothein, he provided his readers with “the less romantic but more accurate truth of things”: that for the greater part of their lives, humanists tended “to various legal, political, and administrative chores in the kingdom of Naples.”³²

With regard to method, Bentley’s study is greatly indebted to Baron. It depicts the Neapolitan humanists as actively engaged in the policies of the kingdom, even if these policies had no links to republicanism. Like Baron, he turned his attention to the humanists’ *ad hoc* writings—diplomatic correspondence, political memorandums, and personal correspondence. From the analysis of these texts, he drew the conclusion that “...the Neapolitan humanists exhibited an increasing willingness to take, if not an immoral or amoral, at least a hard-headed approach toward political problems.”³³ Their formal treatises, instead, were still classical in their

²⁵ Francesco Tateo, “Le virtù sociali e l’immanità nella trattatistica pontaniana,” *Rinascimento n.s.* 5 (1965), 119-20.

²⁶ Mario Santoro, “Fortuna e Prudenza nella ‘Lezione’ del Pontano,” in *Fortuna, ragione e prudenza nella civiltà letteraria del Cinquecento* (Naples: Liguori, 1967), 68.

²⁷ Giuseppe Saitta, *Il pensiero italiano nell’umanesimo e nel rinascimento*, Vol. 1 (Bologna: Zuffi-Sansoni, 1949), 647. “Più che nei suoi scritti filosofici, il vero Pontano si manifesta nell’opera sua poetica, che non teme confronti in tutto il periodo umanistico, se si eccettui il Poliziano.”

²⁸ Most famously in Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955).

²⁹ Anthony Molho, “The Italian Renaissance, Made in the USA,” in *Imagined Histories: American Historians Interpret the Past*, ed. Anthony Molho and Gordon S. Wood (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 280.

³⁰ See, for example, Benedetto Croce, *Storia del Regno di Napoli* (Bari: Laterza, 1925).

³¹ Jerry H. Bentley, *Politics and Culture in Renaissance Naples* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

³² *Ibid.*, 147.

³³ Bentley, 140.

outlook.

In the history of political thought, Quentin Skinner approached Neapolitan humanism from still another angle. According to him, the political language developed by the “civic humanists” of the first half of the Quattrocento was gradually adapted by humanists working in the signories.³⁴ Pontano's *De principe* holds a key position within this change, being “at once a typical and an outstanding example” of the genre.³⁵ More recently, Peter Stacey has underscored the importance of Neapolitan humanism (and especially of Antonio Beccadelli's *On the Sayings and Deeds of King Alfonso*) in the transmission of the Roman theory of monarchy to Renaissance political thought.³⁶

IV

Skinner's and Stacey's approaches have the great advantage of not describing Neapolitan humanism as a variant of humanism in northern Italy. Rather, they assign a strategic place to it in the development of the humanist movement. Still, the humanists' intellectual and political outlook went far beyond their political writings. On the whole, it was distinguished by a cluster of styles of writing and of thought, ethical questions, and strategies of self-representation.

In their writings, the humanists made their knowledge of the past react with the demands of a relentless present. Sometimes this reaction between past and present was harsh and threatened to dissolve traditional ideas; at other times it was rather purifying and led to a sort of refinement of these ideas. The humanist movement had different faces, then, and could be connected to different outlooks. It could mean starting from scratch, thinking anew, making a difference, but equally rethinking, rewriting, proposing once more. It could have a revolutionary as well as a conservative side to it, depending on the circumstances.

When the first humanists settled in Naples, the conflicted relationship among the Italian states tended more and more towards the precarious balance of the Peace of Lodi. The religious crisis of the fifteenth century slowly subsided and “humanism as a literary program became standard in elite Italian education.”³⁷ The humanists' sweeping success created new possibilities for them, augmenting their chances of employment, gaining them new privileges and adding weight to their authority.

Their authority, however, did not depend on their learning only; a great deal also hinged on the humanists' capability to turn their erudition into a display of moral and political authority. It was not possible simply to base this authority on a superior learning, as has been suggested by accounts that oppose an “innovative” humanist thought to an “outdated” scholastic thought.³⁸

³⁴ For an overview, see Quentin Skinner, “Political Philosophy,” in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. Charles B. Schmitt, Quentin Skinner, and Eckhard Kessler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 387-425. Now revised in Quentin Skinner, “Republican virtues in an age of Princes,” in *Visions of Politics: Vol. 2: Renaissance Virtues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 118-159.

³⁵ Skinner, 424. In a way very similar to Skinner's, Maurizio Viroli has placed the changes of the language of political virtues in the context of the “rise of the art of the state” and the “degeneration of politics.” Maurizio Viroli, *From Politics to Reason of State: The Acquisition and Transformation of the Language of Politics 1250-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

³⁶ Peter Stacey, *Roman Monarchy and the Renaissance*. On *De dictis et factis Alfonsi regis*, see below, section V.

³⁷ Christopher S. Celenza, “Petrarch, Latin, and Italian Renaissance Latinity,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 35, No. 3 (2005), 522.

³⁸ The sharpest criticism of this opposition has been formulated in Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-century Europe*

The question of how to accomplish this task was much more complicated and led to severe infighting, sparking conflicts among the humanists. It was these conflicts that molded the intellectual outlook of the humanist movement, rather than a stance common to all humanists. In the remaining sections of this article, I shall sketch some of the conflicts that influenced the internal development of Neapolitan humanism and shaped its outlooks.

V

The first conflict is a kind of prelude, playing in Pavia and dating back to the early 1330s, when Antonio Beccadelli, known as Panormita, was still employed by the Visconti.³⁹ Panormita, who held a position at court as the king's teacher in history and moral philosophy (*regis historiarum moralisque philosophiae magister*), had not always been as serious-minded as his later employments suggested.⁴⁰ He had his literary breakthrough with the daring *Hermaphroditus*, a collection of erotic poems modelled on the writings of classical authors such as Catullus, Tibullus, Propertius, and Martial. Published in late 1425, the work met with a wide yet ambivalent response. Beccadelli's literary skills were praised, while the licentious content of his work was criticized, if not outright condemned.⁴¹

In the early 1430s, the humanist Antonio da Rho attacked Panormita. As he put it, Panormita's "genius will not be condemned but his life someday will be unless he writes serious verse subsequent to his filthy ones...."⁴² Poggio Bracciolini, too, was astonished at the beautiful and well-worded way in which Panormita described things so indecent and improper and admonished him to turn to more serious matters in the future.⁴³

Panormita could not avoid these arguments. Indeed, he defended himself by asserting that he was no longer the daring poet of his youth. "I would like to purge that sin—if what all poets practice is really sin—by a certain severe and grave style of oration (*severo ac gravi quodam orationis stilo*)," he wrote, adding that "this can perhaps be done while bringing the highest, eternal praise and glory to our best and greatest of princes."⁴⁴

(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986). It has recently been renewed by Gerrit Walther in the introduction to Thomas Maissen and Gerrit Walther, eds., *Funktionen des Humanismus. Studien zum Nutzen des Neuen in der humanistischen Kultur* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2006).

³⁹ On Panormita's career, see Bentley, 84-100, and the (sometimes outdated) biographical information in Gianvito Resta, "Beccadelli, Antonio", in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Vol. 7, 400-406.

⁴⁰ "Erat tunc in primis Antonius Panormita, *Regis historiarum moralisque philosophiae magister*, qui, doctissimus cum haberetur, doctos etiam alere et provehere nitebatur" (my italics) Tristano Caracciolo, "Ioannis Ioviani Pontani vitae brevis pars," in *Un profilo moderno e due Vitae antiche di Giovanni Pontano*, ed. Liliana Monti Sabia (Naples: Accademia Pontaniana, 1998), 45.

⁴¹ The *Hermaphroditus* was burnt publicly in Bologna, Ferrara, and Milan and condemned by famous preachers including Bernadino da Siena and Roberto da Lecce. See Donatella Coppini's introduction to Antonio (Panormita) Beccadelli, *Hermaphroditus*, ed. Donatella Coppini (Rome: Bulzoni, 1990), lxxi. For an English translation, see Antonio (Panormita) Beccadelli, *The Hermaphrodite*, trans. Holt Parker (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

⁴² "non ingenium sed vitam aliquando damnabitur nisi seria post foedissima (sic enim Vergilius fecit) scripserit." Antonio da Rho, "Apologia Antonii Raudensis," in David Rutherford, *Early Renaissance Invective and The Controversies of Antonio da Rho* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 2005), 215.

⁴³ "admiratus sum res adeo impudicas, adeo ineptas, tam venuste, tam composite a te dici ... unum est quod te monere et debeo et volo, ut scilicet deinde graviora quaedam mediteris." Beccadelli 1990, 149.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Rutherford, 253.

With these remarks, Panormita actually formulated the main objectives of his later biography of King Alfonso of Aragon. Written in the 1450s, his *On the Sayings and Deeds of King Alfonso* would finally accomplish the severe and grave style of oration which Poggio and da Rho had demanded from him twenty years earlier. His humorous and ingenious character, able to entertain and to transgress the limits placed upon him, had to subside, and the necessity of displaying serious-mindedness and solemnity took over, confirming these limits and conforming to them. Panormita's change of mind paid off well. Although he had lost some of his laughter, his *On the Sayings and Deeds of King Alfonso* became a European bestseller and was reprinted until the middle of the seventeenth century.⁴⁵

VI

The next conflict took place a few years later, in 1442. After seven years of war, Alfonso has conquered the kingdom of Naples. With him is an entourage of humanists, among them Panormita and Lorenzo Valla. During the war, Valla had been the most renowned among Neapolitan humanists. His attacks on the Roman Church and its secular powers, most famously in his writing on the Donation of Constantine, supported Alfonso's cause, as pope Eugene IV had been a supporter of Alfonso's opponent René d'Anjou. However, his importance rapidly diminished with Alfonso's victory, which brought along an agreement with the pope.

After this point, other talents were required. Panormita became the leading figure at the Aragonese court. Together with his close friend Bartolomeo Facio, a Genoese humanist who had joined the court in 1444 and was nominated successor to Valla as official historiographer in 1448, he gave Neapolitan humanism a new direction.⁴⁶ Under Panormita's and Facio's aegis, the humanists at court were much less concerned with polemics than with the construction of the "myth of the magnanimous king" and the cultural legitimization of Alfonso's rule over Naples.⁴⁷ As Riccardo Fubini puts it, the king "no longer had use for militant polemicists, but for celebratory writers and apologists."⁴⁸

This change in outlook made itself felt first and foremost in the king's famous reading hour, where the humanists struggled over favor and authority. In these literary sessions, the king "took great delight in listening to learned men discuss literary and historical issues."⁴⁹ Despite their peaceful sound, these sessions were highly competitive, and it was here that Valla attacked

⁴⁵ My reference is to the *Speculum boni Principis Alphonsus Rex Aragoniae, hoc est, dicta et facta Alphonsi regis Aragoniae* (Amsterdam: Elzevier, 1648). Another interesting edition is the German translation, published under the title *Der Regiments Personen und sonderlich des Adels Lustbuch. Die hohen reden und thaten Alfonsi weyland Königs zu Aragonien* (Frankfurt a.M.: Cyriaco Jacob zum Bart, 1546).

⁴⁶ On Facio in general, see Bentley, 100-108, and Paolo Viti, "Facio, Bartolomeo," in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Vol. 44, 113-121. On his work as historiographer, see Giacomo Ferrà, "Il 'De rebus ab Alphonso primo gestis' di Bartolomeo Facio," *Studi Umanistici* 1 (1990), 69-113, and Sondra dall'Oco, "La 'laudatio regis' nel *De rebus gestis ab Alphonso primo* di Bartolomeo Facio," *Rinascimento* 35 (1995), 243-251, as well as id. "Bartolomeo Facio e la tecnica dell' 'excursus' nella biografia di Alfonso d'Aragona," *Archivio storico italiano* 154 (1996), 207-251.

⁴⁷ Giacomo Ferrà, *Il tessitore di Antequera. Storiografia umanistica meridionale* (Roma: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, 2001), 67.

⁴⁸ Riccardo Fubini, "Lorenzo Valla tra il concilio di Basilea e quello di Firenze, e il processo dell'Inquisizione," in *L'Umanesimo italiano e i suoi storici* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2001), 161.

⁴⁹ Bentley, 57. The most intimate (yet rather colored) account of the king's literary sessions may be found in Lorenzo Valla, *Antidotum in Facium*, ed. Mariangela Regoliosi (Padua: Antenore, 1981).

Panormita, the latter cutting a poor figure in front of the king and his courtiers. Panormita responded in kind and made his friend Facio tear Valla's history of King Ferdinand, Alfonso's father, to pieces.⁵⁰ Although this bickering arose from professional rivalries and personal misgivings, it also highlighted the intellectual tensions within the Neapolitan humanist movement—tensions that resulted from the growing necessity of accommodating to an altered political, religious, and social ambiance. If Panormita had been criticized for his disrespectful poetry and the laughter it aroused, he and Facio now tried to ban any kind of irreverent behavior and critique within the humanists' circle at court.

Accordingly, the main thrust of Facio's critique of Valla's historical work was directed against its author's character. In the eyes of Facio, Valla was imprudent and presumptuous, holding in esteem only himself, despising and disregarding all others.⁵¹ Moreover, for Facio this presumptuousness led Valla to immoderate behaviour resulting in recklessness, arrogance and impudence. For Facio, Valla's comments during the king's reading hour were not legitimate criticisms, but inappropriate breaches of etiquette. Valla interrupted the explications of others most unfittingly, without respect or consideration for persons, place, and time (*nullo respectu, nulla ratione persone, loci et temporis habita*). For according to Facio, when a learned man like Panormita held a lecture on grave and important matters, anything other than silence was improper.⁵²

VII

Panormita's and Facio's critiques also applied to styles of philosophical inquiry. For Valla, philosophy was a quest for truth, and the critique of authorities was possible and necessary.⁵³ In his dialogue *De voluptate*, he set pleasure as the highest good, and his *Repastinatio dialectice et philosophie* (1439) "re-ploughed" and "weeded out" Aristotelian philosophy.⁵⁴ For Valla's opponents, however, philosophical discussions did not have to be aggressive and critical of the tradition; they should rather rely on the authority of this tradition. It was not the task of the philosopher to critically revise his predecessors, but to reformulate their positions and to reconfirm them.

The difference between these two styles of philosophical inquiry became overtly clear in Facio's and Valla's quarrel about Facio's dialogue on human happiness, *De humanae vitae*

⁵⁰ Valla to Pier Candido Decembrio. Regno di Napoli, 1442/43: "Mihi crede, Candide, non iactantie causa dicam, sed testimonii: feci ut et apud regem et apud ceteros Panormita indoctissimus esse videatur." Lorenzo Valla, *Epistole*, ed. O. Besomi and M. Regoliosi (Padua: 1984), 239. For Facio's reaction, see Bartolomeo Facio, *Invective in Laurentium Vallam*, ed. Ennio I. Rao (Napoli: Società editrice Napoletana, 1978).

⁵¹ "... de te uno quam optime existimans, ceteros omnes contemnis ac negligis." Facio, 89.

⁵² "... tu doctissimum hominem de seriis ac maximis rebus legentem interrumpes? Nescis, imperite, nescis adstantis officium esse per silentium audire?" Ibid., 90.

⁵³ On Valla's thought in general, see the classical study of Salvatore Camporeale, *Lorenzo Valla. Umanesimo e teologia* (Florence: INSR, 1972). For his philosophical thought and his complicated relationship to Aristotle and scholastic philosophy, see Lodi Nauta, *In Defense of Common Sense. Lorenzo Valla's humanist critique of scholastic philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009). For a "pathological" explanation of Valla's aggressiveness, see W. Scott Blanchard, "The negative dialectic of Lorenzo Valla: a study in the pathology of opposition," *Renaissance Studies* 14.2 (2000), 149-189.

⁵⁴ Lorenzo Valla, *Laurentii Valle repastinatio dialectice et philosophie*, ed. Gianni Zippel, 2 vols. (Padua: Antenore, 1982).

felicitate (1445).⁵⁵ In a manner diametrically opposed to Valla's *De voluptate*, Facio produced a work that was much less challenging than his adversary's, substituting pious conformism for his rival's disrespectful astuteness.

In the first book, the two interlocutors Giovanni Lamola and Guarino Veronese go through a long list of possible candidates for a happy life on earth: wealthy men, princes and kings, powerful citizens, courtiers, soldiers, priests, humanists. While Lamola puts forward his proposals, Guarino's role consists of their respective confutation. Consequently, book one ends with the conclusion that the answer to the question of the nature of happiness, its place and its pursuit have to be discussed further. In the second book, Panormita joins the discussion and goes through the opinions of the philosophers and theologians; this time Guarino can conclude that "the *summum bonum* is God and the fruition and knowledge of him."⁵⁶

Whereas the Valla of *De voluptate* had created a colorful play with a variety of masques, Facio kept his theoretical vision in black and white. Panormita, who had appeared as the Epicurean interlocutor in Valla's first draft of *De voluptate*, now wrecked the efforts said interlocutor (Maffeo Vegio, in later versions) had made to deconstruct ancient examples of virtuous behaviour and to unmask them as ultimately based on pleasure. Valla had presented his readers with a Christian-Epicurean vision that changed central tenets of traditional moral and religious thought. The Panormita of Facio's dialogue, instead, willingly reaffirmed these tenets and returned to the Stoic-Christian formulation of human happiness.

The price for his clarity was a serious literary and intellectual impasse. As Valla claimed in his riposte to Facio, the authoritative stance and the affirmative attitude of the interlocutors seriously undermined the dialogic structure of the work.⁵⁷ With his critique of Facio's dialogue, he placed himself firmly in a tradition of humanist thought that favoured the *disputatio* as the highest form of learning.⁵⁸

VIII

From the beginning, Giovanni Pontano, the major humanist of Quattrocento Neapolitan humanism, was close to Panormita's line. Pontano belonged to a younger generation of humanists than Panormita and Valla; born in 1429, he joined the Aragonese court in the late 1440s, when Valla had gone to Rome and the man from Palermo had become one of the most influential figures at court, not only on good terms with the king, but also well-connected among the officials at court.⁵⁹ Despite his heavy official attire, however, Panormita had not lost his talent

⁵⁵ Bartolomeo Facio, "De humanae vitae felicitate," in Felino Maria Sandeo, *De regibus Siciliae et Apuliae in quibus et nominatim de Alfonso Rege Arragonum*, ed. Marquard Freher (Hanover: Aubrius, 1611), 106-148. The dialogue is discussed in the first volume of Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness. Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought* (London: Constable, 1970), 176 ff.

⁵⁶ "Beata vita . . . tota est posita in Dei fruitione. Frui autem Deo nihil aliud esse existimo, nisi Deum contemplari atque cognoscere." Ibid., 142.

⁵⁷ "As has come to my attention," an offended Facio wrote at the end of his second invective against Valla, "you criticize that I didn't shape my interlocutors in a way that they would contradict each other more often (*collocutores non fecerim sepius repugnantes*), and first and foremost that the figure of Lamola yielded too easily to the assertions of Guarino (*facilis sit in assentiendo*)." Facio, 108.

⁵⁸ "*quid magis decoro contrariumquam eam personam facere disputantem que disputare aut nesciat aut nolit . . . Nescis que sit natura disputationis? Eadem profecto que pugne: aut non descendendum in certamen aut acriter decertandum.*" Valla 1981, 189-90.

⁵⁹ For biographical information on Pontano, see Carol Kidwell, *Pontano: Poet and Prime Minister* (London:

for humor during the years, and the young Pontano was much to his taste. Not only did he approve of Pontano's character and talent, but first and foremost of his playful and very promising poetry.⁶⁰ Indeed, Pontano's *nugae* showed elegance and wit, much like Panormita's early poetry.

Even more than his poetry, Pontano's first dialogue *Charon* (c. 1465) gave the interplay between laughter and seriousness a new and exciting literary form, far removed from the dryness of Facio's dialogues.⁶¹ *Charon* was a descent to the underworld, a *tour de force* situated on the banks of the river Styx. It consisted of a series of satirical conversations modelled after Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead*. Appreciated as one of the finest pieces of humanist dialogue by modern philologists, it was successful also in its own times, circulating in manuscript and being printed in Naples in 1491.⁶²

One of the secrets of the dialogue's success lay in the congenial interpretation and employment of its literary model. *Luciani risus et seria omnia*—this is how Giovanni Aurispa announced the return of the first complete manuscript of Lucian to Italian soil in 1423.⁶³ Like Lucian, Pontano moved between moral edification and entertainment. With more mastery than anyone else, he exploited the possibilities of the Lucianic dialogue, not simply extracting the serious parts from Lucian, but also taking his laughter seriously. In Pontano's dialogue, the issues of prior humanist debate crystallized and sparkled in a new light: satirical passages alternated with grave sentences; Lucian met Cicero.

Although these early dialogues are full of jokes and a sensuality Valla would have liked, Pontano kept to an image of Valla as a contentious and polemic figure throughout his life. In *De sermone*, one of his last works, he still claims that Valla had written his works not so much in order to teach or to contend for truth, but rather in order to disparage ancient writers such as Cicero, Aristotle, and Virgil.⁶⁴ In a direct allusion to the literary séances with King Alfonso, Pontano maintained that the philological diligence shown by Valla depended more on his

Duckworth, 1991); Erasmo Percopo, *Vita di Giovanni Pontano* (Naples: ITEA, 1938); and, more concisely, Liliana Monti Sabia, "Profilo di Giovanni Pontano," in *Un profilo moderno e due Vitae antiche di Giovanni Pontano*, 7-27.

⁶⁰ Tristano Caracciolo, "Ioannis Ioviani Pontani vitae brevis pars," 45. Caracciolo also tells the story of how the young Pontano, accompanying Panormita on a diplomatic mission in 1452, impressed Cosimo de' Medici with his jokes. Furthermore, Pontano had himself emulated Beccadelli's poems in a book entitled *Pruritus* (Lust). On this book, see the remarks in Walther Ludwig, "Catullus renatus – Anfänge und frühe Entwicklung des catullischen Stils in der neulateinischen Dichtung," in *Litterae Neolatinae. Schriften zur neulateinischen Literatur* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1989), 172-77.

⁶¹ The dialogues have been published in Giovanni Gioviano Pontano, *I dialoghi*, ed. Carmelo Previtiera (Firenze: Sansoni, 1943). There is a reprint of this edition with a German translation: Giovanni Gioviano Pontano, *Dialoge*, trans. Hermann Kiefer (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1984). The I Tatti series has also announced a forthcoming volume of Pontano's dialogues.

⁶² Giovanni Gioviano Pontano, [*Dialogi qui Charon et Antonius inscribuntur*] (Naples: Mathiam Moravum, 1491). Among the manuscripts, see, for example, the fifteenth-century ms. W.108 in the Chester Beatty Library in Dublin, bearing the coat of arms of Alfonso Duke of Calabria, containing *De principe*, *De oboedientia*, *De fortitudine*, *Charon*, *Antonius*, *Commentationes*, and *De aspiratione*. Cf. Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Iter italicum: accedunt alia itinera; a finding list of uncatalogued or incompletely catalogued humanistic manuscripts of the Renaissance in Italian and other libraries*, 10 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1965-1997), 3:197a.

⁶³ Letter to Ambrogio Traversari. 27 August 1424. Giovanni Aurispa, *Carteggio* (Rome: Tipografia del Senato, 1931), 13. Quoted in David Marsh, *Lucian and the Latins. Humor and Humanism in the Early Renaissance* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998), 9.

⁶⁴ Giovanni Gioviano Pontano, *De sermone libri sex*, ed. S. Lupi and A. Risicato (Lucani: In Aedibus Thesauri Mundi, 1954), 29-30. For an Italian translation, see Giovanni Gioviano Pontano, *De sermone*, trans. Alessandra Mantovani (Roma: Carocci, 2002), 126-128.

tendency to display his learning than on his talent.⁶⁵

Pontano dismissed this type of intellectual that he saw epitomized in the figure of the grammarian. Thus his dialogue *Antonius*, dedicated to the memory of Panormita and written shortly after his death in 1471, begins with a satirical prayer against rabies aimed at a grammarian.⁶⁶ Later in the dialogue, the motif of the rabid dog reappears when one of the interlocutors, Andrea Contrario, reports that Panormita used to describe grammarians as “little dogs fighting over the scraps and bones which fall under the table.”⁶⁷

The point of these attacks was not the grammatical method *per se*, but the inappropriate use grammarians presumably made of it. Just as Panormita and Facio had censured Valla for his impertinence, Pontano reprimands the grammarians for their presumption and temerity. In the words of Andrea Contrario, one of the figures of the dialogue, it is difficult to escape the grammarians’ fault-finding. They fretfully complain about poems and letters while their own writings lack any elegance and refinement. Grammatical correctness is one thing, fluency and elegance in composition another. In other words, whereas Valla, more grammarian than rhetorician, insisted on the fine points of Latin language, he was unable to develop the grave style of oration characteristic of Panormita.

While his dialogues bear many traces of Panormita’s and Facio’s influences, Pontano’s intellectual outlook becomes best visible in his preference for the literary form of the moral treatise and his predilection for Aristotelian philosophy. Of course, Pontano did not opt for Aristotle by coincidence. Earlier humanists had made the philosopher the figurehead of those intellectual currents and institutional settings they starkly opposed. Valla, for one, had heavily attacked Aristotelianism both on an institutional and doctrinal level. In the proem to his *Repastinatio*, he evoked the eminent figure of Pythagoras as an exemplar of open-mindedness and a quest for truth that was uninhibited by doctrine and authoritative reasoning—for him, both characteristics of Aristotelian thought. With Pythagoras as his model, Valla fashioned himself as a soldier and revolutionary fighting against the tyrannical rule of the Aristotelians in the realm of philosophy.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Pontano, *De sermone libri sex*, 196. Pontano’s point was not lost on his contemporaries. By 1503, the representation of Valla as a polemical and controversial figure had become a kind of commonplace in the literature. Already in 1490, the young Paolo Cortesi had celebrated Valla as an “immensely learned writer” and “one of the most diligent researchers of Roman history and the Latin language,” nonetheless insisting that Valla was “violent and slanderous” in character, an “irksome and irritable” fellow: “Horum aetatibus adiunctus est Laurentius Valla, scriptor egregie doctus, cuius ingenii acumine constare inter omnes audio Italiam esse recreatam, sed erat acer et maledicus et toto genere paulo asperior, diligentissimus tamen Romanarum rerum atque verborum investigator. Molestus erat et stomachosus: nihil admodum alienum laudabat, sua vero cum diligentia tum acri quodam iudicio expendebat.” Paolo Cortesi, *De hominibus doctis*, ed. Giacomo Ferrau (Palermo: Il Vespro, 1979), 142. On this point, see also Giacomo Ferrau, *Pontano critico* (Messina: Centro interdipartimentale di studi umanistici, 1983), 81.

⁶⁶ Pontano, *I dialoghi*, 50.

⁶⁷ “COMP. An oblitus es Antonii catellorum (hoc enim verbo utebatur) eos persimiles dicentis qui de ossibus deque frustillis ac miculis, si quae forte sub mensam decidunt, rixentur.” Ibid. Of course, the derogatory comparison between grammarians and dogs had its origin in the invective. Already Petrarch had compared his “victims” to dogs whose relentless barking had aroused a sleeping lion. Francesco Petrarca, *Invectives*, trans. David Marsh (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 3. Actually, Pontano makes fun of this tradition when he lets Suppazio, a member of the academy, narrate that he was attacked so ferociously by a grammarian that he had the impression of fighting with a bear or a lion rather than with a human being. Pontano, *I dialoghi*, 89. As David Marsh has shown, this passage is clearly linked with Valla’s invectives against Poggio, Panormita, and Facio, as is the reason for the brawl: the question which arouses the grammarian is whether it is more correct to say *frictio* or *fricatio*. David Marsh, “Grammar, Method, and Polemic in Lorenzo Valla’s ‘Elegantiae,’” *Rinascimento* 19 n.s. (1979): 113.

⁶⁸ Valla, *Repastinatio*, 2: 359-60.

Pontano followed another strategy. In the footsteps of Leonardo Bruni, he applied the humanists' pursuit of eloquence to the Stagirite. Pontano's last dialogue *Aegidius* indeed celebrates the triumph of humanist studies. As Pontano tells his pupils,

Although I am old and weighed down with age, I am yet possessed of the hope that before I leave you, I may see our Latin philosophy expounding its topics with a more refined style and elegance, and that abandoning this contentious manner of debating it may adopt a more tranquil form of speech and discussion, using its own proper and purely Roman vocabulary.⁶⁹

It is obvious that Pontano saw himself as a trendsetter and the initiator of a Latin philosophy. In the proem to *De prudentia*, he presented his readers with the impressive picture of the old Aristotle, admired for his fame and his doctrines.⁷⁰ If Valla had set out his *Dialectics* with the revered figure of Pythagoras as the archetype of the philosopher in order to demolish the authority of Aristotle, Pontano did the reverse. He emphasized Aristotle's undisputed leadership in the philosophical realm and established his own authority on that of the Stagirite.

IX

How did the direction of the humanist movement change within the context of Aragonese Naples? As concerns the first generation of humanists at court, the political circumstances had first favoured an approach that drew its innovative forces from its polemics with more traditional strands of learning. Valla had stood for such a more radical and disruptive approach, comparatively open and on more egalitarian terms with the ancient tradition. He epitomized the figure of the humanist intellectual by bringing the polemical force of the humanist movement to its peak.

Panormita and Facio, instead, represented a more conservative outlook, advocating comparatively closed and hierarchic traditions, hostile to extensive innovation, evoking the ancient writers as an authoritative elite to serve as a bulwark against such innovation.⁷¹ As such, they encapsulated a change in the intellectual climate, eschewing the more ambiguous and radical tendencies of humanist thought in order to create a new educational and philosophical mainstream, less aggressive in tone and more compliant with state and religion.

⁶⁹ "Itaque quanquam senem me annisque gravatum, spes tamen cepit fore ut, antequam a vobis emigrem, Latinam videam philosophiam et cultu maiore verborum et elegantia res suas explicantem utque, relicta litigatrice hac disputandi ratione, quietiorem ipsa formam accipiat et dicendi et sermocinandi ac verbis item suis utendi propriis maximeque Romanis." Pontano, *I dialoghi*, 280. Translation in David Marsh, *The Quattrocento Dialogue. Classical Tradition and Humanist Innovation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 107.

⁷⁰ "In Lycio deambulabat philosophans senex ille philosophorum omnium disertissimus, audiendumque ad eum universa etiam Graecia confluebat, nominis eius admiratione commota, ac disciplinae." Giovanni Gioviano Pontano, "De prudentia," in *Opera Omnia soluta oratione composita*, Vol. 1 (Venice: in aedibus Aldi et Andreae soceri, 1518), 147r. This *Opera Omnia* edition is available online at http://www.uni-mannheim.de/mateo/itali/autoren/pontano_itali.html.

⁷¹ I have borrowed the vocabulary from Mark Bevir, "On Tradition," *Humanitas* 13 (2000). Applied to the present discussion, it seems rather illuminating to me.

Pontano was heir to Facio and Valla, insofar as his treatises reacted to the need for a grave and serious philosophy as well as it responded to the establishment of a humanist writing in which disputative modes of inquiry receded in importance. The main objective of his writing was not critique, but a reconfirmation of ancient authorities, first and foremost of Aristotle. However, he succeeded in rewriting Aristotle in a way that made him attractive to humanists all over Europe. If Florentine humanism stands mainly for a renewed Latin philosophy in the sign of Plato, promoted by Marsilio Ficino, with Pontano Neapolitan humanism served as an equally important point of transmission for a renewed Latin philosophy based on Aristotle.

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