

Petrarch's historicism and the purpose of philosophy

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A tale of curiosity and wisdom (paper draft)

Petrarch, as is well known, was no friend of scholasticism. His library contained no scholastic texts, but he would have encountered them, and the professors who propounded them, during his years as a law student at Montpellier and Bologna.¹ In his familiar letters, in his invectives against a nameless physician, and in his treatise on his own ignorance and that of others, the first humanist repeated again and again that scholastic dialectic and disputation were beneath the dignity of anyone concerned with true learning rather than empty verbiage. An amateur philosopher whose notion of philosophy was learned at the feet of Cicero and from Aristotle's *Ethics*, Petrarch railed against the technicalities and useless subtleties of the professional philosophy of his day.

Scholars of humanism are so familiar with Petrarch's critique of scholasticism that it seems almost second nature. Meanwhile, historians of late medieval philosophy have pointed to the rich philosophical legacy of the

scholastics; Petrarch was hardly a fair critic.² Whether they accept or reject Petrarch's criticisms, modern scholars tend to focus on the content of scholastic philosophy—characterizing it as sterile or fruitful, depending on their own philosophical projects and prejudices.³ They neglect the affective elements in Petrarch's critique—or dismiss it as rhetorical flourish, intended to cover up the weaknesses in his arguments.

In this paper I wish to situate Petrarch's attack on scholasticism within the broader context of his project for the renewal of learning, a loosely-knit enterprise that historians would one day label "humanism." Scholastic philosophy was the vital intellectual current of Petrarch's day, so he had to address it as part of his project.⁴ History was a vital part of that enterprise, as we shall see; indeed, Petrarch is often credited with being the first historicist—the first European scholar to recognize the qualitative changes that had occurred in the West since the fall of the western Roman Empire.⁵ Yet Petrarch's approach to history was capable of developing into a form of antiquarianism that was as opposed to his philosophical goals as was scholasticism; only the constant effort to *overcome* the impulse to historicism could preserve the moral role that history played for Petrarch. In this way, the first humanist bequeathed a moral ambiguity to his successors that has ever since been part of what would become the humanities—an ambiguity that can be summed up as a tension between wisdom and curiosity.⁶

Petrarch desired three things for a new learning. First, knowledge had to be useful. On this ground he scoffed at the useless subtleties of the scholastics and turned to the moral philosophy of the ancients. Second, knowledge had to be combined with the will to employ it. But the scholastics did not inspire their students to want the good, unlike Cicero, Seneca, and the historians, who

produced virtue in their readers. Third, knowledge had to be pursued within a community drawn together by affective bonds that would encourage learning. The disputatious community of the university did not qualify; for it, Petrarch substituted the epistolary community of his friends, into which he integrated the ancients as equal partners.

In sum, Petrarch's ethics required the union of knowledge and will within a community of equals. When humanism was institutionalized a century later, these requirements would place a heavy burden on the humanities, or more specifically, on the humanities teacher. Those who merely conveyed knowledge without passion were traitors to this aspect of Petrarch's heritage, no better than the dialecticians he condemned.

Petrarch against the dialecticians

Petrarch's objections to scholastic philosophy in general, and dialecticians in particular, show his concern with all three aspects of good learning.

First, the university philosophers of Petrarch's day, he held, occupied themselves with useless information rather than useful moral precepts. This emerges most forcefully in his diatribe *On his own ignorance and that of many others*. To the charge, proffered against him in Venice by four false friends, that he was ignorant but good, Petrarch responded with feigned joy. Being good was, after all, more important than being learned. And, Petrarch continued, he could do quite well without what passed for learning among that crowd. The first was himself ignorant, the second possessed only the rudiments, the third was scarcely better, and the fourth knew many things—but they were all useless. Petrarch's examples read like Will Cuppy's parody of ancient natural history: this fourth fellow knows how many hairs are on a lion's head, that the phoenix is consumed and reborn,

that the urchin can stop a ship in the waves, that a bear cub is born shapeless and that the crocodile, alone among animals, can move its upper jaw. “Much of this is simply false . . . or at least unconfirmed by the authors and because of our inexperience, either more easily believed or more readily feigned; while that which is true is utterly useless for leading a good life [*ad beatam vitam*]. For what does it profit to know the natures of beasts, birds, fishes, and serpents, while remaining ignorant of or rejecting the nature of man, the end for which we are born, whence and whither we are going?”⁷ The obvious answer (so obvious that Petrarch leaves it unstated) is: nothing.

This characterization of Aristotelian natural philosophy is hardly just. Petrarch employs the rhetorical trope of hyperbole to convince his readers that this kind of knowledge is not worth having. He proceeds to refute the charge that he is “a good man without learning [*sine litteris virum bonum*]”; indeed, the erudition in the entire treatise is a silent refutation. Yet in a telling passage, he elaborates on this very accusation: “You know, God, before whom is found my whole desire and effort, that I have sought nothing from literature, when I have used it soberly, than to make myself good.”⁸ Knowledge, for Petrarch, was a means to an end, and all that does not contribute to that end is superfluous and inane.

The second and third aspects of Petrarch’s critique are entwined. Scholastic philosophers did not encourage the proper affective attitude toward their subject, and they did not pursue it in a community that was capable of fostering such an attitude. Dialectic was at fault in both instances. Scholastic philosophers sought to argue, not to find the truth. “Truly,” Petrarch claimed, “they derive the highest pleasure from contention, and their aim is not to find the truth but to quarrel. But as Varro’s proverb goes, ‘The truth is lost in excessive quarreling.’”⁹ Petrarch’s

own argumentation was not intended to resolve contradictions dialectically; it was aimed at defending his own position rhetorically. In the *Secretum*, he conceded that some argumentation was useful: one should not “accept everything without criticism,” for that is “the sign of intellectual laziness and dullness.” But the scholastics, who rejected what to Petrarch were obvious truths, were simply contrarians.¹⁰

That is because dialecticians mistake the means of knowledge for its ends. Petrarch admitted that dialectic was one of the liberal arts, that it was “useful armor for those entering the thickets of philosophers. It stimulates the mind, shows the way of truth and how to avoid error.” But one should not tarry in some areas which it is permissible to pass through, and we are all travelers with a distant goal to reach in a brief time. “Many things we once did honorably which are dishonorable to do now: if as old men we can’t leave the dialectical school where once we played, it is equally fitting to play odds and evens, ride a hobby horse, and be rocked in a cradle.”¹¹ Dialectic is a tool and should be treated as one.

Petrarch’s ideal moral philosophy

Focused on trivia, pursued in a contentious spirit, and developed within a disputatious community, scholastic philosophy needed to be rejected and replaced with a new philosophy. Though Petrarch had insinuated that the scholastic devotion to Aristotle verged on heresy, or even apostasy, when he sought “true philosophers, who speak only the truth,”¹² he too turned to the pagans. Petrarch was not a systematic thinker; according to Charles Trinkaus, he pursued philosophy from a poet’s standpoint, while Carol Quillen has emphasized that his forms of argument, rooted in rhetoric, presumed the truth of the proposition they

were arranged to defend. Nonetheless, the moral philosophy he urged on his correspondents responded to all of the faults he saw in scholasticism.

1. Proper content—knowledge of how to live well.

First, philosophy had to be useful. But “useful” did not mean simply necessary for mere existence. In one of his letters to Thomas of Messina, Petrarch responded to the arguments made by “a garrulous old logician” that poetry and moral philosophy were unnecessary and thus ignoble:

‘What is less necessary,’ he says, ‘is less noble.’ O how poorly he hides his insanity! in fact, he shows that he is not only a dialectician but a madman. If necessity ennobles, then shoemaking, baking, and other lowly mechanical arts are the most noble of all, while philosophy and its like, if they contribute nothing to the necessities of the crowd, are ignoble. What a new and exotic doctrine, and unknown even to Aristotle . . . who said, ‘All other arts are more necessary [than philosophy], but none is more worthy’.¹³

For Petrarch, what was necessary for life was *ipso facto* ignoble. In his *Invective contra medicum*, he smeared medicine as a mechanical art on precisely those grounds.¹⁴ Moral philosophy, which taught one how to live correctly, was noble not because it was a prerequisite of existence but because it allowed one to live well.

As we have seen, however, Petrarch also rejected the excessive cultivation of dialectic, and more generally scholastic philosophy, because it was useless. Hence moral philosophy occupied, for him, a middle ground between what was necessary for sheer existence (the mechanical arts) and what was superfluous for the good life (scholastic philosophy).

2. Proper affect—inspiring the will to want the good

Petrarch's notion of the purpose of moral philosophy, as expressed in the *Familiari*, drew heavily from his study of Aristotle's ethics. Nonetheless, he could not recommend Aristotle unequivocally, for Aristotle did not fulfill his own purpose when he stated that ethics was studied not to learn but to become better. The Philosopher left Petrarch cold; he may have known what was better—after all, he admitted to having learned something—but it did not make him better. Aristotle's text taught what virtue was but lacked the “verbal torches” that would inflame the soul with a love of virtue and a hatred of vice.¹⁵

Those torches, Petrarch insisted, should be sought among three Latins: Cicero, Seneca, and Horace.¹⁶ Their words will drive the reader to love virtue and hate vice. How, if they are pagan? Petrarch temporizes by distinguishing virtue from salvation. Virtue, taught by the pagans, is not the end to which we aspire, but it is the right road to that end—so long as “virtues are not only known but loved.”¹⁷

These are then the true moral philosophers, useful teachers of virtue, whose first and final intention is to make the listener and reader a good person, and who do not just teach what virtue and vice are, and yell the famous name of the first and the dark name of the second in the ears, but also introduce love and devotion of the best thing, and hatred and revulsion for the worst, in the heart It is better to want what is good than to know what is true.¹⁸

Knowledge was only useful when it was combined with volition—the desire to employ that knowledge. Cold Aristotle and contentious schoolmen did not inflame that desire; if anything, they quenched it.

3. Proper community: carrying out inquiry in a committed, egalitarian community

Only a properly constituted community could discuss moral philosophy effectively. In a perceptive study of Petrarch's ethics, Nancy Struever has shown that Petrarch constructed this community in his letters. The epistolary community was governed by spontaneous assent, not academic compulsion; it was composed of intimate bonds between equals, not public relations between teachers and students. Against the dogmatism of scholastic philosophy, Petrarch offered provisional conclusions. Perhaps most importantly, Petrarch's moral philosophy was explicitly framed in terms of his relationship with his correspondents; rather than proffering abstract principles, Petrarch drew on ancient moral philosophers to address the specific problems that he and his correspondents faced.¹⁹

The community in which Petrarch conducted his project was, to a great extent, a rhetorical construct. Petrarch rewrote, rearranged, split and combined his actual letters when he assembled his two great letter collections, and some of the letters are fictive in that they were composed only to be included in the collection. Nonetheless, Petrarch offered that construct to the world as a model for how to philosophize effectively. He asserted that an intimate bond existed between the subject of moral philosophy, the affect with which it should be connected, and the community within which it was pursued. Furthermore, the ancients who inflamed men's souls with virtue did so because they were integrated into the community. This has important consequences for Petrarch's approach to history and, in particular, his historicism.

History and moral philosophy

In his strictly historical works, Petrarch approached history conventionally, as a source of moral exempla. He stated this explicitly in the preface to his *Lives of famous men*:

You should expect from me only material that demonstrates virtue or its contrary. I think the fruitful goal of historians is to address those things that the readers should emulate or avoid. Whoever exceeds these limits should know that he is wandering in a foreign country, and that he should retrace his tracks, unless he occasionally introduces other things into his account to please his readers from time to time.²⁰

Petrarch admitted that he himself may have exceeded these bounds: “If I have done this less than I intended, I beg you, reader, to forgive me: you can judge whether I have succeeded, but I want you to believe me as to my purpose.”²¹

Mining the past for moral examples was, of course, nothing new. Petrarch did shift the emphasis from Christian to pagan examples without the allegorical moralizing that characterized medieval accounts of the classics (e.g. the *Ovide moralisé*). But by itself, the exemplary approach to history was profoundly anti-historicist, in that it encouraged readers to wrench great men and deeds from the contexts that produced them in order to apply them to contemporary life.

Petrarch’s historicism is not to be found in his historical works but elsewhere: in the passion for antiquity that he displayed in his life and modeled in his letters.

The allure of the antique—an integrative force

Petrarch’s passion for antiquity is well known.²² He collected manuscripts with a passion, collated them carefully to restore corrupt readings, and integrated them into his own writings.²³ Petrarch’s philological activities fit neatly into his

ethical project: a moral philosophy founded on the ethical precepts and persuasive force of classical texts demands that those texts be comprehensible, as free as possible from the medieval corruption that lessened their exemplary force. Yet the desire to restore texts to their original purity is only part of what drove Petrarch to collect and collate manuscripts. His peculiar letters to classical authors, written across the chasm of a millennium, reflect a sense of loss that goes beyond simple regret that their edifying words have partially or wholly vanished.

To Varro, Petrarch wrote that his ignoble time had lost all of Varro's books; the letter becomes a paean to the fact that despite their total disappearance, Varro retained the reputation of being the most learned of men.²⁴ Cicero, Lactantius, and Augustine all praised Varro, and their praise redounds to his glory despite the fact that moderns cannot read his words. In the end, Petrarch widens the letter to a lament about the disappearance of the works of seventeen named, and a multitude of unnamed, classical writers, an inversion of the medieval *ubi sunt?* topos that emphasizes not the impermanence of *all* earthly concerns but, rather, the loss of valuable books in an age that values only commerce.

Petrarch's letters to Livy and Quintilian, whose works he possessed in mutilated form, continue to lament loss and decay. He likened the "lacerated" manuscript of Quintilian's *Institution of the orator* he acquired to "the scattered limbs of a beautiful body"—a metaphor that scarcely reflects an instrumental concern with antiquity.²⁵ Writing to Livy, he lamented the loss of all but 29 of the Roman historian's 142 books *Ab urbe condita*, and once more attributed their disappearance to an age that valued only gold, silver, and self-indulgence.²⁶ Other emotions characterize some of the letters—Petrarch was famously indignant when he discovered that Cicero had been a canny politician as well as a contemplative

philosopher. But the ground against which other themes are elaborated is *tempus edax rerum*—time the devourer.

This sense of loss drove Petrarch to collect and restore texts; it also motivated his interest in the material remains of antiquity.²⁷ He was no antiquarian in the way that some of his fifteenth-century successors would be, and his topographical account of Rome is redolent of the medieval tradition of the wonders of Rome. Nonetheless, Petrarch read classical inscriptions to increase his knowledge of the ancient world, he examined the ruins of ancient architecture and statuary, and he gathered and identified the ancient coins that were frequently unearthed in fourteenth-century Italy.

Coins were a particular interest of his. Small and relatively common, they could be easily acquired and transported. Petrarch claims to have had a reputation for being knowledgeable about and avid to buy ancient coins: “Often at Rome I was approached by a vinedigger, holding an engraved gem or a gold or silver coin, sometimes scraped by the hoe, asking me either to buy it or to identify the sculpted image of the heroes.”²⁸ Petrarch drew on his small collection of ancient coins to illustrate and, occasionally, elucidate his readings in ancient history.²⁹ He also treated coins like he had treated his biographies of famous men: as examples, in this case concrete examples, of virtue and vice, the coin standing in synecdochically for the biography. The two stand together in Petrarch’s description of an audience he had with Emperor Charles IV in Mantua in the winter of 1355. Charles asked Petrarch for a copy of his *De viris illustribus*, which was not yet finished; in lieu of the book, Petrarch presented him with

some gold and silver effigies of our princes, inscribed with tiny, ancient letters, which were dear to me, among which was an image of Augustus that

seemed to breathe. “Behold, Caesar,” I said, “those whom you have succeeded; behold those whom you should strive to imitate and admire.”³⁰ After making the gift, Petrarch wrote, he gave Charles a synopsis of those deeds of the emperors that would spur the emperor to imitate their virtues.

This incident draws together Petrarch’s moral philosophy, based on classical moral texts and historical exempla, and his passion for antiquity. That passion drove him to collect the literary and material remains of antiquity, and to study them to learn as much as possible about the world that produced them. The goal of this study was to bring the ancients to life, as a way of integrating them into the community of inquiry that Petrarch had created. We see this in Petrarch’s letter to Livy. In a clever variation on Livy’s own topos in the preface to *Ab urbe condita*, where the historian wrote that he hoped to forget present troubles by turning to past glories, Petrarch wrote:

If the heavens only permitted, I would wish that I was born in your age or you in mine, so that either the entire age or at least I should be made better through you.³¹

Petrarch does Livy one better: the Roman had merely wanted to forget himself by turning to the past, while Petrarch wants to either improve himself by living then or his own age by resurrecting the ancients. Nothing specific about the ancients is cited here as matter for emulation; rather, Petrarch attributes to antiquity as a whole the exemplary quality which, in his historical compositions, he drew from individual deeds. The ancients, of course, could not be resurrected, but by learning as much as possible about them, and by modeling that learning, Petrarch could at least try to conjure up their spirit—a conjuring trick that was necessary if their moral precepts were to be “verbal torches” for the moderns.

In a letter to Giovanni Colonna, in which Petrarch described their recent wanderings through the ruins of Rome, we can see how Petrarch conjure up the spirit of antiquity. His account of the city's ancient topography appears confused and erroneous to latter-day antiquarians. That is only natural, since he stood at the beginning of a long tradition of topographical research based on classical texts rather than oral tradition.³² And Petrarch did make fewer errors than his contemporaries. More important for our present discussion, however, is the tone. "We wandered about in this great city and its suburbs, and at every step we saw something to excite the tongue and the intellect."³³ Petrarch's account of his walk reminds one of the fourth century pilgrim Egeria's account of Jerusalem: the ground she walked on was important only as a site for the biblical stories with which it was associated.³⁴ "Here is [or was] Evander's palace, here the temple of Carmenta, here Cacus's cave, here the nursing wolf . . ." And if many of the locations simply evoke stories, at others Petrarch explicitly mentions them: "Here Quintius was plowing when he was judged worthy of being made dictator." "Here Caesar triumphed, and here he perished; in this temple Augustus saw prostrated kings and the tribute of the world." His account blends insensibly from pagan into Christian Rome, from the (mythical) artistic contest of Phidias and Praxiteles to the martyrdoms of the apostles. Despite this blend, Petrarch claimed pagan Rome as his own domain. When he and Colonna discussed the history of the city, they found that Petrarch knew more about the "ancients" and Colonna the "moderns"; significantly, Petrarch drew the line between them at the conversion of Constantine. And what Petrarch really saw in the ruins of Rome, he saw with his mind's eye.

What did Petrarch and his companion discuss as they wandered about in the ruins of Rome, and looked down on the city from the baths of Diocletian? “We spoke much of history . . . and much of moral philosophy . . . and of the arts, mechanical and liberal.” Hallowed antiquity led naturally to moral philosophy and the liberal arts because, for Petrarch, his love of the latter blended insensibly with his love of the former; his will to be good was informed by the pagan writers he had admitted to his ideal community. Only that passion kept his interests in antiquity from degenerating into “mere” antiquarianism. From a purely intellectual standpoint, the connection between knowing about antiquity and leading a good life could only be contingent.

Conclusion: curiosity and wisdom

Petrarch bequeathed this contingent connection to his successors. In the hands of the most inspired of them, antiquity could (so they claimed) spur men on to virtue. The trope of exemplarity persisted in antiquarianism at least through to the seventeenth century. Yet the contingent nature of the connection, dependent on individual passion, constantly threatened a falling away of antiquarianism from any larger purpose. Curiosity was always capable of supplanting wisdom.

Only when curiosity triumphed could historicism develop fully. Petrarch’s own interest in antiquity followed an arc from a sense of loss to the attempt to restore as much as possible of antiquity. He knew that antiquity was, in many respects, radically different from his age, but he also felt that the proper affective bond could, somehow, nonetheless integrate the ancients into a community of moderns. When scholars lost the latter sense, historicism had triumphed—but antiquity was no longer morally relevant.

We might not think that is such a bad thing; the morality that antiquarian studies “taught” was, after all, conventional, and exempla served not to refine it but simply to inspire towards it. But insofar as we, as historians, since Gibbon and Ranke heirs to the antiquarian tradition, wish to justify what we do as more than satisfying idle curiosity, we should not be so quick to condemn Petrarch. We may not agree with his definition of wisdom, but we may find that curiosity alone is an insufficient passion with which to sustain our enterprise, and that pure historicism, though it is intellectually consistent, is somehow not satisfying.

Endnotes

¹ On Petrarch’s library, see Nolhac, *Pétrarque et l’humanisme*, and Billanovich, [ref]. The most recent biography of Petrarch, with ample references to the earlier literature, is Vinicio Pacca, *Petrarca* (Roma: Editori Laterza, 1998).

² *The Cambridge history of later medieval philosophy*, *The Cambridge history of Renaissance philosophy*, and DiLiscia, Kessler, and Methuen, eds., *Method and order in Renaissance philosophy of nature*, are only a few examples.

³ For an approach to scholasticism that emphasizes its usefulness for modern philosophical inquiry, primarily in the analytic tradition, see Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, Jan Pinborg, and Eleonore Stump, eds., *The Cambridge history of later medieval philosophy: From the rediscovery of Aristotle to the disintegration of scholasticism, 1100-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

⁴ Carol Everhart Quillen, *Rereading the Renaissance: Petrarch, Augustine, and the language of humanism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), emphasizes that Petrarch responded to scholasticism as in many ways the most vital intellectual current of his age, and thus his greatest competition (ch. 4).

⁵ Greene, *The light in Troy*.

⁶ Trinkaus, *The poet as philosopher*, presents the clearest exposition of this fundamental and unresolved tension in Petrarch’s thought.

⁷ Petrarca, *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia*, pp. 1038-1040.

⁸ Petrarca, *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia*, p. 1044.

⁹ Petrarca, *Familiarum rerum libri*, 1.7, p. 271: “quippe qui summam voluptatem ex contentione percipiunt, quibus non verum invenire propositum est, sed altercari. Atqui Varronis proverbium est: ‘Nimium altercando veritas amittitur.’”

Endnotes (continued)

¹⁰ Petrarca, *Secretum*, ed. and trans. Carozza and Shey, p. 49: “It is as bad to accept everything without criticism as it is to reject an obvious truth; the first is the sign of intellectual laziness and dullness, the second of contrariness.”

¹¹ Petrarca, *Familiarum rerum libri*, 1.7, p. 273.

¹² Petrarca, *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia*, p. 1104: “veri enim philosophi vera omnia loqui solent.”

¹³ Petrarca, *Familiarum rerum libri*, 1.12, pp. 286-287: “‘Si minus necessaria,’ inquit, ‘et minus nobilis.’ O quam male tegitur insania! iam se non dyalecticum modo, sed freneticum ostendit. Ergo sutrina et piistrina et vilissime mechanicarum artium, si necessitas nobilitari illas potest, nobilissime omnium fient; philosophia autem et relique omnes, quecunque beatam atque exultam et ornatam vitam faciunt, si necessitatibus vulgi nil conferunt, ignobiles. O doctrinam novam et exoticam, ipsi quoque—cuius nomen infamant—Aristotili incognitam! Ille enim ait: ‘Necessariores quidem omnes, dignior vero nulla.’ Legat primum *Methaphisice* librum et inveniet. Sed ignota regione verum sequi et scrupuloso tramite senem ire iubeo: non parvus labor.”

¹⁴ See Quillen, *Rereading the Renaissance*, ch. [ref], on Petrarch’s strategy.

¹⁵ Petrarca, *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia*, p. 1106: “Omnes morales, nisi fallor, Aristotilis libros legi, quosdam etiam audivi, et antequam hec tanta detegeretur ignorantia, intelligere aliquid visus eram, doctiorque his forsitan nonnunquam, sed non—qua decuit—melior factus ad me redii, et sepe mecum et quandoque cum aliis questus sum illud rebus non impleri, quod in primo *Ethicorum* philosophus idem ipse prefatus est, eam scilicet philosophie partem disci, non ut sciamus, sed ut boni fiamus. Video nempe virtutem ab illo egretie diffiniri et distingui tractarique acriter, et que cuique sunt propria, seu vitio, seu virtuti. Que cum didici, scio plusculum quam sciebam; idem tamen est animus qui fuerat, voluntusque eadem, idem ego. Aliud est enim scire atque aliud amare, aliud intelligere atque aliud velle. Docet ille, non infitor, quid est virtus; at stimulos ac verborum faces, quibus ad amorem virtutis vitiique odium mens urgetur atque incenditur, lectio illa vel non habet, vel paucissimos habet.”

¹⁶ Petrarca, *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia*, pp. 1106-1108.

¹⁷ Petrarca, *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia*, p. 1108: “Etsi enim non sit in virtute finis noster, ubi eum philosophi posuere, est tamen per virtutes iter rectum eo ubi finis est noster; per virtutes, inquam, non tantum cognitas, sed dilectas.”

¹⁸ Petrarca, *De suis ipsius et multorum ignorantia*, p. 1108-1110: “Hi sunt ergo veri philosophi morales et virtutum utiles magistri, quorum prima et ultima intentio est bonum facere auditorem ac lectorem, quique non solum docent quid est virtus aut vitium praeclarumque illud hoc fuscum nomen auribus instrepund, sed rei optime amorem studiumque pessimeque rei odium fugamque pectoribus inserunt. Tutius est voluntati bone ac pie quam capaci et claro intellectui operam dare. Voluntatis siquidem obiectum, ut sapientibus placet, est bonitas: obiectum intellectus est veritas. Satius est autem bonum velle quam verum nosse.”

¹⁹ Struever, *Theory as practice*, ch. 1; see also Quillen, *Rewriting the Renaissance*, ch. 2.

²⁰ Francesco Petrarca, *De viris illustribus vitae/Le vite degli uomini illustri di Francesco Petrarca volgarizzate da Donato degli Albanzani da Pratovecchio*, ed. Luigi Razzolini (Bologna: Presso Gaetano Romagnoli, 1874), p. 6: “Apud me nisi ea requiruntur quae ad virtutes vel virtutum contraria trahi possunt: hic enim, nisi fallor, fructuosus historicorum finis est, illa persequi que vel sectanda legentibus, vel fugienda sunt: quisquis extra hos terminos evagari praesumpserit, sciat se alienis finibus errare, memineritque e vestigio redeundum, nisi forte, oblectandi gratia, diversoria legentibus interdum, grata quaesierit.”

Endnotes (continued)

²¹ Petrarca, *De viris illustribus*, p. 6: “Haec si minus quam intenderam assecutus sum, tu, precor, ignosce quisquis haec perlegis: de successu enim te iudicem statuo, de proposito mihi credi velim.”

²² Weiss, *Renaissance discovery*, pp. 30-31.

²³ Quillen, *Rereading the Renaissance*, ch. 2-6, passim.

²⁴ Petrarca, *Familiarum rerum libri*, 24.6, pp. 1260-1262. It is worth noting, given the emphasis placed on Petrarch’s expressions of horror at discovering Cicero’s political career, that Petrarch praises Varro for his successful combination of public life and scholarship.

²⁵ Petrarca, *Familiarum rerum libri*, 24.7, pp. 1262-1265.

²⁶ Petrarca, *Familiarum rerum libri*, 24.8, pp. 1265-1266.

²⁷ On Petrarch as an antiquarian, see Weiss, *Renaissance discovery*, pp. 30-38; Weiss, “Petrarch the antiquarian.”

²⁸ Petrarca, *Familiarum rerum libri*, 18.8, p. 979.

²⁹ Weiss, *Renaissance discovery*, pp. 37-38.

³⁰ Petrarca, *Familiarum rerum libri*, 19.3, p. 1004: “aliquot sibi aureas argenteasque nostrorum principum effigies minutissimis ac veteribus literis inscriptas, quas in delitiis habebam, dono dedi in quibus et Augusti Caesaris vultus erat pene spirans. ‘Et ecce,’ inquam, ‘Cesar, quibus successisti; ecce quis imitari studeas et mirari.’”

³¹ Petrarca, *Familiarum rerum libri*, 24.8, pp. 1265-1266: “Optarem, si ex alto datum esset, vel me in tuam vel te in nostram etatem incidisse, ut vel etas ipsa vel ego per te melior fierem.”

³² A synthesis of this tradition remains to be written; on the origins of Rome, see Jacks, *The antiquarian and the myth of antiquity*; for an introduction to the wide range of Renaissance antiquarianism, see *Archäologie der Antike*, whose title is, however, anachronistic (on this, see Barkan, *Unearthing the past*, a masterful study of Renaissance responses to ancient statues).

³³ Freely translated from Petrarca, *Familiarum rerum libri*, 6.2, p. 481; further quotations and paraphrases are from this letter (pp. 480-485).

³⁴ On Egeria and later pilgrims, see Mary Campbell, *The witness and the other world*.