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While trying to make sense of what authors – and past authors in particular – have actually said, and have meant to say, we realise how problematic the relationship between *thought* and *what-has-been-thought-about-it* is. The problematic implications of our interpretative effort become even more evident when we consider that, as Benedetto Croce put it, it is always an interest of the present that triggers the desire to understand the past. Then we realise that dealing with the divergent ways in which an author's writings have been received throughout time is part of the problem. Needless to say, facing such difficulties is the best way to attain historical significance in that uninterrupted collective intellectual activity that Michael Oakeshott called « the conversation of mankind », comprising the countless voices apt to provide meaningfulness to all human endeavours.

From the second half of the nineteenth century onward, initially in the context of the question of the relationship between State and Church, Marsilius of Padua (1275/1285–1342/1343) and his *Defensor pacis* (1324) have been the focus of scholarly attention. The attractive force of the visions, concepts and ideas displayed in the *Defensor pacis* in particular seems far from declining. The growth of Marsilian studies as such guarantees no direct increase in our knowledge of his life and work. Yet, this very growth is definitely important in so far as it gives us the chance to reflect on how scholars came to represent to themselves Marsilius of Padua and his writings. How to explain this enduring interest? Several answers can be given, which are not mutually exclusive.

The Paduan thinker is widely known as one of the most controversial medieval authors, not only on account of his unorthodox and radical views, but also of his alleged 'modernity'. The themes of Marsilius's modernity and adaptability to current affairs were at the core of the conference held at the University of Padua in 1942 to celebrate the sixth anniversary of his death (see *Marsilio da Padova. Studi raccolti nel VI Centenario della morte*, edited by Aldo Checcini and Norberto Bobbio, CEDAM, Padua). The most notable interpretative achievements date back to the

1950s, 1960s and 1970s, whose common denominator was overcoming the limits of scholarly work that had respectively emphasised the modernity of *Defensor pacis*, the role of Marsilius as the forerunner of the *esprit laïque*, his conciliarist vocation, his commitment to 'radical democracy', his favour for political absolutism, and even his role as the founder of legal positivism. Then a wave of new studies developed stressing the varied historical, political and philosophical sources that influenced his thought, as well as the contexts and perspectives which in turn have been influenced by the latter. This trend found expression, for example, in the international conference held again at the University of Padua in 1980 to celebrate the seventh anniversary of Marsilius's birth. The 1979 and 1980 issues of the Italian journal for the history of medieval philosophy *Medioevo* hosted the most relevant contributions part of the new wave of interest for Marsilius's life and work. The tendency to approach Marsilius's writings as a whole in light of a multiplicity of research perspectives and contexts grew steadily.

Evidence of the enduring attractive force of Marsilius's work can be found in two different volumes that appeared thanks to the effort of distinguished publishers such as Brepols and Brill respectively. In the aftermath of the Marsilius of Padua World Congress hosted by the 2003 International Medieval Congress (IMC), which the Institute for Medieval Studies at the University of Leeds organises and administers since 1994, in 2006 Gerson Moreno-Riaño edited a volume containing accounts ranging from papalist responses to the *Defensor pacis* to issues in translating it, from the nature of Marsilius' political activism to the relevance and influence of medical language and sources, from the traditional problems of power and sovereignty in the first *dictio* to theological and ecclesiological arguments in the second one (see *The World of Marsilius of Padua*). The 2011 Brill volume that Cary J. Nederman and Gerson Moreno-Riaño edited aims to cover aspects that induce to interpret the *Defensor pacis* as a unified and coherent work. Emphasising the importance of the variety of sources and instances that underpin it, the book includes accounts of the impact of the Paduan tradition of natural philosophy seeking respectively to uncover the influence within the latter of medicine and astrology, to stress the impact on Marsilius of Franciscan debates on evangelical poverty at the court of Ludwig the Bavarian and the importance of Marsilius himself in genealogies of the modern understanding of rights, to shed light on Marsilius' adherence to the Ghibelline vision of politics, on the influence of the ideas presented in the *Defensor pacis* on early modern authors, and last but not least on the possible influence of Ibn Rushd's work (see *A Companion to Marsilius of Padua*).

In most recent scholarship, new light has been shed on aspects of his life previously unknown, making us wonder about where Marsilius as a political philosopher ends and the political actor begins. It has been emphasised that Marsilius' political thought constitutes a powerful source of inspiration,

theoretical and practical. On the other hand, it has been remarked that the fortune of his major work depends on the imagination of scholars far too eager to adjust it to cohere with their current expectations and interests. Some interpreters argued that a degree of continuity between late medieval and early modern political discourses can be detected in light of the peculiar theory and practice of Christianity that Marsilius promoted. Eventually, both the widely accepted views of the Paduan thinker as the first truly secular post-classical political thinker, and as a precursor of the republican humanists of the Renaissance, have been questioned with a view to asserting that he was a genuine imperialist, hence, as other interpreters claimed, either a supporter of Ghibelline politics or one of the most prominent theorists of 'Ghibellinism'. Far from being the herald of secular politics in medieval Europe, Marsilius of Padua is also said to have promoted a profoundly Christian understanding of history as a providentially ordained process. In this vein, the *Defensor pacis* was meant to show that the events of his time were the last stage in a divinely ordained apocalyptic process. The year 2024 marked the seven hundredth anniversary of Marsilius of Padua's completion of the *Defensor pacis* (24 June 1324). One of the sessions of the IMC celebrated this momentous event, providing the opportunity to engage Marsilius's thought, writings, milieu, influences, context, and reception in relation to both Marsilius himself and the enduring philosophical issues that have continued to have salience. A new collection of essays is thus expected to be released in the near future.

The 2023 volume edited by Alessandro Mulieri, Serena Masolini and Jenny Pelletier stems from a conference held in July 2018 at the University of Leuven, which had as a title *Marsilius of Padua. Between History, Politics, and Philosophy*. It comprises fifteen contributions by younger and senior scholars introduced by a comprehensive note provided by Alessandro Mulieri. The volume is divided into three parts. Like in the already mentioned 2006 Brepols book edited by Moreno-Riaño, which comprises fourteen essays, in the 2023 volume too chapters are not numbered.

Part One is concerned with Marsilius of Padua's sources. In order to more precisely situate some of the arguments expounded in the *Defensor pacis* in the broad context of the divergent interpretations of 'medieval Aristotelianism', Roberto Lambertini addresses the question of Marsilius's selective and skilful reading of Aristotle's *Politica*. According to the author, a careful examination of the manuscript tradition related to William of Moerbeke's translation suggests that certain incongruencies of citation by Marsilius himself most likely depend on the fact that he used a little-known copy of the *Politica*, one including fewer but longer chapters. Gert-Jan van de Voorde takes as his focus Marsilius's appraisal of the Roman trial of Jesus in the background of the Augustinian reading of it. In particular, the question of the political meaning of the trial to Marsilius and

Augustine is addressed. The author suggests that Marsilius acquired knowledge of Augustinian ideas more from contemporary sources than directly from Augustine's work. On account of his political activism, Marsilius viewed the trail as proof of Jesus's definitive sanctioning of the earthly supremacy of temporal authority. Augustine is seen as a theologian whose political ideas served theology and were subordinate to faith. By contrast Marsilius was a political strategist whose theological considerations were instrumental to promote a purely political agenda. In making this point, however, the author relies on an extremely rigid separation between 'use' and 'influence' on the side of Marsilius with regard to Augustine's work, one whereby the nature of 'influence' and 'use' remain unexplored. Marco Toste's contribution too is concerned with the question of Marsilius's position in the context of medieval interpretations of Aristotle's *Politica*. The author offers relevant insights toward a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between the *Defensor pacis* and Peter of Auvergne's Aristotelian political ideas, the latter being identified as 'the missing link' between Marsilius and Aristotle. In particular, Toste advances the hypothesis that, while at the Parisian Arts Faculty, Marsilius became familiar with Peter of Auvergne's commentaries of *Politica*. In his essay, Iacopo Costa explores the psychological foundation of the conception of law expounded in the *Defensor pacis* and its impact on the Marsilius's vision of salvation and divine law. The question of the very nature of this impact – theological; philosophical; psychological – besides its obvious political relevance, remains largely unanswered. The innovative character of Marsilius's conception of law and order is overstated. A detailed and well-articulated parallel between Aquinas and Marsilius is made, but it overshadows the latter's interest for contemporary civil and canon law elaboration. The first part of the volume ends with Alessandro Mulieri's contribution on the meaning, function, and sources of collective prudence in the *Defensor pacis* seen as a political and ideological weapon against papal plenitude of power. The topic is in fact seldomly treated in Marsilian studies. As far as the reception of the notion of collective prudence is concerned, Marsilius's debt toward Peter of Abano and Peter of Auvergne is acknowledged. Marsilius is said to have meant to substitute natural law as the foundation of human law with a secular idea of knowledge and experience.

Part Two explores the relationships between Marsilius's ideas and contemporary authors and traditions of thought. Juhana Toivanen's contribution deals with the question of the role that Marsilius assigned to 'emotions' in the establishment of social and political institutions in both the *Defensor pacis* and the *Defensor minor*. The author claims that Marsilius had a theory of emotions, although not a full-fledged one. At the same time, he specifies that Marsilius himself was not interested in theoretically elaborating on emotions because this type of intellectual activity would be irrelevant to the political goals that he sought to

achieve. On these grounds, it is unclear in what sense and how the emotional dimension of human life can be said to play an important role in Marsilius' political theory, as Toivanen does. The usage of a terminology so embedded in the current vocabulary of psychology seems to be instrumental to the purpose of shedding light on one of the possibly most neglected aspects of Marsilius's political thought. If this were the case, however, one should also be prepared to accept that in so doing a too high degree of conceptual ambiguity is going to affect the whole interpretative project. Hence, answering the question of the relevance of emotions in Marsilius's major writings becomes a task particularly difficult to perform. Ferdinand Deanini focuses on the tension between the concept of the 'good life', based upon the ideas of self-sufficiency and living well, and the notion of 'perfect life', deriving from the *imitatio Christi*, which requires the renunciation to all the wealth of this world. The author convincingly suggests that, concerned as he was with exploiting the possible political implications of the poverty controversy, Marsilius proved to be unable to explain why the priestly part should still engage in civic activity. Gianluca Briguglia explores the question of Marsilius's Ghibelline commitment and his contribution is an attempt at radically reconceptualise it. One of the implicit assumptions of this author's essay is that we should leave behind as untenable and anachronistic the rigid separation between Marsilius the man of learning and the man of action. If Marsilius had practical political aspirations, and accordingly he crafted persuasive strategies, he nevertheless theorised a distinct approach to understand and deal with the problems of politics. On a parallel basis, the suggestion is made that we should not be satisfied with seeing Marsilius as merely a supporter of Ghibelline politics. Rather we should acknowledge his role as 'philosopher of Ghibellinism', and fully exploit the heuristic potential of this qualification. Hence, we should be able to speak plausibly of 'Ghibellinism' as a political theory. The concept of 'Ghibellinism' – and 'Guelphism' too – would have to be theoretically related to distinctive political sets of institutions, implying two levels of power: local self-government and empire – or papacy – at a higher level. Briguglia refers comparatively to Dante Alighieri, who is said to have been politically a Ghibelline, but to a limited extent. Certainly, the author claims, he was not a 'philosopher of Ghibellinism' in the sense in which Marsilius is said to have been so. Briguglia acknowledges the importance of the militant and ideological components of the *Defensor pacis*. If, on the one hand, the author argues, and rightly so, that a rigid division between political theory and practice cannot be found in Marsilius's self-understanding as a political philosopher, on the other hand, in the light of the new *-ism* which the author presents, with regard to Marsilius of Padua the realms of political theory, political philosophy, and political ideology appear to be interchangeable. The essay, however, does not account for this interchangeability. Charles F. Briggs argues that despite being on opposite sides of the question of papal vs. imperial sovereignty, both Marsilius of Padua and his

Italian Dominican adversaries deplored the factional and violent politics that plagued the central- and northern Italy communes during the late thirteenth and first half of the fourteenth century. They fundamentally agreed on that sufficiency of life could not be achieved without peace and tranquillity, although they radically differed in their identification of the true source of the said lack of peace and tranquillity, hence in their prescriptions for the solution of the problem. The author emphasises the versatile political vocation of a number of Italian Dominican authors. In opposition to Marsilius, who saw the community as an artificial totality, they conceived of it as a whole anterior to its parts. The reader is reminded that despite the fact that Marsilius's answer appears to be more compelling to our current sensibility, the political thought and solutions offered by the Dominicans carried greater weight among not only the prelates of the Church against whom Marsilius railed, but also the lay elites – including the jurists – of the communes that Marsilius hoped to free from papal interference. The conclusion that had Marsilius not been so hostile to the papacy, the Dominicans might have taken no exception to the *Defensor pacis* appears to be redundant. Jacob Langeloh establishes a parallel between John of Paris, Dante Alighieri, and Marsilius of Padua taking as his focus the way in which these authors approached the problem of contingency and finality in history. The essay seeks to demonstrate that the *Defensor pacis* contains no eschatological view of history. The author tries to confute George Garnett's thesis that the *Defensor pacis* was meant to show that the events of his time were the last stage in a divinely ordained apocalyptic process. Despite Marsilius's ability to delve into theological argumentation, Langeloh argues, he ultimately embraced a contingent view on the political event of the day. David Lloyd Dusenbury argues that the Augustinian interpretation of the Roman trial of Jesus – in which Jesus renounces temporal kingship, and Pilate nevertheless convicts him as a king – structures late medieval theories of secular authority in ways that have not been adequately recognized in current scholarship. The author seeks to retrace the Augustinian reading of Pilate's guilt with a view to bring to light unexplored aspects of the political significance of this tradition in the writings of Dante Alighieri, Lorenzo Valla, and Marsilius of Padua himself. The author's conclusion is opposite to the one endorsed by van de Voorde in the first part of the volume. Besides inviting to rediscover a hitherto unnoticed element in Marsilius's denunciation of papal plenitude of power, the author stresses the importance of seeing Marsilius's political vision as a 'drama', one to be properly understood in light of biblical elements. The suggestion is made that if Jesus had not made his 'great refusal' before Pilate, there is reason to believe that the autonomy of the secular order could not have been even theorised, and actualised, in late medieval and early modern Europe.

Part Three focuses on both the presence of Marsilius's ideas in early modern thought and the relevance of the former for contemporary debates. In addressing

the question of the citation of Marsilius in anti-Venetian polemicists, Serena Masolini explores the impact of Marsilius of Padua on Tommaso Campanella chiefly, and on Cardinal Bellarmine too. The author reconsidered the presence of Marsilius in Campanella's work in particular, analysing the two interconnected categories under which the name of Marsilius was understood and employed: Marsilius the pupil of Aristotle and Marsilius the critic of papal claims *in temporalibus*. Masolini concludes that the image that results from the combination of the two categories in question turns out to be 'the negative' of Campanella himself, who championed both a new anti-Aristotelian philosophy and papal authority *in spiritualibus et temporalibus*. The author gives priority to a way of tracking down Marsilius's doctrinal influence that turns around the role that the legacy of the image attached to his name played in the writings of those who referred to him, regardless of whether or not they had any direct access to his works. This analytic strategy can be considered a variation on Umberto Eco's view of the so-called *intentio lectoris*. No references to such instance, or to the ones methodologically related to it, are found in the essay. Cary J. Nederman's contribution has analytic character. It draws attention to a paradox seldomly examined in current scholarship. Even though Aristotle himself warned against the inaccurate usage of the word 'science', which had different meanings, Aristotelian 'political science', expressed in its Latinised form *scientia politica*, has constituted the dominant medieval paradigm for investigation into the realm of politics and society. Marsilius of Padua, who employed the word *scientia* rather seldomly, and hardly conjoined with *politica*, is still taken to be the champion of political Aristotelianism. Once more, Nederman suggests that the foundations on which Marsilius's vision of 'political science' rests cannot be properly characterised as Aristotelian. In his contribution the author establishes a challenging parallel between Marsilius's view of the self-interested individual and contemporary rational choice theory, which is still fashionable in the USA and elsewhere. Nederman's conclusion is thought-provoking for it suggests that by both extracting Marsilius from the mire of medieval Aristotelianism and associating his understanding of self-interest with current political science we may acquire a definitely incisive insight into dilemmas posed by the civic affairs of Marsilius's time. The author, however, is adamant in reminding us that by breaking down the bonds of the philosophical orthodoxy of his time, Marsilius had no intention whatsoever to be seen as a 'political scientist'. Frank Godthardt, who contributed to the refinement of our knowledge of Marsilius's life, explores in historiographical fashion the ways in which at the time of the Third Reich three German scholars – Wilhelm Schneider-Windmüller (1908–1969), Richard Scholz (1872–1946), and Friedrich Bock (1890–1963) – assessed the political importance of the *Defensor pacis* and repositioned it as foreshadowing the Third Reich. Scholz is the historian who produced the two-volume critical edition of the *Defensor pacis* in

1932 and 1933 as part of the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* series. He is often said to have resisted the Nazi appropriation of Marsilius's ideas. Godthardt conveniently sheds light on the ambiguities that characterised Scholz's interpretation. The latter moved from considering Marsilius's theory of the political community as a 'consistent democratic construction' to viewing it in 1938–1939 and again in 1942 as a remarkably flexible or adaptable theory that apparently allowed the *Führer* of the Third Reich to occupy the position of Marsilius's *pars principans*. If different political orders can be legitimised by Marsilius's conception of the political community, Godthardt, who accepts the view of the elasticity and generic nature of Marsilius's political theory, poses the question of whether the latter, based as it was upon the principle of the manifold delegations of powers, is compatible with the *Führerstaat* and with National Socialist church policy. His answer is negative. The last essay in the volume is mostly a tribute to Umberto Eco's memory as a medievalist by Gregorio Piaia. The latter takes as its focus Eco's famous 1980 debut novel *Il nome della rosa* (*The Name of the Rose*) and discloses the presence in it of Marsilius as a supporter of democratic ideals. Piaia explains that the figure of Marsilius plays a particular role in the novel that finds its inspiration in the socio-political climate of the late 1970s in Italy, one profoundly affected by the terrorism of the so-called *anni di piombo* ('years of lead'), which in turn disrupted the progressive front. The 'deadly decade', namely the 1970s, brought about a crisis in the movement of renewal that the cultural avant-garde had started in the early 1960s, culminating in the fateful 1968. The *anni di piombo* marked the predominance of violence over political action and change. It meant that an impressive cultural and political programme was jeopardised, hence the 'silence of the intellectuals'. In the case of Eco, his choice to devote his energies to the field of fiction was inspired by the desire to sublimate the defeat that he, and many others of his generation, suffered on the ideological-political plane. The genre of fiction could then become a means of reasserting a programme based upon the ideas of democracy, freedom and equality. In this context Marsilius played a functional role.

In general, the volume edited by Mulieri, Masolini and Pelletier comprises contributions that take up issues that were essential in the past scholarship, but, to the extent that they do so, they bear witness to the high potential for further elaboration and exploitation that Marsilius of Padua's work possesses. Marsilius's work appears to be an intellectually eclectic and intriguing combination of several contemporary themes and traditions and streams of thought. Complexity and ambiguity characterised his life and work. Most likely, these are the features of an existential tension that the Paduan thinker experienced as a passionate man of learning, fatally attracted by political struggle, honours, and wealth. Marsilius was particularly keen on using a variety of vocabularies, which he deployed as the circumstances dictated. All contributions acknowledge that a mixture of passion,

self-interest, and the desire to acquire and use knowledge critically lies in the background of Marsilius's work. The contributors proved to be aware of the risks inherent in seeking linear filiations and teleological causal links, which they carefully avoided. They treated ideas as social facts that exist independently of the authors who expressed them. Finally, all essays may well constitute the basis for further exploring how philosophy, theology, politics, law, and even ideology and ideology critique coalesced within the *Defensor pacis*. A perspective of the kind, if we think about the role that what we ordinarily call ideology and ideology critique might have played in Marsilius's search for political wisdom and effective political action, can be pursued without having to rely on the notion of anticipation, which would keep us mired in endless discussions about Marsilius's modernity, as well as on total embeddedness, which, if applied consistently, would jeopardise the quest for significance that our attempts to read past texts *iuxta propria principia* sustain.