

CHAPTER 2
FROM SCHOOLS TO COURTS:
RENAISSANCE ETHICS IN CONTEXT

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Children, youths, and adults in Renaissance Europe were everywhere surrounded by reminders of their obligations toward God and society and of their responsibility to live a good life, not only for themselves, but also for others. In a society where political and moral debates centred on duties rather than rights, depictions of virtue and exhortations to follow it could be found everywhere. Domestic objects (including tiles, paintings, tapestries, and relief sculptures) commonly reminded a household of the cardinal—and often the theological—virtues. Printed ephemera (such as art prints and popular posters) and woodcuts in books made these lessons clear even to the less educated, while emblems provided the more learned with matter which appealed simultaneously to their moral, aesthetic, and literary sensibilities. Plays, processions, sermons, and frescoes in churches were additional avenues for driving home the importance of virtue. The sacrament of confession made it clear that people should turn away from evil and do good. Altars on street corners reminded the unruly that they were being watched from above. Perhaps no occasion was more powerful than that of public executions, a solemn reminder of the consequences of heresy and wickedness, and a final opportunity for those declared guilty to repent.¹

Despite the obvious importance of this intensely moral context of everyday life in the Renaissance, historians still know far too little about it. This essay will therefore focus on better-studied and often better-documented institutional contexts in which discussions of virtue and ethics flourished, sometimes in ways

¹ On this point see especially *The Art of Executing Well: Rituals of Execution in Renaissance Italy*, ed. by Nicholas Terpstra (Kirksville, Missouri: Truman State University Press, 2008).

that were quite different from the practice in the centuries immediately before 1400. One should not, however, forget the broader context alluded to above: political and religious authorities demanded at least outward conformity to certain standards of moral behaviour, and fostering education about virtue or encouraging discussions about it were some of the means for communicating their expectations. First I will examine the three formal and more established contexts of schools, universities, and *studia* of the religious orders, and then the newer and rather more informal ones of humanistic circles, academies, and courts. An important question is whether these six contexts had significant elements in common that shed light on the way in which ethics was discussed in the Renaissance. I hope to show that understanding the contexts in which virtue was debated in the period is crucial to grasping the different ethical approaches and genres that developed. It also helps to clarify how certain doctrinal views changed.

1. Formal Institutions

Schools

Although primary and secondary education were not compulsory in the Renaissance, nonetheless various kinds of institutions flourished, geared especially to the needs of an increasingly urbanized society. After boys had learned to read and write they had the option of learning merchant skills (what in Italy was called the *abbaco*) and/or of studying Latin grammar and literature. The latter route was usually taken only by those whose parents had a professional career planned for their sons—as notaries, lawyers, doctors, men of the church, or professional rhetoricians. All of these professions would typically require further study at university level. Youngsters who belonged to one of the religious orders (especially those of the mendicant friars) would, if judged intellectually promising by their superiors, pursue their higher education in one of their order's *studia*, where the curriculum culminated in the study of theology. Needless to say, most of these options were not open to girls, although

the most elementary phase of education was available to them and several well-off families also chose to have their daughters tutored privately in higher subjects. Several letters and treatises point to the way in which girls were educated in the Renaissance, but this remains a historiographically contested field.²

A decline in the number of church schools meant that, especially after 1300, other types of schools were needed.³ The evidence we have for Tuscany, which is among the European areas we know most about, shows that most cities hired masters for the primary and secondary education of their citizens' offspring, while in other centres (especially Florence) primary education was in the hands of private teachers. (Both private and publicly-sponsored education were available at the secondary level.) Increasingly, the well-to-do relied on private schools or tutors to educate their children. Even convents often depended on the services of private teachers coming in from the outside. As Robert Black has pointed out, at least two notable developments differentiated these schools from earlier educational patterns: first, teachers were now overwhelmingly laymen; second, education had now become a business, in which considerations of profit and competition played an increasing role.⁴ Likewise, it seems important to stress that, since schoolmasters travelled a great deal in pursuit of better

² The Florentine Giovanni Villani claimed in 1338: 'Troviamo ch'e fanciulli e fanciulle che stanno a leggere, da otto a dieci mila' ('We find that the boys and girls [my emphasis] who are learning to read, number between eight and ten thousand'); see his *Nuova cronica*, ed. by Giuseppe Porta (Parma: Fondazione Pietro Bembo, 1991), III, 198; some comments on girls' education in Paul F. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300–1600* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 87–102.

³ Grendler, *Schooling*, pp. 6–11; Robert Black, *Education and Society in Florentine Tuscany: Teachers, Pupils and Schools, c. 1250–1500* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), ch. 3. Now see also Peter Denley, *Teachers and Schools in Siena, 1357–1500* (Siena: CISIT, 2007) and Paul F. Gehl, *Humanism for Sale: Making and Marketing Schoolbooks in Italy, 1450–1650* (<http://www.humanismforsale.org/text/>; accessed 6 August 2010).

⁴ Black, *Education and Society*, pp. 241–43.

conditions and remuneration, education increasingly became less parochial (although also less continuous). And the expectations and desires of parents, together with changing societal needs, were responsible both for a surge in elementary literacy and for varying local emphases in education.⁵

Of the elements mentioned above, especially important were the expansion of education and the involvement of the laity, features which received further emphasis in the schools of the Protestant Reformation (Lutherans and Calvinists both pushed for universal education, including that of girls) and in the Catholic Schools of Christian Doctrine (which first started in Milan in 1536).⁶ The pedagogical efforts of Robert Mulcaster, who both founded the famous Merchant Taylors' School in London (1561) and later headed London's School of St Paul's, established by John Colet, consolidated a trend not quite countenanced by the earlier, more elitist humanist schools.⁷

What place did moral education occupy in these schools? Did the involvement of the laity and the broader audience make for a change from the mediaeval aims of virtue and godliness (*pietas*) repeated in countless documents? And, even if the stated objectives remained similar (making allowance for some secularization of the language in which they were expressed), what actually went on in the classroom? On these points historians have, especially in recent years, disagreed. Paul Gehl saw Latin grammar consistently treated as 'a moral art' in the schools of Trecento Florence, and

⁵ Both Black and Paul Gehl, for example, show that Latin grammar schools were less important in Florence than elsewhere in Tuscany in comparison with the abacus schools, quite possibly because of the city's focus on commerce. See Paul F. Gehl, *A Moral Art: Grammar, Society, and Culture in Trecento Florence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

⁶ Grendler, *Schooling*, pp. 333–62.

⁷ Jacqueline Cousin-Desjobert, *La théorie et la pratique d'un éducateur élisabéthain: Richard Mulcaster, c. 1531–1611* (Paris: Editions SPM, 2003); Richard L. DeMolen, *Richard Mulcaster (c. 1531–1611) and Educational Reform in the Renaissance* (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1991); *The Educational Writings of Richard Mulcaster*, ed. by James Oliphant (Glasgow: MacLehose, 1903).

Paul Grendler (not unlike Eugenio Garin) insisted on the moral direction of humanistic education, even though this was rarely testified by actual classroom practice.⁸ Conversely, Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine proposed that the school of Guarino da Verona gave very little space indeed to character formation,⁹ and recently Robert Black's examination of glosses in schoolbooks concluded that the teaching of classical authors in both the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance was 'overwhelmingly philological; the few moral or philosophical glosses are invariably lost in a vast sea of philological detail.'¹⁰

This is not the place to unravel an extremely complex historiographical problem, which would require at the very least an evaluation of glosses and commentaries versus oral classroom teaching and the production of commonplace books, and an analysis of aims versus practices of education. It does seem significant, however, that across Europe the texts that were used for teaching reading and writing tended to be of a moral or moralistic nature; (Ps-) Cato's *Disticha*, Aesop's *Fables*, the *Epigrammata* of Prosper of Aquitaine, and Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* must have been chosen for a good reason other than just their Latin.¹¹ And certainly there was a sense in which, for both Renaissance and mediaeval pedagogues, reading was considered a moral activity, since texts were stored in the memory for recollection, meditation, and imitation.¹² Furthermore, if the grammar curriculum promoted by the humanists relied so heavily on Cicero's prose works, including his shorter moral treatises (*De officiis*, *De amicitia*, *De senectute* and also *De finibus* and *Tusculan*

⁸ Gehl, *A Moral Art*; Grendler, *Schooling*, pp. 263–64, 408.

⁹ Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), pp. 12–19.

¹⁰ *Humanism and Education*, p. 9; see also pp. 286–325.

¹¹ Gehl, *A Moral Art*, chs. 4 and 5.

¹² Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 156–88.

Disputations),¹³ it stands to reason that they were not regarded solely as models of style. Indeed, the diffusion of moral *topoi* through collections of Ciceronian *sententiae* points in the opposite direction.¹⁴ The humanists' assumption that language and morals were so inextricably linked, that to learn Latin was to absorb the virtues of the Romans, is also relevant. In any case, it is hard to believe that the many pedagogical manifestos of the time, linking (according to long-standing precedent) learning and virtue, were just hot air. A particularly eloquent example is Johann Sturm's *The Correct Opening of Elementary Schools of Letters* (1538) for the nascent humanistic school in Strasbourg, in which he states that 'A man will not live virtuously who will be ignorant of what is common to all or many, or what is private, and what is praiseworthy in nature or honorable in habit', even though the curriculum he outlines does not specifically include moral philosophy.¹⁵ Likewise, Sturm identifies the aim of education as 'learned and eloquent godliness' (*sapiens atque eloquens pietas*),¹⁶ something that would also have found approval in the schools of the Bretheren of the Common Life and of the Jesuits. If one looks elsewhere, particularly to the system of grammar schools in England, one finds a constant attention to the moral meaning of poems and prose works to be read (e.g., Ovid, Virgil, Cicero), just as recommended by Erasmus and Melanchthon, and to the value of writing on ethical topics. Peter Mack has concluded that grammar education in England was very strongly moral in orientation.¹⁷

¹³ Black, *Humanism and Education*, pp. 262–67.

¹⁴ Ann Moss, *Printed Common-Place Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

¹⁵ *Johann Sturm on Education: The Reformation and Humanist Learning*, ed. by Lewis W. Spitz and Barbara Sher Tinsley (St Louis, Missouri: Concordia, 1995), p. 72.

¹⁶ *Johann Sturm on Education*, p. 69.

¹⁷ Peter Mack, *Elizabethan Rhetoric* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 14–15, 20–24, 32–38, 46–47 and *passim*.

Universities

Although schoolbooks for children provided examples of virtue and included proverbs, dialogues, or orations relevant to the right choices to make in life, any serious discussion of ethics had to wait until university study. It was then that moral philosophy could be followed in earnest, almost always on the basis of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, and often (but usually not in Italy) of his *Politics* and the (pseudo-Aristotelian) *Economics*. There were considerable local differences in the importance given to the moral-philosophy course and in its place within the wider curriculum, and in any case there were significant developments over time.¹⁸ In Paris the *Ethics* was being taught well before the Oxford scholar Robert Grosseteste provided a fresh and full translation of the work in 1246. It soon became a requirement: according to the statutes of 1366 and 1452, candidates for the MA were to have studied most of its books. Ethics was taught 'ordinarily',¹⁹ at an advanced point in the curriculum, around the same time as metaphysics, usually by a specially appointed *lector Ethicorum* who was studying for his degree in theology and taught the course for two years. Evidence from the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries suggests that the subject was increasingly brought forward to an earlier point in the Arts curriculum, typically to the first and/or second year.²⁰ Ethics was taught very much

¹⁸ For the following, see my *Aristotle's 'Ethics' in the Italian Renaissance (ca. 1300–1650): The Universities and the Problem of Moral Education* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), especially Ch. 2; idem, 'Moral Philosophy in the Universities of Medieval and Renaissance Europe', *History of Universities*, 20.1 (2005), 38–80; and the essay in this volume by Luca Bianchi.

¹⁹ 'Ordinary' teaching was typically required for the degree and imparted on regular teaching days. In Renaissance Italy this designation also indicated a course delivered by a senior professor.

²⁰ This new placement was probably related to various factors, including the pressures faced by several universities of the time, in both France and central Europe, to shoehorn the Arts curriculum into two years rather than the traditional three-and-a-half. Also important were the views of humanists and Reformers concerning the place of ethics in the university curriculum; see below.

philosophically, with a strong emphasis on the solution of philosophical (more rarely, theological) problems through *quaestiones*. Elsewhere in northern and central Europe, theological considerations seem to have interfered less with the teaching of ethics than in Paris, since the lecturers were typically regents in Arts with interests centring on philosophy (or, as in Vienna, other subjects including mathematics or rhetoric). The opposite, however, was true in the Spanish universities, where a theological emphasis seems to have been very strong.

In Italy the context of the ethics course was different yet again. Bologna and Padua, the preeminent Italian centres of university learning, were especially known for their teaching of law, medicine, and natural philosophy. Moral philosophy, which was taught within the faculty of Arts and Medicine, had a hard time establishing itself as a subject in its own right: for a long time it failed to attract specialists, was not required for the degree, was taught only on holidays, and had no clear place in the curriculum. Due to the weakness or absence of theology in the Italian universities, ethics had a more secular orientation than in some other European universities. Indeed, it was not unusual for it to be taught by professors of natural philosophy or medicine, who made little or no reference to the Scriptures or to works of theology. Only during the sixteenth century did some of these aspects change. In Bologna, from the 1560s, the course was made an 'ordinary' one, and it tended to be taught for long stretches of time by a single preceptor, a change that soon took root in Padua as well. Although the subject continued to be fairly poorly paid, it did achieve more prominence and on occasion received lectures based on the Greek text.²¹ Moral philosophy was also affected by a revived alliance with rhetoric and Greek literature, something which had its beginnings in the second half of the fifteenth century in Florence (Angelo Poliziano, for example, lectured on the *Ethics*) and really took off in Pisa during the sixteenth century. Although in Italy the *Ethics* had always been the only textbook read in moral philosophy, university professors started to give attention to the *Politics* as well (but only

²¹ The best examples are Marc-Antoine Muret in Rome and Pier Vettori in Florence. See my *Aristotle's 'Ethics' in the Italian Renaissance*, pp. 238–46, 331–40.

seldom to the *Economics*).²² Some, such as Francesco Piccolomini in Padua, wrote on moral philosophy as a whole, reconciling Aristotle's moral writings with those of Plato and adapting both to the requirements of the Christian faith.²³

Four Renaissance developments were especially significant for the fate of ethics in the European universities. One was the increasing application of humanistic techniques and knowledge of Greek to the study and teaching of the *Ethics*. Already in the fifteenth century, new translations by the Italian humanist Leonardo Bruni (1416/17) and the Greek émigré John Argyropoulos (1450s) had made their way into university teaching; they were just a foretaste of the many new efforts which would be made (many of them by university professors) in the sixteenth century, including further translations by French scholars such as Denys Lambin, and editions of the Greek text by Pier Vettori and others. In many (but not all) circles, literary, linguistic, and scholarly considerations became the preponderant element in explaining a text that up to then had been considered solidly philosophical, and therefore in need of being expounded according to the rules of philosophical discourse. On occasion this kind of analysis shifted attention away from the work's practical implications. Often, however, this tendency was countered by a second important development, namely an effort to build a new Christian philosophy.²⁴ Especially with Lutherans like Philipp Melanchthon, who used moral philosophy as a foundation for explaining the truths of the Gospel, the *Ethics* had a very obvious practical purpose and could be used as an introduction to the elements of faith.²⁵ The religious use of the work transcended confessional boundaries, affecting personalities as different as John Case in England and Francisco Suárez in

²² Again, a telling case is Muret, who lectured at the university in Rome on both the *Ethics* and the *Politics*, respectively in 1563–1567 and 1577–1578.

²³ Francesco Piccolomini, *Universa philosophia de moribus* (Venice: Franciscum de Franciscis, 1583).

²⁴ See the Introduction to this volume, 000-000.

²⁵ See Risto Saarinen's essay in this volume.

Spain;²⁶ the Jesuits' *Cursus Conimbricense*, which included moral philosophy (1592),²⁷ is just one witness among many to their interest in the *Ethics*. Third, the increasing availability of sources related to competing ethical traditions²⁸ made its way into the classroom. Although chairs in Platonic philosophy were few and far between in the Renaissance, and no chairs were officially dedicated to Stoic or Epicurean ethics, university lecturers were well aware of the importance of the non-Aristotelian traditions of thought. They were by no means tempted to abandon the explanation of Aristotle's text, which became more than ever an intense object of interpretation,²⁹ but they sought to solve the differences between the ancient systems of thought as they considered the Stagirite's text. In the process, works that were not officially part of the curriculum in moral philosophy received a hearing. Several sixteenth-century lecture commentaries on the *Ethics*, for example, testify to lecturers' engagement with the moral writings of Cicero; and in 1581 one lecturer of moral philosophy in Padua, Giason de Nores, went so far as to suggest that works such as the *De finibus*, *De officiis*, *Tusculan Disputations*, and *De amicitia* basically correspond in content to Aristotle's *Ethics* and could comfortably take its place (with the added benefit of providing inspiration as well as instruction).³⁰ Finally, of crucial importance was the shift in the audience of ethics. Whereas earlier it had been usual for the

²⁶ Jill Kraye, 'Moral Philosophy', in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. by Charles B. Schmitt and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 303–86 (pp. 342–48 on the reconciliation of Aristotle's moral philosophy with Christianity).

²⁷ *In libros Ethicorum Aristotelis ad Nicomachum, aliquot conimbricensis cursus disputationes* (Lugduni: Officina Iuntarum, 1593).

²⁸ See Chapter 1 in this volume.

²⁹ Charles B. Schmitt, *Aristotle and the Renaissance* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983); Charles H. Lohr, *Latin Aristotle Commentaries*, 5 vols (Florence: Olschki, 1988–2005), II: *Renaissance Authors*.

³⁰ Paul F. Grendler, *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), p. 406.

audience of ethics to be philosophy students, meaning that the subject had therefore been approached with the technical sophistication of professional philosophy, the increasing influence of humanists in the universities meant that students of rhetoric, who were interested in rather different aspects of Aristotle's work, could also hear it. A telling instance of this development is the commentary on the *Ethics* by Niccolò Tignosi, datable to around 1460 in Florence; while clearly not the work of a stylist, this commentary employs various strategies (e.g., philosophical analysis combined with the use of examples from history and classical poetry) in order to appeal simultaneously to students of philosophy and of rhetoric.³¹

A key interpreter who, on the cusp of the sixteenth century, brought together all of these tendencies and transmitted them to others, was Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples in Paris. A teacher of philosophy at the Collège du Cardinal-Lemoine, it was he who, for the first time (1492), placed in direct comparison the older medieval translation of the *Ethics* with those of Bruni and Argyropoulos. Lefèvre not only used a polished Latin style in explaining the work, but enriched his commentaries (according to the model already pioneered by Tignosi) with historical examples and quotations from the classics.³² Furthermore, it was he who cast the *Ethics* into a mould more congenial to his deep commitment to Christianity. (Lefèvre, who is actually best known for his later work on the Bible, allowed his student Clichtove to expand his own notes on the *Ethics* through a running commentary which underlined the points in common between Aristotle and the teachings of Scripture.) Again, Lefèvre was instrumental in highlighting the importance of Platonic and mystical writers, whose insights must have affected his understanding of ethics in ways that

³¹ Lines, *Aristotle's 'Ethics' in the Italian Renaissance*, pp. 192–220. See also this volume's Introduction, pp. 000–000.

³² Jill Kraye, 'Renaissance Commentaries on the *Nicomachean Ethics*' (1995), rpt. in eadem, *Classical Traditions in Renaissance Philosophy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 000–000 (pp. 104–05).

remain to be studied.³³ Finally, the French humanist rethought the pedagogical approach that should be taken to Aristotle's works, including those on moral philosophy, something which had important consequences for how the *Ethics* was taught in the universities throughout the sixteenth century.³⁴

Religious Studia

Far less is known about the teaching of ethics in the schools of the religious orders than in the contexts of secular schools and universities. Especially the Dominicans were, from early on, enthusiastic interpreters of Aristotle's *Ethics*, as is clear from the commentaries on this work by both Albert the Great and his student Thomas Aquinas. And the relevance of Aristotle's moral philosophy for theology is inescapable in works such as Thomas's *Summa Theologiae*, particularly the Ia IIae and IIa IIae. But the documentation concerning any regular teaching of ethics in the *studia* of the Dominicans is very thin.³⁵ It is only after 1314 that moral philosophy clearly enters into the curriculum of these *studia generalia*, but to some this has seemed an afterthought. The fact that this teaching could alternate with that of Thomas's *Summa* strongly suggests that the study of ethics was seen as preparing the way for theology. Documents for the Dominican province of Toulouse in 1327, however, outline a 3-year Arts programme, presumably on the heels of the study of logic, in which moral philosophy is not linked to theology at all. According to this prospectus, ethics was to be studied as a secondary subject in the first two years, while primary attention was given to natural philosophy and mathematics. Instructions from 3

³³ For an outline of Lefèvre's career and Aristotelian works, see Lohr, 'Faber Stapulensis' in *Latin Aristotle Commentaries*, II: *Renaissance Authors*, pp. 138–42.

³⁴ On several of these points see David A. Lines, 'Lefèvre and French Aristotelianism on the Eve of the Sixteenth Century', in *Der Aristotelismus in der frühen Neuzeit: Kontinuität oder Wiederaneignung?*, ed. by Günter Frank and Andreas Speer (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007), pp. 273–89.

³⁵ Marian Michèle Mulchaney, 'First the Bow Is Bent in Study': *Dominican Education Before 1350* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1998), pp. 333–36.

years later list the books that teachers for the course were to cover; these included, in addition to the *Ethics*, the *Magna Moralia*, *Economics*, and the *De causis*, and in the following year the *Politics* and, secondarily, the *Rhetoric*.³⁶ The extent to which these instructions were actually followed is unclear. For Italy, we know only isolated cases of ethics teaching in the Dominican convents, yet the Dominicans were by far the most active among all interpreters of the *Ethics* in the fourteenth century, unsurprisingly offering a point of view which mostly remained close to that of Thomas Aquinas.³⁷ In the fifteenth century their contribution faded somewhat, but significant personalities such as Girolamo Savonarola still wrote on moral philosophy, a subject which he quite possibly taught while he was *regens studiorum* of the convent in Bologna.³⁸ Dominicans could also be found, both in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, teaching moral philosophy and other subjects in the Italian universities. Their approach to philosophy and interventions in the debates of their day could be strongly conservative, as is suggested by the students' opposition to Domenicus de Flandris at the University of Pisa.³⁹ Certainly they did not, in the sixteenth century, take Pietro Pomponazzi's ambiguous comments on the immortality of the soul lying down, and in fact it was one of the Dominicans, a certain Chrysostomus Javelli, who tried to avoid such problems in the future by giving a strongly Christian flavour to Aristotle's philosophy, including to his *Ethics*.⁴⁰

³⁶ Alfonso Maierù, 'Tecniche di insegnamento', in *Le scuole degli ordini mendicanti (secoli XIII–XIV)* (Todi: Accademia Tudertina, 1978), pp. 305–352 (pp. 322–23).

³⁷ Lines, *Aristotle's 'Ethics' in the Italian Renaissance*, pp. 84–85, 167–74.

³⁸ David A. Lines, 'Pagan and Christian Ethics: Girolamo Savonarola and Ludovico Valenza on Moral Philosophy', *Documenti e studi della tradizione filosofica medievale* 17 (2006), 427–44.

³⁹ Armando Verde, 'Domenico di Fiandra: Intransigente tomista non gradito nello studio fiorentino', *Memorie domenicane* n.s., 7 (1976), 304–21.

⁴⁰ Chrysostomus Javelli, O.P., *Totius rationalis, naturalis, divinae ac moralis philosophiae compendium* (Lyon: Juncta, 1568); see Lines, *Aristotle's 'Ethics' in the Italian Renaissance*, p. 499.

Among the Jesuits too moral philosophy was a subject of great interest.⁴¹ Jesuit colleges were of two types: those that taught only grammar and rhetoric, and those that also included the higher subjects—philosophy (for three-and-a-half years) and then theology. In the schools of the second type, such as the Collegio Romano, there was initially a great deal of uncertainty about (and therefore irregularity in) the teaching of ethics during the second half of the sixteenth century. But the definitive *Ratio studiorum* (1599) emphasised the subject's importance, especially for theology, and placed it at the end of the Arts curriculum, as a preparation for the topics to be covered in Thomas's *Summa*. Its teaching gave rise to numerous questions and disputations, and to what was probably the most extensive commentary on the *Ethics* ever written.⁴² The application of the *Ratio*, however, varied significantly in different localities, since the Jesuits were often competing with local schools and universities and had to adapt their teaching programme accordingly.⁴³ Numerous *cursus philosophici* written by the Jesuits in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries skip over moral philosophy altogether.

2. Informal Contexts

Compared to schools, universities, and religious *studia*, other Renaissance contexts of ethical discussion are more amorphous and harder to capture. Both

⁴¹ For this paragraph, see Lines, *Aristotle's 'Ethics' in the Italian Renaissance*, pp. 348–62; and idem, 'Moral Philosophy in the Universities of Medieval and Renaissance Europe', 62–63.

⁴² Tarquinio Galluzzi, *In Aristotelis libros quinque priores moralium ad Nicomachum nova interpretatio, commentarii, quaestiones* (Paris: Cramoisy, 1632) and *In Aristotelis libros quinque posteriores [...]* (Paris: Cramoisy, 1645).

⁴³ This is best illustrated by the correspondence collected in *Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu: Monumenta Pedagogica*, ed. by L. Ladislaus Lukács, 7 vols (Rome: Monumenta Historica Soc. Iesu, 1965–1992). I am preparing an article on the various Jesuit practices in this area.

humanists and scholastics, for example, commonly debated issues such as the superiority of the active or the contemplative life, the nature and limits of friendship, the essence of nobility or love, and (especially in the wake of the Reformation) the relationship of virtue and faith. But these and other topics were not necessarily discussed within well-defined institutions or within a clearly-defined programme or set of rules. The figures involved might be solitary scholars or (more often) in the pay of a republic or court or (especially in the sixteenth century and later) members of academies or professors at universities. Boundaries could blur significantly, as for example when Florentine humanists discussed the power of love while gathered in a Ficinian ‘Academy’, which for all practical purposes was an extension of the Medici’s (undeclared) court, or when humanists in France held debates on moral topics at the court Academy of King Henry III. Not all could be like Erasmus, who corresponded with princes and men of letters throughout Europe without really being subject to any of them.

No systematic study has been undertaken of how ethics was discussed in these overlapping informal contexts, and of the possible implications for the directions the discussions themselves took. In the following I will therefore use individual examples to illustrate some relevant points.

Humanist Circles

Among the most slippery contexts to reconstruct is that of humanist circles, sometimes referred to as *sodalitates* or ‘academies’. Some informal circles flourished in fifteenth-century Italy around figures such as Marsilio Ficino in Florence, John Bessarion in Rome, Giovanni Pontano in Naples, and Aldus Manutius in Venice, but identifying their activities and practices has been bedevilled by a serious lack of documentation.⁴⁴ What does seem clear is that

⁴⁴ For a helpful overview see David S. Chambers, ‘The Earlier “Academies” in Italy’, in *Italian Academies of the Sixteenth Century*, ed. by David S. Chambers and François Quiviger (London: The Warburg Institute, 1995), pp. 1–14; Amedeo Quondam, ‘L’Accademia’, in *Letteratura italiana*, ed. by Asor Rosa, 5 vols (Turin: Einaudi, 1982),

usually these were loose associations of scholars who tended to gather for discussion and/or instruction around a particular respected individual, often meeting in that person's home or business (e.g., Aldus's printing shop). The topics of discussion were, in all likelihood, miscellaneous—from Latin and Greek literature to scholarship, philosophy, and issues in ethics. If the writings of Giovanni Pontano are anything to go by, themes may have varied from the four cardinal virtues to nobility and obedience.⁴⁵ Certainly, many of these groups spawned the writing of dialogues and other works, but one should resist the temptation to treat these as a faithful portrait of what went on in the meetings themselves.⁴⁶

The absence of formal pedagogical responsibilities left discussants free to adopt a broad range of rhetorical strategies including the use of dialogues without resolution (e.g., Leonardo Bruni's *Dialogi ad Petrum Paulum Histrum*) or replete with masterful irony which still today make certain works perplexing to interpreters. In particular, Leon Battista Alberti's ability to assume various masks in dialogues such as *Theogenius* has made it hard for critics to discern who (if anyone) really speaks for the author. It is not always so difficult: Poggio Bracciolini, for example, is more straightforward (some would say, less skilled)

I: *Il letterato e le istituzioni*, 823–98. On the circle around Ficino in Florence a revived (and, by now, tiresome) debate has followed the publication of Arthur Field's *The Origins of the Platonic Academy in Florence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), with several interventions by James Hankins, Robert Black, and Field; see for instance James Hankins, 'The Myth of the Platonic Academy', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 44.3 (Autumn 1991), 429–75. The controversy chiefly illustrates how scant the documentation is and how hard it is to interpret.

⁴⁵ See, for example, *De fortitudine* (Naples: Matthias Moravus, 1490), *De oboedientia* (Naples: Matthias Moravus, 1490) and the works collected in *I libri delle virtù sociali*, ed. by Francesco Tateo (Rome: Bulzoni, 1999).

⁴⁶ This assumption mars the otherwise interesting discussion in Vincenzo De Caprio, 'I cenacoli umanistici', in *Letteratura italiana* (see Quondam, above), I, 799–822.

in dialogues such as *De avaritia* and *De infelicitate principum*.⁴⁷ And it is quite clear where Erasmus' sympathies lie in works such as *The Praise of Folly*. Nonetheless, qualities such as ambiguity, indirectness, elegance of style, classical allusion, dramatic tension, realism, and psychological insight were highly valued all the way from Petrarch's *Secretum* to Rabelais' *Pantagruel*.

It goes without saying that many of these features stand in direct contrast to the main aims of philosophical discourse, which include clarity and the solution of ambiguities. Humanists dealing with ethics therefore tended to loosen the subject from its philosophical moorings and examine it instead through a different approach, derived from grammar and rhetoric. By so doing, the humanists were not so much rejecting philosophy as such; rather they elaborated another, less metaphysical brand of philosophy.⁴⁸ Although they too were able, when called upon, to write fairly systematic treatises (such as Machiavelli's *De principatibus*), what really caught the humanists' imagination was a different kind of writing, when possible tied to the specific detail of everyday life. It is for this reason, among others, that dialogues, short fiction, and works of biography or local history could be privileged as avenues for discussing virtue.⁴⁹ And, since their project was not philosophical in the traditional sense, it became more thinkable to express their debates in the vernacular rather than in Latin.

Yet ironically there was a strong current among the humanists which appreciated and even wrote according to the models of university philosophy, and one should not emphasise too much the distance between humanistic circles

⁴⁷ On Alberti and Poggio see especially the forthcoming volume by Timothy Kircher, tentatively entitled *Living Well in Renaissance Italy: Leon Battista Alberti and the Morality of Humanism* (forthcoming)

⁴⁸ See Ernesto Grassi, *Renaissance Humanism: Studies in Philosophy and Poetics*, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 51 (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1988). See also this volume's Introduction and the essay by Eckhard Kessler.

⁴⁹ On the power of short stories see the essay by Ullrich Langer in this volume. For biographies, see the essay by Alison Knowles Frazier.

and universities.⁵⁰ The *Ethics* commentary of Donato Acciaiuoli is a case in point,⁵¹ as are the writings of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. The trend continued in the sixteenth century; humanists were masters at recycling old material while producing something that looked new. Even Baldassar Castiglione's *Il libro del cortegiano* and Machiavelli's political works owe a significant debt (not usually acknowledged in modern scholarship) to Aristotelian philosophy.

Academies

The sixteenth-century academies, instead, had a much clearer institutional base (although here too documentation is often scarce). They typically had an official membership, a head and/or governing body, some kind of constitution, and a programme of lectures, scholarly discussions, and publication. An especially interesting case is the Accademia degli Infiammati of Padua, founded around June 1540. It was in this setting that the Florentine scholar Benedetto Varchi (who was involved in various aspects of organizing the academy) offered a course on Aristotle's *Ethics*, replacing Vincenzo Maggi who had been scheduled to cover Aristotle's *Poetics*. Varchi's lectures took place on Sundays and Thursdays, the occasions on which the academy typically met (and, doubtless by design, the days on which no university lectures took place). Since he was already engaged in a programme of translating the *Ethics* from Greek into Tuscan, and since many academies anyway championed the merits of the

⁵⁰ See my 'Humanism and the Italian Universities', in *Humanism and Creativity in the Italian Renaissance: Essays in Honor of Ronald G. Witt*, ed. by Christopher S. Celenza and Kenneth Gouwens (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 323–42; Jill Kraye, 'Philologists and Philosophers', in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, ed. by Jill Kraye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 142–60.

⁵¹ Luca Bianchi, 'Un commento "umanistico" ad Aristotele. L'*Expositio super libros Ethicorum* di Donato Acciaiuoli', published in revised form in idem, *Studi sull'aristotelismo del Rinascimento* (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2003), pp. 12–39 (first publ. in *Rinascimento* n.s., 30 (1990), 25–55).

vernacular, it made sense for his lectures to be in Italian. Yet his course met with such success that his lectures were soon swamped by foreign university students. To meet especially the needs of the German-speaking ones who had little Italian, Varchi soon had to switch to Latin.⁵² The surviving lecture notes show that Varchi tried to address both the university adolescents and the academy's grown men, that he made frequent recourse to the Greek text, and that he offered his audience something seriously approximating a classroom lecture in philosophy. Varchi left Padua in 1541, but his example must have left people hungering for more if Alessandro Piccolomini was appointed in the following autumn to cover, once again, Aristotle's moral philosophy.⁵³ His well-received exposition of the subject was published the following year.⁵⁴

One should note, however, that lectures did not need to be explicitly related to Aristotelian texts in order to be ethically charged. Varchi observed, 'non merita il nome di scrittore non che di poeta chi non insegna i costumi buoni ...' ('whoever neglects to teach good habits does not deserve the name of a writer or poet'), before telling his protégé Carlo Strozzi that the whole aim of the writings of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio was moral improvement.⁵⁵ The lectures on Dante which took place in the Accademia Fiorentina (founded in the autumn of 1540 as the Accademia degli Umidi) show how the *Divine Comedy* could be used to impart knowledge of ethics, natural philosophy, and theology (as in the

⁵² Varchi offers a first-hand account, and an initial section of commentary in Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Rinuccini, filza 10, no. 38, fols 511r–518v; see Lines, *Aristotle's 'Ethics' in the Italian Renaissance*, p. 506.

⁵³ Florindo V. Cerreta, 'Alessandro Piccolomini, Teacher of Moral Philosophy', *Italica* 33.1 (March 1956), 22–25.

⁵⁴ Alessandro Piccolomini, *De la institutione de la vita de l'huomo nato nobile in città libera libri X* (Venice: apud H. Scotum, 1542).

⁵⁵ Letter of 8 October 1539 quoted in Michel Plaisance, 'Une première affirmation de la politique culturelle de Côme I^{er}: la transformation de l'Académie des *Humidi* en Académie Florentine (1540–1542)', in idem, *L'Accademia e il suo principe: cultura e politica a Firenze al tempo di Cosimo I e di Francesco de' Medici* (Manziana: Vecchiarelli, 2004), pp. 29–122 (p. 43).

case of Giambattista Gelli) or to provide a strong moral and spiritual inspiration (as happened with Bernardino Daniello).⁵⁶ Francesco Verino Sr. was one of the guiding lights in this philosophical approach to literature from the academy's inception, and his death in 1541 did not prevent his model from being followed by others, even though not all the Academicians in Florence appreciated it.⁵⁷

Courts

The best-known work on moral philosophy associated with a Renaissance court is Castiglione's *Il libro del Cortegiano*. Begun around 1513, when Castiglione was in the service of Francesco Maria della Rovere, duke of Urbino (but only published in 1528, a year before Castiglione's death), this work presents the reader with a series of conversations set in the Urbino court of 1506. The participants include both men and women, both regulars at court and members of the papal curia, whose recent visit had increased the number of participants. As is well known the topics examined vary widely, and do not only include ethics; nonetheless, considerable attention goes to issues such as love, *sprezzatura*, the virtues, the conduct of women, and how to direct a prince onto the path to virtue.

Like many other Renaissance dialogues, that of Castiglione is fictional and can hardly be relied upon to provide an accurate portrayal of the cultural interests of the Duchy of Urbino's rulers or nobles, the frequency and manner of their ethical debates, their contents, or the more general involvement of monarchs, princes, and popes in similar discussions occurring at their courts. Despite the large amount of scholarship dedicated to Urbino, we still remain less

⁵⁶ See Gelli, *Commento edito e inedito sopra la Divina Commedia*, ed. by Carlo Negrone (Florence: Bocca, 1887) and Armand L. De Gaetano, 'Dante and the Florentine Academy: The Commentary of Giambattista Gelli as a Work of Popularization and Textual Criticism', *Italica* 45.2 (June 1968), 146–70; *L'esposizione di Bernardino Daniello da Lucca sopra la Commedia di Dante*, ed. by Robert Hollander and Jeffrey Schnapp (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1989).

⁵⁷ Plaisance, 'Une première affirmation', pp. 96–97 and *passim*.

than informed on the real workings of its court and what kinds of cultural programmes took place there.⁵⁸ Our understanding of these matters is also unsatisfying for several other localities, such as Florence, Mantua, and Augsburg.

It is clear, however, that the courts gave rise to a number of works concerned with the morals of all who were associated with them. The success of mirrors for princes continued unabated and was swollen by works written against Machiavelli's *The Prince*. But more notable are the writings concerned with the deportment of courtiers and other personalities present at court. Castiglione's masterpiece often receives the lion's share of attention on this point. But one should not forget other works including Giovanni della Casa's *Il Galateo* (published in 1558).

One context that sits awkwardly between that of the courts and the academies is the Palace Academy of King Henry III of France. This gathering, which met for around an hour twice a week immediately after supper, took place from 1576 to 1579 despite the monarch's frequent movements. Henry III himself presided, proposing topics to be examined; these were then discussed by the participants (who were not numerous and included two noblewomen) through lectures, several of which have survived. Apparently one lecture was delivered per session, followed by discussion. Moral philosophy was, especially in the early period, a paramount concern.⁵⁹ Discussions included topics such as the superiority of the moral or the intellectual virtues, and specific emotions (such as joy, sorrow, anger, envy and fear) and virtues (including patience and justice). The scaffolding of the lectures is clearly Aristotelian, while the manner

⁵⁸ See especially Cecil H. Clough, *The Duchy of Urbino in the Renaissance* (London: Variorum, 1981), Item IV: 'Sources for the History of the Court and City of Urbino in the Sixteenth Century'.

⁵⁹ On the topic see Frances A. Yates, *The French Academies of the Sixteenth Century* (London: The Warburg Institute, 1947), pp. 105–30. Similar ground is covered, with corrections and further details, by Robert J. Sealy, S.J., *The Palace Academy of King Henry III* (Geneva: Droz, 1981), pp. 37–58. Sealy shows that after 1576 the lectures covered many other fields as well, including natural philosophy and logic.

of exposition combines elements of scholasticism and humanism.⁶⁰ Yates has noted that they also include elements taken from St Thomas and from Plato, thus reflecting tendencies toward reconciliation of Plato and Aristotle in the sixteenth century. The speeches were delivered, however, in French, and they therefore offer an interesting parallel to the discussions depicted by Castiglione, even though an important work closely connected with the Palace Academy (Bartolomeo Delbene's poem *Civitas veri sive morum* of 1609) is in Latin.⁶¹

No similar events seem to have taken place at the court of the Tudors, where cultural patronage was typically directed toward institutions and scholars outside of the court itself. We know of no study- or discussion-groups other than a short-lived school to educate prince Edward and the sons of some nobles.⁶² But the elements of theatre and performance, which applied to the real-life political stage of the court,⁶³ were also part of the entertainments staged for it, and there were elements of moral instruction (especially for the monarch) in the masques and pageants that were an integral part of courtly life.⁶⁴ Also, despite the objections voiced by Puritan writers, drama was considered, along with literature and the arts in general, to have an educative, moral function. Whether performed at court or including members of the court as an audience, comedies and tragedies were not simply forms of entertainment, but could be more or less

⁶⁰ Sealy argues that these were lectures because they were meant to complete the king's philosophical education (*The Palace Academy*, pp. 32–33), but his evidence for this is not compelling, and he does not explain why the same aim might not have been achieved through private tutoring.

⁶¹ Yates, *The French Academies*, pp. 111–16, 120–21 examines the work at length.

⁶² David Loades, *The Tudor Court* (London: Batsford, 1986), esp. pp. 114–26.

⁶³ Fritz Levi, 'The Theatre and the Court in the 1590s', *The Reign of Elizabeth I: Court and Culture in the Last Decade*, ed. by John Guy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 274–300.

⁶⁴ Jean Wilson, *Entertainments for Elizabeth I* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1980), pp. 9–11.

veiled vehicles of moral and political advice, whilst reminding the audiences of the vagaries of fortune, the power of the emotions, and the duty of virtue.⁶⁵

3. Contexts and Their Influence

In what ways, if any, did the contexts just discussed affect the direction of ethics in the Renaissance? A first and fundamental aspect is that of audience. From ancient times, it had been assumed that moral formation was one of the principal objectives of education. Discussions of, and especially incitements to, virtue could therefore take place even at the earliest point in the educational curriculum, and apart from the fact that the virtues extolled may have been more secular than those promoted in church schools in earlier centuries, here one does not note a substantial difference. With discussions of *ethics*, however, we enter a very different arena. Since the twelfth- and thirteenth-century rediscovery of Aristotle, ethics had been strongly linked to philosophy and theology, although it was also recognized that there were points of contact between ethics and rhetoric. It was assumed that, as a part of moral philosophy, ethics should be approached philosophically, by students who were fairly mature (as Aristotle auspicated) and already well-grounded in logic, which provided the discipline's methodology. Humanists and reformers like Melanchthon, however, broadened the audience of ethics: they placed it earlier on in the curriculum, favoured a non-technical approach to the subject, allied ethics more closely with literature, assumed that merchants and nobles were capable—if sufficiently trained—of discussing and understanding it, and in certain instances allowed or even modelled the use of the vernacular for ethical discussions. By so doing, they

⁶⁵ John H. Astinton, *English Court Theatre 1558–1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 133–34 and *passim*; Martin Butles, 'Private and Occasional Drama', in *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Drama*, ed. by A. R. Braunmuller and Michael Hattaway, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 131–63.

enabled ethical teaching to make its way out of the schools and institutions of higher education into informal circles, academies, and courts.

This change brought others in its wake. It would hardly be fair to describe school and university writing culture as restrictive and static, since several forms of expression were available and many developments took place within them during the period we are considering.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, newer contexts did introduce a greater range and flexibility of expression. Its members could choose whether to write in Latin or the vernacular. Although they were quite free to use the forms commonly in use in schools and universities (and many of them did write lectures or commentaries), they often preferred to express their musings in other genres, such as fictional dialogues, invectives, letters addressed to friends, treatises dedicated to princes, poems, or essays in the style of Montaigne. A further development were humanist commonplace-books: a literary, historical, or philosophical text could be quite literally dismembered, and its precious sentences placed under appropriate headings for meditation and future use; its pithy sayings could thus be employed for personal and collective betterment.⁶⁷

A broadening of the audience also meant that other aspects or applications of ethics could be treated in addition to the familiar ones. Household economics, not usually taught in the universities, got a good airing in Alberti's *I libri della famiglia*. Merchant values were much better represented in discussions on the active and contemplative lives, and the tendencies of the nobility might be reinforced through discussions of magnificence. Friendship became (for both social and religious reasons) a topic of crucial importance, linked in interesting ways with the responsibilities of a courtier toward his prince.⁶⁸ It is also worth remembering that the resurgence of Petrarchism in the sixteenth century,

⁶⁶ I am thinking particularly of genres such as compendia, florilegia, commonplace books, questions, treatises, systematic textbooks, and school exercises (e.g., *theses*, the antecedents to the essay).

⁶⁷ See Ann Moss's essay in this volume.

⁶⁸ See especially Ullrich Langer, *Perfect Friendship: Studies in Literature and Moral Philosophy from Boccaccio to Corneille* (Geneva: Droz, 1994).

combined with the renewed influence of Platonism and Neo-Platonism, led to countless discussions of love, a topic with very strong connections with ethics, since true love could only originate within a noble soul.

Finally, the rise of new contexts led to an increasing encounter with new, or different, sources.⁶⁹ We have already referred to the hidden influence of new sources on university contexts. In humanist circles, academies, and courts it was easier and more natural to discuss the theories of Plato in particular, as the *Lezzioni d'Amore* by Francesco Verino Secondo make clear,⁷⁰ or to bring together the moral ideas of Cicero and Aristotle, as Leonardo Bruni did in his much earlier *Isagogicon moralis philosophiae* (c. 1425).⁷¹ Toward the end of the sixteenth century, works such as Justus Lipsius' *De constantia* (1584) were initiating a full-scale revival of Stoic philosophy. Eventually, these alternative positions contributed to erode Aristotle's authority and promote the need for a different philosophical model.

The relative freedom of the informal contexts of ethical discussion was crucial to the developments that took place within Renaissance ethics. But so too were more established institutions, which carried forward debates on ethical issues that were deeply informed by discussions taking place outside their walls. It should not be surprising that university professors were often members of academies and could have connections with papal or princely courts, or that humanists could serve at court, be members of academies, and/or teach in schools or universities. The contexts of ethics in the Renaissance were various and overlapping; their workings and influence deserve to be more fully explored, but had a clear effect on how ethics was discussed.

⁶⁹ On this topic see especially Chapter 1 in this volume.

⁷⁰ Francesco de' Vieri, *Lezzioni d'amore*, ed. by John Colaneri (Munich: Fink, 1973).

⁷¹ See Brian P. Copenhaver and Charles B. Schmitt, *Renaissance Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 77–79.