ARCTOS

ACTA PHILOLOGICA FENNICA

VOL. XXIII

HELSINKI 1989 HELSINGFORS

INDEX

A Humanist Credo

Poggio Bracciolini on the Meaning of Studia Humanitatis and Virtus

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The moral philosophy of the early humanists can best be described as an eclectic amalgam of Peripateticism and Stoicism.[1] Aristotle's ethics had retained its pre-eminent position while Cicero and Seneca disseminated a knowledge of Stoicism. But although the manliness of Stoicism had considerable appeal, its rigidity was in general disapproved of.[2] Aristotelianism, which conceded that *eudaimonia* or *felicitas* required a modicum of the worldly goods, appeared to be both more humane and more practicable.

Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459) is no exception in this respect. He is in general not very inventive, neither is he a systematic thinker. But for this very reason he gives a good idea

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[1] Cf., e.g., P.O. Kristeller, Renaissance Thought 2 (1965) 20-68; Idem, Die Stellung der Ethik im Denken der Renaissance, Quellen u. Forsch. aus Ital. Archiv. u. Bibl. 59 (1979) 273-95; Idem, Humanism and Moral Philosophy. Renaissance Humanism 3, ed. by A. Rabil Jr, 1988, 271-309. J. Kraye, Moral Philosophy. Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy, 1988, 303sqq.

[2] Leonardo Bruni, describing ancient moral philosophies in his Isagogicon moralis disciplinae, in: H. Baron, Leonardo Bruni Aretino: Humanistisch-philosophische Schriften. Quellen z. Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters u. der Renaissance 1 (1928) 27, qualifies Stoicism thus: *nescio an vera, sed certe mascula atque robusta.*

of the prevailing ethical thought. In a letter to Archbishop Pietro Donato, in 1424, he explicates his ethical position: the Epicureans are overly dissolute, the Stoics too severe. The Peripatetics, on the other hand, observe the mean and do not repudiate riches or dignities. They should therefore be preferred.[3] Poggio maintains that the celebrated Stoic *sapiens* is extremely rare or non-existent.[4] Though others may appeal to lofty virtue, Poggio acknowledges that a human being cannot but be afflicted by his own and by his city-state's troubles.[5] This amounts to a disavowal of Stoic *apatheia.* So, although Poggio had endorsed the Stoic commonplace of *virtus* as the antidote to *fortuna,*[6] his moral philosophy was not one of unalloyed Stoicism.

Even though Poggio's ethical thought is not very original, there are several points which repay closer scrutiny. *Virtus* is one of the cardinal ideas of humanism. But *virtus* is a many-faceted, often ill-defined and ambiguous notion. Its meaning could vary from one writer to another. It usually signified moral excellence, the sum total of virtues, but it could also suggest

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[3] Lettere 2, 17 *Epicurei dissoluti sunt nimis, Stoici severiores, mediocritatem Peripathetici servant, admittunt divitias, dignitates non aspernantur; hos censeo amplectendos.*

[4] Ibid. 184, A.D. 1433; Op. cit. 3, 54, A.D. 1447 *sapiens Stoicorum, qui adhuc nusquam est repertus;* De infelicitate principum, A.D. 1440, Opera Omnia 1, 411 and De miseria humane conditionis, A.D. 1455, ibid. 411, a similar remark.

[5] Lettere 2, 371, A.D. 1440. *Sed tum virtus rara est, nostra vero studia leviuscula, tum si homines sumus, necesse est, nisi stipites omnino velimus esse, nos rebus turbidis commoveri*; op. cit. 3, 467, A.D. 1440 *Non sum sapiens ille Stoicorum qui nullo amore, nulla affectione, nulla re adversa moveatur.*

[6] Kajanto, Fortune in the Works of Poggio Bracciolini, Arctos 20 (1986) 46-56. In De nobilitate, A.D. 1440, Opera Omnia 1, 83, he praises the Stoics: *Sapienter igitur Stoici, qui virtuti nulla re extra se posita opus esse iudicaverunt.*

human perfection, even will-power.[7] For Poggio, in the passages in which he specifies its meaning, *virtus* mostly represents temperance, the control of desire.[8]

However, I am not going to give a full and particular account of Poggio's concept of *virtus*. Instead, I shall inquire into his idea of the *causa efficiens*, or origin of human virtue, and of the means of acquiring it. This discussion has wider relevance because of its bearings upon the relations of paganism and Christianity: *Virtus* was conceived of differently by the pagan philosophers and by the Christians. Another problem concerns Poggio's idea of the *causa finalis* and of the rewards of *virtus*. Here too, pagan and Christian thought differed.

In studying Poggio's moral philosophy, there is one impediment. We have very little evidence of his ideas during his formative years. Regrettably, his early letters have been almost completely lost. One letter remains from 1406[9] and a couple of letters from 1416,[10] but it is only from the 1420s on, when he was over forty, that his correspondence begins to be extant. His first dialogue, De avaritia, dates from 1427. I have earlier tried to reconstruct Poggio's attitude to the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns from quotations in Salutati's letters, but this does not resolve the issue under consideration.[11]

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7 Cf. Kajanto, Classical and Christian. Studies in the Latin Epitaphs of Medieval and Renaissance Rome, 1980, 110-13. But a comprehensive analysis of humanist *virtus*, *virtù* is still lacking. J.E. Seigel, Virtù in and since the Renaissance, Dict. Hist. of Ideas 4 (1974) 476-86, mainly discusses Machiavelli.

8 See my paper (n. 6), 48, and below p. 106.

9 Lettere 1, 219sqq.

10 Lettere 2, 153 (another version, ibid. 444) and 157.

11 Poggio Bracciolini and Classicism. A study in Early Italian Humanism, 1987, 7-15.

Available evidence, however, suggests that there was little development in Poggio's ethical thought. His principal ideas were already formed by 1416. In a letter from that year, addressed to his humanist friend Guarino Veronese, he maintains that nothing can be more delightful, pleasant and welcome to Guarino and other *doctissimi viri*, i.e., humanists, than the knowledge of things which make us more learned and – doubtless of greater consequence – *elegantiores*, more eloquent.[12] He is, of course, speaking of the knowledge of classical literature. In the following, Poggio quotes two important classical ideas. Firstly, nature has given mankind reason as an excellent guide *ad bene beateque vivendum*. This phrase comes from Cicero's Paradoxa Stoicorum, where it means a morally good life: *nihil est aliud bene et beate vivere nisi honeste et recte vivere* (15). Nature, then, has given man reason and thereby the fundamental moral principles. This idea was well-known in classical literature. Thus Cicero, following the Stoic Panaetius, argues in De Officiis that nature has presented man with reason, which distinguishes him from the beasts. Nature and reason have provided only man with moral sensibility (1,11-14). Secondly, Poggio mentions the equally classical idea that speech is perhaps nature's greatest gift to man. Without it, reason could accomplish nothing. By expressing the virtues of the mind, speech separates man from the animals.[13] He goes on to praise the inventors of the liberal arts and in particular rhetoricians.

Though the civilising influence of persuasive speech or eloquence had been eulogised by Isocrates,[14] it was no doubt in

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[12] Lettere 2, 153.

[13] Ibid. *haud scio an sit omnium prestantissimum quod ea* (scil., *natura*) *nobis elargita est, usum atque rationem dicendi sine quibus neque ratio ipsa neque intellectus quicquam ferme valerent. Solus est enim sermo quo nos utentes ad exprimendam animi virtutem ab reliquis animantibus segregamur.*

[14] See Br. Vickers, In Defence of Rhetoric, 1988, 10.

Cicero's De inventione that Poggio and other humanists encountered this idea, which constituted a basic theme in humanism. Throughout the Middle Ages, De inventione was as well-known as De officiis. In the opening pages of the former work, Cicero applauds eloquence. He gives it as his considered opinion that wisdom without eloquence is of little use for the commonwealths while eloquence without wisdom is generally very harmful and never of any help.[15] Here primacy is given to wisdom, which is identifiable with moral philosophy. But Cicero by no means disparages eloquence. In a way similar to Lucretius (5,925sqq.), he describes the miserable existence of the primitive man, who relied upon physical strength alone, not upon reason. Finally a great and wise man, aware of the latent power of reason, gathered men dispersed in woods to one place and taught them useful and honourable things, thereby transforming them from wild and savage into gentle and civilised people. But this would not have been possible without persuasive speech. How could men have learnt to observe justice and to fulfil their social and civic duties *nisi homines ea quae ratione invenissent eloquentia persuadere potuissent* (1,3)?

Wisdom or moral philosophy and persuasive speech or eloquence were accordingly closely linked. Taking *eloquentia* in a broader sense to embrace both the spoken and written word, we arrive at the cardinal humanist conviction of the study of classical literature, *studia humanitatis*, as the fountain of moral wisdom and of personal as well as of civil morality.

Poggio's ethical thought was first elaborated in 1424, in an important letter to his curial friend Antonio Loschi.[16] In an ear-

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[15] *Ac me quidem diu cogitantem ratio ipsa in hanc potisssimum sententiam ducit, ut existimem sapientiam sine eloquentia parum prodesse civitatibus, eloquentiam vero sine sapientia nimium obesse plerumque, prodesse nunquam* (1,1).

[16] Lettere 2, 5-10.

lier paper I have discussed the letter concerning the notion of Fortune as the ruler of the external world and virtue as her antidote, also remarking that the theme of the future De varietate Fortune was already found here in embryo.[17] Here I shall raise a number of points which relate to the moral significance of *studia humanitatis*.

Poggio writes that he and his friend are separated from the common run of men by their devotion to humanistic studies. But of what use are they to us if we, like the majority of men, who cannot distinguish between virtue and vice, hanker after life's external goods, such as influence and status, power, pleasure and especially riches. These studies should above all teach us *honestas* and *decus*, moral rectitude.[18] The Stoic attitude is here unmistakable.

Poggio then particularises *studia humanitatis*. They comprise the perusal of poets, orators, and moral philosophers. Only history is missing from the vulgate humanist curriculum, but elsewhere, especially in the introduction to De varietate Fortune, Poggio acknowledges the significance of history as a supplier of *exempla* of moral behaviour.[19]

In addition to the idea of Fortune, this letter to Loschi contains many other ideas central to early Italian humanism. Firstly, Poggio is clearly an élitist. The common man, with little or no knowledge of Latin, was ipso facto deprived of the possibility of attaining true *virtus*. Élitism was a generic characteristic of the humanists. But it should be admitted that in his last dialogue, De miseria humane conditionis, 1455, Poggio evidences some sympathy for the suffering majority as opposed

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17 In my paper mentioned in n. 6, 46-48.

18 Op. cit. 6.

19 According to the new transcription of Outi Merisalo, f. 1 *hec diligens custos et fida preteritarum memoria dicenda est, hec sola illustrium virorum facta, virtutesque nostras in conspectu ad imitandum proponit, hec detestatur vitia, et docet vitanda.*

to the happy few. As I have stated elsewhere, this is probably attributable, besides to increasing age, to Poggio's keen sense of life's realities.[20]

The second point to emerge from this and from innumerable other passages is the persuasion that knowledge should be useful. But the humanists' notion of utility is different from ours. They rejected natural philosophy because it did not bring anything that would profit human life. Mere theoretical knowledge was futile. The idea that Science could be used to improve the material conditions of life was still unknown: for this we had to wait until Bacon's age. But even medicine was depreciated. Nor did the study of poetry mean the cultivation of aesthetic sensibilities. The classics were read, or at least claimed to have been read, because they gave rules and models for the attainment of virtue.

Poggio's attitude to medicine as the foremost representative of science deserves a brief excursus because his position seems to have been misunderstood. Poggio's mentor Salutati, in his De nobilitate legum et medicine, of 1400, preferred the study of law to that of medicine on account of its greater usefulness to society.[21] And indeed the Dispute of the Arts was common in this age.[22] Disparaging medicine as more or less useless may appear strange to us, but contemporary medical science was undeveloped and of questionable value in the treatment of most illnesses.[23] Moreover, as part of natural philosophy, it smacked of scholasticism.

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[20] Op. cit. (n. 6), 50-56.

[21] Edited by E. Garin, Edizione nazionale dei classici del pensiero italiano 8, 1947.

[22] E. Garin, La disputa delle Arti nel Quattrocento. Testi editi e inediti, 1947, xiii-xviii.

[23] Salutati, op. cit., 152 *Utinam vexarent medicine vestre solum et affligerent egrotantes, non aggravarent aliquando morbos et, quod deterius est, non aliquando mortes, nec sepe mortis pericula prepararent.*

In 1450, Poggio in his Disputationes convivales published a dialogue about the rivalry of law and medicine.[24] But in contrast to E. Walser, I do not think that Poggio here prefers medicine.[25] The dialogue is a non-committal exposition of opposing views. Walser overrates the significance of a brief remark in the introduction to the discourse in which Poggio admits that he personally prefers medicine because it helps to maintain physical health. But he immediately corrects this by acknowledging that laws too are extremely beneficial because societies could not subsist without them.[26] Walser maintains that in his letters Poggio is averse to lawyers. But this too is only partially true. Poggio's letters sometimes express contradictory ideas for he could modify them to suit his recipient's known or anticipated position. His basic view is more in evidence in a letter to Bishop Francesco Pizolpasso, in 1424. Castigating various professions for being mere money-grubbers, he blames lawyers too for the same vice. Nevertheless, he praises the utility of jurisprudence.[27] The civil utility of a profession is not dependent upon the moral worth of its practitioners.

Poggio and the other humanists, then, made a point of the practical usefulness of *studia humanitatis* and of knowledge in

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[24] Opera omnia 1, 37-51.

[25] Poggius Florentinus. Leben u. Werke, 1914=1974, 253-58; similarly L. Thorndike, Science and Thought in the Fifteenth Century, 1963, 36.

[26] Op. cit., 37 *Tamen si altera carendum est, opus preferrem medicine, tanquam* (causal) *utilioris mortalium vite, cum sit velut instrumentum bone valetudinis... In legibus quoque versatur maximum vite presidium civilis, sine quibus neque cetus hominum institui, neque civitates conservari queunt.*

[27] Lettere 2, 43 *Neque vero... existimes me aliqua in re detrahere scientie iuris; est enim res egregia... quasi iustitie interpres et defensatrix, sine qua nec cetus hominum nec civitates esse potuissent.* Notice that the passage is almost identical with the one quoted in the preceding note. As early as 1417, in his funeral speech in memory of Cardinal Zabarella, Poggio had eulogised jurisprudence, Opera omnia 1, 256sq.

general. However, by utility they meant the moral education of the few who could read the classics and learn the rules of right living from them.

This leads us to two other questions, which are of paramount importance for the understanding of Poggio's and other humanists' ethical ideas. They concern the *causa efficiens* of *virtus* and the origin of the idea of classical literature as a guide to right action, both of which were already adumbrated in the letter from 1416.

According to Peripatetic and Stoic philosophy, reason and virtue were interconnected. The human mind, guided by correct reason, produced all the moral virtues, which together constituted τὸ καλόν or *honestum*, moral rectitude. Man was himself responsible for his moral character. The seeds of virtue were innate, but man had to develop them by habituation.[28]

In Christian philosophy, reason and virtue were interpreted differently. Augustine rejected the classical primacy of reason and maintained that human reason was incorrigibly depraved and redeemable only by God's grace. Hence he could not accept the pagan idea of *virtus* as an autonomous quality, in accordance with whose adoption man could lead a virtuous life. For him, virtues were God's gift.[29] Following the lead of Albertus Magnus,[30] Aquinas tried to combine Aristotelian and Christian ideas.

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[28] See, e.g., A. A. Long, Hellenistic Philosophy[2], 1986, 179-209.

[29] De libero arbitrio 50 *meminisse te oportet non solum magna sed etiam minima bona non esse posse nisi ab illo a quo sunt omnia bona, hoc est deo... Virtutes igitur quibus recte vivitur magna bona sunt*; Enarr. in Ps. 83,11 *Hic enim per gratiam multae virtutes dantur*, and after describing the four cardinal virtues: *Istae virtutes nunc in convalle plorationis per gratiam dantur nobis*; De civ. 4,20; 11,25; 22,24. Cf. A. Michel, Vertu, Dict. Théol. cath., 1950, 2745sq.

[30] B. Cunningham, Albertus Magnus and the Problem of Moral Virtue. Vivarium. A Journal for Medieval Philosophy 7 (1969) 81-119.

Everything originates primaly from God. Man, a being endowed with reason, is able to participate in the divine law, which is also called the natural law. By its light, he can distinguish between good and bad.[31] Aquinas divides virtues into *virtutes theologicae*, faith, hope and charity, which God had revealed in Scripture, and into *virtutes morales*, which indirectly proceeded from God because they are governed by reason and *quidquid regulatur ratione humana, regulatur etiam lege divina.*[32] The former virtues are necessary for salvation, the latter suffice for an imperfect happiness in this world.[33] Otherwise Aquinas' concept of the moral virtues is mainly Aristotelian.[34]

The early humanists offer an amalgam of classical and Christian approaches. Petrarch argues that the human mind is incapable by itself of attaining virtue, which is of transcendental origin. Only God can give it to him.[35] But as we shall presently

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31 Summa Th. II-I q. 91 a. 2 *omnia participant aliqualiter legem aeternam... talis participatio legis aeternae in rationali creatura naturalis dicitur... lumen rationis naturalis, quo discernimus quid sit bonum et quid malum... nihil aliud sit quam impressio luminis divini in nobis. Unde patet quod lex naturalis nihil aliud sit quam participatio legis aeternae in rationali creatura.*

32 Ibid. q. 63 a. 2.

33 Ibid. q. 62 a. 1 *Est autem duplex hominis beatitudo sive felicitas... Una quidem proportionata humanae naturae, ad quam scilicet homo pervenire potest per principia suae naturae. Alia autem est beatitudo naturam hominis excedens, ad quam homo sola divina virtute pervenire potest.*

34 Thus the doctrines of *virtus moralis* as a habit, ibid. q. 55 a. 1, and as observing the mean, ibid. q. 64 a. 1, originate from the Stagirite. The division of non-theological virtues into moral and intellectual, ibid. q. 58, is also Aristotelian. But in the classification of moral virtues, Aquinas follows Cicero and Ambrosius, who had adopted the Platonic system of four cardinal virtues: prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude, ibid. q. 61.

35 De remediis Utriusque Fortunae, Dial. x,34 *Gau(dium): Nunquid non saltem licet de virtute gloriari? Ra(tio): Ut liceat, in illo tantum licet, qui virtutis & omnis boni auctor solus, atque largitor est.* See Kl. Heitmann, Fortuna u. Virtus. Eine Studie zu Petrarcas Lebensweisheit, 1958, 74-81.

see, this was not Petrarch's only idea of the origin of virtue. Salutati seems to have much pondered upon the nature of correct reason and virtue. He derived the natural law from the divine law but mainly considered it as the basis of justice.[36] As for the origin of virtue, Salutati agreed with Augustine more than with Aristotle: we are only God's instruments. All our virtues originate from God. Virtues are not acquired, as philosophers claim. They are a good quality of the mind, which only God effects in us.[37] On the other hand, Salutati also underscores man's own responsibility and the necessity of cooperation with God.[38]

In Poggio there are a few passages in which he seems to follow Petrarch and Salutati. In De miseria humane conditionis, Cosimo de´ Medici argues that reason, the fountain of moral action, is derived from God:

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36 Op. cit. (n. 21), 16 *Imprimit enim divina lex humanis mentibus naturalem, que quidem communis est ratio actuum humanorum, queve mentibus nostris impressa nos inclinat ad ea, que lex illa immutabilis, divina et eterna, decernit*; cf. 160 and Garin's comment, 346: Salutati was following Aquinas.

37 Epistolario a cura di Fr. Novati 2, 1893, 184 *Nam cum Dei instrumenta simus, nichil in his que facimus, imo que videmur facere, nostrum est... Laus igitur et gloria Deo sit... qui in te virtutes operatur et ostendit: virtutes, inquam, que licet sint habitus electivus consistens in medio, non ex operibus acquiruntur, sicut philosophi tradunt, sed sunt bona mentis qualitas, qua recte vivimus, qua nemo male utitur, et quam solus Deus in nobis operatur.* Similarly Epistolario 3, 1896, 94. This is somewhat illogical for virtue cannot be an elective, i.e. freely chosen habit and simultaneously be accredited to God as a gift. The passage *qua recte...* is a quotation from Augustine, De lib. arb. 50sq. For Salutati's moral philosophy, see E. Kessler, Das Problem des frühen Humanismus. Seine philosophische Bedeutung bei Coluccio Salutati, 1968, 117-21 and R. G. Witt, Hercules at the Crossroads, 1983, Ch. 13: Christian Aristotelianism.

38 Epistolario 1, 1891, 270 *Reddit proculdubio ad virtutes natura nos aptos et ad illas latenter impellit; sed virtuosi non natura sed operibus efficimur et doctrina*; 3. 1896, 270 *Sola vero virtus nostra est et suo resplendet lumine*; for the necessity of cooperation, 1, 65.

> *concessit nobis conditor omnium Deus, rationem rebus ceteris excellentiorem, ad quam tanquam munitam arcem confugeremus, cuius presidio fulti, consilioque parentes rebus modum statueremus, nec progredi longius quam eius prescripta patiantur sineremus nostras cupiditates.*[39]

Again, in the letter to Loschi, of 1424, he at one point mentions *ratio divinitus nobis data*, which teaches us to understand that it is only *virtus* which belongs to us while Fortune's goods are beyond our control and anyway perishable.[40] Whereas the letter from 1416 did not mention God (see p. 94), in another letter to Loschi, from 1425, Poggio argues that speech and reason were God's gift to man so as to institute social life.[41]

These passages are, however, few and somewhat conventional. Considering human reason to be a gift of God is not quite the same as deriving the moral dictates of reason from the divine law. In Poggio, *virtus* is almost entirely an immanent human quality attainable through *studia humanitatis*.

But this view should be qualified. In Poggio's last major work De miseria humane conditionis (1455), doubts are cast upon reason, which is often too weak to resist the assaults of vice and passions, and on the ability of philosophy, i.e., the very *studia humanitatis*, to make men wise and thus save them from misery.[42] In a dialogue it is, however, difficult to tell which protagonist represents the author's ideas. Thus the latter remark is expressed by the spokesman of traditional Christian views, Matteo

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[39] Opera omnia 1, 90sq.

[40] Lettere 2, 8.

[41] Ibid. 49 *Enimvero nihil est largitus nobis deus utilius sermone, nihil ratione melius, quibus solis ceteris animantibus prestamus, quibus servatur hominum societas, conduntur civitates et totius vite commoda comparantur.* Except for the reference to God, the passage is similar to the one in the letter from 1416, see n. 13.

[42] Opera omnia 1, 92 and 108.

Palmieri, but the former is spoken by Poggio himself, corresponding to his somewhat more sombre opinion of the human condition, written as it was in old age (see p. 97).

In both older an more recent studies it has been maintained that Poggio's moral philosophy was at least half Christian. The argument has been put forward by Walser and more recently by Ch. Trinkaus in his discussion of De miseria humane conditionis.[43] According to him, it is Matteo Palmieri's references to the Fall and grace that express Poggio's views.[44] But this is hardly warrantable. In an earlier study I have argued that it was more likely Cosimo de´ Medici, who concludes the discourse, that speaks for the author, although Poggio, who was himself a dramatis persona, modified his overly optimistic beliefs.[45] In any case, even in this dialogue, which is a cavalcade of the miseries of the world, both natural and man-made, Poggio does not repudiate the claim of *virtus* to be able to face up to them.[46]

According to Walser, it was during his quasi-exile in England, between 1418 and 1422, that Poggio's moral philosophy deepened in a Christian spirit.[47] It is true that in his letters from this period his religious posture is patently obvious. But it is questionable whether this constituted a lasting spiritual basis of life. I think that his apparent adoption of religious views is explicable in a different way.

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[43] In our Image and Likeness 1, 1970, 258sq.

[44] Op. cit. 89: human suffering is due to Adam's fall; 101: God's grace has predestined a small number to beatitude in this and the next life. Trinkaus, op. cit. 259 maintains that "For the body of the dialogue he picks Cosimo de´ Medici...as the antagonist and Matteo Palmieri as the spokesman of his own thoughts".

[45] Op. cit. (n. 6), 50-56.

[46] *Non est tam valida Fortune vis, ut a forti et constanti viro non superetur* (131).

[47] Op. cit. (n. 25), 71-83.

These letters from England were sent to his humanist friend Niccoli. In 1420, Poggio advises his friend as a Christian to forgive his enemies and to remember *nihil aliud boni nobis conferre sive divinam, sive humanam philosophiam, nisi ut per contemptum terrenarum pergamus ad meliora.*[48] The contempt for earthly things is a genuinely Christian and even monastic idea. Poggio then castigates the rich for being avaricious and depraved.[49] While this condemnation does not differ from his later views, e.g. in his dialogue De avaritia (1427), he sustains it here by quoting Jerome, St Paul, and Augustine. He concludes by asserting that it is above all else the sacred writings that constitute the basis of moral rectitude, *honeste iusteque vivendi.* This is quite different from his usual endorsement of *studia humanitatis* as the fountain of morality.

The clearest statement of a religious attitude is found in a letter from 1421. Poggio tells Niccoli that his daily reading of *libri sacri* has dampened his former enthusiasm for the humanities, which he now dismisses as empty, partly ambiguous, partly false, and throughout serving only vanity. *Eloquium sacrum*, on the other hand, is based upon the truth, i.e., of Christian faith, without which right action is not possible.[50]

I cannot, however, agree with Walser, who maintains that these years in England taught Poggio to combine the teachings of the Christian Fathers with the wisdom of the ancients. For one thing, when Poggio went to England, he was already forty. Though we do not know enough of his views during his youth and early manhood, at least the letter from 1416 suggests that his

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[48] Lettere 1, 13.

[49] Ibid. 14.

[50] Ibid. 36 *Mihi credas volo: libri sacri, quos legi et cotidie lego, refrixerunt studium pristinum humanitatis, cui deditus fui, ut nosti, a pueritia. Nam horum studiorum principia inania sunt, partim ambigua, partim falsa, omnia ad vanitatem. Sacri veri eloquii principium est veritas qua amissa nihil rectum tenere, nihil operari possumus.*

humanist philosophy was already firmly established by then (see p. 94). One does not usually substantially change one's views in more mature years.

Poggio's seeming adherence to the Christian world-view and rejection of the humanist one is better explained as the passing mood of an impressionable character. In England, which in the early fifteenth century was still untouched by humanism, Poggio did not have access to humanist books. He had to be content with perusing scholastic and patristic authors. He even complained that in the absence of humanist reading, his Latin had deteriorated.[51] It is possible that his disappointments at the Papal curia[52] as well as his loneliness in uncongenial surroundings and above all, his continual involvement with the sacred writings had depressed him and turned his thoughts to things Christian. But after returning to Italy and to the company of his humanist friends, he reverted to *studia humanitatis*. Afterwards the eulogies of sacred literature as the true font of morality were few.[53]

Throughout his long writer's career, Poggio repeated the same idea of literary studies as a prerequisite for virtue. In a letter from 1436, he asserts that *studia humanitatis* should be instrumental in *honestum ac decorum*, or moral rectitude. *Bone artes* were invented to teach us what to do and what not to do as well as to furnish us with *optimi mores*. Hence the wise men have

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[51] Ibid. 55.

[52] See Walser, op. cit. (n. 25), 71.

[53] In a letter to Bishop Francesco Pizolpasso, 1424, Lettere 2, 40, he argues that both pagan and Christian writers counsel a life according to virtue, but the latter are more perfect. Pagan philosophy considers only this life, whereas Christian philosophy *ita presentis vite rationem haberi concedit, ut sit tanquam viaticum future, ad quam et nati et instituti sumus*. But the letter was addressed to a bishop, which may explain the religious tone.

given primacy to moral philosophy.[54] In his funeral speech in memory of Niccoli, 1437, he says that Niccoli had early understood everything else but *virtus* to be perishable and temporary. Learning in general and *studia humanitatis* in particular were the best means of attaining virtue because they taught *honestum ipsum... ac melioris vite cultus.*[55] He is somewhat more specific when writing to Cardinal Ludovico Scarambo in 1449. Literary studies give us recreation and peace of mind. They abolish ambition and avarice and teach us that most difficult art, the restraint of our desires.[56] In the same year he tells Pope Nicholas V that his rise to papacy was attributable to his learning, which had taught him *virtus.*[57] The élitist and cerebral concept of the means of acquiring moral principles thus held good even for the head of the church.

Poggio insists that primacy should be given to virtue, without which literary studies would be useless and even harmful. His letter to Loschi in 1424 began with the complaint that the humanists did not follow the principles they learn in the classics (p. 96 above). In 1426 he writes to Leonardo Bruni that most people do not profit from the books they read because they do not live up to the *precepta virtutum* which they peruse. Poggio affirms that he rejects books *si nihil mihi sint ad vitam profuturi.*[58] A letter from 1427 advises the recipient that the only fruit to be gathered from literary studies should be the acquisition of *virtus* and a more perfect life. Otherwise they only teach vice and should be disregarded.[59] In giving advice to young

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[54] Lettere 2, 221.
[55] Opera omnia 1, 270sq.
[56] Lettere 3, 94.
[57] Ibid. 98 *quem... sola prestantissimarum doctrinarum scientia, sola litterarum studia, ex quibus virtutis fluxerunt incitamenta, ad eam, quam merito tenes, dignitatem pontifiam extulerunt.*
[58] Lettere 2, 61.
[59] Ibid. 277.

Battista Guarino (1456), he exhorts him to add *honesti cura* to his studies because learning beset with vice is useless and harmful.[60] In one of his last letters (1457), he writes that learning without good manners is of little use.[61]

Tracing the emergence of the conviction that literary studies serve as a school for virtue would require a more thorough discourse than is possible here. I can only attain the barest outline. But the idea was arch-classical and in this respect, if not anti-, then at least un-Christian. Ancient ethical thought was intellectual from the very beginning. Socrates argued that if man only had correct ideas, he would act correctly.[62] Another contributory factor was the persuasion that eloquence was needed to make the moral dictates of correct reason explicit.

That wisdom and eloquence should be welded together was one of Cicero's dearest convictions.[63] Above (p. 94) I have discussed Poggio's letter from 1416 in which this Ciceronian idea was clearly stated. In a letter from 1436, Poggio praises Cicero as *eloquentissimus, cum in iis que ad artem oratoriam spectant tum ad institutionem et doctrinam vite moralis.*[64] His rhetorical works, orations, and philosophical treatises should be studied to attain that unison of eloquence and wisdom that Cicero describes in his Brutus.[65]

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60 Lettere 3, 389.
61 Ibid. 495.
62 Plato, Protagoras 352B; Aristotle, Eth. Nic. 1145b.
63 For this idea, see J. E. Seigel, Rhetoric and philosophy in Renaissance Humanism, 1988.
64 Lettere 2, 214.
65 Cicero, Brutus 23. Poggio's quotation is not literal. Cicero argues that *dicere enim bene nemo potest nisi qui prudenter intellegit; qua re qui eloquentiae verae dat operam, dat prudentiae*, which Poggio paraphrases as *qui studet eloquentie eum et prudentie operam dare. Non enim vir improbus aut imprudens esse aut haberi eloquens potest.*

The intellectual concept of learning as a way to virtue was encountered especially in Cicero's celebrated speech in defence of the Greek poet, Archias. Cicero admits that there have been many men *excellenti animo ac virtute... sine doctrina.* He even maintains that *saepius ad laudem atque virtutem naturam sine doctrina quam sine natura valuisse doctrinam.* Nevertheless, he asserts that if *ratio quaedam conformatioque doctrinae* conjoins natural excellence, the result will be something *praeclarum ac singulare* (15).

The idea of the competition or cooperation of nature and education has a long ancestry in Greek thought.[66] But what is pertinent to our enquiry here is Cicero's insistence upon the importance of *doctrina*, which arguably means the same as literary studies or more precisely moral philosophy.[67] The idea of literature cultivating the human mind, furnishing it with moral principles and thus producing an honest and excellent man, became a humanist tenet through this and similar passages in Cicero.

Seneca is somewhat ambiguous. He emphasises the significance of correct philosophical opinions for the attainment of virtue,[68] but he is also critical of the usefulness of the liberal arts because they do not teach virtue. At most, they prepare the mind for its reception.[69] The humanists' emphasis of the primacy of virtue over learning may owe something to Seneca.

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66 See H. & K. Vretska, Marcus Tullius Cicero pro Archia poeta, 1979, 130sq.

67 Ibid. 129sq., the word is argued to mean "système philosophique", which is hardly possible here.

68 E.g. Epist. 89,4 *Sapientia perfectum bonum est mentis humanae. Philosophia sapientiae amor est et adfectatio.*

69 He casts doubt on the usefulness of the main ingredients of literary studies, grammar, history, poetry: *quid horum ad virtutem viam sternit?* Epist. 88,3. He argues that *studia liberalia*, which are the same as *studia humanitatis*, are useful only because *animum ad accipiendam virtutem*

It is Petrarch who made these ideas common humanist doctrine. Though he still held the Christian view that *virtus* originated from God (see p. 100), he also argued that *prudentia* or practical wisdom, the guide of the other moral virtues, could be learnt from ancient moral writings, especially from Cicero and Seneca. Besides moral philosophy, history is also useful because it instructs us through *exempla.* But literature that does not contribute to the moral improvement of man is useless. According to Petrarch, *vir doctus* is equal to *vir bonus.*[70]

Petrarch's follower Salutati espoused the same views. In a letter from 1390 he maintains that the perfection of virtue, not an increase of knowledge, is the goal in life. Knowledge is a good thing only if it conduces to virtue.[71] In a letter from 1401, he defines *humanitas* as *virtus et doctrina.*[72] In one of his last letters – Salutati died in 1406 – he argues that wisdom and eloquence are human endowments which distinguish man from animals.[73] They presuppose each other, but primacy belongs to wisdom.[74] However, as a deeply religious man, Salutati does not forget faith. He advises the superaddition of Christian perfection to all this.[75]

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praeparant, ibid. 20. Cf. M. Rozelaar, Seneca, Eine Gesamtdarstellung, 1976, 425sq.

70 See Heitmann, op. cit. (n. 35), 110-118.

71 Epistolario 2, 1893, 274 *rectum esse sequitur ut appetas in virtute proficere; in virtute quidem, non qua magis scientes efficimur, sed qua meliores secundum virtutis habitum ordinamur.*

72 Epistolario 3, 1896, 536.

73 Ibid. 3, 599.

74 Ibid. 602, *Optime quidem simul coalescunt sapientia et eloquentia, ut quantum illa capit tantum et ista pertractet. Quod si certamen utriusque fiat, que cui preoptanda sit, sapientie palmam dato.*

75 Ibid. 605 *Nec tamen putes me sic ad moralia illa Socraticaque te transferre, quin velim et ea que christiane perfectionis sunt adicias... ut prudenter vivendo graviterque scribendo perfectionem moralitatis, qua sine dubio doctrina Christi perficitur, amplectaris.*

In his De studiis et litteris, 1422-1429, Leonardo Bruni consummated the programme of *studia humanitatis*. Besides a good knowledge of classical Latin, they comprise sacred literature – a concession to the fact that the tract was addressed to a woman –, moral philosophy, history, oratory, and poetry. But Bruni insists that all these studies were only instrumental to the pursuit of religion and morality.[76]

While this essay may have been somewhat biased because of the peculiar requirements of women's education, Bruni's position is stated more unequivocally in his correspondence. Encouraging a youth to undertake literary studies, he argues that he should acquire a good knowledge not only of Latin but also of the things which belong to *vita et mores*. He gives a succinct definition of *studia humanitatis*. They are called thus *quod hominem perficiant atque exornent* and aim at the making of an honest man, *vir bonus*.[77]

Remarkably, Bruni does not quote Christian ideas at all in this letter, which could as well have been written by Cicero or some other ancient writer.

In eulogising *studia humanitatis* as the school of moral behaviour and in insisting on *virtus* as their final end, Poggio was thus advocating the accepted ideas of humanism.

What is important is the fact that this concept of moral philosophy was seemingly more pagan than Christian. The rules of morality were to be found in classical literature. Accordingly, both education in virtue and virtue itself were man-made, neither dependent upon God nor divine law.

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[76] Op. cit. (n. 2), 19 *religionis et bene vivendi studia mihi praecipua videri, cetera vero omnia tamquam adminicula quaedam ad ista referri, quae possint vel adiuvare vel illustrare, eaque de causa poetis et oratoribus et scriptoribus aliis inhaerendum.*

[77] Epistolarum libri, ed. L. Mehus, 1741, Lib. VI, 49sq.

I have so far discussed, in Aristotelian-scholastic terms, the *causa efficiens* of virtus. Its *causa finalis* is equally consequential. In classical thought, the final end was *eudaimonia, felicitas*, though its definition varied.[78] In scholastic philosophy happiness was divided into perfect celestial and imperfect earthly happiness (see p. 100). Poggio's mentor Salutati also embraced this philosophy. Beatitude is the final end of man, but it presupposes God's grace. However, living according to natural law is also necessary for obtaining in the afterlife the happiness which we now have only *in spe*.[79]

Poggio, who disliked abstract philosophical debate,[80] seldom discusses the *finis* of *virtus*. In De infelicitate principum, 1440, by repeating Aristotle's definition, he argues that a life according to the exercise of virtues constitutes happiness.[81] In de miseria humane conditionis, Cosimo, who advocates classical and humanist moral philosophy, maintains that reason and virtue ensure happiness whereas stupid *vulgus* is deprived of virtue and hence doomed to wretchedness.[82]

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78 Cf. Bruni, op. cit. (n. 2), 24 *Sed ipsa felicitas, quid tandem sit? de eo sane inter se discrepant.*

79 De nobilitate legum et medicine (see n. 21), 164sq. *Est igitur alius ultimus finis... que cum felicitas tum dicitur beatitudo, que quidem status est omnium bonorum congregatione perfectus, ad quem gratia, non iusticia, mortalis homo recipitur... Et quoniam nemo sine operibus salvus fiet... propter felicitatem oportet quemlibet operari... Beatus quidem, dum hic vivimus, spe; beatus vero, postquam lege vixerit, erit re.*

80 In De varietate Fortune, f. 16, Poggio argues that Cicero is more useful than Aristotle. *Alter* (scil., Aristotle) *virtutum tradit diffiniones quid ee sint. quasque in partes dividantur perquirens. Alter* (scil., Cicero) *virtutes ipsas in aciem atque in campum deducit* (transcription by Outi Merisalo). Poggio is, however, wrong in maintaining that Aristotle only theoretically discussed virtues, see, e.g., his Eth. Eud. 1216b.

81 Opera omnia 1, 403 *Felicitatem esse vitam operationem* (misprint, possibly *vitae*) *secundum virtutem scribit Aristoteles, et exercitio virtutum comparari.*

82 Opera omnia 1, e.g. 90, 99-100, etc.

Poggio is, however, not silent on the more tangible good consequences of *virtus*. The greatest of them, the ability to face and overcome Fortune, has already been mentioned (p. 92). Here I shall discuss two other rewards to which Poggio often refers. One of them is classical, the other Christian. Both are eloquently expounded in his funeral speech in memory of Bruni in 1444.[83]

Bruni has left an example both in his *virtutes* and in his *ingenii prestantia*. His moral and intellectual excellence should be imitated. Poggio firstly addresses unlettered citizens. They could imitate Bruni's virtues and serve their city-state through advice and action.[84] Poggio acknowledges that in antiquity and later there have been many people, who *absque ulla doctrina, excellenti virtute prediti* have done great deeds in war and peace. Because this closely resembles Cicero's argumentation in Pro Archia (see p. 108), it is not improbable that in writing this passage, he had Cicero in mind. Quoting the peripatetic doctrine according to which virtue consists in action, Poggio then suggests that the state may have greater need of men of action than of men of learning.[85] But if learning is added, it serves both as an adornment and makes people *ad res gerendas doctiores ac perfectiores*.

There can be no doubt that Poggio is here extolling Bruni both as a man of active life and as a scholar. Bruni was the leading representative of what H. Baron calls Civic humanism, active engagement in political life.[86] Bruni favoured *vita activa*, and Poggio is here paying tribute to this side of his life's work.

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83 Opera omnia 2, 671sq.

84 *Hortor eos, quorum vitae ratio est a litteris aliena, ut eius virtutem, continentiam, probitatem, caritatem erga patriam imitentur. Licet enim etiam sine litteris civem esse preclarum, et eum Rempubl(icam) tum consilio, atque opere iuvare.*

85 *Et cum virtutis laus in actione consistat, continentiam, probitatem, innocentiam, animum in consulendo liberum, in agendo diligentem potius, quam scientiam civitas desiderare, atque appetere videtur.*

86 See his celebrated Crisis of the early Italian Renaissance^2, 1967.

But he balances the picture. Addressing the people who are bent on literary studies, Poggio advises them to pursue their course and thus to imitate Bruni. But Poggio adds a reservation. They should above all cultivate *virtus*, without which learning is useless and even harmful to the state and to the individual. Better to be *indoctus civis quam malus*, a theme already familiar to us.

The peroration sums up Poggio's idea of the recompenses resulting from a combination of *virtus* with *studia humanitatis*:

> *Qui autem hec duo enixe amplectuntur, necesse, ut primum beata vita fruantur, que virtute et recte factis acquiritur; tum vero assequantur memoriam nominis sempiternam, postremo felicitatem future vite, que est vera et perfecta felicitas, quamque omnes debemus appetere, consequuntur.*

The idea of happiness springing from virtuous action is originally Aristotelian. But besides undefined *beata vita*, literary studies and a life according to virtue bring eternal fame and salvation.

Fame as the highest reward of virtue was one of Cicero's most cherished ideas. In Pro Archia, he first states that *trahimur omnes studio laudis, et optimus quisque maxime gloria ducitur* (26), and confesses that he has a pardonable desire for fame because *virtus*, in this particular case his suppression of Catilina's conspiracy, does not want any other reward for hardships and dangers than *laus et gloria* (28). He defines *gloria* as *laus recte factorum magnorumque in rem publicam fama meritorum, que cum optimi cuiusque, tum etiam multitudinis testimonio comprobatur.*[87] Recognition of one's honourable services to the commonwealth by the élite and the masses, or in

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[87] Oratio prima in Marcum Antonium 29; cf. Pro Marcello 26 *gloria est inlustris et pervagata magnorum vel in suos civis vel in patriam vel in omne genus hominum fama meritorum.*

Roman political terminology, by the senate and the people, thus constituted glory.

It is scarcely necessary to expatiate upon the importance of personal fame in humanism.[88] But it should be noticed that not only *vita activa* but also a scholar's and poet's life could reap the sweetness of other people's praise. Speaking at his poetic coronation in Rome in 1431, Petrarch quotes Cicero, Ovid, and Virgil and argues *glorie appetitum non solum communibus hominibus sed maxime sapientibus et excellentibus viris insitum (esse)*.[89] The incompatibility of a pagan love of glory with Christian humility was, however, recognized. At one point, Salutati wonders whether we should not prefer eternal glory in Heaven to worldly glory, which is dependent upon a fickle public. But he frankly admits that fame exerts a great pull upon him.[90]

Poggio's correspondence testifies to the great significance he attaches to fame and honour. Ciceronian reminiscences are conspicuous. In a letter from 1454, he defines renown as *vox recte iudicantium de aliqua excellenti virtute*, which is an almost literal quotation from Cicero,[91] and in another letter from the same year he writes that praise follows virtue like a shadow, a phrase which also originates from Cicero.[92] In an earlier letter, 1431, he maintains that praise and glory, as *sapientes* write, make up the prize of virtues.[93] By the "wise men" he refers to the ancients, and naturally above all to Cicero, who more than

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88 Cf. my Classical and Christian (n. 7), 83-86.

89 Scritti inediti, 1874, 318.

90 Epistolario 3, 1896, 86 and 88.

91 Lettere 3, 248; Cic. Tusc. 3,3 *est enim gloria...consentiens laus bonorum, incorrupta vox bene iudicantium de excellente virtute.* The reminiscence is overlooked by Harth.

92 Ibid. 227; Cic. Tusc. 1, 109; this reminiscence too is overlooked by Harth.

93 Lettere 2, 126.

anyone else had committed the cult of honour and renown to posterity. In a letter to Guarino Veronese, 1455, Poggio acknowledges that in the thirst for *laus* and *gloria* the moderns were equal to the ancients.[94]

How deeply the cult of fame had pervaded Renaissance society is tellingly revealed by Poggio's letters to the Hungarian statesman and warrior János Hunyadi (1448), to King Alfonso of Aragon (1455), and to the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick III (1456). Encouraging them to go to war against the Turks, he makes conspicuous reference to the eternal fame to be reaped from the enterprise.[95]

Fame was often considered to result from *virtus* and *studia humanitatis*. Besides the oration in memory of Bruni, the idea is found in the letter from 1454 quoted above (n. 91). In 1442, he writes to a friend, a bishop, that he does not regret having always preferred *litteras et virtutem* to money. Besides healing the troubles of the mind, they confer *laudem et gloriam honestam*.[96] He sums up these ideas in a letter to Cardinal Enea Silvio Piccolomini, a year before the latter's rise to papacy. *Studia humanitatis* are superior to other branches of learning because they teach us virtues and good manners and *in primis admonent nos esse homines, quos sola virtus efficiat clariores*.[97]

In Bruni's funeral speech Poggio also mentions the commonplace idea that renown is mainly won by war and by literary pursuits.[98] But military glory becomes lasting only if it

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94 Lettere 3, 378.

95 Ibid. 66, 325, 326sq., 382, 384, 385, 386sq.

96 Lettere 2, 399.

97 Ibid. 3, 462.

98 Op. cit. 664 *duabus rebus, quibus honor et fama precipue acquiritur, semper claruit, militari gloria, et studiis litterarum*. There is a similar remark in a letter to Guarino Veronese, Lettere 2, 179, A.D. 1433. Cf. my Poggio Bracciolini and Classicism (n. 11), 33.

is immortalised by writers, which is another age-old idea.[99] Everything, then, hinged upon the humanists, the conveyors of ancient wisdom and panegyrists of great deeds.

Besides this classical and even pagan reward of virtue, there was another, which was Christian and unclassical. This was eternal life, salvation. In addition to the peroration in Bruni's memorial address, the idea arises in several letters. Explicating to Loschi his moral philosophy (see p. 95-6), Poggio argues that besides peace of mind, *virtus* also gives us *vitam immortalem*.[100] This can only mean eternal life. In 1424, he tells Bishop Francesco Pizolpasso that *optatus quietis portus* after the present life should be the aim of all our studies and actions.[101] In 1438, he assures Richard Petworth, the secretary of a cardinal, that only *virtus* follows us after death.[102] In the same year he tells a Papal chamberlain that nothing is more delightful than conversing with books, which teach us right living, contempt for the perishable and a love of the eternal.[103] In his letter to Pope Nicholas V (see p. 106), he argues that *virtus*, which is acquired through learning, besides healing the wounds of the mind and instructing in temperance, makes us think of the future life and of the salvation of the soul.[104] Even *laus*, the prize people give us for our services, is to be repudiated if it leads us away from

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[99] This is one of Poggio's and other humanists' favourite ideas, e.g. in his letters to Duke Leonello d'Este, Lettere, 2, 210sq., A.D. 1436 and to King Giovanni II di Castiglia e Leon, Lettere 3, 174., A.D. 1453; in De infelicitate principum, A.D. 1440, Opera omnia 1, 419; cf. my Poggio Bracciolini and Classicism (n. 11), 33.

[100] Lettere 2, 9.

[101] Ibid. 43.

[102] Ibid. 310.

[103] Ibid. 329.

[104] Lettere 3, 98 *Quod vero virtutis opus esse eximium solet, medentur* (scil. books) *animi morbis, monent modum cupiditatibus imponendum, arcendas voluptates, future vite incumbendum, consulendum anime saluti, unde venit, quo sit reditura, premeditandum.*

salvation, which is primary to everything else, as he asserts to Bishop Piero del Monte in 1454.[105]

Poggio's contention that virtue ensures salvation does not wholly agree with Orthodox Christian Ethics. According to Aquinas and other Christian philosophers, it was the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, which were required for salvation. The *virtus* of Poggio and other humanists is, however, wholly classical and independent of divine cooperation (see p. 102).

Poggio Bracciolini's moral philosophy then is at times unsystematic and sometimes even contradictory. Its conspicuous characteristic is its predominantly classical origin. Knowledge is virtue and ignorance is vice. Knowledge of moral rules and *exempla* are to be acquired by *studia humanitatis*, by reading the classics. *Virtus*, judging from the passages in which it is specified, represents the classical moral virtues. Despite his acquaintance with patristic and scholastic literature, his only reading matter during the long years in England, scholastic moral philosophy is inconspicuous in Poggio. Unlike Salutati, he does not consider *felicitas* of the present world as an imperfect anticipation of the perfect happiness in the hereafter. The *causa efficiens* of *virtus* is man himself and his reason. If happiness consists in living according to reason and the virtues and if man has free will to prefer them to a life uncontrolled by reason, man is the maker of his own happiness, an idea which is entirely classical.

This view is unquestionably somewhat qualified in Poggio's last dialogue, De miseria humane conditionis. Both reason and virtue are admitted to be often weak and preyed upon by many enemies. Poggio even quotes the power of passions over reason.

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105 Ibid. 227.

But the basic idea of the ability of *virtus* to cope with external circumstances is not seriously shaken.

For all that, it is hazardous to conclude that Poggio and other humanists of his stamp, such as Bruni, would have reverted to paganism. Genuine disbelief in Christian faith had still to await the Enlightenment.[106] The apparent paganism of his moral thought is rather explicable thus: the admiration for classical antiquity in an age in which the religious zeal of the élite was at a low ebb, had forced the Christian ideas to the background but not effaced them.

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[106] Cf. P.O. Kristeller, The Myth of Renaissance Atheism and the French Tradition of Free Thought, Journal of the History of Philosophy 6 (1968) 233-243. Though his discussion mainly concerns Pomponazzi, it is a fortiori applicable to the early humanists.