

HUMANISM AND THEOLOGY
IN RENAISSANCE FLORENCE: FOUR EXAMPLES
(CAROLI, SAVONAROLA, FICINO, AND PICO)*

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Abstract: The argument in this article is that we should not make clear-cut distinctions between humanism and philosophy or theology, and between the humanists and their contemporary scholastic theologians and philosophers, in the Florentine context of the second half of the fifteenth century. The relations between these two groups were complicated and included, beyond obvious differences, also mutual influences, not always discussed in detail among modern scholars. Starting from the known controversy between Eugenio Garin and Paul Oskar Kristeller regarding the nature of the humanist movement and its relations with philosophy, I then move on to present four examples: the first two deal with “scholastic” theologians and preachers, the Dominicans Giovanni Caroli and Girolamo Savonarola, in whom I emphasize the humanist bias; the last two deal with humanist philosophers, Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, in whom I emphasize the importance of religion and theology for the understanding of their philosophy.

Keywords: humanism, philosophy, theology, renaissance, Florence

Eugenio Garin, replying to Paul Oskar Kristeller’s remark in the discussion following Garin’s lecture in the international conference held in Mirandola in 1963, stressed the relation between Giovanni Pico and the humanist movement, also pointing out the relation between scholastic and humanist culture in general. According to Garin, the difference be-

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tween humanist-philosophers and scholastic-philosophers is not—as assumed by Kristeller — a fundamental distinction between scholastic metaphysicians, representing philosophy, on the one hand, and humanist *grammatici* or *oratores*, often ignorant of philosophy or opposed to it, on the other hand. Both scholastic philosophers and humanist philosophers, as Garin maintained, should be equally regarded as philosophers — of two different types.¹

In this paper I would like to develop this historiographical insight of Garin and argue not only that the separation between humanists and philosophers is not valid, but also that the distinction between humanist philosophers like Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, a professional scholastic theologian like Giovanni Caroli, and a preacher like Girolamo Savonarola, is far from being clear-cut in the realities of late fifteenth-century Florence. I wish to stress the importance of adopting an integrative approach between the history of the revival of ancient philosophy in Florence and the history of the scholastic philosophical tradition of that time, arguing that humanism and theology in late fifteenth-century Florence should be studied inseparably. While dealing with humanists and professional theologians and preachers in their context, we cannot study intellectual, religious, and political history separately from each other, since many of these figures were deeply involved in all these areas of activity or, at least, in more than one of them.

In this I shall be following the new direction given to these studies by three scholars of the last generation, but focusing on a different historical context. These scholars, who did pay proper attention to the relationship between humanists and theology, developed the notion of a specifically humanist theology, which they interpreted in vari-

¹ Eugenio Garin: 'Le interpretazioni del pensiero di Giovanni Pico', *L'Opera e il pensiero di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola nella storia dell'umanesimo, convegno internazionale (Mirandola: 15-18 Settembre 1963)*, 2 vols., Firenze: Istituto nazionale di studi sul Rinascimento, 1965, vol. 1: 3-33, pp. 32-33: "Per chiarezza, tuttavia, intendo precisare che io non identifico la cultura scolastica con la filosofia e la cultura 'umanistica' con la grammatica, la retorica e la letteratura. Ermolao Barbaro, traduttore e commentatore di Temistio e, prima ancora, di Aristotele, è filosofo, anche se il suo orientamento culturale lo porta a dare rilievo a certi problemi e a certi campi d'indagine più vicini alle *artes sermocinales*. Pico è umanista, non tanto perchè latinista e grecista, quanto perchè di fronte agli autori, ai testi del passato, alla 'storia', alla 'morale', assume un atteggiamento che gli 'studia humanitatis' avevano favorito ed alimentato in ogni senso. Per questo ho affermato che il conflitto fra Pico e Barbaro è *interno* all'umanesimo. Per questo io credo che l'urto fra cultura umanistica e cultura scolastica non si possa ridurre al bisticcio fra grammatici e filosofi, ma sia anch'esso utro fra filosofi e filosofi."

ous ways: Charles Trinkaus, concentrating mainly on Petrarch, Salutati, and Valla, used the term “rhetorical theology”; Salvatore Camporeale, focusing primarily on Valla, used the term “teologia umanistica”; and John O’Malley, who studied sermons delivered in Rome, coined the term “Renaissance theology”.² All these terms reflect an attempt to characterize the new attitude of humanists towards religion. By doing so, these scholars radically departed from Burckhardt’s dichotomy between religion and culture,³ and from any idea of secularization or even paganism in the Renaissance.⁴ Nonetheless, they did not portray a “Christian humanism” which thoroughly Christianized Greek and Ro-

² Charles Trinkaus: *In Our Image and Likeness—Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 2 vols., London: Constable, 1970; and his *The Scope of Renaissance Humanism*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983; Salvatore I. Camporeale: *Lorenzo Valla—Umanesimo e teologia*, Firenze: Istituto nazionale di studi sul Rinascimento, 1972; *Lorenzo Valla—umanesimo, riforma e controriforma, studi e testi*, Roma: Storia e Letteratura, 2002; John O’Malley: *Praise and Blame in Renaissance Rome—Rhetoric, Doctrine, and Reform in Sacred Orators of the Papal Court 1450–1521*, Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1979. See also the historiographical remarks in S. I. Camporeale: *Lorenzo Valla—umanesimo...*, *op.cit.*: 247, n. 60; 346, n. 12. For the relation between Roman humanism and religion see John F. D’Amico: *Renaissance Humanism in Papal Rome—Humanists and Churchmen on the Eve of the Reformation*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983, especially: 144–168. D’Amico on p. 167 prefers, for his historical context, the term *theologia erudita* or *docta* to Trinkaus’ *theologia rhetorica*.

³ Jacob Burckhardt: *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. by S. G. C. Middlemore, Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1945: 292–296; *Force and Freedom—An Interpretation of History*, ed. and trans. by James Hastings Nichols, New York: Meridian Books, 1955: 165–166, 218–219. Trinkaus’ words are important here, though I have my hesitations about his use of the term ‘secular’: see Trinkaus: *The Scope...*, *op.cit.*: XX: “This is a matrix for the study of the self-consciousness of our period—not the assertion of a dichotomy between the sacred and the secular, the cleric and the layman, the mystical and the rational which generated factions and multifarious parties, but a search for ways of trying to bring together and reconcile the apparently conflicting values. Let us propose that what was going on was a tendency to secularize the sacred while simultaneously sacralizing the secular.” See also O’Malley’s account in his *Praise and Blame...*, *op.cit.*: 30: “But the irreligion of the Renaissance is a deeply imbedded prejudice. As late as 1969, for instance, Johannes Baptist Schneyer in his *Geschichte der katholischen Predigt* summarily dismissed all ‘humanist’ preaching during the Renaissance as doctrinally vacuous or even erroneous.”

⁴ For two very different approaches to “paganism” in the Renaissance see Edgar Wind: *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958; C. M. Woodhouse: *George Gemistos Plethon: The Last of the Hellenes*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1986. But see also Michael J. B. Allen’s detailed discussion and critique of Wind, regarding “the shadow” of Arianism in Ficino in: ‘Marsilio Ficino on Plato, the Neoplatonists and the Christian Doctrine of the Trinity’, *Renaissance Quarterly* 37, 1984: 555–584; and Allen’s critique of Woodhouse in: *Synoptic Art—Marsilio Ficino on the History of Platonic Interpretation*, Firenze: L. S. Olschki, 1998: 2, n. 3.

man authors, nor did they search anachronistically for the roots of the Reformation or the Counter Reformation in humanist theology. In their accounts, the relationship between humanism and theology was described in all its complexity, especially with regard to the humanistic criticism of scholastic theology. It is surprising how much this re-birth of classical culture which we call Renaissance has interested scholars from the point of view of the revival of learning in Western Europe and the beginning of modern philological and historical methods (which are justly related to the figures of Valla, Poliziano, and Erasmus), or from the angle of the changing social and political structures from the medieval commune towards the Renaissance city-state, and how relatively little attention has been paid in modern scholarship to the influence of this revival on the approach to scholastic theology and religion, even though there is a clear relation between Renaissance, Reformation, and Counter Reformation.⁵

In this paper, I shall focus on the relations between humanism and theology and religion in Florence of the second half of the fifteenth century, through the figures of two Dominican friars: Giovanni Caroli and Girolamo Savonarola, and two Florentine humanists: Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. I shall try to show the humanistic bias in a professional theologian like Caroli and in a preacher like Savonarola, and the religious or theological bias in humanists like Ficino and Pico. I am thus rejecting Kristeller's well-known distinction between humanists and philosophers, and wish to see both the most influential renovator of the Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophical tradition, and the author of the oration on the dignity of man—one of the best-known and most representative documents of Renaissance culture—as both humanists and philosophers. Each of these four figures in his own way, had complex relations with humanism and with the ecclesiastical world, which should lead a student of these figures into breaking the boundaries between the various theoretical and practical areas of activity as mapped up in traditional research. Each was a central figure in the religious and intellectual life of the period. Let us begin with Caroli and Savonarola.

While Savonarola's religious and political activities have turned him into a national hero, whose writings have often been printed, and about whom we now have a vast modern literature, Caroli is hardly known

⁵ See Camporeale's critical note 'Umanesimo, riforma e origini della controriforma—alla ricerca di interrelazioni e differenze', *Memorie Domenicane* 20, 1989: 301–307.

even to experts, and only few sections of his works have been published.⁶ As part of my work in this field, I have begun to prepare the first ever printed edition (an *editio princeps*) of one of his books. One of my aims is to restore Caroli to his contemporary position of a leading theologian, exercising a great influence on theologians, ecclesiastics, and humanists. Caroli—like Savonarola in later years—had his own programme of ecclesiastical reforms. Yet, despite some similarities in their activities and in their tendency to reform the Church, Caroli and Savonarola ended up as the leaders of two opposing forces.

Caroli has been mentioned in several historical works over the years, but almost always as a part of another story or context.⁷ Verde's his-

⁶ On Savonarola see, e.g., the series of books entitled *Savonarola e la Toscana*, published in Florence by Edizioni del Galluzzo per la Fondazione Ezio Franceschini, which include both new edited texts and studies. For biographical facts on Caroli, and a list of his works, see Stefano Orlandi, O. P.: *Necrologio di Santa Maria Novella: 1235–1504. Testo e commento biografici*, II vols., Firenze: L. S. Olschki, 1955, vol. I: 203–205, vol. II: 353–380. For a description of the manuscripts of Caroli found in the library of Santa Maria Novella see G. Pomaro, 'Censimento dei manoscritti della biblioteca di S. Maria Novella—parte I: origini e trecento', *Memorie Domenicane* 11, 1980: 325–470, and 'Censimento dei manoscritti della biblioteca di S. Maria Novella—parte II: sec. XV–XVI in.', *Memorie Domenicane* 13, 1982: 203–255.

⁷ Eugenio Garin: *La cultura filosofica del Rinascimento italiano—ricerche e documenti*, Firenze: Sansoni, 1961: 224–225, mentioned Caroli's "occhio critico alle pagine 'oracolari' del Nesi, e se ammirava lo stile elegantissimo di Giovanni Pico, non ne accettava le conclusioni, e ne discuteva con l'amico Pietro Negro, dolendosi con lui dei tempi moderni, così travagliati." Donald Weinstein: *Savonarola and Florence—Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970: 234–238 (see especially n. 22 on p. 234 for more biographical and bibliographical references to Caroli), is interested in Caroli's critique of Savonarola and his prophetic ambitions. Much the same interest and context are at the centre of Lorenzo Polizzotto's *The Elect Nation—The Savonarolan Movement in Florence 1494–1545*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, e.g., 59–65, and his *La missione di G. Savonarola in Firenze*, Pistoia: Centro riviste della provincia romana, 1996: 29–53, including an appendix with some passages from some of Caroli's polemical texts against Savonarola, in the vernacular, on pp. 47–52. Giovanni di Napoli in his *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola e la problematica dottrinale del suo tempo*, Roma: Desclée, 1965: 144, mentions and discusses Caroli's critique of Pico's *Theses*. Caroli's critique of Giovanni Nesi's *Oraculum de novo seculo* is discussed in Christopher S. Celenza's introduction to his *Piety and Pythagoras in Renaissance Florence—The Symbolum Nesianum*, Leiden: Brill, 2001: 43–45. Caroli's Florentine history, *Libri de temporibus suis*, is discussed, but only as a source for Machiavelli's *Istorie fiorentine*, and with no proper appreciation of its inherent value, in Rab Hatfield's 'A Source for Machiavelli's Account of the Regime of Pietro de' Medici', in: Myron P. Gilmore (ed.): *Studies On Machiavelli*, Firenze: Sansoni, 1972: 317–333, including an appendix with some passages from the *Libri de temporibus suis* on pp. 328–333. Hatfield treats Caroli as a moralizing Dominican friar (pp. 322, 326–327), whose historical account "is not easy going, for Fra Giovanni's Latin is far from terse. And one doubts that the work has much to yield in the way of reliable in-

torical account of Caroli, in which he states that “la concezione classica della storia come sviluppo organico che riceve alimento rimane a fondamento della sua polemica antisavonaroliana”,⁸ echoes two articles by Salvatore I. Camporeale, focusing for the first time on Caroli himself and analysing his activity and importance to Florentine history between 1460–1480, in both a humanist and a religious contexts.⁹ In these two articles Camporeale studied Caroli during the first two decades of his activity, showing the complex relations between *humanae litterae* and *sacrae litterae* in two of his compositions, *Liber dierum lucensium* and *Vitae nonnullorum fratrum beatae Mariae Novellae*, and concentrating in particular on Caroli’s philosophy of history in the *Vitae*, under the shadow of a religious crisis.¹⁰

Giovanni Caroli (1428–1503) was three times Father Superior of Santa Maria Novella. Conscious of the crisis in religion, he attempted—following his predecessors Giovanni Dominici and St. Antonino—to reform his monastery. For this, he was exiled to Lucca in 1460. In a book written there, *Liber dierum lucensium*, he describes the spiritual crisis of his age and proposes his own solution, rejected by the Church. Returning in the late 1460s to Florence and to his former position, he became a central figure in the city’s intellectual life. Beside teaching at the *Studio Fiorentino*, he wrote sermons, works of biblical exegesis, a

formation about Florentine political history during the period of Medici rule” (p. 327). These conclusions do not seem to be very reliable in the light of the works of Camporeale mentioned below. Caroli’s activity in the *Studio Fiorentino*, as well as a detailed account of his polemical writings, can be found in Armando F. Verde, O. P.: *Lo studio fiorentino 1473–1503*, vol. IV (*La vita universitaria*), Firenze: L. S. Olschki, 1985, e.g., 1288–1291, 1348–1361.

⁸ Verde: *Lo studio...*, *op.cit.*: 1290.

⁹ See Salvatore I. Camporeale, O. P.: ‘Giovanni Caroli e le ‘*Vitae fratrum S. M. Novellae*’—umanesimo e crisi religiosa (1460–1480)’, *Memorie Domenicane* 12, 1981: 141–267, including an appendix with Caroli’s letter of dedication to Cristoforo Landino, his general introduction, and his seven introductions to each of the *Vitae*, on pp. 236–267; and his ‘Giovanni Caroli—dal ‘*Liber dierum*’ alle ‘*Vitae fratrum*’’, *Memorie Domenicane* 16, 1985: 199–233, including an appendix containing the third book of the *Liber dierum lucensium*, on pp. 218–233.

¹⁰ Camporeale’s other works on Caroli are: ‘Giovanni Caroli, 1460–1480: Death, Memory, and Transformation’, in: Marcel Tetel, Ronald G. Witt & Rona Goffen (eds.): *Life and Death in Fifteenth-Century Florence*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1989: 16–27; ‘Humanism and the Religious Crisis of the Late Quattrocento—Giovanni Caroli, O. P., and the *Liber dierum lucensium*’, in: Timothy Verdon & John Henderson (eds.): *Christianity and the Renaissance. Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento*, Syracuse, N. Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1990: 445–466; ‘Mito di Enea e crisi mendicante—*Liber dierum* (1460–62) di Giovanni Caroli O. P.’, *Memorie Domenicane* 30, 1999: 5–18.

history of Florence, and biographies of great Dominicans of the past. In his last years, he led the opposition to Savonarola and his followers, and his polemical writings are all extant in manuscripts.

A close reading of Caroli's first book, the dialogue *Liber dierum lucensium* ('The book of my days in Lucca') written during his exile in Lucca in the winter of 1461/2, reveals a profound personal crisis. Caroli failed in his attempt to introduce reforms into the monastery of Santa Maria Novella of which he was prior, he was removed from the monastery and exiled to Lucca—all this because of the opposition on the part of the general superior of the Dominican Order, Marziale Auribelli and the pope, Pius II to the manner of his proposed reforms. But the book also reflects a more general spiritual and political crisis. The need for reform in the Dominican Order, and in the Mendicant Orders in general, was not a subject of dispute: even Caroli's opponents accepted it as necessary in the circumstances. This in itself shows that everybody felt that a religious crisis had been affecting those monastic orders which constituted the living bridge between the Church and the believers. The official position of the Church was that a reform was required, but that it should be dictated from above. Caroli's struggle for a reform from within, which should take into account the local traditions and preserve the autonomy and the liberty of each monastery, is presented in *Liber dierum lucensium* as a struggle for liberty both in its religious aspect (with Scripture and early Christianity struggling against the pagan tyrants employed as a model for the present) and in its political aspect (the institutions of the Roman republic as a model for the administration of the Dominican Order). This struggle is connected both to the past (the tyrants who persecuted the early Christians) and to the present (the general superior of the order who is acting, according to Caroli, as a tyrant in his attempt to impose on the monastery reforms from above).

Caroli thus presents us with the reactions to the impending crisis by a member of the Church and of a monastic order, whose main concern is to deal with the problems of his own order. Yet even here we already find the pervasive influence of Caroli's classical education, and especially his acquaintance with authors such as Cicero, Livy, Tacitus, and especially Virgil. In some places, the classical allusions and quotations even precede the biblical ones, and sometimes we have only classical allusions where we could expect some biblical ones. A good example is given on the second page of the work, where the ruins of his monastery remind Caroli first of all of a famous passage from Virgil's *Aeneid* II on the destruction of Troy. Almost as an afterthought, Caroli adds that

the prophet Jeremiah, also has something to say on the destruction of a holy city.¹¹ But while the prophet saw with his own eyes what he described—he saw both *color optimus* and how it changed into *obscuratum aurum*—it is easier for Caroli to describe the destruction, since he himself learned the excellent morals of the previous generation more through hearing about them than through his own suffering.¹²

For I was born in these times which are not so far from our customs. Since if I were to see that it happened otherwise, surely death would have been more pleasing to me than life. Reading the fathers of the past affects [me], hearing [them] affects [me], but having seen [them] affects [me] most of all.¹³

¹¹ Caroli's autograph manuscript is MS Florence, BNCF, Conv. Suppr. C.8.279, ff. 1r–56v. See f. 1v: “Adeo illa priscorum patrum sanctimonia destituti concidere plerisque ut recte familie nostre ruinas, eisdem versibus, quis poeta noster, Troiana excidia in Hectorea similitudine, flebat, deplorare possimus:

Heu michi qualis erat, quantum mutatus ab illo
Hectore qui rediit, exuuias, indutus Achillis
Vel Danaum Frigios iaculatus puppibus ignes.
Squalentem barbam, et concretos sanguine crines
Vulneraque illa gerens, que circum plurima muros
Accepit patrios, ultro flens ipse videbar.
[Vergilius, *Aeneis* II, 274–279, with variations]

Sed et sanctissimus vates, obscuratum aurum optimumque colorem, lacrimosis, querebatur vocibus inmutatum [Lam 4, 1: Quomodo obscuratum est aurum mutatus est color optimus], cuique sancte civitatis, dirui muros, iuvenes ense prosterni virgines captivas conduci, fanaque omnia violari, egerime conspexisset.” For the last few expressions I cannot find exact parallels in the Vulgate. Caroli is probably summing up images from *Lamentations* in his own words. Notice that the loss of *priscorum patrum sanctimonia* and the ruin of *familia nostra* are described first of all in the verses of *poeta noster*, Virgil. The quotations from Jeremiah are introduced almost as an afterthought: *sed et sanctissimus vates*.

¹² *Idem.*: “Quo michi levius et perferendi et tollerandi ratio praesertim summenda est, quod magis auditu quam nisu superioris etatis egregios mores acceperim.”

¹³ *Ibid.*: ff. 1v–2r: “Incidit enim in ea tempora, que parum a nostris moribus distant. Quod si secus accidisse viderem, gratior profecto mors michi quam vita fuisset. Movet quidem veterum patrum lectio, movet auditio, sed ¶ [2r] visio maxime.” Notice *ea tempora* again. The connection between *tempora* and *mores* is as old as Cicero, *Cat.* I 2: “O tempora! O mores!” One may also mention Livy, *Praefatio* 9: “... ad illa mihi pro se quisque acriter intendat animum, quae vita, qui mores fuerint, per quos viros quibusque artibus domi militiaeque et partum et auctum imperium sit; labente deinde paulatim disciplina velut desidentes primo **mores** sequatur animo, deinde ut magis magisque lapsi sint, tum ire coeperint praecipites, donec ad **haec tempora** quibus nec vitia nostra nec remedia pati possumus perventum est.” This is echoed by Tacitus, *Agricola* 1: “Clarorum virorum facta **moresque** posteris tradere, antiquitus usitatum, ne **nostris** quidem **temporibus** quamquam incuriosa suorum **aetas**, omisit...”. History

Caroli describes a crisis which is occurring in his own day. The consciousness of a certain painful difference, but also a pleasant proximity between the previous and the present generation, produce this sense of crisis. Living in a later generation would be worse than dying, since this sense of proximity would disappear. The next generation would live entirely without this feeling. But Caroli not only read his illustrious predecessors, he was also well acquainted with the one whom he considered to be the last great figure of the previous generation: Archbishop Antonino Pierotti who died in 1459, one year before *ea novitas* and Caroli's exile—the reasons for this composition.

Employing a Roman republican model for the administration of the order and the city, as proposed in Caroli's book, is yet another humanistic feature. In Book III we find Antonino's speech which is full of references and allusions to the history of republican Rome, with political and religious concepts and terms used in the same contexts. What Antonino seems to advocate is a new form of government for the order, in which as in the Roman republic, magistrates should not have absolute power, but should consult assemblies of the friars. This is very close to the model of the Florentine republic.¹⁴ This feature will become a powerful constituent in the programme of the opponents of

was regarded as a source for ethical examples also by most historians in the Middle Ages; but what we have here are clear echoes of well known ancient Latin sources.

¹⁴ The theme of "Florence the daughter of Rome" is known since the first history of Florence, the thirteenth century *Chronica de origine civitatis*, which traced its origins to Roman colonization in the time of Julius Caesar. Republican Rome became the model of Florentine civic ethos during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and it is deeply related to the contemporary Guelfism and to both internal social tensions and external Italian politics; see Weinstein: *Savonarola and Florence. . . , op.cit. : 27–66*. Hans Baron in his *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance—Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966: 61–64, emphasized the republican turn in Florentine foundation story; see e.g., pp. 63–64: "About the time when Bruni in his *Laudatio* was jubilant that Florence was the offspring of the Roman Republic and not of a period when Rome began to obey emperors, Florentine humanists, studying the ancient sources, established in a fashion convincing to their contemporaries the exact historical conditions under which the colony on the Arno had come into being: it was the victorious Roman army under Sulla whose veterans had been settled in the area of Florence not long after the beginning of the first century B.C. The humanist to whom this work of historical reconstruction was chiefly due was Salutati, the chancellor, who arrived at the theory that Florence was founded by veterans of Sulla, by searching carefully in all classical sources for the early conditions of the Arno valley, in particular the information in the *Bellum Catilinae* of Sallust and in Cicero's second oration against Catilina." The important modification we have in Caroli's description is that the Roman republic, in its 'best' period, the late second century BCE, is represented here as a model for governing a religious order.

the Medici, whose growing autocracy during these decades deprived the republican institutions of their substance. The identification of the Medici with tyrannical rule is frequent in the chronicles of the period and reaches its culmination in Savonarola's sermons.¹⁵

Although Savonarola seems to represent an anti-humanistic reaction, his exact relations to the humanists of the age, as well as to the more traditional but still unconventional theology of men like Carli, have not been adequately studied. It is not widely known that Savonarola, beside being admired by most Florentine humanists of the period (including Ficino and Pico), actively encouraged many humanist activities, including philosophical discussions, and especially the learn-

¹⁵ Alamanno Rinuccini: *Ricordi storici di Filippo di Cino Rinuccini dal 1282 al 1460, colla continuazione di Alamanno e Neri suoi figli fino al 1506*, ed. G. Aiazzi, Firenze: Della Stamperia Piatti, 1840: 96–97: "... e in questa petizione si cominciò a vedere la manifesta dissensione tra' principali della città, perchè Messer Luca Pitti ne fu autore e confortatore, e non piaceva così a Piero di Cosimo e suoi seguaci, benchè apertamente non la contraddicessi se non Antonio di Puccio per parte del detto Piero de' Medici; ed il popolo molto si rallegrò di questo, cioè del serrare le borse; ma ne seguì quello che di sotto diremo"; p. 102: "... il perchè Piero di Cosimo ebbe occasione e subito fece pigliare l'arme agli amici suoi, e la notte fece guardare la piazza e così la casa sua, che fu segno di espressa tirannide, perchè poco avanti la signoria avea mandato bando che niuno si dovesse armare ...; E continuamente faceva venire fanti per sua parte, avendo coascuno altro poste giù l'armi; sicchè si vide chiaro lui esser manifesto tiranno nella città nostra; che così adviene dove si lascia fare uno troppo grande sopra gli altri, che è cosa perniciosissima nelle repubbliche, e sempre poi riesce a questo fine"; p. 103: "E più si vinse che le borse del priorato e gonfaloniere di giustizia stessino aperte per anni 10, cioè che in detto tempo si avessino a fare I priori e gonfaloniere di giustizia a mano per li accoppiatori che pe'tempi fussino; cose tutte violente e tiranniche e da tenere il popolo in perpetua servitù, e conculcare la libertà già quasi perduta ..."; pp. 103–104: "... sicchè di tutto si può intendere l'animo di Piero e suoi aderenti non esser suto contento a vivere come cittadino, ma avere sempre appetito di signoreggiare; il perchè admonisco e conforto, se mai alcuni queste cose leggeranno, che abbino avvertenza di non lasciare mai nella repubblica, che disideri vivere in libertà, crescere tanto alcuno cittadino che egli possa più che le leggi: perchè lo insaziabile appetito delli uomini, quando può più che non si coviene, più anche vuole e desidera che non è licito"; p. 104: "A dì 11 di Settembre 1466, pel consiglio della balia furon confinati per anni 20 li infrascritti cittadini, e la cagione si disse che era, perchè eglino aveano voluto fare venire genti d'arme in su' terreni del comune di Firenze, e che aveano voluto fare contro la libertà; il che non era vero, anzi volevano rendere la libertà al popolo e trarlo dalla servitù in che era stato dal 1434 insino allora, ed ora vi è più che mai ..."; Piero Parenti: *Storia Fiorentina*, ed. Andrea Matucci, Firenze: L. S. Olschki, 1994, p. 178: "... Firenze dal falso e tirannico governatore al vero e popolare stato venne ..."; Girolamo Savonarola: *Prediche Italiane Ai Fiorentini*, IV vols., Perugia & Venezia & Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1930–1935, eds. Francesco Cognasso (vols. I and II) and Roberto Palmarocchi (vols. IIIa and IIIb), vol. IIIb, p. 175: "Tu, popol fiorentino, non hai voluto ricognoscere da Dio le grazie che t'ha fatte, che t'ha cavato di servitù e hatti messo in liberta ..."

ing of Hebrew and Aramaic, and translations of the Scriptures from these languages.¹⁶ But I would like to focus on another humanistic feature of the Florentine preacher.

Armando Verde has contrasted Savonarola's negative attitude towards the use and study of pagan classical authors in a theological context to Marcello Adriani's affirmative attitude.¹⁷ In the fifteenth sermon of the sermons on John's first Epistle delivered on January 1st, 1490/1491, we find Savonarola's critique of all human knowledge and disciplines of his time; this was not only (as one would expect) a critique of the relatively new humanistic rhetoric and the grammatical and philological approach, but, more surprising, it was also a critique of the traditional scholastic discussions and their use of logic and syllogisms. Against, and far beyond, all this knowledge, Savonarola puts the significance of Christ's name, which represents for him the essence of Christian knowledge.¹⁸ But almost immediately afterwards, Savonarola

¹⁶ See e.g., Lorenzo Polizzotto: 'Savonarola, San Marco and the Reform', *Memorie Domenicane* 29, 1998: 39–49; see especially p. 42: "Under Savonarola's guidance, it [San Marco] also became a centre of intellectual activity, providing the setting of meetings by the most eminent minds then in Florence. This in turn caused a number of talented individuals, many with university training, to join the convent."

¹⁷ Verde: *Lo studio fiorentino...*, *op.cit.*: 1309–1318; see especially p. 1310: "L'intera prolusione può essere considerata, almeno obiettivamente, come una seria e dignitosa risposta, data in termini propositivi, alla tesi savonaroliana circa la nocività degli studi degli autori 'pagani' per la teologia, dimostrando che, al contrario, gli studi dei classici coltivati dagli umanisti producono un più puro concetto di Dio e costituiscono un presupposto del discorso teologico più dignitoso di quello che la religione cristiana gli ha dato."

¹⁸ Savonarola: *Sermones in primam divi Ioannis epistolam*, eds. Armando F. Verde & Elettra Giaconi, Firenze: Sismel, Edizioni del Galluzzo, 1998: 216: "In hoc enim absconditi sunt omnes thesauri sapientie et scientie. Quid ergo? Sufficit mihi si possum huius nominis intelligere significatum. Volo igitur effici puer, volo gramaticam discere. Veni, gramatice: dic mihi quid significat hoc nomen Yhesus, si nosti. Et ecce gloriatur ille et dicit:—Veni ad me et plene de hoc te instruam—. Sed et quid ita gloriaris? Putasne quia intelligis que legis? Fratres, iterum dico vobis: sufficit mihi intelligere significatum huius nominis: tunc enim omnem habeo scientiam. Alii querant significata infinitorum vocabulorum, alii ornatum verborum, alii gravitatem sententiarum, alii magnas silvas metrorum, alii involutiones syllogismorum, alii magnitudines et formas figurarum, alii proportionales numerorum, alii melodias vocum, alii cursus syderum, alii naturas rerum, alii cultus agrorum, alii artem acquirendarum pecuniarum, alii diversas artes huius seculi; diversi letentur et gaudeant in deliciis huius seculi sive in scientia, *ego autem in Domino gaudebo et exultabo in Deo Yhesu meo* (Abacuch 3, 18). In hoc enim omnia bona invenio, in hoc omnem dulcedinem, in hoc omnem salutem. Hec sit scientia mea, hec gramatica mea, hoc canticum meum, hoc rethorica mea, hoc logica mea, hoc mea philosophia, hoc divitie mee, hoc delitie mee. Sufficit mihi significatum huius nominis posse utcumque etiam intelligere. Hoc enim intelligere est consumata sapientia. *Non enim*—Ait

gives an example for five stages of understanding, since different men understand differently the signification of Christ's name.¹⁹ The example provided by Savonarola to illustrate the constraints on human capacity to understand this mysterious knowledge and the different levels of understanding it is clearly a Christian Latin echo of one of the most famous Platonic myths, the myth of the cave described at the beginning of book VII of Plato's *Republic*.²⁰

Ficino's attitude to religion reveals both the importance of religion for the understanding of his thought in general and the originality of his ideas on this issue. My brief account here of some aspects of Ficino's *De Christiana religione* of 1474, written soon after the already well-established Platonic translator and philosopher decided to enter

Apostolus — *indicavi me scire aliquid inter vos nisi Yhesum Christum et hunc crucifixum* (2 ad Cor. 2; 1 Cor. 2, 2)."

¹⁹ *Idem.*: "Ut autem melius intelligatis et credatis que dico, facio distinctionem et similitudinem. Quidam enim intelligunt per solum auditum aurium, quidam per auditum cordis sed valde confusum, quidam per umbras eius clare et distinctas visas, quidam etiam per quemdam tactum, quidam autem omnino aperte."

²⁰ *Ibid.*: 216–218: "Sit caverna magna **sub terra** [Plato, *Republic* 514a3] et quadra et magnum luminare in principio, post quod sint **diversa animalia** [515a1] que ludant discurrant ex transverso caveerne ita quod **umbre perveniant ad oppositam parietem** [515a7–8] caveerne, et post hec animalia, scilicet in medio caveerne, sint tres columne et quinque homines quorum unus sit cecus catenatus prope primam columnam, alter vero sit non penitus cecus sed videns cum quadam obumbratione et nihil clare sed confuse videat et sit ligatus ad columnam ita quod respiciat parietem ubi sunt umbre et non possit se vertere, et eodem modo sit ligatus tertius sed clare videat, et eodem modo quartus clare videns ita quod etiam frequenter ab animalibus illis tangatur post terga, ita tamen quod numquam videat quid est illud quod tangit eum. Et pono quod isti tres numquam aliquid aliud viderint preter istam medietatem caveerne cum umbris suis et etiam semetipsos invicem. **Quintus autem** [515c6...] sit solutus et videat lumen et animalia et totam cavernam. Hic ergo cognoscit umbras et causas earum distincte. Ille autem qui tangitur cognoscit quia aliquid est quod ipsum tangit et facit umbras, sed nescit quid sit illud. Et similiter 3s, licet non ita clare; 2s autem cognoscit confuse; primus autem, qui cecus est et non tangitur nec videt umbras, non potest hoc cognoscere nisi per auditum aliorum. Hec igitur caverna assimilatur huic mundo. Nos enim, existentes in hoc mundo, non cognoscimus immaterialia et invisibilia Dei nisi per umbras, et ita hoc nomen Yhesu diversimode a diversis cognoscitur. Quidam aperte cognoscunt, ut beati, angeli et homines, verum non comprehendunt; solus autem Deus, idest Sancta Trinitas, hoc nomen comprehendit, unde Hieremias dicit, ut allegavimus: *Incomprehensibilis cogitatu* (Ier. 32, 18)." I have only marked the few expressions where the similarity to Plato's language is apparent. These expressions are not literally derived from Marsilio Ficino's translation, and so far I have not been able to trace their literal source. Savonarola may well be paraphrasing the Platonic myth in his own words. What matters is that he employs a story from a Greek source which was unknown in the Latin West during the Middle Ages and was only brought to light there during the revival of learning.

the priesthood, should be considered as part of the ongoing effort to understand Ficino's early activity, that is from the mid 1450s to the mid 1470s. As Arthur Field and Christopher Celenza have shown, following Kristeller, Ficino in these formative years had close relations with four "scholastic mentors": Francesco da Castiglione (a theologian who probably taught him Greek), Antonio degli Agli (a Florentine prelate and eventual bishop of Volterra), Lorenzo Pisano (a Dominican theologian and friar who was canon of San Lorenzo and who is mentioned also by Caroli), and Niccolò Tignosi (a medical doctor and a professor of logic and Aristotelian philosophy at the University of Florence),²¹ all of whom were entirely at home in scholastic theology. At the same time, they were already influenced by some new spiritual themes deriving from ancient Greek texts, and almost completely unknown to most professional scholastic theologians. For instance, Agli, in his *Explanatio symbolorum Pythagore* and *De mystica statera*,²² treats Pythagorean symbolic mysticism and its Neoplatonic interpretation in relation to Christianity. This is enough to raise some questions, not frequently asked by scholars of Renaissance thought, about the relations between humanism and theology, humanists and professional theologians, *humane littere* and *sacre littere*. Asking why professional theologians would be interested in ancient Greek pagan texts is exactly one of the questions with which an account of the new humanist theology should begin.

What is religion for Ficino? Religion is that quality which gives preeminence in nature to mankind. Without religion, there would be no difference between man and beast. Religion therefore occupies a central place in the life of man:

²¹ Paul Oskar Kristeller: 'The Scholastic Background of Marsilio Ficino', *Traditio* II, 1944: 257-318, especially p. 263. See his important remark on pp. 273-274: "This scholastic element is Aristotelian rather than Platonic in character, and it is obviously due to Ficino's early training at the University of Florence. The specific sources of this element are difficult to verify as long as the philosophical and theological environment of fifteenth-century Italy is not more thoroughly investigated. For it is among the Italian scholastics of the fourteenth and the early fifteenth century that we have to look for Ficino's teachers, not among the philosophers connected with the French schools of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, who have so far attracted most of the interest of competent medievalists". See also Arthur Field: *The Origins of the Platonic Academy of Florence*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988: 129-174, especially p. 136; and Celenza's introduction to his *Piety and Pythagoras...*, *op.cit.*: 26-27.

²² The first text has been edited in John Swogger's Warburg Ph. D. dissertation: see Celenza, *Piety and Pythagoras...*, *op.cit.*: 26, n. 97; the second, however, remains in manuscript: MS Naples BN VIII. F. 9, ff. 19-33; see Celenza: *Piety and Pythagoras...*, *op.cit.*: 27, n. 99.

Man, the most perfect animal, by this quality [religion] especially is both capable of perfection and differs from inferior things; by it he is connected to the most perfect things, i.e., divine ones. And conversely, if man, as man, is the most perfect among mortal animals, it is chiefly because of this quality that he is the most perfect [animal] of all; he himself regards it as his special [quality] which is not common to the rest of them. This [quality] is religion; therefore, it is on account of religion [that man] is most perfect.²³

It follows that religion must have existed ever since the beginning of human history. Ficino goes one step further and emphasizes the unity of philosophy and religion in different ancient civilizations: the Hebrews, the Persians, the Indians, the Egyptians, the Ethiopians, the Greeks, the Gauls, and the Romans.²⁴ The unity of philosophy and religion seems to be a new idea stemming from Ficino's dual background in traditional theology, as a priest, and in recently discovered ancient texts, as a Platonist.

One connection between philosophy and natural religion is that religion aims at securing man a future life:

²³ Ficino: *De Christiana religione, Opera omnia*, Basel 1576; reprinted Torino: Bottega d'Erasmus, 1962, vol. I, p. 2: "homo perfectissimum animal, ea proprietate maxime tum perfectione pollet, tum ab inferioribus discrepat, qua perfectissimis, id est, divinis coniungitur. Rursus, si homo animalium mortalium perfectissimus est, in quantum homo, ob eam praecipue dotem est omnium perfectissimus, quam inter haec habet ipse propriam, caeteris animalibus non communem, ea religio est, per religionem igitur est perfectissimus."

²⁴ *Ibid.*: 1: "Prophetarum igitur Hebraeorum atque Essaei sapientiae simul, et sacerdotio incumbabant. Philosophi a Persis, quia sacris praeerant, magi, hoc est, sacerdotes, sunt appellati. Indi Brachmanas de rerum natura simul, atque animorum expiationibus consulebant. Apud Aegyptios Mathematici, et Metaphysici sacerdotio fungebantur et regno. Apud Aethiopas gymnosophistae philosophiae simul magistri erant ac religionis antistites. Eadem in Graecia consuetudo fuit sub Lino, Orpheo, Musaeo, Eumolpo, Melampo, Trophimo, Aglaophemo, atque Pythagora. Eadem in Gallia sub Druidum gubernaculis. Quantum apud Romanos Numae Pompilio, Valerio Sorano, Marco Varro multisque aliis sapientiae simul, sacrorumque studium fuerit, quis ignoret?" One possible source is Diogenes Laertius I.1-12, but he does not include all the names which appear here. Is there another source, or is it a combination made by Ficino himself? Also, why omit the Chaldeans, or Babylonians or Assyrians, who usually appear in such lists? Could it be because the Chaldean Oracles enjoyed a special status as prophecies for the coming of Christianity? These are questions which should be dealt with by a commentator on this text.

Also by the common religious feeling of people [there] is true religion, since all [men] always and everywhere worship God for the sake of the future life.²⁵

This natural tendency not only seems to be implanted in every single man but also to be an unchangeable and common element, in comparison with all the changeable opinions, affections, manners, and laws of men.²⁶ Incidentally, Ficino does not use logical arguments and syllogisms as one would have expected to find in a scholastic discussion. He prefers the commonly held opinion or religious feeling, a historical fact, as the starting-point for his discussion, and the only inference we find here is that even such a historical fact should be ascribed to God's first act of intervention in history, the creation of human nature. Ficino concludes with his own variation on a remote echo of an Aristotelian motif:

If therefore someone is found to be completely without religion, since this is contrary to the nature of mankind, either he is some sort of monster from birth, or he was defiled by the contagion of another monster.²⁷

²⁵ *Ibid.*: 2: "Communi quoque hominum vaticinio religio vera est, omnes namque semper ubique colunt Deum, vitae futurae gratia." *Vaticinium* usually means prophecy and, in a borrowed sense, poetry. But here it seems parallel to *indicium* cited in the next note. Since Ficino claims (n. 24) that this is an opinion implanted in us by God and nature, one is tempted to translate it as inspiration, but that would imply a moment of inspiration of the sort so important to Ficino, while here he is speaking of a permanent sentiment. I have therefore translated it, with some hesitation, as "religious feeling". See the Italian version, *Della Christiana religione*, Firenze: Appresso i Giunti, 1568, p. 11: "Non altrimenti per uno comune indovinare de gl'huomini la Religione è vera, et quest è che tutti et sempre et in ogni luogo honorono Iddio per cagione della futura vita."

²⁶ *Idem.*: "Talem autem esse religionis assertionem apparet, non solum ex eo, quod solius omnisque hominis est, verum etiam ex eo quod omnes hominum opinioniones, affectus, mores, leges, excepta communi quadam religione, mutantur." Here we have the Stoic idea of *communis opinio*, κοινὴ ἔννοια, and *consensus omnium gentium* of the first sections of Cicero's *De natura deorum* II. But the special immutable nature of religion is also reminiscent of the Stoic idea of natural law expounded by Cicero in Book I of *De legibus*. This idea of a natural or divine law which is not subject to change may have helped Ficino in forming this idea of *vera religio*.

²⁷ *Idem.*: "Siquis ergo reperiatur omnis religionis penitus expers, quia praeter humanae speciei naturam est, vel monstrum quoddam est ab initio, vel contagione monstri alterius inquinatus." See Aristotle, *Politics*, I, 2, 1253a1-4: "ἐκ τούτων οὖν φανερόν ὅτι τῶν φύσει ἢ πόλις ἐστί, καὶ ὅτι ὁ ἄνθρωπος φύσει πολιτικὸν ζῷον, καὶ ὁ ἄπολις διὰ φύσιν καὶ οὐ διὰ τύχην ἤτοι φαῦλός ἐστιν, ἢ κρείττων ἢ ἄνθρωπος." This was later interpreted and supplemented: the man without a polis is either a God or a beast. Ficino turns Aristotle's man without a polis into a man without religion. The implication is that religion for Ficino is analogous to the polis for a representative Greek

Historically, Ficino discusses two aspects of religion: natural religion, represented by *prisca theologia*, and the religion of revelation, represented by Moses and the Hebrew prophets, and culminating in the Incarnation, the Resurrection, and the Apostolic Age. Both of them were divinely inspired. *Prisca religio*, including the philosophy of Pythagoras and Plato, grew out of human nature as created by God, in which religion is the most human quality. Here, divine inspiration was indirect. The inspiration of the biblical prophets came directly from God, and the Incarnation (God himself becoming man) was the culmination of the process. Yet even this direct inspiration only brought to fulfillment the religious instinct which is at the centre of human nature as created by God.

For Ficino, the religious and intellectual crisis which he perceives in his own day has been caused by a separation between the human and the divine, between the Aristotelian philosophy of the scholastics and the empty rituals of the Church. A reunification of the true religion, Christianity, and the true philosophy, Platonism—in which, unlike Aristotelianism, religion plays a key part—is one way of re-establishing the proper relationship between the human and the divine.

If philosophy for Ficino represents the culmination of human disciplines, and religion is the culmination of human civilization, then ancient theology relates these two culminations and represents the perfection of humanity. This perfection derives from the fact that this ancient theology was focused on one specific notion which was essential for Ficino: the eternity of the soul. This notion is what made this ancient theology—in which Plato was the central figure—so important. From Plato, the whole Neoplatonic tradition was developed, a philosophical and theological tradition in which the notion of the eternity of the soul was one of the basic doctrines, a doctrine which gave this tradition its unique profundity. Introducing this philosophical and theological tradition again to the declining Western Christian world meant for Ficino reuniting man to the culmination of his humanity. But this, of course, is not the final end or purpose of the Christian; Christianity offered something which is far beyond humanity: the salvation of the soul and eternal life. Here man needs these moments of revelation, prophecies and miracles, which represent both the border between the human and

political thinker like Aristotle. Just as Aristotle could not contemplate human life outside the polis, Ficino cannot contemplate human life outside religion. Moreover, just as for Aristotle the polis is the highest and most general framework of human life, so, for Ficino, is religion.

the divine; but, at the same time, by signifying this border, they already signify the possibility of crossing it, since these revelational moments represent a revival of the relation between man and God; they are realizations of revelation, and thus, realizations of the notion of divinity in human beings, which reached its total perfection in the figure of Christ.

In 1486, twelve years after Ficino completed his *De Christiana religione*, Pico returned to Florence from his theological studies in Paris. Here he had a new and original plan: to organize an international council in Rome and to invite to it the best philosophers and theologians, to discuss and dispute nine-hundred theological and philosophical theses, some which Pico had assembled from a very wide range of sources and others of his own devising. These theses included much material which was new to Western Europe, taken from Neoplatonic sources such as Plotinus and Proclus, and from the Jewish Kabbalah. Pico published his theses in Rome in 1486. Certain conservative theologians, however, suspected the theses of heresy and persuaded the pope, Innocent VIII to appoint a commission, composed of theologians and of experts on Roman and Canon Law, in order to examine them. Of the nine-hundred theses, the commission found thirteen either heretical or of dubious orthodoxy. Pico's *Apologia*, which he published in 1487 was his answer to the condemnation of these thirteen theses.²⁸

The *Apologia* is an attack on the professional theologians and legal experts who made up the papal committee. In this work Pico highlights the distinction between faith and opinion and in doing so he borrows terms and modes of thought associated with Academic skepticism, that is, the form of skepticism practised in the Athenian Academy from the third to the first century BCE and transmitted to the West largely through the writings of Cicero.

²⁸ A good account on Pico's Roman affair was given by Giovanni Di Napoli: *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. . . , op.cit.* : 81–137. See especially pp. 118–119: on December 6, 1486, Pico first published his theses and he was on his way to Rome. On February 20, 1487, the pope announced that he had appointed a commission to check Pico's theses. On March 13, 1487, the papal commission denounced, without a full agreement between its members, thirteen theses. This denunciation was on different levels of gravity, but three of them were considered heretical. On May 31, 1487, Pico published his *Apologia*. On June 6, 1487, the pope announced that Pico, neglecting the decision of the commission, added new writings; he stated that an inquisition process would begin, but we do not have any details regarding such process. On July 31, 1487, Pico swore to accept the future decision of the pope regarding his theses. On August 4, 1487, the pope denounced the theses, with a prohibition on publishing, reading, hearing, and distributing them, punishable by excommunication.

In the nature of a work like the *Apologia*, what we have here are technical theological discussions by a layman, indeed, even more technical than those of the friar Caroli and the priest Ficino.

But Pico is not interested in determining which theological opinion is truer. It is enough for him to show that many excellent Catholic Doctors believed in his opinion:

But which of the two opinions on the way of being in a place of separated substances would be truer, i.e., that of the Scotists, or rather the opinion of those which I follow, I do not determine. I am only saying that my opinion was both creditable and held as most true by so many Catholic teachers and Doctors most celebrated both in learning and in sanctity; that those who dare to decide between opinions of such approved Doctors which opinion is heretical or smacks of heresy should by far be considered more rash than me, who prefer the authority of those ancient theologians to the conclusions of recent theologians.²⁹

Pico gives the impression that he himself does not support either side in the dispute. He simply sets so many excellent Doctors, who hold the same opinion which he holds, before the papal commission. But Pico is not only unwilling to determine which opinion is truer; he is also unwilling for his opinions to be criticized on the basis of other opinions, such as the Parisian articles.³⁰ This is because of an old problem: theologians *multum discordant*:

The solemn Doctor Godfrey of Fontaines likewise says that these articles require extensive correction because some of them are false, some contradict one another. . .³¹

²⁹ Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: *Apologia, Opera omnia*, Basel 1557; reprinted Hildesheim: Olms, 1969, p. 128: "Utra autem opinio sit verior, de modo essendi in loco substantiarum separatarum, Scotistarum scilicet, an eorum quos sum sequutus, ego non determino, hoc tantum dico, a tot tantisque magistris doctoribusque Catholicis, et doctrina et sanctitate celebratissimis creditam esse opinionem meam, et habitam pro verissima: ut longe magis temerarii iudicandi sint, si qui sunt, qui opinionum doctorum tam probatorum, pro haeretica aut haeresim sapiente audent iudicare, quam ego, qui auctoritatem veterum illorum theologorum iuniorum determinationibus anteponam?"

³⁰ These are the 219 propositions condemned by the bishop of Paris Stefan Tempier in March 7, 1277. See Giovanni Di Napoli: *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. . .*, *op.cit.*: 150, and nn. 45–49, on p. 191.

³¹ Pico: *Apologia. . .*, *op.cit.*: 129: "Item dicit solennis doctor Gotfredus de Fontibus, quod isti articuli indigent magna correctione, quia nonnulli sunt falsi, nonnulli ad invicem sibi contradicunt [. . .]". Gotfredus de Fontibus is Godefrey of Fontaines, who died c. 1306 and left a work, *XV Quod libeta* and some Quaestiones.

The Parisian articles of 1277 are regarded by Pico as merely the opinions of one theological school. They are not binding on Christians as the Scriptures and the Apostolic Creed are:

Wherefore though my conclusion is against the article, let those who condemned me remember that they were entirely mistaken in my condemnation, because they said that my conclusion was against the Apostles' Creed, when they should have said that my conclusion was against the Parisian creed, although also this is a lie as we have presented before.³²

Those who condemned Pico are confusing the articles of faith, that is, the *Symbolum Apostolicum*, with the Parisian articles, which are merely the *symbolum Parisinum*. By mixing up a universal creed which is binding on all Christians with local articles of faith binding only the Parisians, they are in fact mixing up *fides* and *opinio*.

After another detailed discussion concerning Thomas and the standard theological way of dealing with the same problem, in which Pico again uses some typical scholastic terms and adopts an aggressive tone,³³ he restates his purpose: to posit his conclusion as probable (the skeptical Academic *probabile*) and to show that this same conclusion was accepted by many excellent Doctors.³⁴ But what is the purpose of these detailed and technical discussions? Since Pico was not a professional

³² *Ibid.*: 130: "Quare etsi conclusio mea esset contra articulum, meminerint qui me damnabant, quod omnino in me damnando errabant, quia dicebant, quod conclusio mea erat contra symbolum Apostolicum, cum debuissent dicere, quod erat contra symbolum Parisinum, quanquam et hoc est falsum, ut prius ostendimus."

³³ *Ibid.*: 132: "sed ista est valde rudis probatio..."; "...rudis est iste Magister..."; "...dico quod adhuc est rudior prima ratione"; p. 133: "ex quibus sequitur, quod secundum Henricum iste Magister sit male dispositus ad studium philosophiae naturalis, peius ad studium Metaphysicae, pessime ad studium Theologiae, quae etiam est de abstractioribus: relinquitur ergo ei solum aptitudo ad Mathematica, in quibus cum se non exercuerit, quod iudicium de eo faciendum sit, relinquatur ipsimet ut iudicet." The reference is most probably to Henry of Ghent, who died c. 1293 and was a teacher of theology in Paris.

³⁴ *Ibid.*: 135: "...et ego propter hoc solum, id est propter reverentiam universitatis Parisiensis, nolui ponere hanc meam conclusionem, nisi tanquam probabilem, etiam quod viderem ipsam secundum viam multorum probatissimorum doctorum posse etiam assertive poni..."; p. 136: "Recolligendo ergo breviter dico, Quod Christus veraciter descenderit ad inferos, et quod per realem praesentiam fuit in inferno. sed dico quod non eo modo veraciter et praesentialiter fuit, ibi quo dicit Thomas et communis via, quia scilicet sua substantia, non fuit sibi ratio essendi in loco, ut ponunt illi, sed sua operatio. Et haec opinio quam sit probabilis, et a quam multis Catholicis et excellentissimis doctoribus credita, iam satis patuit supra, quod etiam de virtute sermonis sit vera, et non haeretica iudicanda, satis explicavimus, scimus enim quod illa est vera."

theologian, one possible answer could be that he wanted to demonstrate his competence in theology. But I think there is much more to it. Pico had to introduce the background to his theses in order to clarify what he had borrowed from which authors, because the *Apologia* was a substitute for the public disputation. This text is, in fact, a written account of Pico's side in a disputation which never took place.³⁵ His detailed and dialectical discussions are critical observations on patristic and scholastic theology. But they are not based on anything like an acceptance of the scholastic attitude to philosophy and religion. Indeed, Pico considers all the scholastic opinions which he discusses, including ones which he accepts, as mere human *opinionones*, clearly distinct from biblical and early Christian *fides*. In the discussion of *opinionones*, including the views of saints and Doctors, one uses the Academic methods of finding out *probabilitas*. But this is beyond the present discussion.

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Our brief discussion of two theologians with a humanist background and, especially, of two humanists who proposed in some of their writings a new approach to religion, Christianity, and such central religious issues as what constitutes faith and what is mere theological opinion—all these should be sufficient to convince us that a sharp distinction between theology and humanism, professional theologians and humanists, has no historical validity in the context of Florentine humanist theology in the last decades of the fifteenth century.

³⁵ Pico sees public debate—an interim stage of dialectic disputation before writing—as a means of removing all difficulties in order to reach a general explanation that will leave no room for argument; the existence of disagreement undermines the truth. He adds public debate—one of the practices of the Middle Ages—to his range of methods for examining opinions to reach the probable truth or *concordia*. See *ibid.*: 148: “Cum enim quid disputandum proponitur, brevis et concisa, et inexplicita proponitur propositio, in se et verborum et sensuum multiplices implicans difficultates, in ipso disputandi congressu dissolvendas, alioquin si omnia ibi explicarentur, disputationi locus non relinqueretur: propterea ambiguam, obscuram vel aequivocam propositionem ponens disputandam, ideo excusatur, quia futurum est, ut inter disputandum ipsam distinguat, et declaret: qui vero doctrinaliter aliquid literis mandant, id faciunt scribendo, quod hic fit disputando, quare ibi omnia clara, dilucida et expedita esse debent.”