GIOVANNI PICO AND THE SCHOLASTICS: A NOTE ON *A PHILOSOPHER AT THE CROSSROADS*[*]

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I. *Overview*

Amos Edelheit's latest book, *A Philosopher at the Crossroads*, takes up Giovanni Pico della Mirandola – one of the best known and exemplary Renaissance philosophers, certainly in the Italian context – offering important and novel analyses of such well-known works as the *Oratio*, *Apology*, the *900 Theses*, as well as important considerations of, for example, his correspondence with Ermolao Barbaro, and the *Disputations Against Divinatory Astrology*, the latter taken up in the closing chapter that looks at Pietro Pomponazzi's *De incantationibus* in the section dedicated more broadly to Pico's reception among contemporaneous scholastic philosophers.[1] While the book is clearly dedicated to the figure of Giovanni Pico, in another, real sense, this book is dedicated more broadly to scholastic thought at the end of the fifteenth century in Italy. The author from time to time reminds the reader that we must return to Pico – having drifted away from a particular thesis of Pico under consideration – since the context just offered has taken up several, well-documented pages. Such attention to other, scholastic authors stems from Edelheit's desire to contextualize claims of Pico by either identifying – sometimes with certainty, other times plausibly – the sources Pico was relying upon, or by sketching a portrait of, for example, the *stilus Parisiensis*, the intellectual climate among the masters of Paris at the end of the fifteenth century in the third chapter

[*] An earlier version of this note was presented at a virtual event hosted by the Department of Philosophy of the National University of Ireland Maynooth in November 2022. I am grateful to Philipp W. Rosemann for the invitation, and to the many participants. My thanks goes also to Vivienne Anthony of the Emmanuel d'Alzon Library at Assumption University for her assistance, and to an anonymous reviewer for helpful comments.

[1] AMOS EDELHEIT, *A Philosopher at the Crossroads: Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Scholastic Philosophy*, Brill, Leiden – Boston 2022 (Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, 338).

of the book.[2] Thus, Pico serves as a kind of lens through which the variations of scholastic thought might be observed, or perhaps it might be better said to be a kind of prism and not simply a lens, because « Pico's reading and cognizance of the Latin scholastic tradition is thorough, competent, and creative », as Edelheit claims, and his « engagement with these sources is a fundamental component in his claim to originality as a philosopher » (p. 536). Edelheit repeats the main thesis of the book in his conclusion: « Pico's fundamental philosophical ideas, and important aspects of his theological allegiances cannot be understood in isolation of his engagement with the pluriform traditions of medieval and Renaissance scholasticism » (p. 539).

Edelheit contends that the intellectual context that is scholasticism has not received adequate attention by modern scholarship dedicated to Pico. But we should be careful here: the author warns against a uniform, monolithic conception of scholasticism, and often instead prefers to speak of « the pluriform tradition of medieval and Renaissance scholasticism » (p. 2), or rather Renaissance scholasticisms – in the plural. This appellation, *Renaissance scholasticism(s)*, ought even to replace *Renaissance Aristotelianism(s)*, a designation in the plural that has been common since Charles Schmitt.[3] Edelheit's treatment of Giovanni Pico, then, takes up a neglected aspect of his thought, but one that is « essential for understanding the works and the influence of Pico » (p. 2).[4] It should be noted that this emphasis upon the scholastic context is, for the author, corrective of an imbalance typical of the 'dominant trends' of contemporary scholarship on Pico – viz., studies dedicated to the influence of Kabbalah and Jewish mysticism upon the thought of Pico, beginning in the last century with Frances Yates and Chaim Wirszubski and exemplified most recently by Brian Copenhaver. Edelheit thus

[2] Thus, drawing to a close in chapter three: « The purpose of this chapter was not to discuss Parisian scholasticism as such, or to suggest any direct influence of it on Pico, but rather to provide a more concrete and solid account of the Parisian style of doing philosophy (the *stilus Parisiensis*) in the last decades of the fifteenth century, which goes beyond the previous scholarly discussions of Pico and the Parisian masters, while pointing out some obvious thematic and argumentative similarities, and also some similarities in philosophical temperament, between several masters and Pico in the context of the scholastic discourse of the Renaissance », p. 100.

[3] See, especially, the first chapter of Charles Schmitt, *Aristotle and the Renaissance*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1983: « My point is that the single rubric Aristotelianism is not adequate to describe the range of diverse assumptions, attitudes, approaches to knowledge, reliance on authority, utilization of sources, and methods of analysis to be found among the Renaissance followers of Aristotle », p. 10.

[4] One might also consult the recent: Brian Copenhaver, *Pico della Mirandola on Trial: Heresy, Freedom, and Philosophy*, Oxford UP, Oxford 2022. Copenhaver pays special attention to Pico's *Apology* and its particular academic, or scholastic character. Important sources and authorities in Copenhaver's analysis include Robert Holcot and John Capreolus (Jean Cabrol), among other major and minor figures. Also included are English translations of several Questions of the *Apology*.

announces in the opening pages of Part 1 that the Kabbalistic sources ought not be prioritized over any other intellectual tradition, and certainly not over the more immediate, « and probably more obvious » scholastic context of the fifteenth century. An examination of the scholastic sources thus begins with Eugenio Garin's 1937 monograph – whose treatment is, admittedly, all-too-brief and incomplete – and then more fully treated in a 1941 Harvard dissertation by Avery Dulles (p. 11–14). More recently, Edelheit joins Stefano Caroti in paying special attention to the scholastic sources.[5]

The book is divided into three parts: Part 1 is dedicated to Pico's scholastic formation and educational training in Italy and at Paris, divided into three chapters. The complexity of Pico's thought is at least partially the result of his formation in Renaissance scholasticisms. Edelheit insists that, given Pico's sincere interest in, and appreciation of, scholastic sources – something that has indeed already been recognized by scholars – it is certainly justified to pay additional, careful attention to his formation in scholastic philosophy. Edelheit's attempt to do this consists in a reconstruction of Pico's philosophical interests and the broader milieu, first at Padua and then at Paris. Concerning Padua, Elijah Delmedigo is essential; and it is nearly certain that Pico would have studied with Nicoletto Vernia. While it is unlikely that the Dominican, Francesco Securo da Nardo was one of Pico's teachers at Padua, Edelheit nonetheless maintains that it is possible that Pico would have been aware of his work and legacy. Antonio Trombetta, a Scotist, is another thinker who is identified as a possible teacher of Pico. It is such suggestions that afford Edelheit the opportunity to examine in some detail important aspects of their thought in order to paint the portrait of the intellectual climate there.[6] Other suggestions as possible teachers of Pico include two Dominicans, Lazzaro Gallineta da Padova and Andrea da Urbino. The context offered here is one in which Pico engaged with, or at least is exposed to, Aristotelian natural philosophy, Averroism, and a Scotist metaphysics that is in

[5] E.g., Stefano Caroti, « Note sulle fonti medievali di Pico della Mirandola », *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana*, 84 (2005), p. 60–92.

[6] The desire to sketch out a reconstruction of « Pico's philosophical interests during the time he spent in Padua » (p. 43) affords the author the opportunity to spend a bit of time with each of these thinkers. Thus, in chapter 2 we find several pages devoted to a presentation of two *Quaestiones* by Vernia – viz., [1] whether *ens mobile* is the subject of natural philosophy, and [2] whether the intellective soul, when united to the human body as a real substantial form, giving it a unique substantial existence, is eternal and one for all humans; see pp. 32–41. We then find a consideration of Delmedigo's *Quaestiones de unitate intellectus*, preserved today only in Hebrew translation; the author reports that a critical edition of this text is underway, by Michael Engel and Giovanni Licata; see p. 41–53. On Delmedigo, and this topic, one might consult Michael Engel, *Elijah Del Medigo and Paduan Aristotelianism: Investigating the Human Intellect*, Bloomsbury, London 2017. Concerning Trombetta, Edelheit offers a brief survey of his 1493 *Quaestiones metaphysicales*; see p. 55–63.

dialogue with Thomist positions. A reconstructed intellectual context of Paris is then offered in chapter three, and while we are less able to make concrete determinations regarding the direct influence of this or that master on Pico, Edelheit suggests that the climate at Paris might have contributed to Pico's « inclusive method ». Additionally, in this chapter, the author reminds readers that, from the contemporary perspective, we ought to be careful when we find terms such as 'ancient' or 'modern,' 'realist' or 'nominalist' in fifteenth-century texts, since such terms might not always represent a static concept; such terms must be read and understood in their particular contexts.[7]

Part 2 moves on to examine Pico's attitude toward the scholastic tradition. The author employs the term 'traces' for this part of the book: that is, the author hopes to « look for traces and influences of different scholastic philosophers found in the works of Pico, mainly in the *Oratio*, *Theses*, and *Apology* » (p. 6). Given the amount of documentation and evidence provided by the author, it seems as if there are more than simple traces of scholastic philosophy in Pico's works. Part 2 contains eight chapters, six of which are dedicated to the *900 Theses*, about which more will be said shortly.

Part 3 carries the title, « Scholastic Reactions to Pico and the Reception of His Thought and Method », and contains six chapters, dedicated respectively to Bernardo Torni, Galgani da Siena, Pedro Garsia, Giovanni Caroli, Antonio Cittadini di Faenza, and Pietro Pomponazzi, taking up matters of natural philosophy, theology, metaphysics, and astrology. Each one of these episodes sketched out offers an instance of the critical reception of Pico's ideas. These are rich studies that resist summary. In Chapter 13, « Galgani da Siena against a Thesis on the Nature of Sound », Edelheit points out a peculiar portrayal and characterization of Averroes by Galgani: because he had recourse only to unreliable translations of Aristotle, Averroes – 'the Commentator' – is in fact not so much a commentator, but rather an *inventor* and original philosopher. The author, perhaps characteristically, suggests likewise the plurality of Renaissance *Averroism(s)* as an avenue of further research (p. 398–399). Regarding Chapter 14, « Pedro Garsia against the *Apology* », Edelheit cites from the Rome 1489 edition of the *Determinationes magistrales contra conclusiones apologeticas Joannis Pici Mirandulani concordie comitis*; to an otherwise comprehensive bibliography should be added the text of Jérôme Rousse-Lacordaire, which offers a Latin-French edition of the *Determinationes magistrales*.[8]

[7] Later, in the eighth chapter – in brief reference to the Dominican, Paolo Barbo Soncino – Edelheit warns also of such generalizations as 'Thomist' or 'Scotist,' emphasizing that when such labels are found, they ought to be construed according to a specific thinker (p. 284, fn. 48).

[8] JÉRÔME ROUSSE-LACORDAIRE, *Une controverse sur la magie et la kabbale à la Renaissance*, Droz, Genève 2010; on this, see the note by STÉPHANE TOUSSAINT, « Pic et le Magister », *Bruniana & Campanelliana*, 16 (2010), p. 647–651. One wonders whether the corrective approach of the present study to the

II. *The 900 Theses:* Conclusiones secundum doctrinam latinorum philosophorum et theologorum

In Part 2, dedicated to « Scholastic Traces and Influences », the six chapters (ch. 6–11) that up the *900 Theses* are truly compelling from a methodological perspective. The first 115 of those theses are dedicated to the Latins, viz., to six scholastic masters: Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Francis of Mayronnes, John Duns Scotus, Henry of Ghent, and Giles of Rome. Edelheit thus takes up each set of respective theses across six chapters: beyond tracking down the sources for each thesis (this itself is formidable), Edelheit attempts a serious reconstruction of the dialectical context for each individual thesis, in order to determine better Pico's thought.

Perhaps just a few general words are in order concerning the *900 Theses*, so that we might elaborate better upon Edelheit's contribution.[9] When Giovanni Pico was a ripe twenty-three years old, he planned to organize – and to finance – a grand philosophical disputation in Rome: Pico sought to defend 900 theses that would represent all learning available to him. Such theses were to represent the conclusions of, in descending quantitative order, Latin scholastics, Greek Platonists, Arabic Aristotelians, Greek Aristotelians, Pythagoras, Cabalists, Hermes Trismegistus, and Chaldean theologians – 402 theses in total. The remaining 498 theses represent Pico's « own opinions », taking up matters of theology, metaphysics, mathematics, and magic. The famous *Oratio* – for which Giovanni Pico is best remembered – was intended to be an introductory prelude to the disputation of the *Theses*.[10] Papal intervention delayed the public disputation,

'dominant fashion' might account for this omission. Since Origen is not irrelevant in this context, we add one further study to the bibliography of secondary sources: Pasquale Terracciano, *Omnia in Figura: L'impronta di Origene tra '400 e '500*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Roma 2012; see esp. p. 74–101, « Le *Tesi* di Pico ».

[9] One might consult, for an overview, Stéphane Toussaint, « Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494): The Synthetic Reconciliation of All Philosophies », in Paul Richard Blum (ed.), *Philosophers of the Renaissance*, Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C. 2010, p. 69–81, esp. 74–76. Still invaluable is Steve A. Farmer, *Syncretism in the West: Pico's 900 Theses (1486): The Evolution of Traditional Religious and Philosophical Systems*, Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, Tempe 1998, which includes the Latin text, English translation, as well as the ample introductory monograph. Edelheit utilizes Farmer's edition, and signals in the footnotes relevant observations or references given by Farmer throughout.

[10] The *Oratio* has long been known by its 'new' title, *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (*Oratio de hominis dignitate*). On this, see Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Life of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Oration*, ed. and trans. Brian Copenhaver, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA – London 2022 (I Tatti Renaissance Library, 93), p. xxxiii–xliv. One must additionally mention the following recent, extensive study: Brian P. Copenhaver, *Magic and the Dignity of Man: Pico della Mirandola and His* Oration *in Modern Memory*, Belknap – Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA – London 2019; for a critical discussion, see Luca Burzelli, « Specters of Pico:

concerned about the extravagance of the intended event as well as the heterodoxy of some of the theses, but the *900 Theses* themselves were nonetheless printed. It thus represents a curious work, since it was not really meant to be read as a self-standing text and is, in a sense, incomplete: there is no explicit argumentation in the work, only the conclusions that Pico intended to defend at a public event that never took place.[11] « The nine hundred theses are », in Farmer's words, « loaded with ambiguities that Pico meant to resolve in the course of his debate ».[12] Edelheit thus takes up the first group of 115 theses, dedicated to the *doctrinam latinorum philosophorum et theologorum*. Edelheit points out that Pico, in the *Oratio*, refers to this group of scholastics as « our philosophers » – *atque ut a nostris, ad quod postremo philosophia pervenit, nunc exordiar* – representing « the period of the philosophical tradition which was closest to Pico's own time and culture », though professing not to swear by one master or school (p. 141). Edelheit aims to « sketch as fully as possible » the dialectical context of these theses « in order to somehow 'fill the gaps' which Pico leaves in his bare elaboration of the *900 Theses* » (p. 186).

And so Edelheit works patiently, in a sober manner, through each of those theses dedicated to the six Latin masters, taking as his starting point the 1936 monograph by Pearl Kibre[13] – though, never simply with the aim to find the textual *locus* of the thesis, but rather to scrutinize and sketch out the possible dialectical context in light of other possible textual references. This proves to be a difficult task. Through such a scrutiny, we discover that Pico's account of theses according to the teaching of Albert the Great (sixteen in all), for example, are not simply reiterations or presentations of Albert's own views, but rather signify a kind of thinking through the matter at hand via a particular position of Albert – Pico might offer a different emphasis in his articulation of the thesis, when compared to its textual context, however certainly indicates not only real familiarity with Albert's text, but also, more importantly, Pico's own understanding of Albert's ideas. Similarly, in the forty-five conclusions attributed to Thomas Aquinas, many theses are accurate when located and examined in their context; however, one does find that Pico often tends to offer slight variations in his chosen terminology, representing, again, not simply a transmission of unexamined conclusions, but rather a sort of re-working of those arguments in order to arrive at a better understanding of the matter at hand. Pico, after all, envisions the proper task of the philosopher – as opposed to the orator or the

A Note Concerning a Recent Book on the *Oratio de dignitate hominis* », *Mediterranea: International Journal on the Transfer of Knowledge*, 7 (2022), p. 391–422.

11 Edelheit calls the *900 Theses* « a frozen and somewhat silent monument to an ambitious project which was never realized », p. 149.

12 Farmer, *Syncretism in the West*, p. 97.

13 Pearl Kibre, *The Library of Pico della Mirandola*, Columbia University Press, New York 1936.

politician, for example – to be a sort of relentless pursuit of the truth.[14] Such a pursuit, again, proceeds without any sworn allegiance to a particular master or 'school' of thought. While the competent philosopher ought to remove ambiguities in order to arrive at the truth, suggests Pico, the *900 Theses* are full of ambiguities since they are fragmentary, and so Edelheit's attempt at reconstruction offers persuasive accounts of the possible ways in which Pico might have dissolved difficulties had the public disputation taken place. There are certainly times in which Edelheit determines that Thomas' own discussions are not in complete accordance with what Pico offers, and so Pico's view represents an interpretation and working through of a particular view.

Let us look at one example. Thesis 39 offers the following: « the phantasm is the secondary and instrumental agent in the production of an intelligible species ».[15] The relevant *dictum* in the background, stemming from the *De anima*, is of course that the soul never thinks without a phantasm. This claim is taken seriously throughout the commentary traditions, and certainly is taken seriously by Thomas Aquinas, who – not only in his *De anima* commentary, but also in Q. 84, a. 7 of the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae* – insists that the intellect, in this present life when joined to the body, must of necessity turn towards phantasms in order to have actual intellective understanding of anything. Here, in the relevant thesis, Edelheit determines that Pico's motivation is « to increase the independence of the intelligible species over the level of images and sense perception » (p. 263–264). The author determines that we should look at Q. 76, a. 2 of the *Summae Theologiae*, which discusses specifically the relationship between phantasms and intelligible species, asking « whether the intellective principle is multiplied in accordance with the multiplication of bodies ». Thomas' specific concern in that article is to refute the Averroistic thesis of monopsychism. There, Thomas claims that it is not the phantasm that is the form of the possible intellect, but rather the intelligible species that is abstracted from phantasms – one intelligible species drawn from many phantasms. It is not the phantasms themselves that produce intelligible species, but rather an operation of the intellect. If there were but one intellect for all humans, « then the diversity between phantasms which exist in this or that individual would not be able to cause a diversity of intellectual operation of this or that man » (p. 264). Edelheit's point regarding thesis 39 – that the phantasm is a secondary and instrumental agent in the production of intelligible species – is that, properly speaking, the formulation is not found in Thomas as such, but is implied in Thomas' discussion

[14] Edelheit elaborates on this in a discussion of the correspondence between Pico and Ermolao Barbaro; see ch. 4, esp. 116–120.

[15] « Phantasma est agens secundarium et instrumentale in productione speciei intelligibilis », p. 263, fn. 184.

on this matter. Pico's own formulation thus represents not only a grasp of Thomas' point, but also a more specific, implied conclusion.

More generally, Edelheit finds that Pico's theses dedicated to Thomas are mostly accurate, though, especially by paying attention to specific terminological departures, indicate Pico's own specific interests and motivations. Edelheit suggests – and here signals an avenue of future research – that Pico's desire to push Thomas beyond what the context suggests may stem from a desire to refute some view of William of Ockham. Edelheit finds that Pico's presentation of Scotus is mostly accurate. Pico possesses strong familiarity with the Scotist school generally, as is evidenced by the theses dedicated to Francis of Mayronnes, though again with some terminological differences. He finds that those theses of Henry of Ghent include occasion for slight departure which indicates his own particular understanding of Henry.[16]

To offer a second, brief example, the tenth of the theses according to Henry of Ghent states simply: friendship is a virtue – *amicitia est virtus*. Again, on its own, we are left to wonder what Pico would have done with this thesis had the public disputation taken place. Edelheit looks at *Quodlibet* X, q. 12, where Henry does take up friendship, utilizing Aristotle and Cicero as authorities and arguing in fact that friendship is a virtue. In this question, Henry concludes that – Edelheit is offering a paraphrase of Henry here – « friendship should be regarded as an all-embracing virtue and as a principal part of general justice, since it gives each one what he deserves, and thus it fulfils the rule of nature: do not do to someone else what you would not wish for someone to do to you » (p. 329). Pico's thesis thus is but a bare conclusion, and on its own does not possess anything of Henry's more nuanced analysis. The background offered, thus, represents a possible reconstruction of Pico's argument.

Regarding Albert the Great, Pico's preferred texts were his commentaries on the *Physics* and on the *De Anima*, and so represents a variation of the intellectual heritage of Albert in the fifteenth century, where he is chiefly, for Pico, a representative and commentator regarding matters of natural philosophy. Concerning Aquinas, the *Summa Theologiae* turns out to be less important as a source for Thomas' thought as is, for Pico, Aquinas' commentary on the *Sentences*. This is seen not only in the relevant of the *900 Theses*, but also in Pico's *Apology*.[17] It

[16] Incidentally, the most cited scholastic masters in Pico's *Apology* are Robert Holcot, Durandus of Saint-Pourçain, and Henry of Ghent; see ch. 5, p. 185.

[17] Edelheit had already noted this in ch. 5: « Thomas' commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* is one of Pico's main sources for the theses dedicated to the Angelic Doctor », p. 166. In this context, regarding the *Apology*, the author stresses « [i]t is clear that Thomas for Pico is not an authority but rather an author and one source among many », p. 168. In this chapter, while elaborating on the authority of Henry of Ghent in the *Apology*, the question regarding the adoration of the cross and images (*de adoratione crucis et imaginum*) arises along with Pico's presentation of Thomas'

should be noted that Pico's library contained many of Thomas' works – parts of the *Summa Theologiae*, the *Summa contra Gentiles*, many commentaries on Aristotle as well as disputed questions, and shorter works such as *De esse et essentia* and *Tractatus de principiis naturae*. Edelheit reports that Pico also « most probably » possessed Pietro da Bergamo's *Concordantiae conclusionum in quibus Thomas de Aquino videtur sibi contradicere*, though suggests in a footnote that this might be the concordance of Gerard de Monte (p. 214). Regarding the status of Thomas' commentary on the *Sentences* in Pico's writings, in light of the texts in his possession, such material evidence is indicative of certain textual topographies that exist at different stages of intellectual history, where particular texts are privileged at the expense of others.

Edelheit's study of this first group of theses – the Latin scholastics – thus represents a real contribution to the study of Pico's curious work. It should be noted that, in offering these reconstructions, the author provides heavy paraphrase of any given scholastic source; readers, however, have at their disposal ample footnotes that offer long passages of the Latin texts. At any rate, Edelheit, here and at other points in the book, signals particular avenues for future research. The general *desiderata* regarding the whole of the *900 Theses* would be similar kinds of attempted reconstruction for the other groups of conclusions and thinkers – a rather large undertaking, given the variety of source material.

III. *A New Status of Philosophy*

Early on in the introduction to the monograph, Edelheit announces very clearly that Giovanni Pico is not a scholastic and that the purpose of his book is not to show that Pico was a scholastic philosopher.[18] Edelheit repeats in his conclusion that Pico is not a scholastic – certainly not in the sense that he was committed to the thought of one master or was a member of one of the 'schools.' We of course should recall Pico's own words, from the *Oratio*, adopted from Horace: *Nullius addictus iurare in verba magistri* – I am not bound to swear by the words of any master. Edelheit's *A Philosopher at the Crossroads* offers careful analyses of Pico's

position (p. 162, 171–173); to this discussion should be added Stéphane Toussaint, « Il Cristo di Pico: Dalla Croce al Trigramma », in Antonella Del Prete, Saverio Ricci (eds.) *Cristo nella filosofia moderna*, Le Lettere, Firenze 2014, p. 77–96.

[18] Edelheit states: « The purpose of this book is not to show that one of the most prominent figures in the philosophy of the fifteenth century, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494), was a 'scholastic philosopher', at least as this term has been commonly understood », p. 1. This qualification, « as this term has been commonly understood », of course arouses the curiosity of the reader, and one now wonders whether this remains the case employing a new, *uncommon* understanding of the designation.

texts that are in close conversation with scholastic sources: it is clear that Pico is versed in those scholastic sources and is able to speak the language and employ the tools and methods of scholastic philosophy; it is clear that scholastic philosophy as a tradition of inquiry – in all of its varieties – is still alive and in fact dominant throughout Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. What seems to exclude Pico from the ranks of the scholastic philosophers proper has to do with his *inclusive* approach to philosophy, the history of philosophy, and more generally to ideas and texts generally; this inclusive approach is distinct from the exclusive models that might characterize both the more typical humanist and scholastic perspectives. Pico thus represents, for Edelheit, a new approach and model to philosophy and the history of philosophy, and this is taken up in chapters four and five.

Edelheit suggests that Pico – alongside Poliziano, Barbaro, and Ficino – were constructing historical models that contrast greatly from the systematic approach of the scholastics. Angelo Poliziano (1454–1494) is presented as someone who is uniquely dedicated to philosophy, seeing the liberal arts generally not as tantamount to the philosophical project, but as a course of studies that opens the way and draws one closer to philosophy. Edelheit presents Poliziano's version of 'dialectic,' which goes beyond Aristotelian logic, emphasizing his elevation of ancient philosophy over that of the middle ages, and his approach to philosophy and the history of philosophy as one that is 'exclusive' – giving preference to Greek and Roman sources. Despite his estimation and praise of true philosophy (i.e., ancient philosophy) and his contempt for the 'barbarians' (i.e., scholastic philosophers), Edehelt draws attention to the fact that Poliziano stresses that this true philosophy ought to be defended with *ratione vel autoritate*, using reason and rational argument and relying on authority – these are precisely the practices employed by the scholastics. Edelheit comments that Poliziano's commitment to philosophy found in his *Praelectio de dialectica* perhaps does not square with standard conceptions of fifteenth-century humanism. Despite his commitments to philosophy and his elaboration of dialectic, Poliziano's model remains exclusive, and scholastic sources are dismissed (p. 108–115).

Pico, on the other hand, is not eager to distinguish sharply between classical Greek and Roman philosophers and the much nearer scholastic philosophers. Edelheit contends that Pico's approach to scholastic philosophy is a historical one, but perhaps not purely historical since scholastic philosophy still very much belongs to the present of Pico's day. Edelheit claims that « [w]e witness here what is probably the birth of the historical approach to philosophy in the early modern era » (p. 116). Pico's model was an inclusive one. His inclusive approach rejects the exclusive classicism favored by the 'humanists' and also exceeds the confines of the approach and methods of the scholastics. In articulating this, Edelheit employs language of anticipation: « there is something refreshing in this approach that

anticipated early modern conceptions of philosophy and science, which also accepted an essential separation between philosophy and rhetoric » (p. 117). The task and activity of philosophy is, ultimately, the examination of and search for truth, and the philosopher proceeds in this activity out of necessity. The philosopher is distinguished from both the orator and the politician, both in aim and in means. A new status thus must be given to the philosopher, and this seems to involve for Pico the employment of a specific and technical vocabulary and language that belongs to the philosopher: « while rejecting many aspects of the scholastic idiom, [Pico] is still wedded to the idea that a specialized vocabulary is needed in order to prosecute speculative debate » (p. 120, fn. 35). Refuting false arguments, upholding sound ones, clarifying ambiguities, removing doubts, and illluminating the obscure – these are the competencies of the scholastic masters which ought to be admired – all require precise language in order to reflect distinctions of nuance. The scholastic methodology and style, bland though it might be from the perspective of the classicism at the time, does not obstruct the ways to truth. Pico's project, however, and the range of sources he employs, does exceed the scope of mere scholastic discourse – however, those methods, though they already form a part of history, as such remain valid.

Pico also rejects a conception of philosophy as a discipline that is merely preparatory or propaedeutic for the higher disciplines of medicine, law, and theology; he rejects « the notion that the study of philosophy was an instrument for achieving something else which was more valuable, not an aim in itself » (p. 138). The study of philosophy, however, involves the consideration of any and all possible sources, and Pico again goes out of his way to vindicate and in fact elevate the scholastics by pointing out specifically their practice of public disputation (not only in philosophy but also theology). Such forms of public disputation belong essentially to the activity of philosophy and Pico associates such practices with none other than Plato and Aristotle and other prominent philosophers: « By maintaining that the very best Doctors (*doctores excellentissimi*) participated in these disputations, as had the best ancient philosophers, Pico created a philosophical continuity between classical and scholastic philosophy, rejecting any sharp distinction between these two traditions and any exclusive approach which prioritized the philosophical culture of classical antiquity over that of medieval scholasticism » (p. 139). Edelheit sees in Pico not simply a reader and conduit of scholastic trends of philosophy, but rather a distinctive philosophical voice who attempts to proceed in bold and independent ways; his engagement with the scholastic traditions *in particular*, however, are of special interest. On the one hand, Pico's « reading and consideration of the scholastic tradition affords us a unique insight into the ways in which philosophy, as it was practiced in the Italian peninsula and further conceived as an independent branch of intellectual enquiry, was in a state of profound transition at the end of the

fifteenth century » (p. 149). On the other, precisely because philosophy as it was practiced in the universities throughout Europe at this time – i.e., scholastic philosophy – was « more or less synonymous with 'philosophy' », and because the developments in philosophy during the seventeenth century identified their projects in clear opposition to this professional, scholastic philosophy, Edelheit sees the richness and tensions at work in Pico's engagement with the scholastics as a kind of « dialectic which is essential for the understanding of later stages of the history of philosophy and the sciences » (p. 117). Edelheit is careful. He does not call Pico a modern *avant la lettre*. Edelheit more generally warns against such rigid descriptors as reductive and at times historically misleading and problematic. But, as we have seen above, Edelheit does employ language of anticipation, and does see in Pico the 'birth' of a new kind of approach to philosophy that is akin to approaches of the centuries to follow. Philosophy must proceed using a careful vocabulary of a specialist, and must reckon with its own history, or histories. The suggestion in the text perhaps is that Pico is yearning for a philosophical method that can cut through the apparent incommensurability of the many and various sources at his disposal. The scholastic methods and practices themselves play an important part in this new conception, and yet Pico remains only at the threshold, or better, a crossroads. Whatever reservations one might have in seeing in Pico the origins of a new and modern philosophy (and it seems that Edelheit might be laying emphasis on this fertile context and intellectual milieu as transitional and, as a result of this, exceptionally rich), as well as those that might arise from the apparent rejection of a Kabbalistic Pico, what is incontestable is that a serious consideration of Pico's thought must take into account the scholastic heritage.[19] What is also clear – a much more ambitious *desideratum* – is that a new history of philosophy is needed, one that takes seriously the scholastic traditions and does not fall victim to common narratives concerning, on the one hand, the decline of the medieval inheritance, or, on the other, the origins of 'proper,' modern philosophy. That history of the enduring tradition of scholasticisms remains to be written, but the author makes the convincing case that Giovanni Pico della Mirandola – not incidentally, but significantly – ought very much to find a place in that history.

[19] Copenhaver likewise emphasizes that Pico's thought ought to be studied not only by students of the Renaissance, but also by specialists of medieval philosophy. See note 4, above.