# Humanist Lives of Classical Philosophers and the Idea of Renaissance Secularization: Virtue, Rhetoric, and the Orthodox Sources of Unbelief

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*Humanists seeking to defend the classics in Christian-dominated Europe often reframed ancient philosophers as virtuous proto-Christians. This is particularly visible in the biographical paratexts written for printed editions of ancient philosophers such as Pythagoras, Epictetus, and Democritus, whose humanist editors' Christianizing claims grew stronger over time. Pious humanists intended and expected the classics to strengthen and reaffirm Christian orthodoxy, but humanists' own claims that pre-Christian sages, by the light of reason alone, had deduced the central truths of theology and surpassed Christians in the exercise of virtue inadvertently undermined the necessity of scripture and paved the way for later deism.*

## INTRODUCTION

THE STUDY OF Renaissance humanism persistently faces questions about humanism's connections to later radical movements, such as Enlightenment deism, atheism, and especially ideas of modernity.[1] A secularizing narrative, which characterizes Renaissance humanism as a rationalist, irreligious, modernizing movement, standing on the brink of modernity and linked somehow to

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[1] On this debate see Robichaud; Wootton, 1985; *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*; Fubini; McKnight; Baumer; Wagar; Hankins, 2006; Brown, 2010 and 2011; Passannante; Davidson, 2015; G. Buckley; Sheppard.

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modern notions of secular humanism, seems ineradicable.[2] Many are the rebuttals to this narrative,[3] including the foundational studies by Paul Oskar Kristeller and Charles Trinkaus,[4] later chronologies that locate the birth of modern radical thought in the seventeenth century,[5] and cases for a pious Renaissance. The latter have labored to demonstrate that humanists read the church fathers as voraciously as pagan ancients and very frequently became clerics or entered monastic orders, and not just because the church was the institution best able to offer a secure and honorable livelihood.[6]

While the secularizing narrative, and broader claims about a self-consciously irreligious or secularizing Renaissance, has been exaggerated, there is not nothing to the claim that the radical religious movements that took off powerfully in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had Renaissance roots.[7] Examinations of this question have often taken the form of debates over whether particular Renaissance individuals might have been secret atheists. Discussions have focused on figures who were labeled *atheists* by their contemporaries, such as Gemistius Pletho (1355–1454), Galeotto Marzio (1427–97), Pomponio Leto (1428–98), Pietro Pomponazzi (1462–1525), Machiavelli (1469–1527), and Giordano Bruno (1548–1600), but such discussions are complicated by the tendency of premodern authors to use the term *atheism* as a label for many divergent

[2] Denis Robichaud observes how such zealous theists as Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola are often claimed as predecessors in modern works on secular thought. See Robichaud, 182. Discussions of the secularizing narrative have been recently reignited by Stephen Greenblatt's *The Swerve*. See reviews such as Monfasani; Caferro; Hinch.

[3] I use *secular* and *secularizing* here in their modern sense, referring to ideas or movements separate from or opposed to religious thought or institutions. This is a strictly modern usage, one very different from the medieval and Renaissance use of *secular* to denote the temporal and finite in contrast with the divine and eternal.

[4] Kristeller, 1993; Trinkaus. See also Febvre; Wootton, 1988; O'Malley, Izbicki, and Christianson; Hankins, 2016 and 2017.

[5] For chronologies focused on the seventeenth century see M. Buckley; Beech and Roberts, 54–58; Wallace; Hill; McGregor and Reay; Bradstock. Scholars who accept a seventeenth-century turning point still frequently point to a Renaissance prehistory, as in Luiz Lima's characterization that "between the medieval prevalence of religion and a full secularization of life there stands the 'magical' science of the Renaissance": Lima, 91.

[6] See Kristeller, 1970; Dionisotti, 1960 and 1967. Humanist interest in church authorities was also the focus of Antony Grafton's Margaret Mann Phillips Lecture, "Renaissance Humanism and Christian Antiquity: Philology, Fantasy, and Collaboration," delivered at the Renaissance Society of America Annual Meeting in Berlin, 27 March 2015.

[7] See my earlier work on the reception of Lucretius: Palmer, 2014.

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heterodoxies including theist ones.[8] Yet, even if such debates were soluble, two or twenty secret radicals are not, in my view, the best place to seek humanist contributions to later radical movements. Rather, I argue that the mainstream activities of pious humanists generated a new way of imagining the relationship between classical thought and Christianity, which—in the absence of any active desire to undermine theism or dismantle the church—created one of the tools that enabled later deism and similar radical movements.

My approach here is similar to that employed by Alan C. Kors in seeking the "orthodox sources" of unbelief.[9] Kors has demonstrated how Scholastics, taking the existence of God as a test case with a known correct answer, practiced the art of logic by debating on paper with fictitious mock atheists.[10] In such exercises, stout believers generated numerous antitheist arguments, which then became fuel for later radicalism. Lucien Febvre recommends a similar approach, observing that, since premodern radicals, especially atheists, were wary of persecution and therefore intentionally evasive about their beliefs in their own writings, it can be more fruitful to seek not radicals, but the intellectual apparatus necessary to support radical ideas. This apparatus includes related beliefs or tools of reasoning that accompany or enable doubt or new movements, what Febvre characterized as the "intellectual habitat" capable of supporting that rare and evasive beast, the early atheist.[11]

While Kors and Febvre concentrated on atheism, my examination will focus on the roots and habitat of deism, and of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century theist arguments against the necessity of revelation or organized religion. These movements required much the same intellectual habitat that fostered skepticism, libertinism, and atheism, but were more acceptable and widespread than such extreme radicalisms as atheism. My study has a recent parallel in the recent work of Ruben Buys, who has argued that fundamentally theist Dutch radicals of Spinoza's circle owed much to rationalist techniques pioneered by ploddingly pious Reformation theologians of the sixteenth century, who would never had expected their defenses of the faith to have such consequences.[12] My present attempt to expose the similarly inadvertent radical consequences of pious humanist activities draws upon a modest and uncontroversial body of sources: Renaissance biographies of classical philosophers.

[8] See, for example, Woodhouse. On premodern uses of the term *atheist* see Palmer, 2014, 1, 21–25; Bullivant, 11–20; Robichaud, 181; Wagar; Sheppard, 14–40; *Atheism from the Reformation to the Enlightenment*, especially Wootton, 1992; Davidson, 1992; Smith.

[9] Kors, 1990, continued in Kors, 2016a and 2016b.

[10] Kors, 1990, esp. 81–109 (chapter 3, "Atheism without Atheists").

[11] Febvre. See also Wootton, 1988; Kors, 1990, 7–11.

[12] Buys, 2013 and 2015.

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## GRAND CLAIMS IN MODEST BIOGRAPHIES

In 1558 the French jurist and humanist Jean de Coras (1515–72)—best known today for his account of the trial of Martin Guerre—wrote a short description of the life of the Stoic philosopher Epictetus (55–135 CE). Discussing Epictetus's famous maxim "sustain and abstain," De Coras wrote:

> Great words, and worthy to be inscribed on all rings, walls, marbles, and columns of this world . . . from which it seems that [Epictetus] lacked nothing other than a baptism and Jesus Christ, because these sayings, divinely Christian and Christianly divine, in a few words encapsulate the law, and the prophets, and that which Saint Paul himself worked hardest to accomplish, namely to fortify us to be peaceful, forbearing, to not plunge into vengeance, but to support one another, to abstain utterly from coveting bad things, and not to defile ourselves in carnal lust; for from such things arise the schisms and wars among the Christians.[13]

This deeply pious and apologetic account of Epictetus's virtue and orthodoxy is typical of humanist efforts to defend the study of pagan authors in a Christian-dominated world, where their obsession with pre-Christian antiquity never stopped arousing suspicion. De Coras went on to write that Epictetus's sect was the Cynic sect, founded by Antisthenes (445–365 BCE), the pupil of Socrates, and here the mismatch between De Coras's antiquity and a modern understanding of antiquity becomes apparent. Scholars now label Epictetus a Stoic, not a Cynic, and this kind of conflation is one of the elements that makes Renaissance biographies of classical philosophers such rich sources for investigating the imagined antiquity that humanists aspired to imitate—an antiquity that differs greatly from today's. To give another choice example, Girolamo Borgia (1475–1550) in his vita of Lucretius (ca. 1503) expanded Jerome's four-word statement that Cicero edited (*emendavit*) the *De Rerum Natura* (On the nature of things)[14] into the claim that Lucretius went regularly to Cicero's house, meet-

[13] De Coras, 13–15 (*La vie d'Epictetus Philosophe*): "Soutiens & Abstiens. Sustine, & Abstine. Parolles certes grandes, & dignes dêtre entaillees, en tous les anneaux, murales, marbres, & colomnes de ce monde . . . en quoi semble, qu'il n'aiê eu besoing, que d'un bâtême: & d'un Iesuchrist. car ces sentences divinement Chretiennes, & Chretiennement divines, en peu de parolles, comprennent la loi, & les prophétes. & ce en quoi aussi S. Pol, se travaille le plus. C'êt à sçavoir à nous fortifier, d'être paciens, & longanimes. de ne nous précipiter à vengeance. mais supporter les uns, les autres. de n'être point couvoiteux, des choses mauvailes. ni se souiller, en charnelles concupiscences. dê quelles procedent les debats, & les guerres, entre les Chretiens." All translations are my own unless otherwise noted

[14] Eusebius of Caesarea, and Jerome, a. Abr., 1923–24, Helm 149.

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ing there with Atticus, Brutus, Cassius, Memmius, and other Roman luminaries to get Cicero's feedback on each round of freshly composed verses.[15] Such a composition critique group is very unlike anything suggested by ancient sources, but is exactly like what Girolamo Borgia himself did with his teacher Pontano (1426–1502), and what his humanist peers were doing in literary capitals around Italy. These biographies of ancient philosophers are projections—self-portraits—and expose much about how humanists saw themselves, their activities, and their mission.[16]

Even more valuable for this study is that most of these biographies are not formal, independent works, like the lives of Seneca and Socrates by Gianozzo Manetti (1396–1459). Rather, they are short excerpts, usually paratexts written by editors to accompany translations, print editions, or digests of classical material. De Coras's little biography, for example, was written to introduce a fictitious dialogue between Epictetus and the emperor Hadrian. Such short introductions are no scholar's magnum opus but aimed to be enticing and uncontroversial, to open the doors of classrooms to new texts and curricula, and to please and appease censors and other authorities. In such paratexts, humanist authors were on their best behavior, so to speak, striving to present the ancients and the humanist project in the most persuasive, palatable manner possible. Authors often erase even their own authorship in these works, claiming that they are presenting nothing but the learned consensus, while hiding more controversial ideas in footnotes or appendixes, or confining them to their own original treatises.[17] When a humanist innovation such as syncretism appears in one of these paratexts—as when De Coras conflated Cynics with Stoics, and defined the Cynics as a sect focused on the study of the liberal arts, music, geometry, virtuous living, and teaching Plato's doctrines on the immaterial soul—this syncretism is not the work of a firebrand outlier like Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–94).[18] Rather, De Coras's intentionally uncontroversial paratext demonstrates the ambient syncretism present in the general worldview of a scholar who had a comparatively mainstream relationship with antiquity. When such syncretic moves, and other unexpected assumptions

[15] Solaro, 33–34; Palmer, 2014, 148–55.

[16] Garin, 57, discussed the utility of these biographies for investigating Renaissance identity.

[17] This situation may be compared to Diderot's instructions to contributors to the *Encyclopédie*, urging them to conceal their more radical ideas to protect the project from attack; see Kafker, 452–61.

[18] De Coras, 11: "In short they had no other goal than to live according to virtue. And they taught what Plato had left written in a certain place [Plato in *Alcibiades* 1] that to be truly and properly human, the essence of this consists in the spirit, and the rational soul."

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about antiquity, recur in many such minor introductory works, they provide a window on the antiquity humanists believed they were reconstructing.

Paratextual introductions to classics also had a different and substantially broader audience than ambitious humanist treatises such as Marsilio Ficino's (1433–99) *Theologia Platonica*. Editions of ancients were printed and sold in great quantities, welcomed into the libraries of Scholastics, doctors, theologians, and statesmen, and used in many classrooms where few if any modern works were admitted. Thus the paratexts accompanying Seneca or Aristotle might be a first and powerful taste of humanism for a youth sent to university to study for a career in law, or for a young woman studying with a private tutor. Humanists' ongoing campaign to defend the wholesomeness and profitability of the classics was so successful that, increasingly from the sixteenth century on, censors even judged classics more leniently than newer works, granting them an almost protected circulation.[19] Many of Erasmus's (1466–1536) editions of classics circulated in regions where his own original works were banned, and where his very name was required to be expurgated from title pages. Yet his paratexts and the ideas within them—including the life of Seneca in his *Opera Omnia*—made it past the censors with only the author's name excised. Similarly, in the seventeenth century, long after Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) was banned from publishing on politics or philosophy, his translations of Homer were permitted to circulate—translations that carried many Hobbesian concepts encapsulated within them.[20] Hobbes and Erasmus are extreme examples, but many hundreds of lesser-known scholars published their own summaries of the goals of philosophy and the utility of the ancients in introductory vitae and other paratexts, without such paratexts engaging the attention of the gatekeepers of orthodoxy.

These ubiquitous and strategically moderate paratextual lives of ancients were also frequently reused in many editions, some long after the authors' deaths, so their content outlasted intellectual vogues and individual reputations. In the seventeenth century, when new movements sparked by Francis Bacon and Descartes led many scholars to distance themselves from humanism, figures who would never have called themselves humanists, or sought out humanists' works, still owned and studied humanist-edited editions of the classics and read the humanist voices contained in their paratexts. Thus, even as the direct influence of figures such as Ficino and Pomponio Leto diminished, the words that the fairly minor humanist Petrus Crinitus (1475–1507) had written about Lucretius in 1505 were

[19] Ghislieri's comment that the Inquisition, in suppressing modern heretics, must not ban such good works as Lucan and Lucretius despite their controversial ideas, is treated in de Bujanda, 8:32n14. On how comparatively liberal the Inquisition was in granting licenses to read banned classics, see Marcus.

[20] See Eric Nelson's introduction to Hobbes, 24:xix–xx.

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still in the hands of young Montaigne (1533–92) as the century closed, and in the hands of the Baron d'Holbach (1723–89) two centuries later.[21]

Even the language of these paratextual lives facilitated broad consumption. While early humanist vitae, like those produced by Pomponio Leto and his circle,[22] might be written in elaborate and ornamented prose designed to demonstrate their authors' mastery of Latin style, later humanist-educated editors, writing for the increasingly competitive print market of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, preferred smooth, uncomplicated Latin paratexts, easily understood by students, and by nonspecialist scholars whose primary interests might be medicine, science, history, or theology rather than pure philology and high humanist style.[23] Vernacular translations similarly presented humanist ideas in condensed form, and to much larger audiences. For all these reasons, paratexts in editions and translations of ancient authors—with their intentionally moderate and uncontroversial versions of the humanist cultural program—saturated European education in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and even eighteenth centuries to a degree that rivaled the most celebrated works of Petrarch (1304–74). These paratexts expose not only what humanists believed about antiquity, but the view of antiquity that they passed on most directly to the next generations.

## THE UTILITY OF THE ANCIENTS

In attempting to argue that pagan philosophy was useful to Christians, humanist biographers and editors, and humanists in general, were responding to what John Marenbon has called the "problem of paganism."[24] Marenbon has demonstrated that Christian concerns over virtuous pagans—whether good pagans can be saved and whether their philosophy is useful to Christians—appeared as early as Paul's letter to the Romans and the Acts of the Apostles, and then crystallized with Augustine (354–430).[25] Augustine believed that his philosophical, and largely Neoplatonic, education had been essential in preparing him to understand Christianity, and praised Plato's rejection of the senses and his focus on contemplation of the divine. Augustine also admitted many compatibilities between Christianity and the hybrid Stoic and Neoplatonic philosophy current in Rome of his era. In his *De vera religione*, Augustine explicitly suggested that, if Plato and other celebrated philosophers had returned to life after the coming of Christianity, they

[21] See Palmer, 2014, 101–04, 53–55, 61–62, on Crinitus, and 212–22, on Montaigne; see also Screech. On d'Holbach, who owned twelve editions of Lucretius, see Kors, 2016a, 199.

[22] On lives produced by Leto's circle (including texts), see Pade.

[23] On the earlier humanist focus on Latin style, see Baker.

[24] Marenbon.

[25] Ibid., 19–24.

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would have embraced the new faith, as many Platonists of Augustine's day had done.[26] He claimed too that pre-Christian philosophers would have recognized, in the attention Christianity gave to spiritual goods and eternal life, the very ideas that philosophers themselves had tried to teach in their esoteric works, but had not dared hope to see embraced by the public. Humanists from Petrarch on enthusiastically echoed Augustine's claim that resurrected philosophers would be instant converts, and they used it to defend their beloved ancients. But Augustine coupled this statement with another, one very uncomfortable for humanists: that Christianity had surpassed philosophy and made it obsolete by turning the minds of all people toward the divine, whereas philosophy had only ever achieved this for a few members of tiny sects. Augustine also stated explicitly that religion and religious knowledge should not be sought in the works of philosophers because, despite their participation in public religious rites, in private philosophers held divergent and contrary opinions about the gods and the good.[27]

Augustine's rejection of the utility of classical philosophy in *De vera religione* was a problem for classicizing humanists, especially because the problem of paganism became a subject of fresh and fierce debate during the High Middle Ages. As Marenbon has demonstrated, in the early Middle Ages pagan thought had been so comfortably integrated into Europe's varied Christian communities that the problem of paganism was not actively debated.[28] It was Peter Abelard (1079–1142) who revived the topic, both by endorsing the extensive use of Aristotle in theological circles, and by arguing overtly that Platonists and other pagans had worked out, through pure logic, a theology extremely similar to Christianity, including both monotheism and the Trinity. Abelard even claimed that many pagans might be in heaven, saved thanks to pre-Christian prophecies of the Incarnation. Albert the Great (1200–80), Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), and many others contributed to the debate revived by Abelard, which grew more heated in light of concerns over Averroism, and the frightening supposition that philosophical truths might be logically valid even if they contradict scripture. This controversy culminated in the condemnation of 1277, in which the first seven of the 219 propositions condemned by the church were affirmations of the usefulness and excellence of philosophy, especially of classical philosophy, while many other condemned propositions targeted the doctrines of particular pagan thinkers, especially Aristotle.[29]

[26] Burleigh, 229 (*De vera religione* 4.6).

[27] Ibid., 230 (*De vera religione* 4.8). On Augustine's efforts to argue that pagan virtue is not true virtue, see Marenbon, 24–41.

[28] Marenbon, 73–94.

[29] Ibid., 149–59; Wippel, 169–201; Uckelman; Flüeler, Lanza, Toste, and Austenfeld, 29–40.

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Humanists' primary asset in pushing back against this rejection of the usefulness of philosophy for Christians lay in another passage of Augustine. In his *De civitate Dei contra paganos*, Augustine stated that the lives of so-called virtuous pagans were not useful models for the moral education of Christians except in one way: if sinful Christians read about pagans who surpassed them in courage, temperance, and other virtues, the shame of being outdone by those who did not even have the advantages of grace and revelation might spur Christian readers to try to do better. James Hankins has called this rhetorical formula the *quanto maius* (by how much more) formula, and he has found it in the works of many Renaissance figures beginning with Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Salutati.[30] The *quanto maius* formula appears frequently in humanist paratextual biographies of ancients, and its origin in Augustine offers at least one orthodox precedent for humanists to cite when pushing back against characterizations of classical philosophy as obsolete, useless, or dangerous.

*Quanto maius* is a rhetorical device rather than an argument, a fact that highlights a key difference between, on the one hand, the paratextual biographies that are my subject and, on the other, the arguments about the existence or nonexistence of God used by Kors in his parallel study. Unlike Scholastic debates with mock atheists, humanist lives of philosophers rarely contain formal logical arguments bearing on religion, or indeed on any topic. When biographies touch on larger issues, it is generally indirectly, through rhetorical moves: whether Plato and Paul are presented as equal or unequal authorities, whether a pre-Christian is characterized as virtuous for his fallen age or virtuous in an absolute sense, or whether the metaphorical light of reason is described as shining dimly or brightly on a particular author, place, or era. The contributions of rhetoric to intellectual change are, by nature, subtler than those of direct arguments, but not necessarily weaker. And since rhetoric often persuades without the audience realizing it, biographies that invoke, as rhetorical stage setting, particular images of the relationship between antiquity and religious truth can transmit the assumptions underlying those images without the reader being consciously aware that the topic is even under discussion. Thus, my study cannot, as those of Kors and Buys have, identify positive statements or logical techniques that appear in a radical Enlightenment source and also in a self-consciously pious work penned centuries before. What I can demonstrate is that certain common humanist rhetorical claims about antiquity imply, as logical necessities, radical theological positions, especially about revelation, commonly associated with the Enlightenment. Someone who read these humanist sources, and imbibed these rhetorical claims, could derive from them radical positive claims about religion, which humanists never overtly made or nec-

[30] Hankins, 2009, 340.

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essarily recognized as consequences of their rhetoric, but which they nonetheless transmitted to their readers.

## THE MONASTIC PYTHAGORAS

*Quanto maius* is one of several rhetorical strategies that recur in humanists' apologetic lives of ancient thinkers. While lives of Epictetus will receive the most attention in this study—since the extraordinary popularity of Stoic ethics made humanists bolder in their discussions of Epictetus than in those of more controversial ancients—a review of six humanist treatments of Pythagoras (ca. 570–ca. 495 BCE), composed from 1449 to 1598, will demonstrate several other standard Christianizing strategies employed by humanists, and how these evolved from the fifteenth century to the end of the sixteenth.[31]

Raffaele Maffei Volteranno (1451–1522), writing at the midpoint of this tradition, provides a tidy example in the 250-word entry on Pythagoras that he wrote for his encyclopedic *Commentarii Rerum Urbanarum* (Commentaries on urban[e] things, 1506). In it Maffei claimed that Pythagoras's famous philosophical travels—described by Diogenes Laertius and other ancient sources—were ordained by the stars.[32] He described Pythagoras lecturing to the public about frugality, temperance, chastity, and modesty, and added that Pythagoras founded a community of three hundred acolytes, bound by sacred oath to follow his rules for a life of study and rigorous self-discipline, separated from the broader community. This strongly hagiographic characterization, especially of the Pythagorean school, might be applied to such monastic founders as Saint Francis of Assisi. Maffei added that public suspicion incited a mob to attack the school, resulting in the martyr-like death by fire of many of the acolytes, and Pythagoras's

[31] On these lives of Pythagoras, see Palmer, 2016b. The six treatments discussed here are: Giovanni Aurispa's dedication of his translation of Hierocles's commentary on the *Golden Verses*, published as *In Aureos Versus Pithagorae Opusculum* (1449; see Hierocles); Francesco Filelfo, *Epistula de Opinionibus Philosophorum* (1454; published in Hankins, 1990, 2:515–23); Raffaele Maffei Volterrano, entry on Pythagoras in *Commentarii Rerum Urbanarum* (Rome, 1506); Johannes Reuchlin, *De Arte Cabalistica* (Hagenau, 1517); Michael Neander, dedication to his edition of the *Golden Verses*, titled *En Lector, Librum Damus Vere Aureum* (Basel, 1559); Johannes Arcerius Theodoretus, dedication to the editio princeps of Iamblichus's life of Pythagoras, titled *Iamblichi Chalcidensis ex Syria Coele de Vita Pythagorae* ([Heidelberg], 1598). On the popularity of Stoic ethics in the Renaissance see Palmer, 2016a.

[32] "Pythagoras Samius philosophus . . . in Aegyptum primo, mox Babyloniam discendi siderum cursus gratia profectus est" ("Pythagoras of Samos the philosopher . . . embarked, under the influence of the stars, on a voyage of study, first to Egypt, soon thereafter to Babylon"): Maffei, 1552, z5$^{v}$; for the translation, see Palmer, 2016b, 510, 512. Maffei's encyclopedic work contains 152 entries on classical philosophers.

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unhappy death in exile.[33] Maffei's choice to include these grim events in his account might reflect his own experiences of the sufferings that so often dogged scholar-sages in his own day, including himself, since Maffei had personally barely survived the mobs after the Pazzi conspiracy, had witnessed the persecution of Pomponio Leto (1428–98) and his circle, and had observed the unfortunate fates of Pico and Savonarola (1452–98) at the hands of religious authorities.[34] Savonarola in particular is invoked by Maffei's description of how Pythagoras encouraged women to sacrifice their luxurious ornaments at the temple of Juno as an act of piety.[35] Clearly Pythagoras as monastic scholar-priest held far more traction in Maffei's imagination than many other details available in the classical sources from which he worked.

While some apologetic strategies—such as stressing Pythagoras's personal rejection of luxury—are common to all six humanist accounts of his life, other rhetorical claims grew more inflated, step by step, over time. The earliest humanist treatment of Pythagoras is Giovanni Aurispa's (1376–1459) dedicatory letter to Pope Nicholas V, in his 1449 translation of Hierocles's commentary *In Aureos Versus Pithagorae Opusculum* (Short work on the golden verses of Pythagoras). In it, Aurispa stressed the extraordinary "usefulness to the reader" of Pythagorean thought, which "hardly differs from Christianity," a characterization that does admit some pagan error, but attempts to minimize it.[36] Aurispa also compared the restoration of Pythagoras's tattered works to his patron Pope Nicholas's efforts to repair ancient Rome's architectural relics. Aurispa's contemporary Francesco Filelfo (1398–1481), in his 1464 *Epistula de Opinionibus Philosophorum*, described Pythagoras's pilgrimages to study with the mystics

[33] "But when three hundred of the youths bound together as comrades by a certain sacred oath were living together, separately from other citizens, in pursuit of religion and discipline, suspicions of a secret conspiracy against the commonwealth circled them. Consequently a mob glutted everyone with riot, and when [Pythagoras's followers] had been herded into one building, they rushed to burn it, whereupon sixty died, and the others passed into exile. Thus Pythagoras, driven from Croton in old age, moved to Metapontum and died in undeserved disgrace. His prestige was so great that people made his house into a temple, and honored him like a god": Maffei, 1552, z5$^{v}$; for the translation, see Palmer, 2016b, 510, 512.

[34] On Maffei, see Frazier, 2003, esp. 71n6; Frazier, 2005, 259–314; Banfi, 462–82; D'Amico.

[35] "Matronas ad pudicitiam, iuvenes ad modestiam cohortari coepit. Eius passim sanctitate ac vitae abstinentia inductae mulieres, auratus vestes, ornamentaque lasciviora in tempo Iunoni consecravere" ("He strove to urge matrons to chastity and youths to temperance. Everywhere women were inspired by the saintliness and purity of his life to consecrate their gilded garments and lewd accessories at the temple of Juno"): Maffei 1552, z5$^{v}$; for the translation, see Palmer, 2016b, 510, 512.

[36] Hierocles, 1474, a2$^{r}$: "legenti utilitas . . . parum . . . a fide christiana differt." On this edition, see Hankins and Palmer, 62; Celenza, 2001, 13–14.

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of Egypt and with Zoroaster in Chaldea, hailing Pythagoras as the founder of Italic philosophy.[37] Filelfo also claimed that while Plato learned political and civic matters from Socrates and details of the sensory world from Heraclitus, Pythagoras was Plato's source in matters of reason and the divine.[38] Between them, these two fifteenth-century accounts present Pythagoras as a virtuous sage, connected to divine knowledge and the invaluable Plato, but, unlike Maffei's account written forty years later, they do not yet credit Pythagoras with saintly activities or apply hagiographic tropes.

In the forty years between these early accounts and Maffei's, narratives of ancient theology, and Pythagoras's place in them, were transformed by Marsilio Ficino, who included Pythagoras in his chronology of ancient sages.[39] Developing a narrative that might be called the philosophical revelation or gentile revelation narrative, Ficino posited that, in the pre-Christian world, religious wisdom was transmitted in two parallel strands: Jewish revelation in the Old Testament and the divinely inspired philosophical writings of ancient sages.[40] These two strands together, according to Ficino, prepared humanity, and specifically the Roman world, for the dawn of Christianity. Using the suggestion from Saint Ambrose that Pythagoras had a Jewish father,[41] Ficino suggested that divine philosophical knowledge had passed through a series of sages, from Moses, to Hermes Trismegistus, then Orpheus, Aglaophamus, and others, thence to Pythagoras, from him to Philolaus, then Plato, Plotinus, and finally the church fathers.[42]

In addition to leaving its mark in the form of portraits of pagan sibyls alongside Hebrew prophets on the Sistine Chapel ceiling and the floor of the Siena cathedral, Ficino's idea of a separate philosophical revelation, and its accompanying intellectual genealogy of sages, was adapted by later scholars of Pythagoreanism, including the renowned German Hebraist and friend of Pico and Ficino, Johannes Reuchlin (1455–1522). Reuchlin's 1517 *De Arte Cabalistica* mixes Pythagoreanism, Kabbalah, and other neoclassical mysticisms, and begins with an account of the life of Pythagoras. Maffei, writing soon after Ficino's death, had

[37] Hankins, 1990, 2:522. On the *Epistula de Opinionibus Philosophorum*, see Joost-Gaugier, 22–23.

[38] Hankins 1990, 2:522: "For we read that Plato in all philosophy followed a certain three philosophers: in civil affairs Socrates, in those which bear upon sensation Heraclitus, and in those things which look toward intelligence and divine matters, Pythagoras of Samos, who was the chief and founder of Italic philosophy."

[39] See Marenbon, 240–41; Allen; Edelheit.

[40] See Celenza, 1999.

[41] Heninger, 201–02, 229n5.

[42] The specific names Ficino included varied over time. See Hankins, 1990, 2:643–45; Joost-Gaugier, 27–30; Hankins and Palmer, 65.

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presented a more explicitly saintly Pythagoras than Aurispa and Filelfo, but without explicit reference to Ficino's theories. In contrast, Reuchlin included a version of Ficino's intellectual genealogy of sages, along with descriptions of Pythagoras's virtue and willful poverty, his philosophical pilgrimages, the importance of the school he founded, and his superiority to other classical sages who lacked access to Hebrew wisdom.[43] In the *De Arte Cabalistica* Reuchlin attributed to Pythagoras, not only Jewish and quasi-Christian beliefs, but also Neoplatonic ones, including belief in metaphysical dualism, Platonic forms, and hypostatic degrees of reality. Reuchlin also credited Pythagoras and his disciples with miraculous powers, such as raising the dead, the details of which exist in classical sources but which earlier humanist biographers had chosen to omit. Reuchlin claimed that Pythagoras believed in a fundamentally Christian afterlife, and that he even foresaw the resurrection and Judgment Day, but that when Pythagoras had tried to explain these unfamiliar concepts to pre-Christian peoples, they were imperfectly understood and written down in garbled form, resulting in accounts of reincarnation and other heresies that were not Pythagorean beliefs but failed attempts to describe Pythagoras's proto-Christian understanding of the soul's immortality and return.[44] Ficino had made the same claims about Plato, when defending him against charges of endorsing reincarnation.[45]

The influence of Ficino's philosophical revelation narrative diffused far beyond personal friends like Reuchlin.[46] Jumping forward another forty years, the dedication of the 1559 Basel edition of the *Golden Verses*, titled *En Lector, Librum Damus Vere Aureum* (Behold reader, we present the truly golden book), describes another divinely ordained series of pagan sages like Ficino's, this time flowing forward from Solomon to Pythagoras. The volume's editor Michael Neander (1525–95) duplicated elements of Maffei's life of Pythagoras, but doubled its length, omitting Maffei's accounts of the mob and quasi-martyrdom, while adding additional details about the rules of the supposed Pythagorean order.[47] Neander expanded Maffei's statement that Pythagoras undertook pilgrimage-like philosophical travels into the claim that Pythagoras founded a tradition of philosophical pilgrimage, later imitated by Plato, Cicero, Jerome, Galen, and other wholesome authorities. Forty years after Neander, in

[43] Reuchlin, 36–39. Reuchlin's 1516 opening dedication to Leo X also contains a touching account of the blossoming of philosophy in Lorenzo il Magnifico's Florence, the loss of Pico, and Reuchlin's hopes for the restoration of the church now that classically educated Leo is in power. See also Joost-Gaugier, 42–45.

[44] Reuchlin, 178–82.

[45] Hankins, 2005a.

[46] On Reuchlin's relationship with Ficino, see O'Callaghan, 41–42.

[47] Neander, c1$^{r}$.

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the dedication of the 1598 editio princeps of Iamblichus's life of Pythagoras, produced in Holland, the Dutch classics professor Johannes Arcerius Theodoretus (1538–1604) presented yet another intellectual genealogy of sages, stating, like Ficino and Reuchlin, that Pythagoras and, through him, Plato were students of Moses. Thus, according to Arcerius, "those of the Socratic School, or almost, as we shall soon call it, the Mosaic school, have learned about God, and truly about virtues and vices, by the leadership of better nature, without God or the help of Scripture, and similarly have left behind helpful examples, which we can use to our advantage in common life, and above all in the administration of states."[48] Arcerius further claimed that Clement of Alexandria and other church fathers had fully embraced Pythagoras as part of the Christian tradition.

The boldness of the rhetorical claims made in these six lives increases step by step over time. Each author wanted to highlight Pythagoras's Christian attributes, so they reinterpreted earlier accounts in more emphatically Christian terms, adding increasing levels of distortion, like a game of telephone. Aurispa in 1449, working from ancient sources, could say no more than that Pythagoras "hardly differs from Christianity." Similarly, the highest praise Filelfo could muster was that Pythagoras was Plato's theological source, a good connection since Augustine in turn used Plato. Ficino, who had read Filelfo, went further, claiming that Plato's debt to Pythagoras evidenced a second revelation parallel to Moses's, divinely ordained and essential to church fathers. Maffei in 1506 knew these accounts when he described Pythagoras as marked by the stars like Saint Dominic, a paragon of poverty and chastity like Saint Francis, and a persecuted champion of public moral reform like Savonarola. In 1517, Reuchlin, using Ficino, went further: Pythagoras was indeed the missing link between Moses, Plato, and Christianity; he did not "differ" from Christianity even slightly, as Aurispa had said, rather reincarnation and other apparent deviations were garbled accounts of Pythagorean prophecies of not-yet-revealed Christian mysteries. Forty years later, Neander took literally Maffei's oblique suggestion that Pythagoras's school had a quasi-monastic rule, and expanded on that rule, adding speculative details to what he did not realize was itself a speculative detail. Thus, when Arcerius introduced his edition of Iamblichus in 1598, multiple layers of Christianization filtered his reading of the sources thus: first, Iamblichus and Diogenes Laertius described Pythagoras's travels; second, Filelfo made these travels sound like pilgrimage; third, Maffei claimed

[48] Iamblichus, *3r: "Quippe qui in Schola Socratica, peneque ut mox dicemus, Mosaica, belle institute, de Deo, quatenus quidem naturae melioris ductu, sine Deo & Scripturae adiutorio potuerunt, de virtutibus & vitiis german[ae] disseruerunt, exempla itidem salutaria reliquerunt, quibus in communi vitae usu juxta, ac rei pub. administratione apprim[e] conducibilibus uti queamus."

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these pilgrimages were divinely ordained; fourth, Neander added that these divinely ordained pilgrimages inspired later pilgrims like Saint Jerome; fifth, Arcerius could claim that church fathers like Jerome had embraced Pythagoras as a divinely inspired contributor to the Christian tradition. Each step was small enough that a biographer could see himself as simply highlighting Christian elements present in earlier accounts, but the rhetorical inflation built up over time to imply a new relationship between antiquity and Christianity.

One perennial justification for assigning Pythagoras quasi-Christian status—also common in lives of other ancients—was his personal virtue. That many of the specific virtues humanists attributed to Pythagoras are extrapolated or invented rather than mentioned in any ancient source was no impediment. In the period, virtue of character was often considered to be proved by the beauty and wisdom of an author's works. Cicero had argued that only a virtuous orator could be persuasive,[49] and both Thomas Aquinas and Plato had said that truth, beauty, knowledge, and virtue have the same good and divine source. Petrarch, addressing the charge that he was a bad Christian for loving the un-Christian Cicero, had argued, "Cicero said much on the art of words, the virtues, and human wisdom, all true and therefore doubtlessly pleasing to the God of truth. For, since God is living truth, and since, as father Augustine says, 'every truth is true because it derives from the truth,' then any truth that one utters derives beyond doubt from God."[50] By this logic, even pagan authors, to the extent that they were wise and eloquent, were automatically of good moral character and their ideas in alignment with Christianity, which was, de facto, truth. Thus, Neander could claim in his introduction to Pythagoras's *Golden Verses* that "Each of the poems, and the teachings of each of the two authors, Pythagoras and Phocylides, contain golden things, that is holy, pure and complete things, but succinct, well-rounded and short: these are the characteristics of wise men's sayings about piety, the honest direction of studies, morals, and, in the end, all of life."[51]

## VIRTUES STRATEGIC AND SINCERE

The focus on virtue in these lives is no surprise, since humanist biographies were self-consciously didactic. Instilling virtue was humanism's most consistent goal, a program to bring about a new golden age through the moral trans-

[49] Kahn, 29–35.

[50] Petrarch, 3:186 (*Epistolae Familiares* 21.10).

[51] Neander, c2$^{r}$: "Utrumque vero poema, utriusque autoris, Pythagorae & Phocylidae, praecepta continent vere aurea: hoc est, sancta, pura & absoluta, sed succincta, rotunda & brevia: qualia sunt sapientum monita de pietate, de studiorum & morum ac vitae denique totius honesta gubernatione."

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formation of Europe's educated classes, perhaps best expressed by James Hankins's term "virtue politics."[52] Humanists hoped readers, pupils, and Europe's leaders would imbibe—through ancient writings and their own—the virtues that had produced Cicero, Seneca, and the Pax Romana. This shared didactic aim was especially present in biographies, since Renaissance authors saw biography as a fundamentally ethical genre, which taught good morals through examples of virtue and, when necessary, vice.[53] Thus, biographies have a certain homogeny as sources, and humanist biographies of princes or soldiers are just as saturated with virtues as those of philosophers. I consider this homogeny an asset rather than a weakness, since it means that biographies contain a concentrated and particularly visible form of the didactic focus on virtue that was, in its way, even more definitive of humanism than the reuse of antiquity. Scholastics, Protestant Reformers, and even Enlightenment radicals used antiquity, but not for the sake of virtue politics, as humanists did. The rhetorical strategies that humanists used to shoehorn Christian virtue into everything from astronomy to pornography exposes humanists' shared program, and the tactics and assumptions they relied on to advance that program. The strategies they used in lives of ancient philosophers specifically demonstrate how these tactics and assumptions affected the portraits of antiquity and knowledge that humanists passed on to subsequent intellectual movements.

The humanist assumption that wisdom and eloquence proved orthodoxy, based on Cicero and Aquinas, was easily applied to figures like Pythagoras and Plato, who were understood to have many doctrines compatible with Christianity. But it was also applied to more controversial figures. Apuleius (124–70 CE) posed a challenge because of his strong associations with mystery cults, yet even pagan priesthood is transformed into evidence of quasi-Christian piety in a 1621 edition, whose title *Apulei Madaurensis Platonici Opera Omnia* stresses Apuleius's connections to Platonism.[54] According to the life:

> In Greece [Apuleius] studied the many initiations and diverse rituals of sacred cults, and various ceremonies, because of his eagerness for truth and

[52] James Hankins's paper, "The Virtue Politics of the Italian Humanists," delivered at the conference "Beyond Reception: Renaissance Humanism and the Transformation of Classical Antiquity," sponsored by the Sonderforschungsbereich 664: Transformations of Antiquity: Berlin, Humboldt University, 23–24 March 2015.

[53] Frazier, 2013.

[54] Apuleius. Seventeenth-century editors of ancients continued to cite similarities to Plato as evidence of their subjects' orthodoxy, even though Plato's quasi-Christian status was not unopposed: see Hankins, 2005b.

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> piety toward the gods. He was a priest in the province of Africa, and clothed the hunters according to Augustine. He was not very wealthy, but sold his very clothes, to raise a sum equal to the expenses of his sacred duties. He fiercely desired to learn magic, for which reason he eagerly traveled to Thessaly, where people from all around the world chant native magic incantations together, and there he fell into servile voluptuousness, and reaped the grim reward of unlucky curiosity. Lactantius, Jerome, Marcellinus and Augustine count him with Apollonius of Tyana, and others who, living before the excellent miracles of Christ, nonetheless recognized that stupid [*stulta*] paganism was no less empty than sacrilege.[55]

This portrait transforms Apuleius's participation in mystery cults into the serial religious explorations of a man so wise that he sensed there must be some true religion hidden among the false ones. It even invokes a tragic parallel between Apuleius and Augustine, who similarly explored various cults—Manichean, Skeptical, Platonic—in his vain and voluptuous youth. If Augustine found what Apuleius did not, it feels as if mere accident of birth separated saint from philosopher, since both searched for the truth their intellects perceived beyond the pagan shadows.

The infamous Lucretius—denier of the afterlife, prayer, and Providence—was also not beyond the power of humanist Christianization. Lives of Lucretius, like that written by Giovanni Battista Pius (d. ca. 1540) for his 1511 edition of Lucretius, excused the poet's un-Christian "errors" about atoms and the mortality of the soul as the confused poetic madness of a divinely inspired *vates* (poet-prophet) whose philosophy was too lofty to be communicated in imperfect language.[56] This parallels Reuchlin's and Ficino's claims that Pythagorean or Platonic orthodoxies were garbled to produce reports of reincarnation. Epicurean asceticism and monk-like modesty in diet were stressed in all Lucretius's Renaissance vitae.[57] In 1570 his most influential editor, the Parisian

[55] Apuleius, 14–16: "Sacrorum pleraque initia in Graecia & multiiugos ritus, variasque ceremonias studio veri & officio erga Deos didicit. Sacerdotum provincie Africe munera edidisse, & venatores vestivisse autor est Augustinus. Non valde divitem fuisse . . . quod vestem ipsam distraxerit, quo sacrorum impensis parem summam corraderet. Magia noscendae ardentissimus cupitor; unde Thessaliam ubi artis magica nativa cantamina totius orbis consono ore celebrentur, cupide petivit, indidemque ad serviles voluptates delapsus, curiositatis improsperae sinistrum reportavit praemium[.] Laetantius, Hieronymus, Marcellinus & Augustinus eum Apollonio Tyaneo, & aliis magni nominis magis adnumerant, quos stulta paganitas praestantia miraculorum CHRISTO superiores, non minus vane quam sacrilege credebat."

[56] See examples in Palmer, 2014, 156, 60.

[57] Ibid., 140–91, esp. 161.

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Aristotelian Denys Lambin (1519–72), made Lucretius into a good Aristotelian, claiming that all the un-Christian errors in his work are summaries of Epicurus, not Lucretius's own beliefs, which focused on wholesome Roman virtues.[58] But it is not in the lives of infamous radicals like Lucretius—whose editors knew they had to tread carefully—that the phenomenon I am attempting to describe is most visible. It is in the lives of the figures humanists considered safe.

## THE DIVINE EPICTETUS

Thus I return to Epictetus, whom Jean de Coras in 1558 called "divinely Christian and Christianly divine," and who communicated, in a two-word maxim, what the prophets and Saint Paul struggled to get across in lengthy scriptures.[59] De Coras deployed the *quanto maius* formula full force in his introduction, proclaiming that Epictetus's tranquil, forgiving followers lived more like Christians than the vengeful and quarrelsome Christians of his war-torn age.[60]

Stoic virtue sold a lot of books in the Renaissance. The first Latin translation of the *Enchiridion* by Angelo Poliziano (1454–94) was printed forty times between 1497 and 1750, joined by numerous other translations, editions of the original Greek, and editions of the commentaries by Simplicius and Arrian.[61] The digest's brevity was one of its main selling points. As translator John Healey (d. 1610) said in his 1610 English edition, "It filles not the hand with leaves, but files 'y head with lessons: nor would bee held in hand, but had by hart."[62]

In such editions, biographical material often appears in the dedication as well as the vita. Ancient references and known facts of the author's life usually comprise less than half of the biographical content, while the remainder is praise of the thinker's virtuous character. In the case of Epictetus, biographies tend to put foremost his low social status and physical disability, lending authenticity to his advice about patient suffering and juxtaposing his bodily weakness with

[58] See Lucretius, e1[r]; Palmer, 2014, 178–79.

[59] Twelve treatments of Epictetus are discussed here: Epictetus, 1529; Epictetus, 1550; De Coras; Epictetus and Arrianus, containing Simplicius's and Arrian's commentaries translated by Heironymus Wolf; Epictetus, 1567; Epictetus and Simplicius; Epictetus, 1600, an edition of Poliziano's Latin translation (Lyons, 1600); *Epicteti Stoici Philosophi Enchiridion*, containing Poliziano's translation, and Arrian's commentary translated by Jakob Schegk (Lyon, 1600); *Epictetus His Manuall. And Cebes His Table Out of the Greeke Originall by J. Healey* (London, 1610); Epictetus, 1642; Epictetus and Boileau.

[60] De Coras, 13–15 (*La vie d'Epictetus Philosophe*).

[61] Hankins and Palmer, 40–41.

[62] Epictetus, 1610, A4[r].

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his strong and lofty soul, as in this 1567 quatrain: "Of servile kinde I borne was, / hight Epictete by name, / in substance pore, to God a friend, / and eke in body lame."[63]

Printers often reproduced biographies from rival editions, rarely crediting the source, so in Epictetus's case many editions contain a standard 200-word Latin vita. This vita states that Epictetus "was, in Rome, the slave of Epaphroditus, a certain intimate of Nero. He was a man of most holy and untainted life, wholly devoid of every haughtiness and arrogance, vices which troubled almost all other philosophers."[64] Next follows Lucian's anecdote that someone paid 3,000 drachmas for Epictetus's clay lamp,[65] a tale that gave different translators the opportunity to localize the story by substituting familiar currency: 50 pounds sterling in Healey's English translation, or 600 French livres in De Coras's French.[66] The standard vita ends with the statements that "[Epictetus] said that the sum of all philosophy was contained in two words, 'sustain and abstain.' During Domitian's rule, either offended by his tyranny, or forced by a decree of the Senate expelling philosophers from the city, he moved to Hierapolis from Rome. After lingering briefly there, he is said to have lived in Rome until the time of Marcus Antoninus."[67]

This was the common, unembellished version of Epictetus's life. Elaborations frequently involved linking Epictetus to other ancients, often syncretically. In 1558 Jean de Coras claimed that Epictetus and his Cynics taught Plato's doctrines on the soul. By 1600, the dedication to a reprint of Poliziano's Latin text could boast, "It is agreed by everyone, and very well established even among those of mediocre learning, that the philosopher Epictetus strove after the pure and most true philosophy of Plato, and transmitted that part of it which pertains to the cultivation of morals and the ordering of an upright and pious life, a part which indeed is reckoned by all to be a supremely useful and necessary part of human

[63] Epictetus, 1567, Avi$^{r-v}$.

[64] Epictetus, 1642, 3 (A2$^{r}$): "Servivit enim Roma Epaphrodito cuidam Neronis familiari. Vir sanctissima & integerrima vita, alienissimus ab omni fastu & arrogantia quibus tamen vitiis omnes ferè laborarunt philosophi."

[65] Lucian, 3:13 (Πρὸς τὸν ἀπαίδευτον καὶ πολλὰ βιβλία ὠνούμενον, *Adversus indoctum et libros multos ementem* or *The Ignorant Book Collector*); Epictetus, 1642, 3–4 (A2$^{r-v}$).

[66] Epictetus, 1610, A6$^{r}$. Fifty pounds is also given as the price in Epictetus, 1567, Avii$^{r}$; De Coras, 13–14.

[67] Epictetus, 1642, 5 (A3$^{r}$): "Summam totius philosophia duobus bis verbis continere dicebat, διατηρήσει και να απόσχει id est, sustine & abstine. Domitiano autem imperante, vel offensus eius tyrannide, vel coactus ob senatus consultum de pellendis urbe philosophis, Romam Hierapolim commigravit. Commoratus iterum dicitur Roma usque ad tempora Marci Antonini."

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life."[68] Other editions appended more anecdotes, usually focused on Epictetus's moral character. In 1563 translator James Sedford added,

> Albeit he was a bond man, lame, and in extreme penurie, yet he doubted not earnestely to affirme that he was a friend to the Gods. . . .[69] He did read in Plato (of whom he was a diligent Reader and follower), accompting the minde only to be man, and the body but an instrument . . . neyther dyd he declare that only in wordes or bokes but also in hys life: for he did so withdrawe himselfe from the care & love of outwarde things, so little regarding hys body, or any thing thereto belonging, that at Rome hys house had no dore, for there was nothing at all in it but a bad beggerly bed of little value.[70]

Epictetus's willful poverty, humility, and saintly patience were recurrent take-home messages, his life a model of how to weather suffering.

Whether summarizing Epictetus's ideas or advertising the utility of his handbook, these editors never discussed Stoic ontology, epistemology, or natural philosophy, and discussed Providence without reference to any of Stoicism's distinctly un-Christian justifications for it. This is typical of Renaissance presentations of Stoicism. Seneca—whose works in Latin circulated more broadly and earlier than Epictetus's in Greek—had been recommended by Petrarch as "an incomparable teacher of moral philosophy," who singlehandedly made the Romans superior to the Greeks in moral arts.[71] Helped by Petrarch's recommendation,[72] Seneca out-circulated all other ancients except Cicero, Virgil, and Aristotle, to the degree that, at the turn of the fifteenth century, the University of Piacenza had a professor of philosophy and a separate professor of Seneca.[73] Yet, the Senecan works that enjoyed the greatest early circulation were not Seneca at all, but spuria that focused even more narrowly on moral philosophy: the spurious letters between Seneca and Saint Paul; the treatise *De Quattuor Virtutibus Cardinalibus* (On the four cardinal virtues), which is actually the work of Saint Martin of Braga (ca. 520–80); and the

[68] Epictetus, 1600, *ii$^{r}$: "Costat enim omnibus, atque etiam mediocriter eruditis exploratissimum est, Epictetum philosophum veram ac purissimam Platonis philosophiam affectat [urum], ea duntaxat prodidisse, quae ad cultam morum, vitamque recte ac sancte instituendam pertinerent: quae certe philosophia pars humana vitae in primis utilis ac necessaria omnium iudicio existimatur."

[69] Sedford bases this claim on Macrobius, who was also a source for Maffei's entry on Epictetus: Maffei, 1552, 350 (line 26).

[70] Epictetus, 1567, Avi$^{r-v}$.

[71] From Petrarch's letter to Seneca: Petrarch, 3:322 (*Familiares* 24.5).

[72] Erasmus cites Petrarch's letter as an authority in his life of Seneca: Seneca and Erasmus, 7.

[73] Seneca, ci.

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maxim collections *De Moribus* (On morals) and *Proverbia* (or *Sententiae*).[74] Erasmus, in the life of Seneca that he wrote for the edition of *Opera Omnia* that he personally edited, wrote:

> Since the method of all philosophy was divided into three parts by our ancestors, natural philosophy or physics, moral philosophy, and that art of differentiating things, which they call dialectic, it is agreed that Aristotle embraced that part which was about morals with the highest talent and greatest care. For in that part of his *Ethics*, which treats personal ethics, he laid out the art of good husbandry so diligently, if fame can be believed, that nothing more apt, nor more holy, could be taught or written by anyone. Nothing seems to me more admirable than this kind of philosophy, which is occupied more with action than with thought. For I have always been of this opinion, and I have understood the most learned men often agree with me, that none out of all these arts and disciplines is more necessary to human society for virtuous living, than this which lays out the method for living. Since therefore among those, who are counted among the most important, easily the chief of all among these stands Aristotle, however I consider no one among our Latin authors nor Greek authors, whom I would compare to Seneca for the explication of the actions which we demand from a good man. For as Aristotle foremost established the virtue of the Greeks, thus [Seneca] demonstrated to our Latins, with his marvelous exhortation, what actions one must perform for virtue. For which reason he is justly called life's teacher by all people of our age.[75]

[74] Palmer, 2016b.

[75] Seneca and Erasmus, 5: "Cum enim omnis philosophiae ratio foret a nostris veteribus in treis partes distributa, naturalem videlicet sive physicam, moralem, atque in eam differendi rationem, quam dialecticam vocant, illud certe constat, eam quoque partem, quae de moribus erat summo ingenio & maxima cura Aristotelem fuisse complexum, perfectissimeque de eius partibus differvisse. Nam cum illis suis Ethicis partem illam, quae monastica dicitur [Erasmus uses the term monastica in the old sense of personal or private], profecisset, oeconomica sunt ab eo, si famae credere est, tanta diligentia conscripta, ut neque aptius, neque sanctius a quoquam in rem familiarem praecipi, conscribique potuerit. Quo genere philosophandi nihil mihi videri solet admirabilius, quod in actione magis, quam in cognitione repositum sit. Nam semper hoc animo fui, & mecum sentire doctissimos homines saepe intellexi, nullam ex omnibus artibus, ac disciplinis esse, quae societati hominum ad beate vivendum magis fit necessaria, quam haec una quae de ratione vivendi extat. Cum igitur inter eos, qui in primis numerantur, facile omnium princeps in his existat Aristoteles, neminem tamen habeo, neque ex nostris Latinis, neque ex Graecis, quem ad rationem earum actionum, quas a bono viro exposcimus, Lucio Senecae comparem. Ut enim vir ille summus Graecorum Aristoteles virtutem constituit, ita hic noster Latinis, quales oportet ex virtute actiones prodire, mira exhortatione demonstravit. Nam itaque immerito dictus, vitae magister ab omnibus nostrae aetatis hominibus."

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Seneca's opinions on fields beyond moral philosophy were minimized in Erasmus's edition, and completely absent from his vita.

This focus on ethics persisted in treatments of Epictetus. Jean de Coras—sharing Erasmus's division of philosophy into three branches—claimed that Epictetus and his sect "hated rational philosophy and natural philosophy, and interested themselves only in moral philosophy."[76] A 1583 vernacular Italian edition of Epictetus with Simplicius's commentary offers a rare counterexample; its dedication advertises an uncommonly broad selection of topics:

> These commentaries treat the highest good possible on Earth, the immortality of souls, the differences and similarities between humans and brute animals, things which serve the needs of this mortal life, the conjunction of humans with divine intelligences and the mind of God, the order of the universe, the divine underpinnings of all things, the nature of pleasure, good advice, circumstances, Fate, Fortune, human free will, the nature of the soul, the effects of the stars, the truth of Astrology, the nature of good and evil, the causes and limits of human suffering, friendship and benevolence, Manichean madness, their rites, sacrifices and ceremonies, Providence and the immutable Will of God, the philosophical cleansing of the soul, divination, fear of things to come, and other very useful questions.[77]

Yet even in this version—published for a broad vernacular audience, and in the last years of the sixteenth century, when interest in non-Aristotelian natural philosophy was on the rise—ethics still took first place. The volume appeared under the title *Arte di Correger la Vita Humana, Scritta da Epitteto Filosofo Stoico* (The art of correcting human life, written by Epictetus the Stoic philosopher). The editor's opening address asks whether "among the many supremely useful

[76] De Coras, 10–11: "Ils otoient la philosophie rationale, & naturelle & suiuoient seulement la morale."

[77] Epictetus and Simplicius, a3$^{r-v}$: "Trattasi in questi Commenti del sommo bene qua giù in terra: della immortalità de gli animi: della differenze dell'huomo, & della animal brutto, & de gli huomini stessi tra di loro: delle cose, che servono a bisogni della presente vita mortale; della congiuntione dell'huomo, & della divine menti, & dello stesse Iddio: dell'ordine dell'universo: divino principio di tutte le cose: dalla natura del piacere: del consiglio, & dello avenimento: del Fato, & della Fortuna: della libertà della volontà humana, & natura dell'animo: dell' effetto della stelle, & della verità dell' Astrologia: della natura del bene & del male: della cause & fine delle calamità humane: dell'amicitia, & beneficienza: dell communi notitie dell'animo: del furor Manicheo: de gli uffici: de sacrifici & ceremonie: de gli Providenza, & voluntà immutabile di Deo: della filosofica purgatione del l'animo: della indovinatione, & cura della cose future, & altre utilissime questione."

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lessons of the wise ancients, which are found written on this subject, is there any, as I judge it, so beneficial to human life, or so similar to our Christian religion, as that of Epictetus?,"[78] adding that the *Enchiridion*, "using human reason, persuades people of many things which we are divinely commanded, the sum of which are, to obey God and nature, to do good to all as far as possible and harm none, to tolerate injuries done by others. . . . That happiness is found in a self-examined and tranquil soul. And finally that from the divine administration of human affairs comes justice, wisdom, and our salvation" and other familiar virtuous sentiments.[79] Even when marketing the book to an audience with interests in astrology and the order of nature, the editor still characterized Epictetus, like Seneca, as valuable above all for the fact that he lived like a Christian, and could teach others how to live like Christians.

John Healey, in his edition, celebrated Epictetus's quasi-Christianity by invoking Augustine, and used the image, popularized by Aquinas, of philosophy as a loyal handmaid to theology (*ancilla theologiae*).[80] Healey wrote, "This *Manuall of Epictetus*, though not *Saint Augustines Enchiridion*, now by hap is the hand, or rather the hand-maide of a greater body of Saint Augustines: and hath beene held by some the hand to Phylosophy, the instrument of instruments. . . . In all languages, ages, by all persons high prized, imbraced, yay imbosomed."[81] Healey crowned this eulogy with a pun on "stock fish"—i.e., salted cod—writing, "He is more senceles than a stocke, that hath no good sense of this Stoick."[82]

While Healey joked about the foolishness of those whom Stoics cannot move to virtue, other editors approached the issue more gravely. A 1642 Latin edition published in Cologne includes a particularly ferocious articulation of the *quanto maius* formula: "This little book has such a religious spirit, and such

[78] Ibid., a2$^{r}$: "Ma tra quante maniere d'utilissimi ammaestramenti de gli antichi savi, che in tal materia si ritrovan scritti, e niuna ve ne ha; a giudicio mio, tanto alla humana natura giovevole, ne simile piu alla christiana religion nostra, quanto quella di Epitteto, filosofo Stoico?"

[79] Ibid., a2$^{r–v}$: "con humane ragioni, persuade a g'huomini molte cose, che divinamente commandate ci sono. La somma delle quali è, che si dee ubidire a Dio, & alla natura: che per quanto si puo a tutti si dee far bene: a veruno nuocere: de ingiurie da altrui fatteci tolerare: qualunque cosa. . . . Che la felicità si dee riporre nell'animo di se ben consapevole, & tranquillo. Finalemente, che nella divina amministratione delle cose humane, si come giustissima, & sapientissima, & salute nostra."

[80] Aquinas, 1888–1906, 4:16 (q. 1 art. 5), where Aquinas cites Proverbs 9.3 "misit ancillas suas vocare ad arcem"; see also Aquinas, 1992, 80–88 (q. 1 art. 1–3); this image seems to have begun with Clement of Alexandria, 25–26 (1.5); see Baudoux.

[81] Epictetus, 1610, A3$^{v}$–A4$^{r}$.

[82] Ibid., A4$^{r}$.

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hidden wisdom; that you may think it written by a supremely pious man. This little book by the excellence of its divine sentiments makes many Christians blush for shame, who have written morally filthy things, and never lived piously. Doubtless it must stir shame that Christian people, formed in this full noon of truth, do not see that thing whose light reached through to primitive people in the midst of pagan night. Thus, in our blindness, we are most in need of that thing, which those blind people understood."[83] A 1640 edition from Lyons focuses even more on the contrast between Christian hypocrisy and Epictetus's Stoic authenticity, proclaiming: "I will not be Christian unless I live as a Christian, even if I have memorized all Christ's words and commands to the last detail, and preach them to others. . . . What Christ gave to his disciples, the Stoic prescribed to his. . . . What Christ gave, the Stoic required."[84]

So successful was this Christianizing campaign that, straying forward to the early eighteenth century, a 1704 volume claims that Epictetus might actually have been Christian. This very long French life of Epictetus by Gilles Boileau (1631–69) was accompanied by a translation of the *Enchiridion* by the prolific scholar-cleric Jean-Baptiste Morvan abbé de Bellegarde (1648–1734). Boileau's introduction states that "some authors have suggested that Epictetus might have been secretly Christian, because one finds on his writings many maxims which spread contempt for honors and riches, the love of poverty and the private life, and forgiving one's enemies, which do not have the flavor of ancient Philosophers."[85] This claim, he says, is based on the fact that Epictetus's master Epaphroditos was Nero's captain of the guard and helped Saint Paul while he was in prison, so some speculate that Epictetus might have heard his master talk about the apostle and his doctrines, or even attended his master's secret meet-

[83] Epictetus, 1642, 8–9: "Hic Libellus tantum Religiosi spiritus habet, & arcana sapientiae; ut eum a Religiosissimo putes conscriptum. Hic Libellum supremo iudicii die in ruborem dabit Christianorum plurimos, qui & spurcissima scripserunt, nex vixerunt sanctius. Nimirum erubescendum esset Christianos homines in ipsa veritatis meridie constitutos, ea non videre, quae in media gentilitatis nocte ad homines fidei rudes, sua luce penetrarunt. Maxima enim sit oportet multorum in nobis caecitas, quam ipsi deprehendunt caeci."

[84] Simplicius, *2$^{r-v}$: "Non ero Christianus nisi Christiane vivam, etiam si omnia Christi verba ac mandata ad unguem didicero, & aliis explanavero . . . quam Christus suis discipulis donavit, quam Stoicus suis praecepit . . . qualem Christus dat, qualem Stoicus mandat."

[85] Epictetus and Boileau, A2$^{r-v}$: "Quelques sçavans ont avance qu'il fit profession du Christianisme, parce que l'on trove dans ses écrits plusiers Maximes répandues sur le mépris des honneurs & des richesses, sur l'amour de la pauvreté & de la vie cachée, sur le pardon des ennemis, qui n'etoint nullement au goût des anciens Philosophes." This work was reprinted several times; the 1704 edition is often mistakenly catalogued as "1604" because "MDCIV" appears in error on the title page.

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ings with Saint Paul.[86] "But it is not possible to conclude with certainty that he renounced Stoic philosophy, or pagan superstitions," Boileau concludes.[87] Rather, "What Epictetus had uniquely, out of all the pagan Philosophers, is that he advanced the furthest into our mysteries, and had the best opinions touching divinity. In effect, he was so in accordance with Christianity that St. Augustine, who was a foe of all the ancient philosophers, spoke very favorably of [Epictetus] alone. For which reason it is not a problem to honor him with the title 'most wise.'"[88] Despite this celebration of the uniqueness of Epictetus's theological wisdom, Boileau also made syncretic moves, claiming that "Epictetus held Pyrrho in particular veneration, because he didn't recognize any difference between life and death. . . . He imitated in words and deeds the lifestyles of Socrates, Zeno and Diogenes . . . he particularly venerated Socrates, and fashioned himself after him."[89] Yet, Boileau continued, Epictetus "as much as he strongly esteemed Pyrrho, conceived such an extraordinary grudge and hatred for the Pyrrhonists that he could not endure them."[90] This last comment reflects the intellectual atmosphere of the early eighteenth century, which was still saturated by the skeptical crisis sparked by Montaigne, and the battles waged against it by Bacon, Descartes, and their followers. Epictetus was welcome as another ally against skepticism. Yet, while Epictetus might have seemed innocuous in 1704, Boileau's celebration of this pagan who advanced so far into Christian mysteries contains within it that seed of radicalism I am attempting to describe.

To demonstrate why, I will jump back 200 years to the first Renaissance Epictetan paratext, Poliziano's 1479 dedication to Lorenzo de Medici. Comparing Epictetus's philosophical work to Heracles's battle with the Centaurs, Poliziano wrote, "Yet our Epictetus received his arms, not from Vulcan (like

[86] This claim brings to mind the spurious letters of Saint Paul and Seneca, popular in the Middle Ages, which had been used to frame Seneca as a secret Christian, and his death as a martyrdom, ordered by Nero when he learned of Seneca's conversion: see Ker.

[87] Epictetus and Boileau, 20 : "Mais l'on ne peut conclure de la qu'il ait renonce a la Philosophie Stoique, ni aux superstitions paiennes."

[88] Ibid.: "Mais ce qu'pictete a eu de particulier, c'est que de tous les anciens Philosophes paiens, il a été celui qui a penetré le plus avant dans nos mysteres, & qui a eu les meilleurs sentimens touchant la divinité. En éfet, ils sont si conformes au Christianisme, que S. Augustin, tout ennemi qu'il étoit des anciens Philosophes, a parlé de celui-ci tres-avantageusement. Jusques-là même qu'il ne fait point de dificulté de l'honorer du titre de tres-sage."

[89] Ibid., 10–13: "Epictete avoit encore Pyrrhon en particuliere veneration, à cause qu'il ne mettoit point de différence entre la vie & la mort. . . . Il imitoit dans ses discours & dans ses actions la façon de vivre de Socrate, de Zenon & de Diogene . . . il estimoit particulierement Socrate, & s'étoit formé un stile comme lui."

[90] Ibid., 13: "Encore qu'il estimât fort Pyrrhon, il avoit conçu une inimitié & une haine si éstrange contre les Pyrrhoniens, qu'il ne les pouvoit soufrir."

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Achilles and Aeneas) but from Nature herself and Reason, by which means he showed himself safe and untouchable, not only by darts and swords but also by fear and suffering and other disturbances of soul. This man waged bitter warfare, not with Centaurs (like [Heracles]) but with fortune and (false) opinion, both of which he laid low and put to flight, so that he expelled them too from all of human life."[91] This is a typical humanist celebration of the eudaemonist claims of classical philosophy. But Poliziano's Epictetus received his arms from nature and reason, by which he prevailed over misery and error—nature and reason alone, nothing beyond. Remember, similarly, how eighty years later Jean de Coras would write that Epictetus's maxim "sustain and abstain . . . divinely Christian and Christianly divine, in a few words encapsulates the law, and the prophets, and that which St. Paul himself worked hardest to accomplish."[92] Epictetus was more successful than Saint Paul, and his followers more Christian than Christians, all thanks to reason. As the 1583 Italian translation boasts, "[Epictetus's *Enchiridion*] using human reason, persuades people of many things which we are divinely commanded," including traditional Christian lessons: to obey God, do good, tolerate wrongs—all necessary for the holy ordering of human affairs.[93] Arcerius in his 1598 treatment of Pythagoras went further, saying that "the Socratic School, Mosaic" school, founded by God, taught virtue and truth "without God or the help of Scripture."[94]

Though the venue is strange, and the reason stranger, these lives contain early articulations of the Enlightenment celebration of reason as an independent path to truth, requiring no revelation. This is the kind of independent reason that will be so core to Enlightenment radicalisms, both theist and atheist. The path from humanist excitement about ancient philosophical religion to the Enlightenment cult of reason had several steps. Fifteenth-century humanists such as Poliziano, Aurispa, and Filelfo made the excited but modest claims of first discoverers, astonished and vindicated by finding that—as Petrarch had prophesied—their long-sought ancients did indeed align miraculously with Christianity. Both the ancients' teachings and their lives, framed with *quanto maius* rhetoric, seemed likely to help teach

[91] Epictetus, 1529, C3$^{r}$: "At vero Epictetus hic noster ea non a Vulcano (ut Achilles atque Aeneas) sed a natura ipsa ac ratione arma accepit, quae non modo se a telis & ferro, sed a metu quoque & dolore, caeterisque animi perturbationibus tutum inviolabilemque praestiterint. Bellum quidem hic vir, non cum Centauris (ut ille) sed cum fortuna, cumque opinione acerrimum gessit: quas ita ambas fudit atque fugavit, ut eas ex universa quoque hominum vita exterminaverit."

[92] De Coras, 13–15.

[93] Epictetus and Simplicius, a2$^{r–v}$: "nell'Enchiridio sui descritta: dove, con humane ragioni, persuade a g'huomini molte cose, che divinamente commandate ci sono."

[94] Iamblichus, *3$^{r}$, quoted above.

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a sinful Europe to be more modest, temperate, peaceful, and saintly. That a wise person in a foreign age could discover the nature of divinity by reason's light alone seemed, to these humanists, to be another welcome proof of the truth of Christianity, rather than anything that might undermine the necessity of revelation.

In the later 1400s, Ficino and other syncretists sought to explain the similarity between Christian and pagan theology, now attributed to the influence of Hellenistic and Neoplatonic thought on early Christianity. But Ficino and his peers had a different chronology, placing pseudo-Dionysius centuries too early, mistaking late antique verses for pre-Socratic fragments, and reading too literally Boethius's (ca. 480–524) ubiquitous image of Lady Philosophy walking happily with early thinkers, while in later ages her robe was shredded and carried off in scraps by selfish inferior schools.[95] Ficino's intellectual genealogy of pre-Christian sages depicted an original, pure, untattered theology fragmenting as it traveled forward from Moses to later ancients who clutched its scraps. In constructing this timeline, Ficino mistook Neoplatonism—now considered a late, syncretic hybrid of Platonism and other ancient schools—for the original, and he mistook what are now considered separate schools—Stoicism, Aristotelianism, Epicureanism—for the shredded scraps waiting to be knit back together by the aid of Lady Philosophy.

After Ficino's death in 1499, sixteenth-century scholars acquired more sources, and began to identify some of Ficino's chronological and factual errors. Successors modified or rejected the details of his genealogy, but retained the image which the concept of a philosophical revelation had forever sealed onto the Sistine Chapel ceiling: ancient sages seeing truth by a light far older than that shed by the Incarnation. When in 1610 John Healey wrote that the pagan Epictetus composed a book that is the handmaid to Augustine's; when the editor of the 1652 Cologne *Enchiridion* told his impious Christian peers that what they needed to stop sinning was the light that reached primitive peoples in the midst of pagan night; when edition after edition boasted that the pagan Epictetus was a friend of God, these images of the relationship between truth and reason contain within them inadvertent seeds of deism. These statements are rhetoric, not logical arguments, but they imply that there are better places to seek divine truth than scripture, laying the groundwork for later attacks on the necessity of revelation and organized religion.[96] And all this was voiced by scholars motivated primarily by their excitement at how well the ancients harmonized with Christian truth.

[95] Allen.

[96] On early deism, see Hudson and Lucci; Betts; Lemay; Jacob; Israel.

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Epictetus's humanist biographers never doubted Petrarch's interpretation of Augustine's statement "every truth is true because it derives from the truth." Recall Kors's observations: most Scholastics were so confident that reason would prove God's existence, never his nonexistence, that they assumed practice attacks on proofs of the existence of God could never harm the faith.[97] Just so, humanists trusted that unbridled reason, even exercised by pagans, must lead to Christian truth. Humanist didactic rhetoric, by spreading and celebrating the assumption that Christianity was completely rational, encouraged later attempts to rationalize Christianity, and to reach theological truth through reason alone, as the ancients had. Humanists promised their readers that such attempts would yield nothing but a purer, cleaner, universal orthodoxy.

## THE NEXT GENERATIONS

In 1646, Johann Chrysostom Magnenus (1590–1679), teaching medicine at the University of Pavia, published *Democritus Reviviscens, Sive, De Atomis*, a defense of atomism similar to that of his more famous contemporary Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655).[98] *Democritus Reviviscens* elaborates an atomist system that goes much further than what can be gleaned from fragments of Democritus (ca. 460–ca. 370 BCE), and includes the results of many of Magnenus's original experiments.[99] Since Magnenus is mainly known today as an early and eager practitioner of experimental science in the wake of Galileo (1564–1642), his work has mainly been studied by historians of science, who often refer to *Democritus Reviviscens* by its second title, *De Atomis*. But the work introduces itself in a thoroughly humanist spirit, as an effort to "restore the philosophy of the Atomists—firstborn among all the sects of philosophers—and to vindicate from a thousand calumnies the obscured fame of their doctrines."[100] The volume's front matter, with its lengthy vita of Democritus, is more than a classicizing veneer over controversial Galilean science. The 1648 reprint even dropped *De Atomis* from the title, renaming the work *Democritus Reviviscens, sive, Vita et Philosophia Democriti*. This made *Democritus Reviviscens* an even more direct competitor with what had been the dominant source on Democritus, the

[97] On efforts to date when Europe began to see atheists as products of reasoned argument instead of irrational beings, see Sheppard.

[98] Magnenus, 1646.

[99] See Güsgens; Meinel, 1988a and 1988b.

[100] Magnenus, 1648, [***11]$^{r}$ (beginning of the *Prolegomena*): "Cum primogenitam inter omnes sapientum sectas Atomorum philosophiam restituere designaverim, eiusque opinionis famam mille calumniis obsoletam vindicare."

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1616 *Democritus Christianus* of Pierre de Besse (1567–1639).[101] The book, like its companion *Heraclitus Christianvs*,[102] is full of familiar Christianizing arguments, citing Plato and scripture freely and presenting Democritus as a paragon of contempt for vanity and of philosophical asceticism.

In *Democritus Reviviscens*, Magnenus also used familiar arguments, commingled with something new. His dedication first celebrates Boethius as an example of philosophy triumphing over tyranny.[103] A list of *testimonia* follows, and a vita celebrating Democritus's rejection of luxury, the concordance between his morals and Seneca's, and his philosophical pilgrimages. A genealogy of sages comes next, with Pythagoras in his usual place, but Magnenus's list continues past church fathers to other figures whose brilliance Democritus prefigured: Kepler (1571–1630), Galileo, Christoph Scheiner (1573–1650), and Anton Maria Schyrleus of Rheita (1604–60), the astronomer and maker of Kepler's telescope.[104]

Magnenus's address to the learned reader begins—much like Erasmus's life of Seneca—with the declaration that all philosophers can be divided into three categories; but instead of a topical division into natural philosophy, ethics, and dialectic, Magnenus's division is methodological: "Our age has poured forth a threefold race of philosophizers. One type are slaves to a certain fixed author [i.e., Aristotle], to whose words they are bound as if by chains of adamant; hence they put all their zeal into finding senses [in texts] favorable to their Prince [i.e., Aristotle], and think up subterfuges to protect him, and if it is not allowed to engage in open warfare, they use stratagems. These are the Peripatetics of today, who, making time for Aristotle alone, don't understand the difference between explaining an author and adhering to his opinions."[105] Such criticism is familiar from both humanist and seventeenth-century anti-Scholastic rhetoric. The passage continues: "A second kind are defenders of philosophical liberty, who place no weight on authority and all on reason, and make themselves either the arbiters of Nature or the restorers of Arcady: these men give rise to new [philosoph-

[101] De Besse, 1616; another competitor followed in 1549, Johann Lange's *Democritus Ridens*: see Lange.

[102] De Besse, 1615.

[103] Magnenus, 1648, 3***v.

[104] Ibid., 4–6. Scheiner's name appears as "Schemer" in the text.

[105] Ibid., 45: "Triplex philosophantium genus in lucem nostra aetas effudit, alii enim certo cuidam authori sunt addicti cuius verbis veluti catena quadam adamantina alligantur, unde totum suum ponunt studium, ut sensus principi suo favorabiles inveniant, excogitent illi tuendo subterfugia, & si aperto Marte propugnare non liceat, stratagematis utantur. Uti sunt nunc peripatetici, qui uni vacantes Aristoteli, non intelligunt, quid intersit autorem explanare, vel eius adhaerere placitis."

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ical] sects, whether they possess true wisdom or are rushing headlong into ambitious error."[106]

As heroes of this camp, Magnenus named Democritus alongside new figures: Tommaso Campanella (1568–1639), Tyco Brahe (1546–1601), Kepler, Galileo, Christoph Scheiner, "innumerable" mathematicians and experimental philosophers, and all who agree that "Plato is a friend, Aristotle is a friend, but the greater friend is Truth."[107] Here the innovations of seventeenth-century science are visible, already splitting into factions, and while Magnenus did not name those he thought were rushing into ambitious error, his words invoke contemporary criticisms of Descartes. Meanwhile, "The third kind of philosophers, having either scorned or already sampled recent views, went back to [ancient] philosophy as to a tired old woman, and inquired whether the torch now collapsed into ashes yet had any of its former beauty and strength. Thus Copernicus educed the astrology of Aristarchus of Samos; Marsilio Ficino and his Florentines honored Plato's doctrines; and the elegant Lucretius recited in part the philosophy of Empedocles, almost worn out after many ages; and we attempt in this book to restore the philosophy of Democritus."[108] Despite placing his own work in this third camp, with the charming but outdated humanists, Magnenus concluded that, "Of these three sects, if you want my view, I would say that all of them deserve honor, but the most important one is that which pays homage to the Sun of reason alone."[109]

The light of reason is an ancient image, transformed many times between book 6 of Plato's *Republic* and the Enlightenment. Magnenus's light of reason in *Democritus Reviviscens* is at a very particular moment of transition. The text is a hybrid, experimental science nested inside classical revival. Magnenus's Democritus is simultaneously a trailblazing peer of Galileo, and the pious, monastic ancient sage celebrated by humanists. His character, according to Magnenus, was "outstanding in personal or private conduct [*mores privatos seu monasticam*],

[106] Ibid., 46: "Alii sunt libertatis philosophicae vindices, qui nullius autoritatem, & omnium rationes ponderant, seque veluti naturae, & Lycaei, vel arbitros faciunt, vel restitutores: Isti novis sectis principium faciunt, sive veram habeant sapientiam, sive ambitioso errore sint praecipites."

[107] Ibid., 47: "Amicus Plato, amicus Aristoteles, magis amica Veritatis."

[108] Ibid.: "Tertium philosophorum genus adolescentioribus placitis vel spretis, vel iam delibatis, ad philosophiam anum vetulamque regressi, quaerunt, ecquidnam decoris firmitatisque suo tempore habuerit, quae nunc collapsa in cineribus fax est. Sic Samii Aristarchi Astrologiam deduxit Copernicus, Platonis doctrinam celebravit cum suis Florentinis Marsilius Ficinus, & a multis saeculis obsoletam pene Empedoclis philosophiam ex parte cecinit cultissimus Lucretius, restituereque in hoc opere tentamus Democriti."

[109] Ibid.: "De tribus hisce sectis, si judicium a me quaeris, dicam, omnibus suum honorem deberi, potissimamque esse, quae unum veritatis solem adorat."

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sarcastic in public conduct, serious in political conduct, indifferent toward matters of wealth; he excelled in the physical sciences, especially that of plants and natural magic, as they call it, and he handed down many mysteries, to which Seneca, Pliny and Constantine Caesar bear witness."[110] The monastic asceticism so long celebrated by Christianizing humanists remains. And yet, for Magnenus, Democritus is not a peer of Aquinas and Dominic, but of Kepler and Tyco Brahe, an exemplar of the kind of philosophy that puts the light of reason above all. Magnenus's focus on reason and his choice to categorize philosophers by method, instead of by topic as Erasmus had, were fruits of the seventeenth century, reminiscent of Francis Bacon, but their seeds were planted by Petrarch's rhetoric long before.

Another late sixteenth-century example of the consequences of the new intellectual habitat that humanist celebrations of philosophy provided will help clarify their three-stage impact. Socinianism—infamous across Europe in the seventeenth century—has primarily been studied as a step in the history of anti-Trinitarianism and Reformation confessional conflict. Sarah Mortimer has recently demonstrated that Socinianism played a formative role in the development of several intellectual signatures of Enlightenment thought, especially ideas of natural law essential to Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Thomas Paine, and other pillars of Enlightenment reform.[111] The movement's founder, Faustus Socinus (1539–1604), is not labeled a humanist, but he knew his ancients well enough to cite Livy and Plutarch as comfortably as Justin and John Chrysostom.[112] His own library was destroyed by a riot in Krakow,[113] and quotations in his works are too scarce to make a reconstruction practical; but his itinerary gives a good sense of the libraries where this eclectic reader encountered both pagans and church fathers. The young Socinus joined his uncle Celso Sozzini's Accademia del Sizienti in Sienna, and worked in Florence for at least a decade for Isabella de Medici, daughter of Grand Duke Cosimo.[114] Both Sienna's and Florence's many libraries were packed with humanist-edited editions of pagan and Christian authorities, of which the easiest to use were later, more compact editions with humanist paratexts. Socinus also spent time in the printing centers of Lyon

[110] Ibid., 12: "Ingenio quoad mores privatos seu monasticam raro, quoad civilem satyrico, ad politicam serio, ad oeconomicam indifferenti, in physicis praecelluit, herbarum praesertim, magiaeque naturalis, ut vocant, arcana pleraque prodidit, quod testantur Seneca, Plinius, Constantinus Caesar."

[111] Mortimer.

[112] See, for example, his *De Auctoritate Sacrae Scripturae*, in Socinus, 270.

[113] Wilbur, 400–10.

[114] Zucchini.

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and Basel, which, after 1540, poured out humanist-edited classics, the majority of which contained biographies as front matter.[115]

Socinus's infamous technique of subjecting scripture to the same critical analysis as any historical source employed humanist methods of textual criticism, familiar from the works of figures such as Lorenzo Valla and Machiavelli, and common in the Florentine scholarly circles in which Socinus participated.[116] Yet skill with textual criticism is not the most substantial consequence of Socinus's Italian humanist roots, even if it is the most visible. Among Socinus's primary convictions, as Mortimer has demonstrated, was his rejection of the corruption of the will, insisting that humans before and after both Adam's Fall and Christ's Incarnation had always possessed the same intellectual freedom and the ability to consciously choose a path of religion and virtue.[117] Christianity, he argued, encouraged virtue primarily by providing incentives, but both virtue and salvation were always available to any human who chose them, even without Christ and his sacrifice.[118]

Socinus's position clearly reflects humanist ideas of good pagans achieving theological wisdom before Christ, without any impediment from corrupted will. Socinus was substantially more radical than the humanist peers he left behind in Florence, and his infamous claim that humans have no innate or natural knowledge of religion, and no way to know God without the historical documentation provided by scripture, was in some sense as anathema to Boileau's Epictetus, who advanced deep into theological mysteries by reason alone, as it is to the theory of innate ideas.[119] But while Socinus did not embrace the humanist philosophical revelation narrative, his thought was clearly shaped by it as he took the radical steps of treating Hebrew, Christian, and pagan access to theological truth as equals, and insisting that natural reason and human moral judgment are the only causes of virtue and piety. Humanist editors of Epictetus and Pythagoras claimed that the light of reason alone gave pagans moral and religious wisdom perhaps better than that of Christians. Socinus, growing up on their editions of the classics, went on to claim that humans did not need Christianity, revelation, or even religion to exercise rational virtue. Fierce reactions from Catholics and Protestants alike made this Socinian idea a major talking point across Europe, and it then lay in the background as Pierre Bayle (1647–1706), in his discussion of Spinoza, penned his explosive claim that an atheist could be

[115] On the prevalence of biographies in sixteenth-century editions of classics, see Palmer, 2014, 258–59.

[116] Mortimer, 14, 18.

[117] Ibid., 16–17.

[118] Ibid., 19.

[119] Ibid.

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a good citizen.[120] Radical deism, and the arguments for religious tolerance made by Bayle's avid reader Voltaire (1694–1778), lie one short step beyond. This three-stage transition, from humanist-framed classroom editions, to the education of Reformation and seventeenth-century figures, to their respondents in the radical Enlightenment, enabled the intellectual habitat shaped by the humanist celebration of antiquity to foster later thinkers who would never have identified themselves as humanists, who did not go out of their way to read humanists, and whom no humanist would recognize as anything but an alien and frightening stranger.

## CONCLUSION: THE LIGHT OF REASON

The Platonic, Augustinian light of reason, which so excited Petrarch and Ficino, had been a servant of theology, expected to reinforce the truths of Christian orthodoxy, which it would not change except by brushing a few medieval cobwebs off the truth. Early humanists expected this excavated truth to be a clearer version of an unchanging truth incompletely described by sages from Thomas Aquinas back to Epictetus, Plato, Pythagoras, and Moses. The first humanist readers of Seneca and Epictetus were delighted to find them so orthodox—as they read them—and full of moral lessons that could further the program of virtue politics, and make Europe's bellicose Christians act more like Christians. But by the later sixteenth century, humanist enthusiasm for the pre-Christian light of reason had progressed so far that a student's copy of the *Enchiridion* claimed to teach virtue better than scripture could. The rhetorical technique of *quanto maius* had morphed. The message was no longer that Christians should feel shame if they fell short of the pagans, but that the pagan method of seeking wisdom by reason alone was extremely powerful, if not superior to seeking it through revelation. If the owner of such an *Enchiridion* visited the Florentine Badia—a center of orthodoxy—and there saw Filippino Lippi's 1480 altarpiece *The Virgin and Angels Appearing to Saint Bernard of Clairvaux*, which features Epictetus's maxim "sustain and abstain" pinned on the craggy stone of Bernard's desk, the painting now communicated an unintended secondary message to the sixteenth-century viewer: that Epictetus achieved the same wisdom as Bernard without the help of Mary and the angels.

These are the inadvertent secularizing seeds planted by humanists. Even if there were impious humanists—some Machiavellis and Pomponazzis among the Ficinos—humanism was not a great secularizing project. From Petrarch

[120] On Bayle as a turning point in how Christians imagined the causes of atheism, see Sheppard, 224–83.

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on, humanism's goals had been compatible with, even productive of, Christian piety. But over time, humanist inflationary rhetoric so transformed classic images that they gained radical implications, as even Augustine's *quanto maius* formula turned into a celebration of reason's independence of scripture. These radical implications then became intellectual tools, reused by figures like Socinus and Magnenus to advance more radical positions. Magnenus and his seventeenth-century peers were also primarily pious Christians, but their innovations developed yet more new intellectual tools that would, in a third stage, become the intellectual habitat that facilitated the Enlightenment's deism, its attacks on dogmatism, its calls for religious tolerance, and, in its wildest corners, its atheism. Hieronymus Wolf in his 1563 Epictetus edition, boldly titled *Enchiridion, Hoc Est Pugio, sive Ars Humanae Vitae Correctrix* (Enchiridion, i.e., the dagger, or the method for correcting human life), had written: "Philosophers speak of God more briefly, coldly, obscurely, while Theology does so more ardently, volubly, and eloquently. But in instruction of morals and life lessons, generally the same is related by both sides," adding that, "Saint Paul chided philosophy—that is human reason—sternly for stepping beyond its bounds . . . yet, so long as it performs its duty, and subjects itself to God, it embellishes the Good News [i.e., the Gospel] to whose power nothing can be added."[121] Philosophy is a powerful art, but Wolf and his peers did not expect that herald, that dagger, that correction, to strike so deep.

Returning briefly to the historiographical debate between a Christian Renaissance and a secularizing or pagan Renaissance, I do not seek to argue that the pious motives I depict mean that humanist Christianity was orthodox, or monolithic. I agree with the observations of Matteo Soranzo and others that the new Christianities developed by humanists were plural and often pluralistic, attempting to embrace and balance multiple difficult-to-reconcile authorities, often with results that threatened orthodoxy.[122] As Soranzo observed, the very narrative of philosophical revelation advanced by Ficino and Giovanni Pico deeply troubled Gianfrancesco Pico, who labored to diminish aspects of his uncle's work that threatened the differently radical, partly Savonarolan Christianity that Gianfrancesco came to embrace. Yet all these figures' different humanist theologies were self-consciously Christian, and theist. As Soranzo

[121] Epictetus, Simplicius, and Arrianus, α4ᵛ: "philosophos de Deo loqui brevius, frigidius, obscurius: Theologiam contra ardentius, copiosius, disertius. In morum vero doctrina vitaeque praeceptis, eadem fere utrobique tradi . . . Philosophiam enim, hoc est, rationem humanum D. Paulus ultra suos limites euagantem acerrime obiurgat, & vehementer insectatur: eandemque dum officio fungitur, & Deo se subiicit, iis ornat praeconiis, ad quorum amplitudinem nihil addi potest."

[122] See Soranzo, esp. 74–75.

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and others call for more examination of the truly surprising theologies present in humanist works, I hope scholars will consider these theologies as divergent but potentially sincere theisms, and neither attempt to blur them into orthodoxy, nor return to the problematic technique of presuming that anyone expressing a radical variant on Christianity was a secret atheist feigning theism to escape the stake. If the Lutheran break spawned a hundred Protestantisms, so the classical revival spawned a hundred humanist Christianities, which should not be reduced to Christian or pagan camps. Inflating the pagan or secularizing camp has been the more common error, in my view, but, as the Christian Renaissance model gains dominance among historians, the danger of the reverse increases.

To conclude, throughout the Middle Ages, Christian philosophers and theologians had always had scripture, doctrine, and church fathers to provide fixed points of certain knowledge. Theology took place within a partially precharted space, where details—such as the information given about God in the Nicene Creed—served as streetlights outlining points on a path, while theologians labored to chart out the dark spots in between. Humanists, in contrast, celebrated, and relived through empathy, the experience of ancient thinkers, whom they imagined wandering in the dark night of genuine ignorance, groping toward distant knowledge without streetlights ahead. By extolling this experience, maturing humanism exhorted students to imitate how people without revealed answers had sought them out by reason's light alone. Humanists were sure that practitioners of their new method would end up where they believed the ancients had ended up: at the light, the good, God, truth, the source and center of all things. The biographies and other didactic works that humanists gifted to the reading world would, they hoped, achieve their dream of virtue-dominated politics, a better Europe guided by the light—both Christian and universal—that shone from such sages as Epictetus and Saint Paul.

Yet, as the sixteenth century became the seventeenth, it became clearer that Epictetus did not agree with Saint Paul, that Stoic divinity was fully immanent, that Pythagoreans were serious about reincarnation, and in general that the philosophical religion of antiquity was larger and stranger than what Petrarch had expected his followers to excavate from the manuscripts he urged them to recover. In the same dynamic decades of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, experimental and descriptive science yielded a stream of new and strange discoveries at odds with received theology and classical science. As inherited doctrine fell apart, humanist descriptions of great ancients, who began philosophy from nothing, waited ready on the bookshelves of Socinus, Bacon, Descartes, Magnenus, and, later, of Voltaire, Rousseau, Thomas Paine, and Diderot. Humanists had celebrated the ancient acolytes of Philosophia because they believed Philosophia had led her sages—and could lead

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others—to the Christian truths that were so bafflingly difficult to reach using the tools of scripture and the corruption-ridden church. Yet, in the hands of much later generations, the enthusiasm for Philosophia that humanist teachings had rekindled outlived Philosophia's loyalty to Lady Theology. Herein lay the secularizing potential of the pious Renaissance.

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