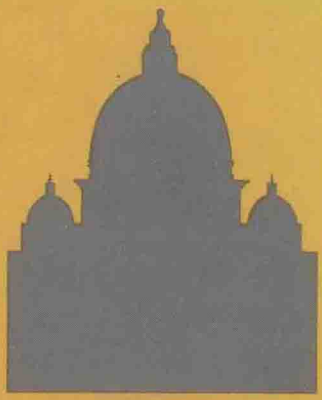
Selected Writings with Critical Introductions: PETRARCA • VALLA • FICINO • PICO • POMPONAZZI • VIVES



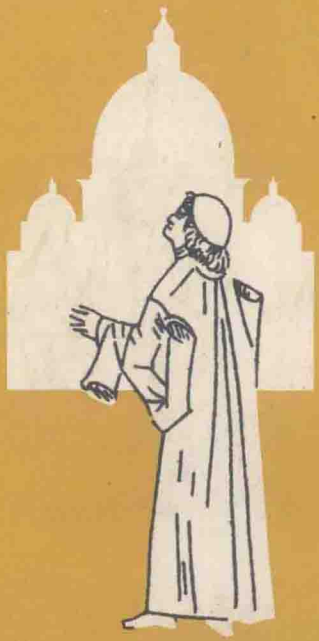
THE RENAISSANCE PHILOSOPHY OF MAN

Edited by

ERNST CASSIRER

PAUL OSKAR KRISTELLER

JOHN HERMAN RANDALL, Jr.



PHOENIX BOOKS
P1 $3.95

PETRARCA · VALLA · FICINO · PICO · POMPONAZZI · VIVES

The Renaissance Philosophy of Man

Selections in translation, edited by

ERNST CASSIRER · PAUL OSKAR KRISTELLER

JOHN HERMAN RANDALL, JR.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS

CHICAGO & LONDON

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS, CHICAGO 60637
The University of Chicago Press, Ltd., London

82 81 80 79 78 18 17 16 15 14

ISBN: 0-226-09603-3 (clothbound)
0-226-09604-1 (paperbound)
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 48-9358

PREFACE

THE purpose of this volume is to acquaint the student of philosophy with certain major thinkers of the early Italian Renaissance through English translations of some of their more important works. To understand any author, the best way is to read his writings in the original, the second best is to read them in a faithful translation, the worst is to rely upon short summaries found in reference works or in textbooks. Most of the treatises included in this volume have never before been published in an English version. The only exceptions are certain letters of Petrarca; Pico's *Oration*, of which another translation appeared last year in *View* magazine, long after the present one had been ready for publication; and Pomponazzi's treatise on immortality, the present translation of which, now out of print, was published privately in 1938 at Haverford, Pennsylvania, and is now republished with the translator's permission and in a revised version approved by him. It is hoped that these translations will prove useful even to those able to read the original texts, especially since some of the latter are not easily accessible.

While this volume was being prepared for publication, one of the editors who had taken an active part in its planning suddenly passed away. The death of Ernst Cassirer will be a serious loss for the readers of this volume, since he had promised to contribute a general introduction from his pen. Conscious that they are not able to supply what he left undone, the remaining editors have tried to fill the gap as well as they could.

PAUL OSKAR KRISTELLER
JOHN HERMAN RANDALL, JR.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
NEW YORK CITY

CONTENTS

V. PIETRO POMPONAZZI

Translated by William Henry Hay II, revised by John Herman Randall, Jr., and annotated by Paul Oskar Kristeller

VI. JUAN LUIS VIVES

Translated by Nancy Lenkeith

SELECTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY

INDEX

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

By PAUL OSKAR KRISTELLER *and*
JOHN HERMAN RANDALL, JR.

THE period of the Renaissance, which we take to extend from about the middle of the fourteenth century to the end of the sixteenth, has been widely admired and studied for the great changes it witnessed in society and the church and for its achievements in the arts and in literature, in the sciences and in classical learning. But it has not attracted much interest, especially its earlier phases, from students of philosophy. The studies that have been devoted to the thinkers of the early Renaissance are hardly known outside a small circle of specialists.

The reasons for this neglect are not hard to understand. The Renaissance produced no philosopher of the very first importance; and, once a thinker acquires the reputation of not being "great," his chances of being read and studied are slight indeed, in a day when influential writers and educators are reiterating that we need read nothing but their own books and the hundred greatest works of world literature. Moreover, many students of philosophy are convinced that the progress of science and thought since the seventeenth century has superseded everything that came before, with the possible exception of Plato and Aristotle. For their part, the admirers and followers of medieval philosophy are often inclined to think that the impressive development which culminated in the thirteenth century with Thomas Aquinas was followed by a period of complete decay and disintegration.

We are convinced, however, that a reader whose curiosity extends beyond the limits of a strictly rationed intellectual diet is

likely to be rewarded and that the works of many so-called minor thinkers, including those of the early Renaissance, deserve attention and study for the intrinsic interest of their ideas. Moreover, such lesser thinkers fill in the historical vacuum left between the greater minds, and thus they help us to understand them and to see their relations to one another. A mountain climber cannot jump directly from one peak to the next. On the way he must traverse many valleys and ascend lower foothills, which also command interesting vistas and are still high enough in comparison with the plains far behind.

The philosophical literature of the Renaissance is in fact rich and diversified, and its extent appears still greater if we include the writings of theologians, scientists, artists, historians, and classical scholars that are of related interest to the student of intellectual history. To give a complete picture of this whole literature would be impossible within the limits of a single book. The present volume aims to illustrate merely one part of the entire period—the earlier Italian Renaissance. The opening phase was first selected because its contribution to philosophical thought is comparatively unknown. It was then determined to emphasize Italian thinkers, since during that period Italy held a dominating place in many fields of culture, and since several intellectual impulses then originated in that country were later transmitted to the rest of Europe. Our selection does not presume to minimize the contributions made during the later Renaissance, or in other lands, or in other fields of thought and literature. On the contrary, it is hoped that some of these other aspects of Renaissance thought will be treated in further volumes of the present series.

The philosophical thought of the early Italian Renaissance may be grouped into three major currents or traditions: Humanism, Platonism, and Aristotelianism.

To understand the Humanistic movement, it would be well to remember that during the Italian Renaissance the term "Humanism" denoted primarily a specific intellectual program and

only incidentally suggested the more general set of values which have in recent times come to be called "humanistic." Humanism appeared in Italy toward the end of the thirteenth century. It was in part an outgrowth of the earlier traditions of professional teaching in rhetoric and grammar in the medieval Italian schools. However, the emphasis on classical studies, which was to remain the distinctive characteristic of the Humanism of the Renaissance, was a new development that may have been encouraged by influences from France and from Byzantium. The earlier beginnings of the movement were very modest. Petrarca, who was not so much its initiator as its first major representative, may still be called the "father of Humanism," since his authority and influence gave the whole movement a strong impulse. He was followed by a great number of other Humanists who, during the fifteenth century and later, exercised an extremely important influence on the cultural life of Italy. After the middle of the fifteenth century, Humanism spread to the other European countries, where it reached its climax during the sixteenth.

The major concern of the Humanists was an educational and cultural program based on the study of the classical Greek and Latin authors. In dealing with these texts, they elaborated methods of historical and philological criticism which contributed greatly to the later developments of these disciplines. Yet the interest of the Humanists in the classics was not merely scholarly but also served a practical purpose. They emphasized the ideal of literary elegance and considered the imitation of the Roman authors the best way of learning to speak and to write well in prose and in verse. Moreover, admiration for the classical models extended from their form to their content, and it became increasingly fashionable to quote their words and to restate their ideas. At the same time the demands of the present were by no means neglected for a search after the distant past. The Humanists tried and managed to express the concrete circumstances of

their own life and their personal thoughts and feelings in a language and a style largely borrowed from classical models.

The interests of the Humanists ranged from rhetoric and poetry to history and moral philosophy. Work in each of these fields comprised both the study of the appropriate classical authors and the composition of original writings patterned on their model. For this group of disciplines the scholars of the time, following certain ancient precedents, coined the comprehensive term, *Studia Humanitatis*, or "the Humanities," and hence called themselves "Humanists." It is from this designation that nineteenth-century historians derived the term "Humanism." Although "the Humanities" is merely another name for these particular studies, the choice of the term implies a claim very characteristic of the cultural and educational ideal of the Humanists: the cultivation of the classics or "the Humanities" is justified because it serves to educate and to develop a desirable type of human being. For the classics represent the highest level of human achievement and should hence be of primary concern for every man.

It is for this reason, as Petrarca's words clearly show, that the Humanists profess to despise the study of logic and of natural philosophy, so much cultivated during the preceding centuries. Yet the polemic of the Humanists against the teaching of the schools was largely a struggle between one field of learning and others and not, as it often appears, between a new philosophy and an old. On the other hand, the opposition to medieval logic and natural philosophy found in many of the Humanists was far from being an opposition to the Church or to the Christian religion. The teaching of the medieval Italian universities was scientific and often anticlerical in its interests, and to such interests the Humanists were opposing their own religious and moral aims. Petrarca, in posing as the defender of religion against the atheism of his Averroist opponents, or Valla, in appealing from philosophical reason to blind faith, is obviously trying to detach theology from its dangerous link with Aristotelian natural phi-

losophy and metaphysics and to join it instead with his own different type of learning, with eloquence or with Humanistic studies. This religious tendency was strong among many of the Humanists and found its culmination in the Christian Humanism of Erasmus.

The literary production of the Humanists makes clear that their interest in philosophy was but secondary and was limited primarily to the field of ethics. Compared with the enormous number of translations, commentaries, poems, speeches, letters, and historical, grammatical, and rhetorical works they composed, their treatises and dialogues on moral subjects are of slight extent or importance. Their direct contribution to philosophy must hence be called rather modest. But their indirect contribution is much greater. They influenced the style and form of philosophical literature; they vaguely formulated new problems that furnished material to the thought of more serious thinkers; they made available a considerable number of ancient philosophical texts not known to the Middle Ages; and, with the help of these new sources, they encouraged a great deal of philosophical eclecticism or paved the way for the revival of several ancient philosophies besides Aristotle's. The Humanistic movement, with the classicism it brought about, is the most pervasive element of Renaissance culture. Its influence may be traced in every country and in almost every field of intellectual endeavor. Its cultural and educational ideal survived long after the Renaissance, at least until the end of the eighteenth century; and certain faint traces of it are still discernible in the midst of our own "progressive" age.

For those who demanded a more intellectual philosophy, there was Plato, the natural refuge of those fleeing Aristotle and his fundamentally scientific interests. Most of the Humanists had rejected this scientific interest for other concerns, practical, artistic, and at bottom religious. What they objected to in the organized Aristotelian learning of the universities was not its synthesis with religious values, and certainly not any other-

worldliness and asceticism. It was rather in behalf of a purer and deeper religious life that Humanists on both sides of the Alps opposed Aristotle. The Neo-Platonism of the Florentine Academy or the "philosophy of Christ" of an Erasmus or a Lefèvre d'Étaples is a turning-away from scientific questions to the problems of the moral life and the religious imagination.

Platonism was the most imposing alternative to the Aristotelian schools, the one best adapted to a religious revival and best combining the imaginative values of religion with the values of a humane life. Platonism had already long been thoroughly Christianized in the familiar Augustinian tradition, which had dominated medieval thought until well into the thirteenth century and had persisted thereafter side by side with a Christianized Aristotelianism. Duns Scotus had dressed up the essential Augustinian and Platonic theses in an Aristotelian terminology, and Scotism continued as the prevailing conservative, theological, and metaphysical philosophy in the Italian schools. Moreover, Augustine dominates all the various currents of religious revival and reform from the mystics and Cusanus onward. It was but natural for the grammarians of the Renaissance, leading an educational revolt, in behalf of an emerging type of culture, against the vested interests, the complacency and the academic conservatism of the professional intellectuals, to go behind him to his intellectual sources in the Platonic tradition. And it was equally natural that what they found, even when they read Plato's own words, should be still primarily the religious, Neo-Platonic Plato—Plotinus rather than the dialogues as we understand them today, and Augustine rather than Plotinus.

Yet the Renaissance Platonists were now in a position to appreciate something of the humanistic, artistic, and imaginative side of Plato. Intellectually they were indeed left with a theological Neo-Platonism, with the Christian world view minus its Oriental values, its dualism, and its need for magic—with a single Truth, Platonic in philosophy, Christian in theology, and humanistic in values. And yet the Renaissance did manage to make

its Platonism an artistic way of life, a this-worldly religion of the imagination—attractive in contour and wistfully reminiscent of another world, like the Platonism of Botticelli's pencil and, like it also, thin and disembodied and ever trembling on the verge of the Christian mystery. With wider horizons, it grew eclectic and universal, embraced the love of perfection wherever it might be discerned, and identified it with the essence of Christian faith.

When Petrarca, combatting the naturalism, the rationalism, and the scientific interests of the Averroists, opposed Plato to the authority of Aristotle and the Commentator, he did not know too much about Plato's philosophy, though he was thoroughly familiar with Augustine. But he at least formulated a program which found its first fulfilment in the translation of certain of Plato's dialogues by the early Humanists. To this was added the influence of Byzantine Platonism, when Pletho and Bessarion came to Italy and made a strong impression on the Italian scholars of their time.

Nicholas of Cusa may in a sense be called the first Western Platonist of the Renaissance. But his influence during the Renaissance, especially during the early period, while suggested by similarities of thought, is very difficult to establish. More specifically, this title belongs to Marsilio Ficino, leader of the Platonic Academy of Florence, which became, after the middle of the fifteenth century, the most important center of Platonic influence in Western Europe. Ficino's Platonism was in many ways a product of the Humanistic movement. Humanistic are his style and the literary form of many of his works, the sources he used and the way he made them available, and even some of the problems that determined his philosophical thought. Yet Ficino was more than a mere Humanist who happened to be interested in Plato. He was a thinker who was attracted by the thought of Plato and of the ancient Neo-Platonists. Consequently, he was not, like most of the Humanists, opposed to the traditions of the medieval schools but was strongly influenced by

them. His terminology, his method of arguing, and much of the subject matter of his philosophy are clearly derived from medieval philosophy, theology, and medicine, with which he probably became familiar as a student at the University of Florence. This scholastic heritage is even stronger in Giovanni Pico, the other great representative of the Florentine Academy, who had received part of his training at the universities of Padua and of Paris, and who was also familiar with many of the original sources of medieval Arabic and Jewish philosophy.

Whereas the philosophical thought of the early Humanists was rather amateurish, that of the Florentine Platonists embraced serious if not original metaphysical speculation. Consequently, the influence of Platonism on the later Renaissance, affecting both philosophy and literature, though less extensive was much deeper than that of the Humanistic movement. It consisted not only in the transmission of the works of Plato, Plotinus, and other ancient thinkers, important as this was, but also in an interpretation and restatement of Platonic and Neo-Platonic doctrines which showed originality on many points. This influence can be traced down to the end of the eighteenth century and is still apparent in such thinkers as Berkeley and Coleridge.

The third philosophical current of the Italian Renaissance, the humanistic Aristotelianism of Pomponazzi and Zabarella, sprang from the teaching tradition of the universities and derived in an unbroken line from the academic thinking of the preceding centuries. This Aristotelian tradition, with its central concern for the fields of logic and method, natural philosophy and metaphysics, made its first appearance in Italy toward the end of the thirteenth century. It may have been introduced, together with the writings of John of Jandun, the Latin Averroist, which continued to exert a strong influence on its teachings, from the University of Paris about that time. The physician Pietro d'Abano, early in the fourteenth century, determined the main lines Italian Aristotelianism was to follow. There was a

significant difference between the way Aristotle was taken at Paris and in the Italian universities. In Paris the Aristotelian philosophers were either theologians or students of logic and of natural philosophy in the faculty of arts who had to defend themselves against a powerful theological faculty. The Italian universities long had no faculties of theology; and from the beginning Italian Aristotelianism developed as the preparation for medicine rather than for theology. This type of scientifically oriented philosophical thought was elaborated without interruption far into the period of the Renaissance; it did not reach its culmination until the sixteenth century.

Thus, during the entire Renaissance, Aristotle continued to inspire the vigorous intellectual life of the Italian universities and to dominate the professional teaching of philosophy. The new humanistic tendencies appeared almost as early in that living Aristotelianism as in the Florentine Academy; and they were there allied with and not opposed to an already flourishing scientific movement. Pomponazzi, like Ficino, focused attention on man and his destiny; both emphasized individual and personal values, and in this sense both were humanistic. But where Ficino and the Platonists went back to the Hellenistic world and the religious philosophies of Alexandria, the naturalistic humanism, initiated by Pomponazzi and culminating in Zabarella, built on the long tradition of Italian Aristotelianism an original philosophy in accord with the spirit of the emerging natural science and strikingly anticipatory of Spinoza.

Like most of the Schoolmen from Thomas down, the Italian Aristotelians had regarded Averroes as the chief guide and commentator. But, unlike Thomas and the theologians, they had little motive to disagree with him on those points where he followed Aristotle or his Hellenistic commentators rather than the true faith. This version of Aristotle without benefit of clergy is hence known as Latin Averroism. It had accompanied the introduction of Aristotle at Paris in the thirteenth century; when its spokesman, Siger de Brabant, was condemned in 1270 and

1277, and, refuted by the more accommodating modernism of Thomas, it took refuge in the Italian medical schools.

Averroes himself, a physician and judge rather than theologian, had applied a rigid legal method to interpreting Aristotle. But struggling with Arabic texts, and relying on the Neo-Platonic Hellenistic commentators, he found much cosmic mysticism and pantheism in his philosopher. Creation is eternal, by emanations; there is no creation in time, and hence no first man, no Adam and Eve, no Fall. Matter is eternal, and so is that mysterious Intellect of which Aristotle speaks. It is deathless and unremitting, the Intelligence of the lowest sphere, common to all men and particularizing itself in their individual souls, as light illuminates their bodies. These human intellects live on after death only as moments in the single Intellect of mankind. Hence there is no personal immortality, no heaven or hell, and no last judgment.

These views, whether Aristotelian or no, are obviously not Christian; and the earliest Latin Averroists frankly admitted that the conclusions of reason, philosophy, and Aristotle are not the conclusions of faith. Faith is true, but Aristotle is more interesting, held Siger, taking an irrationalist position. But John of Jandun, recognizing no authority save reason in agreement with experience, and meaning thereby Averroes' Aristotle, maintained all these characteristic Averroistic doctrines as an open rationalist, mocked at faith, and called Thomas a compromising theologian. His writings are satirical and ironical in the Voltairean sense. The fifteenth-century Italian Aristotelians maintained on such matters a less defiant and more Christian Averroism. As the Church, thoroughly tamed in Padua, where anticlerical Venice guaranteed liberty of teaching after 1405, offered no menace, they were not enough concerned with Christianity to be violently anticlerical. But the supremacy of natural reason, the denial of creation and personal immortality, with their theological consequences, and the unity of the intellect were taught in the universities and, we are told, accepted by many Venetian

gentlemen. Such a philosophy expressed with precision the stage of skepticism toward the religious system, of antisupernaturalism rather than of positive naturalism and humanism, which had been reached by the northern Italian cities in the fourteenth century. It attempted a rational defense of the attitude so well expressed in Boccaccio and so horrifying, as the selection here reveals, to Petrarca.

This was a naturalistic and scientific rather than a Humanistic philosophy; its conception of human nature emphasized man's dependence on the world rather than his freedom and glory. And the unity of the Intellect is a collective and impersonal conception, with little scope for the more individualistic and personal values the Humanists prized. It is small wonder that from Petrarca down the Humanists felt in strong opposition to this professional philosophy of the universities and that their own intellectual defenses and rationalizations were developed in contrast to it. As against its Aristotle, they turned to Plato; as against its prevailing anticlericalism, they turned to a free and modernizing religious gospel; as against its scientific interest, they turned to human nature; and, above all, as against its collectivism, they turned to the dignity and worth of the human personality. The personal immortality of the soul became the banner under which men fought for more individualistic and personal values. And so "spiritual" Florence set out on a crusade against naturalistic Venice. But it was not against medieval asceticism and otherworldliness that their philosophy was aimed; it was against a scientific rationalism in the name of a more personal interpretation of the world. And the answer of the Aristotelians was not to abandon their naturalism but to introduce into it just those individualistic values it had hitherto lacked. Thus the two great philosophic rivals in early sixteenth-century Italy are a naturalistic and an imaginative and religious humanism, with the former widespread and rapidly increasing in strength.

The thinker who opposed the earlier impersonal and collec-