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The Idea of Fate in Poggio Bracciolini

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In Arctos 1986, I have discoursed upon Poggio Bracciolini's (1380-1457) idea of Fortune, which had a very prominent place in most of his works.¹ The cognate idea of Fate, *fatum*, is far less conspicuous in Poggio. Nonetheless, his conception of, and attitude to Fate, is worth enquiring into, especially as in contrast to Fortune, the post-classical history of Fate has so far been given scant attention.²

A History of the Idea of Fate

Apart from the spinning goddesses of Greek mythology, *Moirai*, who in Latin were called *Fata* and *Parcae*, in classical Roman literature Fate appeared as an indistinct and sinister agency, which led humans towards preordained goals, usually death and misfortunes. It was less often conceived of as a benevolent power.³ In philosophy and in writings influenced by philosophy, *fatum* corresponded to Greek εἰμαρμένη. In Cicero's famous definition, *fatum* is *ordo seriesque causarum, cum causae causa nexa rem ex se gignat*.⁴ It was especially the Stoics who appropriated and developed the

¹ Fortuna in the Works of Poggio Bracciolini, Arctos 20 (1986) 25-57.

² Cp. V. Cioffari, Fortune and Fate from Democritus to St. Thomas Aquinas (1935); Idem, Fortune, Fate, and Chance, Dict. of the Hist. of Ideas 2 (1973) 225-36, with bibliography.

³ I. Kajanto, God and Fate in Livy (1957) 12sq.; H. O. Schröder, Fatum (heimarmene), RAC 7 (1969) 523sqq.

⁴ Div. 1, 125.

idea of εἰμαρμένη.⁵ In stoic philosophy, Fate is a manifestation of the logos or ordering principle of the world, which can be given different names according to the particular point of view. It can be called Providence or nature⁶ or Jupiter and the other gods⁷ or *fatum*.⁸ Fate is an inexorable law which determines private and public matters.⁹ Human will is unable to alter the course of Fate.¹⁰ The wise man, however, can find peace of mind by freely submitting himself to Fate.¹¹ In particular it was Seneca who transmitted these Stoic ideas to posterity as well as greatly influencing Poggio's conception of Fortune.

Fatum / εἰμαρμένη still gained in importance after astrology's great expansion during the first centuries of the Christian era. The influence of the stars was rationalized by resorting to the Stoic doctrine of συμπάθεια τῶν ὄλων, Harmony of the Universe.¹² Everything in the universe was interconnected. Hence even a small change in the configuration of the stars could affect events on earth. It was especially Manilius that propagated astral determinism. His saying *fata regunt orbem, certa stant omnia lege*, sums up this philosophy.¹³ In later antiquity, astrological *fatum* had become so common that according to Augustine, when people hear the word *fatum*, they inevitably understand by the word the influence of the position of the stars at the moment of birth or conception.¹⁴

The Christian Fathers faced a similar task in regard to Fate as they did concerning Fortune. But it was easier to solve. In Stoic philosophy, God and Fate had been identified. The Fathers only had to substitute a Christian

⁵ Sources in H. von Arnim, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* 2 (1903) 264-98; W. Gundel, *Heimarmene*, RE 7 (1912) 2627-34; M. Pohlenz, *Die Stoa* 1-2³ (1971-72) 101-6.

⁶ Seneca, *nat.* 2, 45.

⁷ Seneca, *benef.* 4, 7-8.

⁸ *Ibid.* 4, 7, 2.

⁹ Gellius 7, 2, 5, quoting Chrysippus; Seneca, *prov.* 5, 6-7.

¹⁰ Seneca, *nat.* 2, 36.

¹¹ Seneca, *epist.* 117, 1, quoting a poem of Cleanthes.

¹² Gundel, *op. cit.* (note 5) 2030-34; Schröder, *op. cit.* (note 5) 543sqq.

¹³ *Astronomica* 4, 12. The whole passage down to line 118 describes Stoic determinism.

¹⁴ *Civ.* 5, 1.

God for a Stoic deity. Hence Augustine argues that the pagans, who used the word *fatum* about chains of causes in fact ascribed it to the will and power of supreme God.¹⁵

For the post-classical history of *fatum*, it was the elaboration of Boethius in his Consolation of Philosophy that became the seminal influence. Boethius distinguishes Providence and Fate. Providence is the divine reason itself, *fatum* proceeds from Providence as the local and temporal order inherent in the things of this world.¹⁶

For the medieval Schoolmen, it was Boethius rather than Augustine who provided the model for explaining the idea of Fate. According to Albertus Magnus, *fatum* is the chain of causes that flows from Providence and extends to all created things.¹⁷ Aquinas discusses Fate in several connections.¹⁸ For Aquinas there is nothing fortuitous in the world. Events that seem accidental are ascribable to a superior cause, which cannot be the stars. It can only be divine Providence. Like Boethius and Albertus, he asserts that *fatum* exists only in created things. According to his definition, considered from the point of view of causation (*causaliter*), Fate is identifiable with God's power or will, but as to its essence (*essentialiter*), it is comprised of a series of secondary causes.¹⁹ He thus combined Augustine's and Boethius' theories.

The humanists, when they tackled *fatum* as a philosophical problem, did not go beyond the Scholastics. Poggio's mentor Coluccio Salutati, in his *De fato et fortuna*, 1396,²⁰ admitted that *fatum* was not easily reconcilable with contingency and the freedom of the will.²¹ He rejects

¹⁵ Loc. cit.

¹⁶ Op. cit. 4, 6, 1-13. For the mainly Neo-Platonic sources of this doctrine, see H. R. Patch, *Fate in Boethius and the Neoplatonists*, *Speculum* 4 (1929) 62-72; *Idem*, *Necessity in Boethius and the Neoplatonists*, *Speculum* 10 (1935) 393-404; P. Courcelle, *La consolation de philosophie dans la tradition littéraire* (1967) 203sqq.

¹⁷ *Summa theol.* 1, 17 q. 68 = *Opera omnia* 31 (1894) 695.

¹⁸ Recorded in the note on *Summa theol.* 1 q. 116, 1, edited by Petrus Caramellus (1952) 545.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* q. 116, 2.

²⁰ Printed first in 1985 a cura di Concetta Bianca.

²¹ Op. cit. 4.

the Stoic identification of Fate with God²² but assigns the first cause of everything to God and divine Providence. *Necessitas fatalis*, because it flows from God's Providence, first exists in heaven and after that in the inferior (or secondary) causes, ordering and controlling everything that is under heaven. In this sense, *fatum* is the classical chain of causes.²³ But though *fatum* is the providential ordering of things, something is left for contingency and free will. Because *fatum* originates from the first cause or God, who controls the actions of our will, *fatum* can be said to initiate our actions, but not without our free cooperation with God.²⁴ It is inherent in the nature of the will that is free.²⁵

This is, however, only one aspect of the post-classical history of *fatum*. In non-theological and non-philosophical writings, which during the Renaissance increasingly imitated classical Latin language and phrases as well as the ideas of classical authors,²⁶ Fate too was more often than not a classical and not a Christian agency. In funeral inscriptions, e. g., death was often imputed to *Fatum* or *Parcae*.²⁷

Fate, God, and the Stars in Poggio

It is evident from the very infrequency of the references to *fatum* that Poggio attached much less importance to this idea than he did to *fortuna*. In the whole corpus Poggianum there are only about 40 passages in which *fatum* suggests an agency. Nor is there much consistency in Poggio's ideas of Fate.

²² Ibid. 25.

²³ Ibid. 22sq. *necessitas ista fatalis, prout a Dei providentia est, prius est in celo et exinde est in inferioribus causis... fatum sit necessitas a Dei providentia fluens, cuncta dirigens et gubernans que sub celo sunt et efficiuntur.*

²⁴ Ibid. 52.

²⁵ Ibid. 65 *Naturale, igitur, necessarium et inevitabile voluntati est quod agat libere et, cum ipsa non sit prima causa sed secunda, etiam de sui natura, qua secunda est, necessarium habet sequi primam causam semper tamen libere et secundum exigentiam sue nature.*

²⁶ Cp. I. Kajanto, Poggio Bracciolini and Classicism (1987) 19-27.

²⁷ See I. Kajanto, Classical and Christian. Studies in the Latin Epitaphs of Medieval and Renaissance Rome (1980) 41-48.

In fact, most of the various meanings and interpretations of *fatum* outlined in the preceding chapter can be encountered in Poggio's works.

The most significant passages in which Poggio ascribes the course of events to Fate are found in his letter to his friend Niccoli, dated 28. 12. 1430.²⁸ In this letter, Poggio bitterly denounces Florence's unjustified aggression against the neighbouring town of Lucca. It is probably due to Poggio's emotional opposition to the war that he attributes its origin to Fate. Though the future is uncertain, he writes, one can guess that the present tempest will lead to a major shipwreck and to an end determined by *fata* :

*Superiora nos certe regunt, mi Nicolae, quibus cum vires nostre obsistere nequeant, nostrum est communem, quecunque a deo oblata fuerit, equo animo perferre rerum conditionem. Arduum quippe est contraire fati...*²⁹

He thus seems to equate Fate and God's will, to which we have to submit. This is the approved Christian position on the idea of Fate. Resigning oneself to unescapable Fate is, however, a Stoic doctrine, too, amply documented e. g. in Seneca.

A little later in the letter, referring to the debates in Florence which preceded the decision to go to war, he writes:

*Vicit tamen maior pars meliorem,³⁰ cupiditas rationem superavit, ut vim suam exercerent fata, quibus ex levi favilla universam Italiam terramarique bello flagrantem conspiceremus.*³¹

According to strict logic, this is of course somewhat defective. Beginning the war was due to the aggressive spirit in certain leading sections in Florence. It was this human factor which allowed Fate to exercise its power and to involve Italy in a major war. Perhaps this is explicable as a juxtaposition of

²⁸ Lett. 1, 197-200.

²⁹ Ibid. 197.

³⁰ This is a quote from Livy 21, 4, 1.

³¹ Op. cit. 198.

the human and supernatural factors, which is found in many other passages in Poggio.³²

But Poggio does not leave the matter at that. He again blames his countrymen, who as individuals were intelligent and judicious, for their collective stupidity in engaging in war of which they have little experience. However, he tries to exonerate them by imputing the war to Fate:

*Sed tamen, quod coeperam, volo fatis ista potius tribuere quam ascribere inertie nostrorum, licet astrorum predictiones nostra stultitia comprobemus.*³³

Because this cannot be changed, we should not overly fret over politics.

There can be no doubt that in this passage Poggio identifies *fata* with the influence of the stars. Poggio's mentor Salutati was one of the stern opponents of astrology.³⁴ Poggio, however, seems to have had some belief in astrology, though this was never very pronounced.³⁵ The passages suggesting astrological ideas are in fact few. In 1447 in a letter to Pietro Tommasi, a Venetian physician, he writes:

*De Astrologis vero que scribis et astrorum vi tibi assentior, quamvis isti theologi predictionibus repugnent, et Deum preesse eorum fatis dicant, mutareque illorum minas.*³⁶

This is not very clear. Because Tommasi's letter to Poggio is not extant, we do not know about his position on astrology. However, as a physician he may have had a professional interest in astrology, which was by tradition closely associated with medicine.³⁷ Poggio seemingly rejects the

³² See my paper (note 1) 40 and below.

³³ Op. cit. 199.

³⁴ De fato et fortuna 105-23. L. Thorndike, A History of Magic and Experimental Science 3 (1934) 516sq. cites passages from Salutati's Correspondence critical of astrology. But see note 38.

³⁵ Cp .E. Walser, Poggius Florentinus (1914 = 1974) 196 and 235sq.

³⁶ Ton. 9, 399.

³⁷ See J. Tester, A History of Western Astrology (1987) 23sq. and passim (see index).

reservations of the theologians, who maintained that God presided over the stars and could, if he so deemed, change the future foretold by them. This would make him an adherent of strictly deterministic astrology. But it is not certain that Poggio discloses his own convictions here. He may only have humoured his friend. Even Salutati, whose opposition to astrology is beyond doubt, was not always consistent. There are passages in his correspondence which are favourable to astrology.³⁸

Another important reference to astrology is found in a letter from 1438.³⁹ In modern terms, he discusses here the perennial question of nature vs. nurture. He had received a letter from Cencio De' Rustici, who seems to have belittled the influence of the stars upon well-endowed natures strengthened by intellectual and moral education. Poggio modifies this by asserting that before a child has acquired good manners and sufficient humanist education the stars may have a decisive influence:

plus sidera et celos valere arbitror ad disponendum animum nostrum quam hominum precepta et suasiones. Nisi enim sive deus sive sidera aut celi nobis faveant posteaquam in lucem editi sumus... nisi nos accomodatos ad percipiendam virtutem in lucem educant, frustra atque inanis ferme omnis erit parentum affectio et cura.

He mentions Cicero's depraved son as an example of the failure of paternal education. On the other hand, many men have surpassed their fathers in fame though no particular care has been given to their education. Hence he concludes that *natura ipsa sola dux esse videatur hominibus ad virtutem*. But Poggio is no educational pessimist for he continues: *Sed hanc ipsam* (scil., nature) *fateor adiuvari plurimum posse studio et domestica cura*.

What Poggio is referring to here is a well-known doctrine of natural astrology. The position of the stars at the hour of birth or conception influenced the composition of the neo-nate's temperament and hence his propensities and the formation of his character, which in turn affected the shaping of his life. Even people who repudiated judicial or divinatory astrology believed in natural astrology or the influence of the stars upon physical nature. This was a doctrine approved by the Church, e.g. by

³⁸ Thorndike, op. loc. cit. (note 34) and 206.

³⁹ Lett. 2, 336.

Albertus Magnus⁴⁰ and Aquinas,⁴¹ the two luminaries of Scholasticism. But Poggio is not very emphatic. Besides the stars, a child's disposition is also ascribed to God or simply to nature. The same idea is repeated in *De Nobilitate*, 1440.⁴²

The other references to astrology are of little importance. In a letter from 1456,⁴³ Poggio mentions a position of Saturn, which he suggests helped him to make up his mind to leave the papal curia.⁴⁴ But the meaning of the passage is not completely clear and the connection between Saturn's position and his decision is not unequivocal. In *De Varietate Fortunae*, Poggio records celestial and other omens foreboding fateful events. Comets were always thought to portend great public misfortunes and especially the deaths of rulers.⁴⁵ The death of Giangaleazzo Visconti, Duke of Milan, in 1402, and the disastrous civil wars that followed it, had been foretold by a comet, *stella crinita*.⁴⁶ Poggio comments upon this by remarking that these phenomena have always been thought to portend something for great men. The ancient historians have told us about that. The death of Pope Martin V and the troubles of Eugenius IV's reign were foreboded by the cry of an owl, the falling down of bells in four pontifical churches, the gate of *Sancta Sanctorum* hit by lightning, and an eclipse.⁴⁷ Poggio remarks that this shows *magnorum virorum curam celestibus esse*.

Considering the size of Poggio's literary production, the references to astrology are very few and not unequivocal. If he had a firm belief in the

⁴⁰ Op. cit. (note 17) 696.

⁴¹ Op. cit. (note 18) q. 116, 1.

⁴² Opera omnia 1, 75 *virtus nulla parentum eruditione, sed divino quodam numine favoreque percipitur, ac serie occulta fatorum*.

⁴³ Inedit. 94 Walser 539.

⁴⁴ *Ex tuis brevissimis litteris cognovi Saturnum esse hoc anno retrogradum et chorea illa agere, qua plus retrocedunt quam proficiscantur: hoc ego iam dudum presagio, cepi consilium ex tempore magis necessarium quam voluntarium curie relinquende*.

⁴⁵ Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* 2, 9, 90; cp. Claudian, *Bell. Goth.* 243 *nunquam caelo spectatum impune cometem*.

⁴⁶ Op. cit. 64sq.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 86. Walser, Op. cit. (note 35) 235sq. interpreted this and other similar passages as evidence of Poggio's superstition. But Poggio may have quoted the omens simply for literary effect.

stars, he would surely have mentioned them in more than just a handful of passages. Like the majority of people until the Scientific Revolution in the 17th century destroyed the theoretical foundations of astrology, he may have given some credence to natural astrology, but about divinatory astrology he probably shared the scepticism of Petrarch⁴⁸ and Salutati.

To return to Poggio's letter to Niccoli about Florence's unjustified war against Lucca, his explanation of the causation of the event is not quite consistent. Florence's aggression is primarily imputed to the stupidity of the majority of her citizens. To mitigate the blame on his compatriots, he attributes the war to Fate, too. But the uncertainty of his ideas in this particular case is revealed by the fact that Fate is first juxtaposed with God and then with the predictions of the stars. In his *Hist. Flor.*, he repeats the two-level explanation.⁴⁹

Blaming Fate for events that were in reality due to humans is found elsewhere in Poggio, too. In a letter from 1448 he wrote that Florence's internal dissension and the unsuccessful pursuance of the war against Venice could be imputed to *fata*, which one can blame without fear, and to the excessive love of power of the Venetians.⁵⁰ In *De Varietate Fortunae*, Poggio tells the story of the downfall of the house of the Guidi, Counts of Casentinum in Tuscany. Through miscalculation, the last count lost the friendship of Florence and went into exile.⁵¹ In explaining his motives, Poggio compounds rational and supernatural factors. The count may have entertained hopes or been stung by the insults of the Florentines or been led by *fatum*, which is thought to dominate mortal affairs. He remarks that *fatum* could be safely blamed for the family's ruin. Then he accuses Fortune, which shows that here there was little difference between these two ideas.⁵²

⁴⁸ For Petrarch's attitude, see especially *Epist. famil.* 3 No. 8. But Thorndike, *Op. cit.* (note 34) 220sq. maintains that Petrarch's hostility to astrology has been exaggerated.

⁴⁹ *Op. cit.* 254: after peace had been concluded with Milan, one would have expected the unwarlike Florentines to enjoy a long period of peace, *sed aut fatis ita iubentibus, aut civium, quibus Reipublice damna questui erant, libidine, novis calamitatibus aditus est patefactus.*

⁵⁰ *Ton.* 9, 362.

⁵¹ *Op. cit.* 109sq.

⁵² See my paper (note 1) 40.

Poggio does not seem to have given serious attention to the problem of Fate's nature. The standard Christian interpretation of *fatum* as identical with or flowing from God's will is recorded with particular emphasis in his fourth funerary speech in memory of Lorenzo de' Medici, 1440:

*Nulli igitur diem proferre licet, agimur enim fatis, atque fatum inevitabile est. Sed ne forte quid erroris in verbo capiatur, non hic fatum secundum stoicorum morem accipitur, sed per fatum dei voluntatem intelligo. Fato ergo, hoc est divina voluntate omnes morimur.*⁵³

But this is the only passage clearly representing the Christian view. The clarification of the meaning of Fate may owe something to the fact that this was a *laudatio funebris* in memory of a great man. The few juxtapositions of God and Fate are mostly insignificant. In addition to the letter to Niccoli discussed above, there is a letter from 1439 in which a child's death is attributed to *fati necessitas*, which should be borne with courage, and to God, whose decisions are always to be considered good.⁵⁴ It is worth noticing that *fati necessitas*, which is a common phrase in Latin literature,⁵⁵ is to be faced with the Stoic virtue of fortitude but God's decision with Christian humility. In an undated letter he deplores the fact that God has not allowed them to have peace while the end of the war will be due to *fata*, but this is only an expression of emotional attitude.⁵⁶ On the other hand, God and Fate are explicitly separated in *De Varietate Fortunae*. Considering that the majority of the Popes were unworthy, Poggio wonders whether the immense power of the papacy was due to divine Providence *or* Fate and chance.⁵⁷ A few lines earlier, he had described the Popes as *Fortune miranda potestas*, which shows how small the difference between Fortune and Fate in reality often was. But through the mouth of his interlocutor Luscus, he evades the question by arguing that all Papacies, even the evil ones, were

⁵³ Opera omnia 1, 279.

⁵⁴ Lett. 2, 356.

⁵⁵ E.g. Cicero, Phil. 12, 30: it denotes a natural as opposed to a violent death.

⁵⁶ Ton. 11, 95.

⁵⁷ Op. cit. 80 *Deine providentia ac nutu tanta imperii moles, an fato casuque temere ducatur.*

ascribable to God's will and infallible order, which may be unknown to us but to which we have to resign ourselves – the usual Christian answer to the problem of evil. However, in an earlier passage Poggio wrote that the infamous Baldassare Cossa had been elected Pope (John XXIII) *fatis cogentibus, nullo suo merito*.⁵⁸

All this suggests that Poggio did not much care about the problem of God and Fate. His Christian faith cannot be called in question, but the ideas he had learnt in his classics were equally dear to him. The choice of one or the other of the supernatural explanations was often dependent upon the context. Papacy was too sacrosanct to be explained only as a sport of Fortune and Fate, although the vicissitudes of the Popes occupied a prominent place in *De Varietate Fortunae*. On the other hand, a condottiere's rise to Papacy stretched the credibility of a Christian interpretation. Hence it could more easily be ascribed to ineluctable Fate.

Classical Fate in Poggio

In the majority of cases, *fatum* in Poggio's works has classical features. He probably mostly used it as a literary motif, especially to suggest ineluctable doom or death. Thus Ladislas of Durazzo, King of Naples, dies before attacking Florence in 1414 *fatis volentibus, quibus hominum consilia sepius interrumpuntur*.⁵⁹ Bernabò, Signore of Milan, dies amidst great prosperity: *vim fatorum effugere nequivit, fortune tum maxime, cum blandiri videbatur, opera deceptus*,⁶⁰ where the very juxtaposition of *fatum* and *fortuna* bears evidence of the literary nature of the reference.⁶¹ A little later there is a similar passage. Luigi Alidosi, a just and beloved Signore of Imola, was destroyed by Fate. Although he had been forewarned by the apparition of his dead father, *nequaquam tamen urgentem fatorum vim exuperare quivisse*.⁶² Classical literature gives plenty of examples of the idea that Fate

⁵⁸ Ibid. 59.

⁵⁹ Hist. Flor. 196.

⁶⁰ Var. fort. 62.

⁶¹ In describing his death in Hist. Flor. 84, Poggio writes that a just death overtook him *fatis volentibus*.

⁶² Var. fort. 71sq.

is inevitable even though one is aware of it.⁶³ But *fatum* also suggests impending doom of which its victims are unaware. Pope Urban VI did not know *quam acerba fata delicias suas Butillum* (his nephew, whom he tried to advance) *manerent*.⁶⁴ The same phrase recurs in another context⁶⁵ and in another form.⁶⁶

Wars and political troubles could be imputed to Fate.⁶⁷ In classical fashion, it suggests premature death: *fata interceperunt*.⁶⁸ Leonardo Bruni's death is ascribed to *fatorum iniuria*.⁶⁹ For *fati necessitas*, see above p. 68.

The above examples show clear traces of the imitation of classical phrases. In some cases, the expression is traceable to a definite source. The phrase *fata viam invenient*, used in a letter,⁷⁰ is a quotation from Virgil, *Aen.* 3, 395. In his discourse on Caesar and Scipio, he writes that Scipio was elected to wage war in Hispania *tanquam fatis ipsum ad Carthaginiensium bellum deposcentibus*.⁷¹ According to Crevatin, Poggio was here following Florus, *epit.* 1, 22, 37, though Florus refers to the command in Africa: *cui iam grande de Africa nomen fata decreverant*. Livy too describes Scipio as *fatalis dux huiusce belli*.⁷²

One passage may be discussed in more detail. Braccio da Montone, whom Poggio in a letter mentions as a superb example of the sport of

⁶³ E.g. Livy 1, 42, 2 *nec rupit tamen fati necessitatem humanis consiliis* ; 25, 16, 5 *nulla tamen providentia fatum imminens moveri potuit*.

⁶⁴ Var. fort. 57sq.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 81.

⁶⁶ Hist. Flor. 85 *ignari quem finem datura essent fata*.

⁶⁷ Lett. 2, 118 a. 1431 *bellum timeo, video enim nos fatis agitari, que timeo ne aliquid contra nos moliantur*; Inedit. 85 Walser 529 a. 1454 *Fuit olim fatum nescio quod ut ee respublice dissiderent, que antiqua societate et federe fuerant coniuncte*; De infelicitate principum, Opera omnia 1, 417 *his quoque felicitas defuit, quibus fato datum fuit, ut in suis urbibus decederent e vita insulse plebis iudicio....*

⁶⁸ Funeral speech in memory of Cardinal Zabarella, Opera omnia 1, 255; Lett. 2, 7 a. 1424; cp. Quintilian, inst. 6 pr. 1.

⁶⁹ Opera omnia 1, 663.

⁷⁰ Ton. 12, 142, undated.

⁷¹ Edited by Giuliana Crevatin, in: Poggio Bracciolini 1380-1980. Nel VI centenario della nascita (1982) 318.

⁷² 22, 53, 6.

Fortune,⁷³ is in *De Varietate Fortunae* represented as a soldier of fortune, who puts his trust in Fate and Fortune:

*Erat in eo, prout in viro militari, nulla religio, nullus Dei neque timor, neque cultus, omnia fato fieri putante.*⁷⁴

The phrase may have been lifted from Cicero, *nat. deor.* 3, 14,⁷⁵ though by it Cicero means Stoic εἰμαρμένη. Braccio's trust in Fate and Fortune and Poggio's own ironical comment are combined in:

professus sepius sequi se fortunam ducem rerum suarum, fatumque esse inexuperabile. Sed tamen quam brevi et inanem spem et infidam fortune societatem sensit !

It is of course not possible to know whether Poggio had firsthand knowledge of Braccio's beliefs or whether he depicted him as a typical warrior. The latter alternative seems to me more probable. This is confirmed by the fact that the description of Braccio's irreligion was modelled upon Livy's famous characterization of Hannibal: *nihil veri nihil sancti, nullus deum metus nullum ius iurandum nulla religio.*⁷⁶ Regarding the idea of Fate, Poggio separates the subjective and objective aspect. Subjectively, Braccio believed that he was a favourite of Fate. *Fatum* and *fortuna* are here virtually synonyms. A similar conviction was not rare in professional warriors and adventurers. In describing his beliefs, Poggio thus showed fine psychological understanding. But objectively he viewed Braccio as a victim of the same fickle power of Fortune that constituted the main theme of his *De Varietate Fortunae*.

⁷³ Lett. 2, 7sq.

⁷⁴ Op. cit. 74.

⁷⁵ See *Thes.* 1. Lat. VI. 1, 365, 65 for further parallels.

⁷⁶ 21, 4, 9. I owe this remark about the Livian parallel to Professor P. G. Walsh.

Juxtaposition of Fate and Human Agency

The preceding discussion suggests that for Poggio *fatum* was mainly a literary figure with a distinctly classical flavour. The fact that *fatum* was often introduced into the text to give it an emotional touch explains why it was sometimes combined with human agency. Thus he leaves it to the judgement of his readers whether the military setbacks of Pope Eugenius IV were imputable to *fatum* or to self-seeking councillors or to avaricious prefects.⁷⁷ The Pope was warlike *seu natura ad id propensa seu fatorum vi seu hominum culpa*.⁷⁸ There are similar remarks in his history of Florence.⁷⁹ For further cases, see p. 67.

D. J. Wilcox has given due attention to "the existence of two levels of interpretation within the presentation of a single event",⁸⁰ though he views the problem from a somewhat wider angle. He wonders whether Poggio may have taken the technique from Tacitus, who by this device avoids having to make his own choice between alternative interpretations. The passage from ann. 1, 9-10, which Wilcox mentions, does not, however, relate to a rational against a supernatural interpretation of events but to the people's different opinions of Augustus. In Tacitus there are, it is true, passages which combine Fate and the human factor, e.g. hist. 5, 10 *qui ubi fato aut taedio occidit*, and especially ann. 4, 20 *unde dubitare cogor fato et sorte nascendi, ut cetera, ita principum inclinatio in hos, offensio in illos, an sit aliquid in nostris consiliis...* But Poggio otherwise shows little influence from Tacitus. He is not quoted at all in the discourse on Fortune in *De Varietate Fortunae*.

⁷⁷ Var. fort. 98.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 122.

⁷⁹ Op. cit. 202. Peace was concluded *seu fatis volentibus, seu quia pacis nomen plurimos movebat*.

⁸⁰ *The Development of Florentine Historiography in the Fifteenth Century* (1969) 149.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

With a few exceptions, Poggio's works have been reprinted in facsimile in 1962-69, *Opera omnia* 1-4 a cura di R. Fubini. Most of the editions used are very old, including the first publication of Poggio's principal works in 1510. The following abbreviations have been used:

Hist. Flor. = *Historia Florentina*, 1715, reprinted in *Opera omnia* 2.

Lett. 1-2 = Poggio Bracciolini *Lettere I. Lettere a Niccolò Niccoli* a cura di Helene Harth, 1984; *Lettere II. Epistolarum familiarium libri* a cura di Helene Harth, 1984.

Ton. = T. de Tonellis, *Epistolae* 1-3, printed in 1832-61, reedited by Helene Harth (partly), reprinted in *Opera omnia* 3.

Var. fort. = *De varietate fortunae*, printed in 1723, a separate reprint in 1969. A new edition is being prepared by I. Kajanto and O. Merisalo.