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Fortuna in the Works of Poggio Bracciolini

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Fortuna is one of the most enduring and influential legacies of antiquity. While Jupiter and all his retinue of major and lesser divinities vanished after the triumph of Christianity, surviving at most as lifeless symbols or literary ornaments, *fortuna* retained her vitality through the Middle Ages, to receive a new boost during the Renaissance.[1]

The popularity of Fortune in Renaissance literature is evident also from the fact that many leading humanists wrote treatises about her. There is Petrarch's De Remediis utriusque fortune,[2] Salutati's De fato, fortuna et casu,[3] Poggio's De varietate fortune,[4] and Pontano's De

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[1] For *fortuna* in the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance, see A. Doren, Fortuna im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance, Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg, 1922—23 I, 71—144; H.R. Patch, The Tradition of the Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Philosophy and Literature (Smith College Studies in Modern Languages III,4) 1922; K. Hampe, zur Auffassung der Fortuna im Mittelalter, Archiv für Kulturgeschichte 17 (1927) 20—37; V. Cioffari, Fortune and Fate from Democritus to St. Thomas Aquinas, 1935; id., The Conception of Fortune and Fate in the Works of Dante, Dante Society of Cambridge, Mass., 1940; id., Fortune, Fate and Chance, Dictionary of the History of Ideas 2 (1973) 225—36; M. Santoro, Fortuna, ragione e prudenzia, 1967; C.W. Kerr, The Idea of Fortune in Italian Humanism from Petrarch to Machiavelli, a Harvard thesis, 1956, has been unobtainable.

[2] Printed in 1581; cp. the analysis of K. Heitmann, Fortuna und Virtus. Eine Studie zur Petrarcas Lebensweisheit (Studi italiani 1) 1958.

[3] Printed only in 1985, a cura di Concetta Bianca (Istituto nazionale di studi sul rinascimento. Studi e testi 10). Previously discussed by L. Gasparetti, Il "De fato, fortuna et casu" di Coluccio Salutati, La Rinascita 1941, 555—82; E. Garin, I trattati morali di Coluccio Salutati, Atti e memorie dell' Accademia "La Colombaria" 1944, 55—88; W. Ruegg, Entstehung, Quellen und Ziel von Salutatis "De fato et fortuna", Rinascimento 5 (1954) 143—90.

[4] Printed in 1723; cp. O. Merisalo, Le prime edizioni stampate del De varietate fortunae di

fortuna.[5] But Fortune was also important in a number of works that were not specifically dedicated to her, e.g. in Boccaccio's De casibus virorum illustrium,[6] in Alberti's Della tranquillita dell'animo and Della famiglia,[7] and especially in Machiavelli.[8] Apart from these, *fortuna* was a familiar idea and figure in most learned and imaginative literature as well as in the fine arts during the Renaissance.

The persistence of this intrinsically un-Christian idea in a society and culture permeated by the unquestioned doctrines of Christianity and dominated by the unassailable Church is an intriguing problem. This is no place to enter into such a large and knotty problem. We may here rest content with two suggestions. Firstly, the idea of the unreliable and illusory nature of the goods distributed by Fortune was not contrary to the Christian conviction of the transitoriness of temporal things.[9] Hence there was some common ground between the pagan idea of deceptive Fortune and the Christian renunciation of the world. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, fickle and malicious Fortune could account for all the uncertainties of human life and for its mystifying amorality, the success of evil men and the misfortunes of good people, better than the Christian belief in the world as governed by an all-powerful and benevolent god. These basically incompatible ideas subsisted in a sort of peaceful coexistence. The attempts of the Christian thinkers, from Augustine to

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Poggio Bracciolini I, Arctos 19 (1985) 81—102. Poggio's idea of Fortune has not been systematically discussed. E. Walser, Poggius Florentinus. Leben und Werke, 1914=1974, 236—43, treated the subject only marginally. There are brief remarks in Doren (note 1) 111sq. and in Cioffari 1973 (note 1) 235.

5 Printed in Opera quae soluta oratione composuit 2, 1538; cp. Santoro (note 1) 11—63.

6 Printed in 1544. In the preface Boccaccio states his purpose to be to show *quid Deus omnipotens, seu, ut eorum* (scil., *ethnicorum*) *loquar more, fortuna in elatos possit, et fecerit*, 2. Boccaccio's work may not have been without significance for the genesis of Poggio's VF. The very theme is similar. But whereas Boccaccio mainly uses classical examples, Poggio draws upon recent and contemporary histories for the illustration of the theme. The problem will be discussed in ampler detail in my forthcoming treatise Poggio Bracciolini and Classicism. A Study in Early Italian Humanism.

7 Opere volgari 1—2, 1960, 1966; cp. Patch (note 1) 217sq.

8 In his Il principe, a chapter (25) is dedicated to the problem of Fortune and of the means of opposing her. For the modern discussion, see Cioffari 1973 (note 1) 235sq.

9 Cp. Doren (note 1) 83.

Aquinas, to subsume Fortune under Providence were unconvincing and had little influence upon popular ideas.

While there is little doubt that Poggio Bracciolini kept the official faith of his Church and did not seriously question its creed,[10] his piety was certainly of a lower pitch than was that of his predecessors, men like Petrarch and Salutati. It was much more in the background. In fact, in his personal letters and in the whole Corpus Poggianum the number of passages referring to God or to Christian religion is small. Thus in his history of Florence there is nothing comparable to the 14th-century chronicles of Giovanni and Matteo Villani, who thought they perceived consistency with the overriding design of Providence in the evolving of historical events.[11]

Besides the human factor, the greed and ambition of individuals and peoples, sometimes though less often mingled with nobler passions, patriotism and love of freedom, Poggio considered the course of events to be moulded by the supernatural agencies of Fate and Fortune. It is especially the latter that is conspicuous in most of Poggio's writings, whereas *fatum* played a minor role.[12] Besides De varietate fortune, 1448, his last dialogue, De miseria humane conditionis, 1455, is also concerned with the influence of Fortune in human life. In his Historia florentina and in his letters, in his dialogues and in the funeral speeches he made, *fortuna* is often quoted. It is only his nowadays best-known work, his scurrilous *Facetie*, that carries only a few insignificant references to *fortuna*.

Poggio's discussion of the nature of *fortuna*

Poggio Bracciolini was not an especially original thinker. Almost all his ideas were borrowed. Regarding the nature of *fortuna*, his one analysis

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[10] Cp. Walser (note 4) 61—70; P. Joachimsen, Aus der Entwicklung des italienischen Humanismus, Hist. Zeitschr. 121 (1920) 221.

[11] L. Green, Historical Interpretation in Fourteenth-Century Florentine Chronicles, Journ. Hist. Ideas 28 (1967) 163.

[12] For reasons of space, I have here omitted analyzing Poggio's conception of *fatum*. I hope to return to the subject in another connection.

of her, in VF Book One, 25—33, is a collection of ideas from classical and Christian sources which contains no conclusions of his own.[13]

The contemplation of Rome's ruins brings to mind the omnipotence of Fortune over human affairs. After quoting Virgil (Aen. 8,334), Sallust (Catil. 8,1), Livy (9, 17,3), Caesar (no definite passage, cp. below) and Cicero (off. 2,19), and mentioning the cult of Fortuna in Roman religion, Poggio states the problem. Is Fortune *animus quidam, quiddam divinius* or something *exanime* or *vulgi inane somnium, nomen inane?* Only the first and last alternatives are discussed. It is in fact hard to understand what Poggio meant by *exanime*. The writings of the learned and the general consensus suggest the former, Christian religion and reason the latter alternative. Poggio's interlocutor in the dialogue, his curial friend Antonio Loschi, tries to resolve the problem. He argues that of the ancients it was only Aristotle that defined Fortune. His recapitulation of Aristotle's minute analysis in Physica 2,4—6 is very condensed yet succeeds in giving the gist of matter:

> *fortunam causam accidentem dixit iis rebus quas agendas susceperis. Has causas infinitas esse vult et incertam esse fortunam, idque fortuna fieri quod nobis agentibus preter propositum eveniat, preterque cogitatum* (Urb. Lat. 224, 9v; VF 26).

He was quoting from the medieval Aristoteles Latinus, in places almost verbatim.[14]

According to the interlocutor, Aquinas followed Aristotle in his conception of Fortune. But here Aquinas is somewhat misrepresented. Doctor Angelicus discussed Fortune in many connections.[15] In his commentary upon Aristotle's Physica 2, lect. 7—10,[16] he explicates

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[13] The quotations from VF are taken from the manuscript Urb. Lat. 224 (Vatican). The 1723 edition is an incorrect copy of Ottob. Lat. 2134. In the following, VF refers to the 1723 edition.

[14] The Latin Text is printed in Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia 17^2, 1949, 274—80, in connection with the commentary of Aquinas.

[15] Cp. Cioffari 1935 (note 1) 103—18. Both Doren (note 1) 97sq. and Patch (ibid.) 184—86 treat Aquinas superficially. According to Doren, Aquinas „hat, wie es scheint, das Fortunaproblem kaum gestreift"; Patch argues that Aquinas "rejects Fortuna utterly".

[16] Opera omnia 17^2, 1949, 274—82.

Aristotle's doctrine, but except for the conclusion, does not put forward his own ideas. Despite the note in the 1723 edition of VF, Poggio (the real author, not the fictitious interlocutor) does not quote Aquinas from this commentary. The work Poggio utilized was almost certainly Summa c. gentiles 3 cap. 91—92, 252—55.[17] Aquinas is not always easily comprehensible. Hence one should not unduly reprehend Poggio for misunderstanding him. In this work, Aquinas represented the Christian reinterpretation of Fortune: *Ex his ergo . . . colligere possumus quomodo humana ad superiores reducuntur causas et non aguntur fortuito* (91,252). These *superiores causae* were of three different type: God, who exerts direct influence upon our will; angels, who govern our faculty of comprehension, and celestial bodies, which rule *corpora nostra et alia quae in usum nostrum veniunt* (ibid.). But though Aquinas concedes some influence from the stars, he is far from a true believer in astrology. For one thing, the stars affected only our bodies, not our souls. Still more important is the fact that the stars were themselves subject to God.[18] Hence Poggio's argument that *Utriusque vero fortune* (viz., adverse and propitious) *causam refert ad superiora corpora: ut quamvis aliquid eveniat preter intentionem hominis, id tamen prodeat dispositione superna ad id inclinante nos licet inscios* (Urb. Lat. 224, 9v.; VF 26), though clearly taken from the discourse of Aquinas,[19] misconstrues his thought. He stood by the orthodox Christian view which subsumed all fortuitous events under Providence.[20]

But the Poggio of the dialogue is not satisfied with this. Aristotle and Aquinas had defined Fortune too narrowly. Her power is greater, *non accidens quippiam aut preter intentionem, sed firmum quid ac stabile* (Urb. Lat. 224, 10; VF 27). Poggio's desire to refute the definition of *fortuna* as

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[17] Ibid. 5^2, 1948, 252—55.

[18] See especially Summa Theol. I—I q. 116 a. 1: *humani actus non subduntur actioni caelestium corporum, nisi per accidens et indirecte.*

[19] Poggio's *cum bonum aliquod eveniat homini preter intentionem* is an almost literal quotation from Aquinas, cap. 92,233: *quando aliquod bonum accidit sibi preter intentionem.* Moreover, *dispositione superna — inclinante* have parallels in Aquinas' text.

[20] See cap. 93,154 *Sic igitur hujusmodi fortuiti eventus, reducti in causam divinam, amittunt rationem fortuiti.* Similarly in his Commmentary on Aristotle's Physica 2, 282. Still more clearly in Summa theol. I—I q. 116 a. 1: *ea quae hic per accidens aguntur, sive in rebus naturalibus sive in rebus humanis, reducuntur in aliquam causam praeordinantem, quae est providentia divina.*

chance makes him describe her in terms which are in remarkable disagreement with her accustomed fickleness and malice. He cites Alexander, who enjoyed Fortune's favour for 14 years, *non ex improviso aut preter intentum* (Urb. Lat. 224, 10; VF 28); Caesar, who boasted that he was following Fortune as his leader and who in warfare *non insperato sed optato cogitatoque est beneficio fortune usus* (ibid.), and a merchant who made clever use of a favourable wind (Urb. Lat. 224, 10—10v.; VF 29). But the conclusion drawn from these examples contradicts the preceding statement of Fortune's stability: *itaque . . . existimatur esse maior atque ordinatior quedam divina vis volvens versansque res humanas pro libidine, nihil a se firmum nihil tutum prebens* (ibid.). Part of this confusion may be due to the fact that the ancient idea of the personal *fortuna* was unfamiliar to Poggio.[21] For Alexander, he was probably following Curtius.[22] Regarding Caesar, he had mixed up two quite different things, Caesar's alleged belief in his own *fortuna*, a later legend, and his well-known references to the importance of chance in war.[23] But Poggio also attributes Caesar's victories to a rational factor, to his great knowledge of military matters (VF 28).

Now one could argue that what Poggio here had in mind was the popular medieval idea of *bona fortuna.* This is traceable to the Ps.Aristotelian treatise De bona fortuna, composed in the Middle Ages from Ps. Aristotle, Magna moralia 2,8, and from Ethica Eudemia 7,14, which is today, with some hesitation, ascribed to Aristotle.[24]. The short discourse, in an inept and often very faulty Latin translation, was held to be a genuine work of the Stagirite.[25] It deals with the psychological problem of the repeated luck of some men in things ruled by Fortune (*tykhe*), although they may be foolish and evil. In Eth. Eud. the personal instinct (ὁρμή, *impulsus*) , which guides them to success, is ascribed to divinity, and in Magna moralia to Nature.[26] This idea of *bona fortuna*,

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[21] See my Fortuna, ANRW II 17,1, 524sq. and below p. 35.

[22] Ibid. 548sq.

[23] Ibid. 537sq.

[24] G. Lacombe, Aristoteles Latinus I, 1939, 72; D. Ross, Aristotle, 1923 = 1964, 14sq.

[25] The short discourse has been printed in Aristotelis Opera, 1496, 348r. — 349v.

[26] Cp. Cioffari 1973 (note 1) 227.

which conflicts with the popular notion of fickle Fortune, is evident e.g. in Aquinas' discourse in Summa c. gentiles. In his treatise De fato, fortuna et casu, Salutati dedicated a chapter to *bona fortuna* (III.3), naturally ascribing this kind of luck to God. But although Salutati mentioned Alexander as an example of a man favoured by *bona fortuna*, it is questionable whether Poggio had been influenced by his discussion. Two distinctive features are missing, the reference to the psychological *impulsus* as the cause of lucky choices and decisions, and the ascription of all this to God. In this passage Poggio was no doubt recording ideas culled from classical literature, in which he confused personal *fortuna*, which he probably did not fully understand, with the usual conception of fickle Fortune. Again, the inadequate treatment of Aquinas' conception of *fortuna* as well as his ignorance of or at most vague idea of the *bona fortuna* of Aristoteles Latinus suggests that medieval doctrines did not overly interest him.[27]

Poggio now proceeds to quote passages from Roman authors to support the idea that fortune was something divine and not simple chance, Cicero, Manil. 47; Marcell. 6—7; Att. 14,17,1; 14,11,1; 14,13,3. He also quotes Theophrastus from Tusc. 5,25 (VF 29sq.). But it is Seneca to whom he seems to owe most of his ideas of Fortune. Seneca, a Stoic if not a very dogmatic one, in accordance with Stoic metaphysics believed that the world was governed by a pantheistic divinity, who could equally well be called Jupiter or other gods or Nature or *fatum* or *fortuna* because *omnia eiusdem dei nomina sunt varie utentis sua potestate* (Benef. 4, 7—8). In

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[27] It is equally problematic whether there are any echoes of Plato here. In Leg. 709A—C Plato argued that human affairs were not mere *tykhai*, fortuitous events, but were governed by God, assisted by *tykhe* and *kairos*, opportunity. As the third factor Plato mentions *tekhne*, human skill. What is interesting is the fact that as an example of skilful use of opportunity Plato records a helmsman who exploits a favourable wind. Poggio's story of the merchant could be an expanded version of the example. Moreover, his reference to Caesar's skill in warfare could be another example of *tekhne*. But on nearer scrutiny the possibility of direct Platonic influence vanishes. Poggio does not speak about God or *kairos*, in Latin *occasio*. The story of the sailor is similar only in the barest outline. Above all, because Poggio was not fluent in Greek, he had to use Latin translations. Plato's Laws were translated into Latin only between 1450—1455, see R.R. Bolgar, The Classical Heritage, 1964 = 1954, 434.

practice, however, Seneca's Fortune exceeds these philosophical limits, quite apart from the fact that the proper definition of *fortuna* in Stoic philosophy was a knotty problem. In Seneca, whose literary style conformed to the silver Latin blend of rhetorical and poetical elements, Fortune was mainly the fickle, malicious and amoral power of popular belief. Rather than philosophical concept she was a symbol for all the uncertainties, hazards and misfortunes of human life, which the Stoic Wise could defy and overcome by resorting to his *ratio* and *virtus*[28].

Poggio begins his quotations from Seneca by summarizing his philosophy of Fortune:

> *Seneca vero cuius habetur maxima sapientia inter latinos, multum pre ceteris attribuit fortune, quam tanti facit omnibus suis libris, ut hec que vocantur bona externa, queve dari, auferrive possunt, velit illius arbitrio subjecta divitias, opes, dignitates, liberos, corpus ipsum denique, nihil omnino excipiens preter animum . . .* (Urb. Lat. 224, 10v—11; VF 29sq.).

His quotations, which need not to be repeated here, include Cons. Marc. 10,6; Cons. Polyb. 13,2; Cons. Helv. 5,4; Tranq. 13,1; Prov. 2,7; probably Cons. sap. 5,4 (VF 30sq.), and a little later Herc.f. 524 — Seneca referred to as *Tragedus* — and Prov. 1,1 (VF 33). In none of the quotations were passages indicated.

Poggios dependence upon Seneca was not absolute. The idea of Fortune as a fickle and malicious power was similar in both, but as will be shown later on, *virtus* as the antidote of Fortune was somewhat different. Here too, in quoting Seneca, he criticizes his austere Stoicism, which did not admit that *fortuna* could in any way, even through bodily torture, afflict the mind (VF 31).

The Antonio of the dialogue counters Poggio's repudiation of the Aristotelian concept of Fortune as chance by suggesting that he should consider the theological definition, *nihil aliud fortunam esse, quam divine*

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[28] See my Fortuna (note 21) 542—44; cp. G. Busch, *Fortunae resistere* in der Moral des Philosophen Seneca, Antike u. Abendland 10 (1961) 131—54; M. Rozelaar, Seneca. Eine Gesamtdarstellung, 1979, 454—59.

nutum voluntatis, singula aut permittentis aut imperantis fieri, et ita disponentis cuncta que fiunt, ut que prodire a fortuna existimantur, summi dei dispositio efficiat certa ratione, que presit humanis rebus (Urb. Lat. 224, 11v.; VF 31). This is the traditional Christian interpretation of Fortune developed by Augustine and Boethius[29] and accepted by Aquinas, Dante, Salutati and others.

But Poggio discards all definitions. It is best to follow Seneca's example who, instead of subtle definitions, gave practical advice how to meet Fortune's challenge. Hence he is much more useful than Aristotle, even as Cicero's De officiis is a more serviceable guide to conduct than Aristotle's Ethics with all its definitions of virtues (VF 31sq.). Antonio ends the discourse on the nature of *fortuna* by remarking that whether one accepts Aristotle's idea or thinks Fortune to be *quid sublimius excellentiusque,* in any case *preesse mihi videtur rebus humanis, quas pro libidine extollit vel deicit* (Urb. Lat. 224, 12; VF 32). The fickle, malicious and amoral power of Fortune is further described, until he comes to the main theme of VF, the description of *commutabilitas, mutatio, varietas fortune* by examples drawn from contemporary rather than from ancient history.

From a philosophical point of view, Poggios disquisition of the true nature of Fortune is a disappointment. Apart from the confusion of ideas in some places, none of the three interpretations is finally accepted. The Aristotelian definition of Fortune (*tykhe*) as chance, or coincidence, is most clearly rejected. But no choice is made between the idea of the classical authors of *fortuna* as *vis divina quedam* and the Christian subsuming of *fortuna* under divine Providence.

Nevertheless, certain preferences are observable. Neither here nor elsewhere does Poggio seriously espouse the Christian interpretation, expounded even by his mentor Salutati. The few references to Providence in connection with *fortuna* do not carry much weight (see p. 56). It was the classical idea of *fortuna* as an erratic, malevolent and amoral agency that most appealed to him. But in the last analysis, all definitions of Fortune are of little use and are expendable. What matters is the duty to watch her

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[29] See my Fortuna (note 21) 555—57 and the corresponding passages in Cioffari 1935, 1973 and Patch (note 1).

power over human affairs and to meet her challenge by all the resources of the mind.

More than with Salutati and other philosophically-minded thinkers Poggio agrees with Petrarch in his views of *fortuna*. Although Petrarch in his *De remediis utriusque fortune* gives advice on how to cope with both good and bad Fortune, the former requiring moderation, the latter fortitude,[30] he supplies no definition of *fortuna*. But in a later work, Senilium rerum lib. 8, epist. 3,835—38,[31] he sets forth his ideas about the nature of Fortune. In his Remedia he repeatedly mentioned *fortuna* because he was writing to ordinary people, not to philosophers. But fundamentally he thinks that there is no such thing as *fortuna*, there is only the coincidence in the old Aristotelian sense. This, he argues, is the true Christian attitude to *fortuna*. On the other hand, he dare not, without more ado, accept the interpretation of *fortuna* as *providentia ipsa dei occultis homini, sed sibi notissimis causis agens* or as *providentie ministra, et divinarum voluntatum executrix*. The problem of the true nature of *fortuna* is thus left open.[32]

In the last analysis, this indecisiveness was perhaps unavoidable. Pagan *fortuna* and Christian Providence could appear compatible only to a cloistered philosopher, not to a keen observer of the vicissitudes of human life. Poggio, however, differs from Petrarch in that he also rejected the Aristotelian solution. Moreover, the pagan features of *fortuna* are more conspicuous in his works than in Petrarch's, an inevitable consequence of the steady advance of humanism and of the increasing authority of the classics.

A survey of the material in all of the Poggio's writings will show that in ideas no less than in language Poggio's *fortuna* was largely modelled upon classical literature.

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[30] Rem. fort. Praef.: *utraque fortune acies metuenda, verumtamen utraque tolleranda est, et hec quidem freno indiget, illa solatio, hic animi elatio reprimenda, illic refovenda ac sublevanda fatigatio*, 2; cp. Heitmann (note 2) 89sqq.

[31] Printed in Opera, 1581.

[32] Cp. Heitmann (note 2) 51sq.

The characteristics of Fortune

Poggio used the word *fortuna* in most of the senses it had in classical literature. Clearly passive meanings, such as "position", "property" or simply "lot", do not interest us here. But it is of course not always easy to tell a passive from an active meaning. Thus, the cases in which the word depends upon the genitive of a proper name are sometimes ambiguous. In a number of relevant passages, the word probably denoted "lot" and did not suggest an agency, e.g. *varia partium fortuna,* Urb. Lat. 224, 17v.; VF 47; *similem fortunam experturos*, Harth 2,155; *miserrima . . . Urbis et Italie fortuna*, Mis. hum. 125.

But the distinction between a passive and an active meaning is not always easy to make, e.g. HF 142: *sed Roberti* (scil. Rupert, Duke of Bavaria) *fortuna . . . exercitum servavit*, his "good luck". The most important passage is HF 152: *Ladislaum Apulie regem, cujus ope Mediolanensis* (scil. Giangaleazzo, Duke of Milan) *fortuna reprimeretur . . . accersendum putabant* (scil. the Florentines) and a few lines later: *tam favens, propitiaque Galeatii fortuna, tam votis, ceptisque ejus prospera, animum glorie cupidum incenderat . . .* This seems to allow several interpretations. We could consider Ps.Aristotelian *bona fortuna* (see p. 30) or the personal *fortuna* of pagan Roman religion or the usual fickle agency. But as I have already shown, Poggio had scarcely been interested in medieval scholastic cogitations. Again, personal *fortuna* was certainly common in Roman religion and in classical literature. But this type of *fortuna*, originating in pagan cults, did not survive to later ages. There is nothing comparable to *Fortuna populi Romani*, a familiar figure in Cicero and Livy and other Roman authors, who in critical situations manifested herself to save Rome.[33] Another important variety of Fortuna as a guardian spirit was *Fortuna Augusti*, though she was much more common in cults and coinage than in literature.[34] For the alleged personal *fortuna* of Alexander and Caesar, see p. 30 above. Less important persons were

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[33] See my God and Fate in Livy, 1957, 64—71 and my Fortuna (see note 21).

[34] See my Fortuna (note 21) 517sq.

seldom supposed to enjoy the protection of a personal *fortuna*.[35] With the disappearance of pagan religion, this variety of *fortuna* also died away.

It is thus no wonder that Poggio never mentions Fortune of Florence, though *fortuna* is otherwise important in his description of the wars between Milan and Florence. He is content with expressions like *favit . . . fortuna Florentinis*, HF 98, where *fortuna* cannot be a special protecting deity of Florence.

The passage from HF 152, quoted above, illustrates the difference between classical and Renaissance ideas of Fortune. This is the story of one of the most dangerous times in the history of Florence, which was only saved from defeat by Giangaleazzo's unexpected death from plague in 1402. This if anything could have been ascribed to Fortune of Florence. *Fortuna* is, however, nothing but the usual fickle and deceitful agency here. Again, far from being Giangaleazzo's protectress, *fortuna* only seduced the Duke to try to seize the mastery of Italy, until all his plans were cut short *divino numine*, by his death. In recording the failure of the Duke's testamentary arrangements for his conquests, Poggio states: *parum sapienter profecto fortunam secundam perpetuo sibi suisque desponderat*, HF 153. The Duke, like so many before and after him, fell a victim to Fortune's insecure favour. *Divino numine* scarcely suggests that Poggio regarded *fortuna* as a handmaid of Providence. This is not the only instance in Poggio of different supernatural agencies juxtaposed without a clear idea of their mutual relations (see p. 40).

In the majority of cases, Poggio's *fortuna* is the classical agent of the whimsical ups and downs in human life. The meaning of "chance" is chiefly limited to Fortune of war (see next chapter). In VF, almost every page will illustrate Fortune's fickleness. In the preface he states that he will describe *fortune instabilis favor . . .et in evertendis que extulit pervicacia*, Urb. Lat. 224, 2; VF 2. Soon afterwards we have a cluster of expressions describing Fortune's fickle power over human beings, *fortune arbitrium, ius, impetus, vires, violentia, varietas.*

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[35] See my God and Fate in Livy, 1957, 71sq. and my Fortuna (note 21) 513sq. as well as Notes on the Cult of Fortuna, Arctos 17 (1983) 14sq. for epigraphical evidence.

Not unexpectedly, Poggio lifted a great deal of the vocabulary of Fortune from the classics. Of the expressions quoted above, all but *pervicacia* were found in Roman literature according to Thes.l.L. A few classical passages had particularly influenced Poggio, thus Sallust's Catil. 8,1: *Sed profecto fortuna in omni re dominatur; ea res cunctas ex lubidine magis quam ex vero celebrat obscuratque.* There are four direct quotations[36] while other passages, though they do not acknowledge Sallust, imitate him.[37]

Another favourite phrase of Poggio, *fortune arbitrium*, may have been borrowed from Seneca, Cons. Marc. 10,6, a passage describing the power of *fortuna* twice directly quoted by Poggio.[38]

It may, however, be futile to hunt for classical reminiscences in Poggio's vocabulary of Fortune. He was no servile imitator of classical diction. His Latin, maliciously arraigned by Valla for grammatical crimes, was a vigorous creation, able to express subtle nuances of thought and feeling. In the imagery of Fortune, too, Poggio had a number of expressions and metaphoras unparalleled in the classics known to him. The world as the theatre of Fortune,[39] e.g. *Nos ad theatrum fortune revertamur, in quo quidam adhuc eius ludi nobis spectandi supersunt*; Urb. Lat. 224, 28v.; VF 78,[40] may have been inspired by Seneca's *ludi fortunae*[41] or *fortunae spectaculum.*[42] Both these metaphoras were frequent in Poggio, e.g. *Adiecit fortuna ad spectaculum suum etiam ludum gabrini cremonensis,* Urb.Lat. 224, 24; VF 70.[43] An original metaphora, unparalleled at least in classical literature, is *tanquam adumbratos fortune*

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[36] VF 85; Mis. hum. 95; Harth 2,190; Ton. 14,256 (see p. 50).

[37] E.g. HF 277: *fortuna que in rebus humanis maxime dominatur*; Mis. hum. 100: *eam vitam vivunt, cui nulla in re fortuna dominetur.*

[38] VF 30 and Mis. hum. 92.

[39] For this idea, cp. R. Fubini, Il "Teatro del mondo" nelle prospettive morali e storico-politiche di Poggio Bracciolini, in: Poggio Bracciolini 1380—1980, 1982.

[40] Other passages e.g. VF 2,85 and 100.

[41] Epist. 76,4, but cp. Horace's *Fortuna saevo laeta negotio et / ludum insolentem ludere pertinax*, Carm. 3,29,49sq.

[42] Prov. 2,8 *Ecce spectaculum dignum ad quod respiciat intentus operi suo deus . . . vir fortis cum fortuna mala compositus.*

[43] Cp. VF 58; 103; Ton. 14,258; 293.

coloribus, Urb. Lat. 224, 28v.; VF 81, i.e., their unworthiness had been veiled by success.[44]

On the other hand, there are not many instances in Poggio of *fortuna* as a clear personification. Most of them are found in VF, in which Poggio, as he stated in a letter, *extuli paulum dicendi genus,* Ton. 9,351. Personifications of abstract concepts properly belong to poetical style; cp. my remark about Seneca (p. 32). Here are a few examples, *fortuna tanquam beneficiorum suorum peniteret subito conversa est,* Urb. Lat. 224, 16; VF 43; *sed erubuit fortuna contraire moribus suis,* Urb. Lat. 224, 19v; VF 56; *ipsam que ludebat risisse puto,* Urb. Lat. 224, 20; VF 58. The malicious laughter of Fortune was one of Poggio's favourite images, cp. VF 79 and 102. This simile was used by Ovid, trist. 1,5,17, but only as a symbol of her benevolence.[45] An original metaphora for Fortune's capriciousness is *ad quos fortuna profecta pedem retulit,* Urb. Lat. 224, 36v.; VF 105.

On the whole, these clear personifications were few. Though *fortuna* was conceived of as an agency moulding events, it was seldom presented as a person, still less as a goddess. In fact, Poggio never refers to *fortuna* as *dea.* Even the attributes of Fortuna, well-known to us from her classical iconography, were limited to the sole instance of *fortune rota,* which Valla was represented as turning when appraising *prisci illi,* an ironical use, Inv. Valla 1,189.

The two distinctive features of classical Fortune were fickleness and malice. Most of the passages, especially in VF, suggested inconstancy. Yet Fortune's malice was equally essential. She was inherently an amoral power, who raised and ruined with total disregard for just deserts. In a Christian-born writer, this aspect of Fortune is not without significance. As stated (p. 26), the Christian Fathers and scholastics, when they could not totally repudiate the idea of *fortuna,* tried to Christianize it by subsuming *fortuna* under Providence. Consequently, since divine Providence was always benevolent and *fortuna* was only the other name

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[44] The same image in Ton. 10,14: *nullis fortune adminiculis adumbrata,* i.e., by one's own merits.

[45] Cp. my Ovid's Conception of Fate, 1961, 31.

for Providence, a Christian should not blame *fortuna*.[46] It goes without saying that all this is quite contrary to the classic idea of malicious Fortune.

In Poggio, the malicious amorality of Fortune is evident from the very language. *Iniquitas Fortune* is a favourite phrase, e.g. *Est . . . tum summa fortune iniquitas iudiciumque perversum, tum frequens commutatio*, Urb. Lat. 224, 12—12v.; VF 33; *crudelitas*, VF 6; *iniuria*, VF 9; *malignitas*, VF 21; *saevitia*, VF 10, and many other frequent expressions also accentuate Fortune's malice.[47]

Only in a few passages does *fortuna* act justly, even then more by accident than by design. Paolo Guinigi, Signore of Lucca, a dreadful tyrant, finally *in carcere finem vite meritum excepit. Ita ex mercatore tirannum, ex tiranno captivum varie fortuna versavit*, Urb. Lat. 224, 26v.; VF 76, an adaptation of the classic phrase of Fortuna making a king into the lowliest thrall.[48] On the death by a shipwreck of Butillus, a wretched nephew of Pope Urbanus VI, Poggio remarks: *tulit et ipse meritam tante ambitionis penam, vir vecors sola fortuna insignis, quam credo nefas putasse, cuius causa patrium solum tam multas calamitates subisset, ipsum incolumem calamitatis expertem,* Urb Lat. 224, 28; VF 80, a patent personification.

Nowhere is Poggio's idea of Fortune as an amoral power more in evidence than in his famous description of Rome's ruins in VF Book One. Far from considering Rome's destruction as a just punishment for her paganism and for her wicked empire, as Augustine does, Poggio imputes it all to Fortune's malevolence. Rome was once *rerum domina*, the domicile of famous men and excellent virtues and arts, but now, due to *fortune omnia vertentis iniquitatem*, despoiled of her power and majesty, nothing more than mere ruins. In destroying the Roman Empire, *iure suo fortuna*

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[46] For this idea, see Salutati (note 3) III.7 *Relata ergo divina providentia ad hec que descendunt ab inferiorum agentium ratione tum casus dicitur tum fortuna. quam accusare deum est procul dubio criminari sibique (=ei) talium aliquid imputare. si dei providentiam fortune vel casus intelligimus nomine recte facimus.*

[47] Cp. Epist. inedita 597 a. 1426 *Fortune iniquitas* exalts men who have no learning and who tolerate only that which agrees with their tastes.

[48] Enn. ann. 312—13 (Vahlen).

principatum exercet. But there is more cause for sorrow that her *libido* has run riot and raged in razing the city itself to ground (Urb. Lat. 224, 4v; VF 7).

Poggio does not appear to have even made an attempt to bring classical *fortuna* and Christian Providence into some sort of harmony. A particular event is seldom ascribed to God. On the whole, Poggio's God is thanked for life's good things. It is God who has blessed him with children.[49] While Fortune is in general blamed for life's adversities, it is God who arranges deliverance. In his letter of consolation to Cosimo de'Medici because of his exile, a. 1433, Poggio writes, *Accepisti ob sevam fortune iniquitatem, hanc enim culpari impune licet, gravem iacturam dignitatis tue*, Harth 2, 181. Fortune could be safely blamed, whereas incriminating Florentines might bring serious consequences. But for Cosimo's return from exile gratitude was primarily due to God, ibid. 196. A good instance of the imperfect mingling of classical and Christian ideas about the causation of events is the story of the death of Ladislas I King of Hungary at Varna in 1444, VF 115. Poggio primarily attributes his death to *fortune iniquitas* and *vis fatorum*, but shrinks from blaming God, whose ways are inscrutable but always just.

Fortune as a supernatural agency was also at variance with Poggio's analyses of psychological factors as the causes of events. In general, he accords them more weight than he does to Fortune, who often seems to have been mentioned as a mere rhetorical commonplace. One example of this is the story of the downfall of the house of the Guidi, Counts of Casentinum in Tuscany, VF 109sq. Through miscalculation, the last count lost the friendship of Florence and went into exile. Poggio remarks that *fatum* could be safely blamed for the ruin of the family. Here *fatum* is hardly more than a synonym for *fortuna*, for he continues: *Culparem fortunam . . . nisi hoc non nulli ambitioni potius quam fortune vitio acceptum referrent . . . Sed quoniam quicquid hominibus adversi contigit, tribuitur fortune, nos quoque talis viri casum inter fortune opera adnumeremus*, Urb. Lat. 224, 36v. Poggio may really have preferred the psychological explanation, but because of the very theme of VF made a specious concession to popular *fortuna*.

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[49] Harth 2,366 a. 1440; similarly 385 a. 1442; 404; 406; 407, etc.

The realm of Fortune

The province of *fortuna* is defined by Poggio as *res externae*, e.g. Harth 2,131 a. 1431 *Neque ita me dabo rebus externis, ut in me multum possit fortuna*; Urb. Lat. 224, 29v., VF 85, Preface to Book Three, *Rerum externarum vices versare eam, quam vulgo fortunam vocant*; Mis. hum. 96, *externa bona, que sue* (scil., *fortune*) *ditionis existunt*. The antithesis of Fortune is the human mind and everything connected with its operations.

Besides these general remarks and frequent phrases like *bona, munera, beneficia, dona fortune*, Poggio was also more specific about the constituents of these external goods. In most cases they consisted of wealth, power and status, thus Harth 2,6 a. 1424, *divitias, opes, dignitates, honores, reliquasque fortune pedissequas*; ibid. 123 a. 1431, *divitias, opes, dignitates, imperia ceteraque fortune blandimenta*. But physical attributes, especially health, e.g. Harth 2,182 a. 1433, and even beauty, Mis. hum. 87, as well as family, e.g. Orat. fun. Lorenzo de' Medizi 179, and friends, Epist. inedita 518 a. 1454, also belonged to the gifts of Fortune. In all this Poggio was following the ancient doctrine of the goods, which originated from Plato[50] and Aristotle, who in Ethica Nicomachea 1,8 divided the goods into external, of the soul, and of the body. The first and the last goods were often treated as one, thus Aristotle in the chapter quoted, where he included a physical asset like beauty in the external goods. In Rhetorica 2,11,2 he states that by *tykhe* he means noble birth, wealth and power, which thus constituted her realm.

In Roman literature, from which Poggio no doubt obtained his ideas of the external goods, Cicero defined *fortuna* as *domina rerum externarum et ad corpus pertinentium*, Tusc. 5,15. Seneca, epist. 74, 7 specified the goods of Fortune as *honores, divitias, gratiam*. But it was especially in the classical rhetorical doctrine that Poggio found rich material for the description of the external goods. His dependence upon ancient rhetoricians will be clear from the analysis of one of his oratorical masterpieces.

Poggio's funeral speech in memory of Lorenzo de' Medici, 1440, was written in conformity to the rules of epideictic speeches laid down by

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[50] E.g. Euthydemus 279A—B.

Cicero, Rhetorica ad Herennium, and Quintilianus. These rhetoricians divided the praise of a person into mind, body, and external circumstances.[51] Though they explicitly subjected only the external circumstances to Fortune, in practice these could be combined with the goods of body. External goods comprised things like descent, education, wealth, power, fame, native country, friends, while with the body it was especially health that was advised to be worth praising. But in eulogizing a person, all this should be of importance only so far as he could be shown to have made good use of these gifts. The main point was always *virtutes animi.*

In Lorenzo's eulogy, Poggio divides his good qualities into the gifts of Fortune, given to him *larga manu*, and the *virtutes animi*, 283. But Lorenzo had made the former *meliora atque illustriora*, using them not *ad fortune nutum* but *ad virtutis normam*. These comprised his birth-place, Florence, made *augustior* and *ornatior* by him; descent from a noble family, whose prestige he increased; wealth, which he used to common satisfaction; fine physique and health; high public office, always utilized for the common good. Having described these *que fortuita estimantur*, he at great length praises Lorenzo's various virtues.

But though things like health, family, and friends were occasionally included in the goods of Fortune, in most cases she was thought to rule over the giving and taking of wealth, power, and status. Hence it was mainly men in high positions that were the sport of Fortune. In the spectacle of VF, the cast consisted of princes and warlords, Popes and cardinals, and other comparable celebrities. Thus Poggio could write to Cardinal Cesarini, Harth 2,131 a. 1431, after the sentence quoted above p. 41 : *Nam ut nunc mee quidem res sunt, est ut non timeam impetum eius* (scil., *fortune*) *cuius est maxime, veluti fulgura solent, eminentiora quatere ac dissipare*, a reminiscence of Horace, Carm. 2,10,11.

The fortune of war

A special and very important section in the realm of Fortune is her power in war. In classical Roman literature, *fortuna* is very often the

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[51] Cic. inv. 3,177; Rhet. Her. 3,10; Quint. inst. 3,7,12.

incalculable element, the accidents and chances that may tip the scales of battles. *Fortuna* in this sense is close in meaning to chance, *casus*. Even a great modern statesman could argue that "it is impossible to forecast the hazards of war".[52] The idea was succinctly expressed by Caesar, Gall. 6,30 *Multum cum in omnibus rebus tum in re militari potest fortuna.* That it was chance and not the goddess that he had in mind is evident from what follows: *Nam magno accidit casu ut . . .* [53] Cicero in his letter to his brother Quintus, ad Q. fr. 1,1,5, enumerates the unpredictable contingencies brought about by *fortuna* in war. In Sallust, Livy and other historians, Fortune in war was very common, mostly expressed by set phrases like *fortunam temptare* or *fortunae se* or *aliquid committere*. The frequent phrase *fortuna pugnae* or *belli* also suggested the incalculable element in war.[54]

The classical Fortune of war and the very expressions recur in Poggio's Historia florentina, which is principally a chronicle of wars. Though it has been claimed that this work was largely modelled upon Sallust,[55] the influence of Caesar and Livy is patent at least in the idea of Fortune in war. The reflection of Caesar, quoted above, was repeated by Poggio, *fortuna, que plurimum in bello potest* HF 343. The parallel to Caesar is particularly close in another passage. Caesar could avail himself of the notion of *fortuna* to explain away setbacks, e.g. Gall. 6,35,2 the escape of Ambiorix. Similarly in HF 107, an unexpected defeat of the Florentines in 1391 was put down to *fortuna*. The general of the Florentine troops urged the leader of the French mercenaries *ne quam belli fortunam . . . priusquam secum jungeretur, tentaret.* Knowing the impetuosity of that nation, he forbade him *ullo pacto fortune arbitrium, que plurimum in bellis posset, subire.* But his advice went unheeded, the Frenchman *temere in totius Fortune discrimen descendit*, and was duly crushed, HF 108. Besides the comment upon *fortuna*, reprehending the rashness of the Gauls is also found in Caesar, Gall. 3,19,6. The set phrases are frequent in

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[52] Churchill, The Second World War 1, Penguin 1985, 534.

[53] Cp. similar expressions Gall. 6,35,2; civ. 3,10,6 and 68,1.

[54] See my Fortuna (note 21) 539 and my God and Fate in Livy, 1957, 77—79.

[55] D.J. Wilcox, The Development of Florentine Humanist Historiography in the Fifteenth Century, 1969, 131.

HF, *fortunam belli tentare*, 19 and above; *fortuna oppugnandi tentata*, 20; *certam quodammodo victoriam fortune arbitrio commiserunt*, 37: rash action resulted in disaster; *fortunam belli communem* (scil., *esse*), 114;[56] *fortunam belli experiundam esse dicebant*, 235; *nullis nondum certis inditiis, quo se fortuna* (scil., *belli*) *inclinaret*, 237, cp. 247;[57] *ne summam belli fortune crederet*, 332, etc.

The hazards of war and the unreliability of Fortune is one of the main arguments in the oration of Niccolò Uzzano when he tried to dissuade the Florentines from the war against Lucca in 1429. Poggio was firmly opposed to the war, which proved to be disastrous for Florence. The oration was composed on the model of classical historians, and its arguments were naturally Poggio's. The speaker points out that

> *qui in rebus dubiis, et periculo proximis exploratum sibi finem certumque futurorum exitum pollicentur, raro sui desiderii compotes fiunt, cum presertim rerum humanarum, et maxime bellorum dominam constet esse fortunam, cuius est eludere nostras cogitationes* . . ., 260.

Those who believe that the war will be short and easy are badly mistaken, *ignari incertos esse bellorum exitus, martemque communem*, 261. But in contrast e.g. to Cicero, who in his letter to Quintus enumerated all the contingencies of war, Poggio is not very specific about the effects of Fortune. This lack of concrete details is characteristic of Poggio as it is of humanist historiography in general.[58] He is mostly content with general and often tautological expressions like *multa tempus, multa casus, multa fortuna, multa rerum varietas secum ferunt nostris consiliis remota*, 262. He pays, however, some specific attention to unpredictable psychological factors: *quis novit hominum partim novas res appetentium, partim invidorum, partim sibi prospicientium voluntates?* Who can foresee the reactions of the Duke of Milan or of the Pope or of the city of Siena?

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[56] Cp. the classical phrase *Mars communis*, i.e. "impartial", e.g. Cicero de orat. 3,167; Liv. 7,8,1. Poggio, HF 253: *communisque Mars ac belli eventus incertus.*

[57] Cp. Liv. 3,61,4: *at si fortuna belli inclinet.*

[58] Wilcox (note 55) 175.

262sq. It is thus folly to be confident of Fortune's favour, *semper in bellis dubia ac dominans*, 263.

In one passage in HF, the parallel to Cicero is close. In Manil. 28 Cicero argues that a good general should possess four qualities, *scientia rei militaris, virtus, auctoritas, felicitas*. The last requirement is defined in 47: *ego enim sic existimo, Maximo, Marcello, Scipioni, Mario ceterisque magnis imperatoribus non solum propter virtutem sed etiam propter fortunam saepius imperia mandata atque exercitus esse commissos*, for they enjoyed *quaedam . . . divinitus adiuncta fortuna*. The reference to gods as the origin of this good luck is natural in a speech made *ad Quirites*. Interpreted more rationally, Fortune in war, all the incalculable elements of battle, had constantly been favourable to Pompey and to the other great generals.

Poggio modelled his judgement on a great warlord upon this speech. Ending his description of the defeat of Carlo Malatesta, Lord of Rimini and ally of Florence, by Filippo Maria Visconti in 1429, Poggio concludes by conceding that in his opinion Malatesta was equal to the ancients, *prisci illi*. He enjoyed *maxima auctoritas*, acquired through *plurimae virtutes* and *morum optimorum gravitas*. Moreover, he was a friend of learning and of the learned. *Fortuna tantum in bello, et felicitas pugnandi defuit, que prima in Imperatoribus requiruntur* HF 218sq. This corresponds to Cicero's requirements for a good general, with one difference. Cicero's knowledge of military matters is replaced by the praise of Malatesta's love of learning. As historical truth, this is somewhat biased. Malatesta is known for bigotry rather than *studia litterarum*. His one remarkable act was the destruction of the statue of Virgil at Mantua. But Poggio was not alone in singing the praises of Malatesta. Bruni eulogizes him in almost similar terms.[59]

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[59] Epistolarum libri, ed. L. Mehus 1741, III.9, 81 *Principem hujus civitatis, quem quotiens intueor, totiens michi aliquem M. Marcellum, aut Furium Camillum invictissimos bello duces, & eosdem in pace mitissimos atque optimos viros, legibusque obtemperantissimos videor intueri . . . Nunquam vidi hominem, qui magnitudine animi, & ingenii praecellentia, aliisque summo Duce dignis virtutibus ad antiquos illustres viros propius michi videtur accedere.*

Virtus and fortuna

In Roman literature, *fortuna* never reigned supreme. She was resisted and as a general rule mastered by man's inner resources, by his *virtus*. Classical Roman *virtus* originated from the merging of the native manly courage (*vir-tus*) of the Roman with the *arete* of Greek, especially Stoic ethics. Hence its two principal meanings were courage and moral excellence, "virtue", which were not always easily distinguishable. In Cicero, the superiority of *virtus* over *fortuna* is a commonplace, and so is it in Sallust, Caesar and Livy, and the majority of Roman authors.[60]. But it was Seneca who made the greatest contribution to the elaboration of this famous antithesis. It was mainly from him that the humanists learned the principles of *remedia fortunae*.

According to Seneca, Fortune held unquestionable sway over *res externas*. Man was unable to change the course of events. But Fortune could not crush the human spirit, provided it was well prepared to meet all the vicissitudes of Fortune, good and adverse alike. The Stoic wise, who had made reason his loadstar, mastered the former by moderation, the latter by fortitude, e.g. epist. 78,29: *adversis non succumbere, laetis non credere, omnem fortunae licentiam in oculis habere*.[61] The brave man even welcomed the challenge of Fortune because it gave him a chance to test and strengthen his *virtus*, Prov. 4,2; 12.

In the debate on the nature of *fortuna* in VF, Poggio quotes this basic doctrine of Seneca, 30sq. But though he undoubtedly owes a great deal to Seneca's moral philosophy, on some important points his conception of *virtus* differed from Seneca's. Thus, in this very passage, he modifies Seneca's assertion that Fortune can have no power over *sapiens* by remarking that Fortune can certainly afflict him by physical suffering (cp. p. 32).

Poggio's main ideas on *virtus* and *fortuna* are set forth in his letter to his curial friend Antonio Loschi in 1424, Harth 2,5—10. The humanities should free us from the pursuance of the external goods, which the great

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[60] See my Fortuna (note 21) passim.

[61] Other similar passages, epist. 66,6; 71,8; 98,3; nat. 3 praef. 7; cp. Busch (note 28) 143 and 148.

majority, the *vulgus* without intellect and learning, covet. Because *studia humanitatis* have taught us *honestas* and *decus*, i.e. the principles of moral philosophy, it is shameful for us to hanker after things which we know to be unworthy, *instar eorum, qui neque virtutum neque vitiorum ullum discrimen norunt*, 6. Like the other humanists, Poggio was frankly elitist. But no class distinctions enter here. *Vulgus*, who pursue unworthy things are rather the rich and the powerful.[62]

This philosophy is based upon the idea of Fortune. The classics teach us the primacy of *virtus* over *fortune pedissequas*, riches and dignities. The use we derive from things acquired by great toil and hardship, is *instabilis, fragilis ac perbrevis*, 7, a phrase which suggests the Christian idea of the transitoriness of temporal goods (cp. p. 26).

The idea of future VF is already here in embryo, 24 years before it was actually written. VF illustrated the inconstancy and unreliability of Fortune by examples drawn from recent and contemporary history. In this early letter, too, Poggio records recent cases, first of all Braccio da Montone — very prominent in VF 73—75 — *quem ex infimo homine fortuna extulit* to a great warlord, a menace to a large part of Italy, and who, already confident of victory, *una acie victus cecidit*, 7. Comparison with the ancients, who by their literary genius raised even minor events to fame, is also here: *Qui casus si priscis illis accidisset temporibus, quas illi tragedias, quas nobis scenas exhibuissent?* 7. Later in VF, this served as justification for turning to contemporary instead of to ancient history for examples (see p. 33).

After recording a few other recent cases, Poggio sums up his philosophy: *mecum ipse admiratus rerum mortalium mutationem varietatemque fortune*, etc., the usual complaint of Fortune's fickleness, which should deter us from pursuing external goods. Reason, that gift of God (*divinitus nobis data*) should convince us of the fact that only *virtus* is stable whereas *fortune bona* are *aliena, incerta, caduca.* But very few follow *honestum illud virtutis iter*, 8.

Poggio is, however, no Stoic. He rather subscribes to the peripatetic

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62 *Itaque alii student opibus et dignitati, alii honores ambiunt, quosdam vexat cupido dominandi, nonnulli voluptatibus deduntur, plurimi ardent pecunie cupiditate*, which are not pursuits of the poor and the lowly.

school, which did not reject *fortuita bona* if honestly acquired and moderately used, 9.[63] But virtue is the primary thing. Here he gives his definition of this many-faceted concept:

> *Hec in adversis animum submittere, in secundis efferre prohibet, hec dolorem, paupertatem, mortem reliquaque, que homines veluti magna exhorrent mala, minime formidanda docebit. Hec nos instruet imperandum cupiditatibus, refrenandas voluptates, libidines coercendas, nihil optandum; nihil ducendum in bonis, quod sit subiectum temeritati fortune.*

For him *virtus* is both patience and moderation. Challenged by Fortune, we can resort to the former to face adversities, and to the latter to avoid being carried away by success, always under the menace of Fortune's reversal.

This is the classical doctrine of Cicero and especially Seneca. It is noteworthy that recognizably Christian ideas are much in the background. By his own resources, by resorting the reason, not by the grace of God, man can learn the principles of moral philosophy. His guide is the classics, not the Bible. The few traces of religious ideas are unimportant. *Ratio divinitus data*, 8, smacks of Stoicism. *Virtus*, besides giving us peace of mind and freedom, also gives us *vita immortalis*, 9. Though this probably refers to the Christian hereafter, gained by virtuous life, at least in this letter the idea is neither very explicit nor prominent.

In a few other letters, this idea is given more weight. In his letter to Bishop Francesco Pizolpasso, a. 1424, Harth 2,38—44, Poggio at some length discourses upon *studia humanitatis*. He argues that pagan philosophy considered only the present life whereas *nostri*, i.e. the humanists, teach us to live so as to secure salvation, 40, cp. 43. In 1438, he urges Richard Petworth, the secretary of an English cardinal,[64] to leave

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[63] See Aristotle, Eth. Nic. 1,8. In Ton. 14,270sq. Poggio argues that he is no Stoic because he has feelings. He had been educated at the Roman curia, in which both the Epicurean and the Peripatetic philosophy were cultivated. The latter was more befitting human life.

[64] Concerning him, see Walser (note 4) 73. Their friendship dated from Poggio's sojourn in England.

everything else and to cultivate only virtue, which *sola etiam post mortem nos comitatur*, Harth 2,310. In 1445, in another letter to the same person, the exhortation is repeated. His friend should free his mind of *fortune munera* and instead give his attention to *virtus* and *ea bona, que nos etiam post mortem comitantur*, Ton. 9,294.

Poggio's *virtus* was thus at least in part Christian. Here his position was similar to Petrarch's.[65] But, as I have already remarked (p. 27), while there can be no doubt of Poggio's basic if somewhat subdued piety, in considering the testimony of these letters, we should give due attention to their addressees. Antonio Loschi shared Poggio's ideas and views. Hence we can assume that in expounding his ideas to Loschi he was more uninhibited than in writing to a bishop and to a friend, who probably held to the Christian doctrine with greater earnest than did the Italian humanists.

Despite these Christian modifications, the classical basis of Poggio's doctrine of *fortuna* and *virtus* is beyond doubt. There is, however, one fresh approach. Poggio lays great stress upon the fact that *virtus* is to be learnt from books, from his beloved classics. Unless they provide us with moral education, by advising us not to attach undue importance to external things, to power, status, and riches, they are of little value and can even be harmful.[66]

Poggio is indeed deeply convinced of the value of learning as the school of morality. Hence, learning is often contrasted with Fortune. Learning alleviates *fortune iniurie*, Ton. 11,102 a. 1454; literary studies free the mind of anxieties and encourage us to despise the things over which *fortuna* has more power than reason, Harth 2,387 a. 1442.

In a letter from a. 1444, Harth 2,431sq., Poggio argues that Fortune's favour makes people despise learning, which has dire consequences after good fortune is reversed: *tunc se insulsos cognoscunt contemptuique habentur apud omnes veluti ridiculi atque insani.* But his young friend, the addressee of the letter, had prudently retained *cum fortune indulgentia*

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[65] See Heitmann (note 2) 194.

[66] Harth 2,44. This favourite idea of Poggio is repeated in a considerable number of letters, cp., e.g., Harth 2,282 a. 1438 *Credebam litterarum studia sibi (=ei) adeo profuisse, ut priscorum, quorum virtutes legerat, vellet vestigia imitari.*

. . . *priorem discendi animum* and pursued those studies which teach us to bear *utramque fortunam*, success and misfortune, with moderation.

Another favourite idea of the humanists was also connected with Fortune. Poggio took great pride in the fact that only literary monuments saved the deeds and virtues of the high and mighty from oblivion.[67] The point is stressed in his letter to King Alfonso, Ton. 13,228 s.a.

> *omnia superiorum principum gesta et virtutes in oblivione ac tenebris obscuras fuisse futuras, nisi litterarum lumine in memoriam hominum atque in lucem educerentur . . . fortune arbitrio sunt subiecta; sole littere supra fortunam sunt, et prestant famam egregiorum principum immortalem.*

These praises of learning as the school of virtue, which raises men above Fortune's fickle power, could be multiplied from Poggio's correspondence and dialogues. Their frequency suggests that this was one of his most firmly held convictions, as it was of the other humanists, too. It served both as justification for their *studia humanitatis* and as a source of pride for their important social role.

Poggio's alleged pessimism

Poggio, then, held an optimistic view of *virtus* and *fortuna*, which he summed up in a letter: *Quamvis autem omnibus in rebus nostris fortuna, ut ille* (scil., Sallust, Catil. 8,1, cp. p. 37 n. 36) *inquit, dominetur, tamen plerumque videmus virtuti locum esse*, Ton. 14, 256 s.a. But this view seems to disagree with the two works in which Fortune was of primary

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[67] This was a commonplace in humanist literature. Cp., e.g. P. Vergerio, Epistolario, 1934, LXXXI 192, a. 1397: *lateret apud inferos incognitus Hercules . . . nisi poetarum fabule eum figmentaque celebrasset.* Again, Troy, Odysseus, Alexander, Thebes, Pharsalia *nonne nuda hec essent nomina . . . nisi que mortalia natura fuerant, divinis ingeniis immortalia redderentur?* A little later, 197: *in illorum* (scil., the princes) *gestis plerumque dominetur fortuna, in horum* (scil., the humanists) *studiis minimum; neque enim in rebus ingenii ullum est ius fortune.*

importance, De varietate fortune and De miseria humane conditionis, published in 1448 and 1455, respectively. Both seem to suggest a pessimistic outlook, showing mankind as the plaything of irrational forces of *fortuna*. It is especially the latter dialogue which has recently been interpreted as an expression of Poggio's pessimism, his concern for the miseries of the great majority of mankind, his repudiation of Stoic virtue and acceptance of the Christian doctrine of original sin and grace.[68]

VF is undoubtedly a cavalcade of kingdoms and cities, kings and princes, Popes and cardinals etc. tossed up, but mostly cast down, by *fortuna*. It is also true that *virtus* as a remedy of Fortune is rarely mentioned in this dialogue. But VF is only an illustration of the fact that people who hanker after *fortune bona*, riches, power, status, fall victims to her fickleness and malignity. There is nothing to suggest that *virtus* would be of no avail against her.

The theme of the work is explicitly stated in the dedication to Pope Nicholas V, a great friend of humanism, Urb. Lat. 224, 2v—3; VF 3—4. God has, it is true, raised the majesty of papacy *extra fortune arbitrium*. However, because of their possessions, which are *fortune iuri subdita*, a few of the Popes have been tossed about *fortune impetu*. This of course means that Fortune, mistress of the external things, holds sway over the Popes as terrestrial potentates. But Nicholas V is not subject to *fortune vires*, possessing as he does great knowledge of theology and moral philosophy, together with *summa prudentia* and *sapientia*. Nevertheless, he will be made still more cautious by these *preteritorum casus, et exempla, in quibus fortune violentia crassata est*. Reading these books may teach him that the safest policy is to act *modice* in the things in which *plus fortuna, quam ratio, aut consilium possit*.[69]

VF is thus a collection of *exempla* especially for high-placed people not to trust Fortune, to act with moderation in success and with fortitude

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[68] C. Trinaus, In Our Image and Likeness, Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought 1 (1970) 258sqq.

[69] These ideas were repeated in his letter to the Pope a. 1449, Ton. 10,13sq.: Learning fosters virtue, which teaches restraint of desires and care of salvation. Obeying the precepts of virtue we can enjoy enduring happiness, whereas power and riches and *alia bona quibus fortuna dominatur* are fragile, weak, temporary, in truth *infelicitatis instrumenta*.

and patience in adversity. As a matter of fact, it is mostly the ambiguity of success that Poggio is anxious to bring home to his readers. Though this may imply the classical idea of hybris and nemesis, Poggio does not seem to have given much attention to this aspect of *fortuna*. One instance may be the description of the downfall of the nephews of Bonifacius IX after the Pope's death: they were *adeo inflati presentium rerum felicitate, ut ipsam qua stabant, fortunam contemnerent, ignari que fata eos manerent*, Urb. Lat. 224, 28—28v.; VF 81. Though *indulgentia fortune* first made them the envy of all, she was ultimately as deceitful to them as to others, *cum eos quos antea tam claros conspicuosque ediderat, mestos deinde ac sordidatos redderet*. But even here, Fortune is not represented as acting vengefully because of these people's arrogance. She casts them down because fickleness is inherent in her nature.[70]

In the new preface to Book Three, the theme of VF is once again set forth: in the examples above Poggio had tried to show that the vicissitudes of the external things were due to what is in general called *fortuna*. Any one surveying these examples with an unbiased mind will be convinced of the truth of Sallust's saying *qua voluit omni re fortunam dominari* (Catil. 8,1; cp. p. 37 n. 36). But he will also perceive the immense stupidity of people, who in this famous theatre of Fortune observe her fickleness yet headstrong and unarmed enter the hard battle , *relictis veris animi bonis, in quibus nullum possidet ius fortuna*, Urb. Lat. 224, 30; VF 85. People ought to crave the good things of Fortune with greater moderation and caution when they see her *impetus* so often frustrate all our hopes and forestall all our plans. But Poggio resignedly states that *nulla ratio, nulla exempla* deter us *per ambitionem* from preferring the goods of Fortune to *virtus* and *ratio*. Hence his conclusion that *hominum vesania auctoritatem tribuit fortune*.

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[70] The hybris of the rulers is mentioned in the dialogue *De infelicitate principum*, 1440, according to which princes are very unhappy since they trust to Fortune and rarely follow virtue. One consequence of this is the fact that they will be blinded by Fortune, who is herself represented as blind: *libidine enim pro ratione abutuntur . . . quo fit, ut posthabita honesti cura, cum ad vitia deflectantur, sepissime de statu rerum cadant, et a fortuna deserantur*, 412. But in contrast to original Greek hybris, the downfall is due to psychological factors and not to divine justice. Here as in many other passages, Fortune is more a literary ornament than a real cause of events.

Though more pessimistic than some other passages in which *virtus* is presented as an antidote to *fortuna*, there is no suggestion here of Fortune as an irresistible force. Fortune may crush a man in the external things but not in spirit, provided he makes proper use of reason and of the teachings of moral philosophy and history, which is a storehouse of moral *exempla*. If Fortune enjoys great authority, this is due to the folly of mankind, not to Fortune's inherent power.

Apart from the general advice of not trusting Fortune, Poggio is not very specific about the beneficial consequences of trusting to virtue. This lack of specific details is characteristic of him as it is of the humanists in general (see p. 44). But occasionally he is more explicit. Beginning the story of Cardinal Giovanni Cornetano, he admits it to demonstrate *in rebus humanis plus fortune arbitrium, quam ingenium posse*, Urb. Lat. 224, 38v.; VF 110, but corrects this dark vision by maintaining that everybody, and especially men who aspire after power, should try to secure *virtus . . . quod unum firmissimum est adversus fortune impetus munimentum.* Here *virtus* clearly denotes moderation, for Poggio writes that it gains the benevolence of people and secures the stability of power, whereas *vitia* subvert it. The next sentence is intriguing: *Ea* (scil., *vitia*) *licet quandoque declinent hominum penas, nunquam summi dei, tamen presens magis quam futura . . . ultio exoptatur.* Though vice may sometimes escape human punishment, God will certainly act as the revenger sooner or later. Fortune and God are opposite forces here, amoral Fortune reigning in the world to a certain extent. This passsage is a further instance of the lack of clear vision often observable in Poggio's ideas of the causation of events, in the last analysis ascribable to the imperfect fusing of classical and Christian ideas (see p. 40).

VF, though recording countless examples of Fortune's malignity and capriciousness, does not disagree with Poggio's elitist and humanist view of the possibility of mastering Fortune if men only resort to the precepts of moral philosophy available in the classics.

There can be no denying that Poggio's last dialogue, De miseria humane conditionis, is more pessimistic and in places more Christian than his earlier discussions of virtue and Fortune. The debate is conducted by three interlocutors, Cosimo de' Medici, Matteo Palmieri, a Florentine humanist, chiefly memorable for his Della vita civile, and Poggio. Cosimo

advocates the optimistic view. Though admitting the power of Fortune, he asserts that with the aid of reason, that gift of God, man can by his own free will muster strength to resist the onslaught of *fortuna*. Only the stupid give in to her, 90sq. This view of Cosimo coincides with Poggio's as described above. It is essentially the traditional classical doctrine of Cicero and Seneca.

Matteo views the problem from the Christian angle. Man is miserable because the consequences of Adam's fall, 89. There are, it is true, a few predestined to beatitude in this and the future life, but they are saved by God's grace, not by their own resources, 101. This is of course the well-known Augustinian dogma.

In the dialogue Poggio is standing between the Stoicism of Cosimo and the Augustinianism of Matteo. He criticizes Cosimo for his over-optimistic view of the human condition and for his ignorance of the misery of the great majority of mankind. The exceptions, the men who by resorting to *ratio* and *virtus* overcome Fortune, are very few indeed. The Stoic wise does not exist: *imbecilles sumus natura omnes, neque ulla sapientia obsistimus fortune temeritati, que cum in suam nos ditionem arbitriumque redegit, infinitis pene miseriis sursum deorsum pro arbitrio versat*, 95. He quotes from Sallust, Cicero and Theophrastus select passages which maintain Fortune's superiority over reason.[71] He admits *animum . . . virtute preditum nulli miserie subesse*, but redresses this by arguing that *externa bona que sue* (scil., *fortune*) *iuris existunt* can afflict such a man with much suffering, 96. This criticism or modification of Stoic *virtus* is quite similar to the passage from VF 31 discussed above (p. 46).

To understand Poggio's angle of view in the dialogue, the next passage is crucial: *Non enim nobis sapiens stoicus queritur, qui in tauro Phalaridis futurus sit beatus, sed de communi hominum natura, deque publica totius humani generis miseria disputamus.* In other words, he considers the problem of virtue and Fortune not from his accustomed elitist view but from a broader point of view encompassing the high and the low alike. Hence his ironical description of the Stoic Wise, who would be happy even in the brazen bull of Phalaris.

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[71] Sall. Catil. 8,1; Cic. Att. 14,13,3 (not literal) and 14,17,1; Theophrastus from Cic. Tusc. 5,25. The same quotations were found in VF, see p. 28, 31 above.

It is certainly difficult to judge the opinions expressed in a dialogue. To what extent do they conform with the author's views? Now it is obvious that the above passage voices ideas not altogether alien to Poggio the author. He was no harsh Stoic but rather a peripatetic, who conceded some value to the external goods, too. Hence the argument, illustrated with classical examples, that even men celebrated for their *virtus* suffered from misfortunes and adversities, 96sq., does not jar with his philosophy. The view that we should rather consider the sum total of human suffering than a few exceptional individuals, however, clashes with Poggio's usual elitist stance, which despised *vulgus* of any origin.

To understand the real drift of the dialogue we must consider the preface, where Poggio the author speaks in person, and the peroration, which draws the conclusions from the discourse. Both show that there is no serious break with Poggio's views as expressed in his other works. In the preface he states his purpose to be to demonstrate that all our anxieties and miseries come *a fortune donis*, which are specious and deceptive. The only antidote to this is moderation, the restraint of desires and ambition. Rejecting *commercium cum fortune donis* we may acquire physical and mental well-being. The treatise was accordingly composed in the same didactic spirit as was VF. If its purpose had merely been to show that men were helpless victims of Fortune, to be saved if at all only by God's grace, it would certainly have been written in vain.

It is equally significant that Cosimo and not Poggio or Matteo sums up the debate. Thus it was the ideas voiced by him that were meant to linger on in the memory of the reader. That they coincided with Poggio's is evident from their correspondence with the preface and with similar ideas in Poggio's other works. Cosimo admits that human life is frail and uncertain and the goods of Fortune transitory, 130. Hence we should spurn the sensual pleasures and by following reason and virtue secure genuine freedom and peace of mind. There is no difference between Poggio's arguments in the preface and Cosimo's words here. Further, Cosimo maintains that virtue advises us to despise superfluous wealth and to make use of *fortuita bona* as if they had only been lent to us, to be returned at the discretion of the creditor. This illustrates the idea that the goods of Fortune can never be enjoyed in perpetuity.

Even adverse Fortune can be useful since it gives us chance to put our

virtus to the test, an idea clearly lifted from Seneca (see p. 46). Optimistically, Cosimo declares: *Non est tam valida fortune vis, ut a forti et constanti viro non superetur*, 131. Even if she takes from us *opes, vires, valitudinem, uxorem, liberos*, the mind will be free of her power.

But the same incomplete mingling of classical and Christian ideas as elsewhere (p. 40 , 53) is evident here, too. The next sentence urges us to accept with equanimity the loss of Fortune's gifts, seeing that all is due to the Providence of God, who knows what is best for us. It is true that the equation of *fortuna* with Providence was an accepted Christian expedient to incorporate *fortuna* into Christian doctrine, but Poggio makes extremely rare use of it.

Cosimo winds up by once more stressing the freedom of will. It is our own choice to follow reason and virtue and thus to attain happiness or to hanker after riches and power, which bring only misfortunes and great unhappiness to most people.

The optimistic view of the possibility of defying Fortune, then, remained with Poggio to the end. But no doubt he had grown more sceptical of the ability of the great majority of people of any social origin to attain that wisdom which would make them invulnerable to Fortune's arrows. It is equally true that his sense of realism had made him increasingly aware of the dark realities of life and of the wretched condition of most people. Poggio seems also to have been aware of the fact that the celebrated Stoic virtue was often a mere boast. Even the wise could be crushed by great misfortunes. While Cosimo sometimes sounded unduly optimistic, Poggio's discourses thus provided the necessary correction. Matteo voiced the traditional Christian view, which Poggio of course could no repudiate but which was of little importance for him.

Conclusion

Although the basic idea of meeting excessive good *fortuna* by moderation and restraint, and adverse *fortuna* by fortitude and patience is similar in Poggio and Seneca as it is in Petrarch, Poggio's *virtus* is clearly less rigorous than Seneca's. Whereas Seneca exhorts the reader to battle against Fortune to test and strengthen one's *virtus*, Poggio mainly advises

avoiding Fortune as much as possible. Resignation is better than open challenge. Clearly *virtus* had lost something of its original meaning of "manly courage". Moreover, it had acquired a Christian connotation because it was also thought to secure salvation.

Bibliography

With few exceptions, Poggio's extant works have been reprinted in facsimile in 1962—69, Opera Omnia a cura di R. Fubini. The only new edition so far is that of his correspondence, still in progress, by Helene Harth. The following abbreviations have been used:

Harth = Lettere 1, 1984, and 2, 1985, by Helene Harth.
HF = Historia florentina, printed in 1715, reprinted in Opera Omnia 2.
Mis. hum. = De miseria humane conditionis, printed in 1538, reprinted in Opera Omnia 1.
Ton. = T. de Tonellis, Epistolae 1—3, printed in 1832—61, reedited by Harth (partly), reprinted in Opera Omnia 3.
VF, see note 13.