# PETRARCH'S DEMARCATION OF HUMANISM

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**Abstract** Based on Petrarch's epistle *De ignorantia*, the present paper offers a critique of the thesis of the modern demarcation of humanism proposed by Th. E. Mommsen, a thesis that still causes reverberations within the scholarly literature that focuses on Petrarch. The paper analyses Petrarch's stance on what he calls *medium nostrum tempus* in relation with Antiquity and the way in which his notion of darkness represents a means to delimit humanism within a Christian philosophy of history based on ethics. The conclusion of the paper shows that Th. E. Mommsen's interpretation, together with other contemporary readings of humanism must be recalibrated in accordance with the practical and eschatological finality that Petrarch gave to his notion of *studia humanitatis*.
**Keywords** Petrarch, humanism, moral philosophy, ignorance, self-care, Middle Ages, modernity

## 1. *On ignorance*: a manifesto for humanism

*De ignorantia*[1] is a polemic text in response to the calumny made by four of Petrarch's friends (who are thus proven to be pretended friends). A manuscript copy

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[1] The original text of the *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia* can be found in two autographed manuscripts (Francesco Petrarca, *Über seine und vieler anderer Unwissenheit*, Übersetzt von Klaus Kubusch, ed. August Buck (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1993): *Cod. Hamilton* 493, Staatsbibliothek Berlin (the copy sent by Petrarch to Donato Albanzani, together with the dedicatory epistle) and *Cod. Vat. lat*. 3359, Bibliotheca Vaticana (Petrarch's personal copy, dated: Arqua, June 25, 1370). The latter contains corrections and the following *Postscriptum: "Hunc libellum ante biennium dictatum et alibi scriptum a me ipso, scripsi hic iterum manu mea; et perduxi ad exitum Arquade, inter colles Euganeos 1370 Jun. 25, vergente ad occasum die"* (L. M. Capelli, *La traité De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia* [Paris, 1906], 4.) The first edition was made by L. M. Capelli, *La traité De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia* (Paris, 1906). The second edition represents a *revisio* of L.M. Capelli's made by P. G. Ricci, *De*

of the work *De ignorantia* preserved in Venice (*Codex Marcianus Latinus*, IV, 86) contains a *marginalia* that lists the names of the four objectors of Petrarch: Leonardo Dandolo, a Venetian man (1330-1405), the son of Dodge Andrea Dandolo, followed by Zaccaria Contarini (probably a law graduate in Paris), a Venetian nobleman and diplomat, Tommaso Talenti, a successful Venetian merchant, and Guido da Bagnolo, the court physician of the King of Cyprus, but more importantly, a former student of the University of Bologna and, of all the aforementioned friends, an expert in Aristotle's writings, the commentaries to these and, of course, also in the works of Averroes.

The one who informs Petrarch about the rumours that had already been circulating since 1366, spread by the four objectors, is also the recipient of the dedicatory letter at the beginning of *De ignorantia*, Donato degli Albanzani de Pratovecchio (1328-1411).[2] A letter sent to Boccaccio reveals that Petrarch started writing *De ignorantia* at the end of 1367 while navigating on the river Po towards Padua, but this initial version was only finalised towards January 1371 (three and a half years before his death). Only then did Petrarch send his work to Donato Albanzani in the form of a letter accompanied by the introductory dedication. Therefore, we can conclude that this short text had been on Petrarch's mind for five years.

*De ignorantia* [On Ignorance] simultaneously represents thus a short manifest and a testament. The faults of which he is accused by his four Venetian friends are fame, reputation and glory, and Petrarch nostalgically reflects: "I travel happily, having laid down this illustrious but weighty bundle. With oars, sails, and ropes, I overcome the current of Po, returning to the Ticino river and its ancient city of scholars. There, if I choose to, I shall not only resume the mantle of my former fame, which has been lost among the seaman [in Venice[3]], but I shall not be able to renounce it, even if I should really want to (139)[4]."

These were the circumstances of a kind of retreat and of a sort of regret: the poet's fame was contested in Venice; his fame had become a reason for polemic and

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*suis ipsius et multorum ignorantia – L'ignoranza mia e di tanti altri*, in F. Petrarch, *Opere latine*, a cura di A. Bufano (Turin, 1975), vol. II, 1025–1151. The present paper is a restatement of the ideas expressed as a prefatory study to the Romanian translation of Petrarch's *On ignorance* (Iași: Polirom, 2016), 11–36.

[2] A friend with whom Petrarch exchanged letters, who taught in Ravenna and Venice. He translated Petrarch's *De viris illustribus* and Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus* from Latin to Italian.

[3] Our explanation.

[4] The numbers in parentheses, if not marked otherwise, always refer to the paragraph number in the English translation of *De ignorantia* used throughout this paper: Francesco Petrarca, *Invectives*, trans. David Marsh, The I Tatti Renaissance Library 11 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 222–364.

he could not escape it even after he confessed to not being worthy of it no longer wished to bear it. His fame became a burden; it constantly attracted envy and it fed on that envy regardless of where it took refuge, where it hid or how much it was masked by apparent ignorance – this is thus the tone of the lamentation rocked by the thwarting flow of the Po that the reader encounters in the beginning and that accompanies him throughout the text which, in this metaphor of writing on water, seems to confront the passing of time itself.

As a literary genre, *De ignorantia* is not an invective[5] in its entirety, as it would seem, but, in an epistolary confession style accompanied by lamentation, it rather emulates the form of the Ciceronian pleads, so that Petrarch, the son of a notary and a student in law, writes in a Ciceronian juridical style: accusers, a fault, a defender and a court are all present. What unfolds before our eyes is therefore the defendant's plea. The starting model seems to be Cicero's *In Catillinam*: the epistle's intro is abrupt and bawls a blast of seven questions; that certain Ciceronian interrogative dive from *Quoadusque abutere…?* is also used by Petrarch in his questions at the beginning of his work. However, the literary form is composite and varied: the basis is structured as a juridical plea, but the stylistic inflections throughout the text bring epistolary and confessionary tones, invectives, dialogues, imprecations and lamentations.

But what is it all about? Who brings accusations, to whom and why? In essence, we are given to understand that four friends formed an ad hoc court in order to accuse the fifth (the defendant, i.e. Petrarch) of ignorance and to thus contest his fame. They contest his fame and teachings, basically stating that "the man is not that great" and, furthermore, that he is ignorant especially in philosophy. Petrarch defends himself in a Socratic manner, admitting his guilt and showing his willingness to accept the accusation of ignorance. In this case, what would be the purpose of a trial in which the defendant pleads guilty? Well, the purpose is represented by the fact that the way in which he admits his guilt would actually give way to a new trial: the accusers that formed the court are now on trial, the case is the legitimacy of the aforementioned court, the basis of the accusation of philosophical ignorance. At first glance, this basis is represented by knowledge, for only through superior knowledge can ignorance be identified. But is knowledge a good enough reason to define man's humanity and to therefore reduce the humanity of an ignorant? What type of guilt is human ignorance and who can judge it? What is left after a verdict that shows lack of knowledge? Is knowledge the final decisive criterion for what man is or what man should be? These are the thematic questions that outline the epistemic location of ignorance.

[5] William J. Kennedy, "The Economy of Invective and a Man in the Middle," in *A Critical Guide To The Complete Works*, eds. Victoria Kirkham, Armando Maggi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 263. The article points out the elements of satire and invective, as well as the economic metaphors *mercator, merces* from *De ignorantia*.

In his defence, Petrarch formulates an opposition between two models of knowledge: the first model is that of the "natural philosophy" around which the paradigm of the "scientific" knowledge of the world is constructed. Petrarch's four "accusers" were Aristotelian representatives of this paradigm who, at the time, identified with Aristotelianism, the only available philosophy which offered a platform for the study of nature. According to Petrarch (62), regarding the way in which the meetings with these Aristotelians took place, there was a direction specific to the Italian universities where Artistotelianism, interpreted in the lines of Averroism, was used in the study of medicine and in applied natural sciences (biology and physics), but not in theological matters. Therefore, the accusation of ignorance is formulated based on this orientation and it implied the fact that Petrarch was a respectable man of letters but an ignorant in regard to the paradigm of the pure interpretation of nature.

Today, this division into "two cultures"[6] is quite familiar: on the one hand, the philological paradigm and, on the other hand, the paradigm of natural sciences; on the one hand, those who read entire libraries, on the other hand, those who calculate. But in this case, we are only collaterally facing the issue of the cultural secession described by C. P. Snow in 1959, because the second model, which was formulated by Petrarch as a retort, does not focus on philology or on "books" in general. What Petrarch brings forth is the idea of knowledge in the field of Christian morals. It is not the "man of letters" who opposes the researcher, but rather the one who makes his life the purpose of salvation, trying to become better and to make others better. For Petrarch, goodness, happiness and self conversion are "reality" to a greater extent than the realism of orientation in the knowledge of reality. In this case, Petrarch is critical of the scientific stances that consider religious engagement to be *ignorance* and, in other words, the lack of sapiential-superior detachment from the matters regarding faith. Therefore, for Petrarch, the accusations made by the four friends offer the opportunity to bring arguments against the imperative "detachment" endorsed by the theory of the double truth in Averroist Artistotelianism, according to which we have access to the truths of natural philosophy, truths which are different from the truths of faith.

Petrarch's ideal is, in contrast, a "unified" man for whom being good, doing good, preparing for salvation are issues that go beyond the idea of knowing nature; the engagement with the truths of faith imply his theological scepticism regarding humans' capability to investigate and to understand nature as the result of an act of creation. The argument for this scepticism is as follows: nature as creation is an *object of absolute complexity*, which reveals its Author through its complexity. The argument is borrowed from Cicero, who speaks "like an Apostle" (68) in this case: in Petrarch's summary, just like an instrument that shows the movements of the stars

[6] C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1961).

and their positions (a model of the heavens) cannot be suspected of having appeared by accident, but is supposed to be a result of its creator's reason (the astronomer) and of his art, the real heavens with those laws regarding the movements of the stars also could not have appeared by accident, and therefore it proves the existence of an author more complex than his creation[7] (67). But, as a *complex object*, nature only contains truth in its *entirety*, which also includes its author. Therefore, any investigation that is limited and that has limited means (the human mind) of an infinitely complex whole (nature – God's creation) is marked by partialism and is thus doomed to fail. This is the scepticism of the incommensurability of knowledge which, at least through its base elements, anticipates Nicholas of Cusa's stance and whose origins are to be found in Augustine's Book XII of the *De civitate Dei* (99). The theme of the "errors of the philosophers" is based on this scepticism, a theme that is widely present in *On ignorance*: the multiplicity of the gods, Aristotle's lack of knowledge of true happiness, the construction of the world from atoms, the belief in the eternity of the world etc.

**2. A Christian Theology of History: Against Th. E. Mommsen's Dark Ages**

In Petrarch's plea, faith is not connected to the simple hope of a promise or to what became a wager after Pascal's theories; it takes Augustine's radical expression (*De civitate Dei* XX, 9,1): *ergo et nunc ecclesia regnum Christi est regnumque caelorum*[8], where *faith* implies the acceptance of the certainty of immortality as a fact in the Christian history of the world which Augustine structures in three interventions (*De trinitate*, XIII, *On ignorance* 51-52) made by God himself: 1. The fall as an expression of *power*; 2. The redemption of Christ as an expression of *justice* (of divine justice); 3. Redemption as the power of justice. This theological reading of history is based on Petrarch's own view of history and of the essence of man, ideas that must guide the understanding of Petrarchan humanism. In our hurry to modernise Petrarch, his humanism was imprudently interpreted as part of an Enlightenment type of deliverance from different tutelary authorities, or as an endeavour to philologically reclaim Romanism. The expression "dark ages" belongs to him and is somewhat responsible for this interpretation.

[7] The argument for theistic complexity is still used today in the philosophical debate regarding creationism vs. anti-creationism. Richard Dawkins in *The Blind Watchmaker* makes a fascinating argument against the irreducible complexity. He offers a model of small replicants, which, during a long period of time, through nano-deviations, manage to form complexity.

[8] "Therefore the Church even now is the kingdom of Christ, and the kingdom of heaven", St. Augustine, *The City of God*, in *New Advent*, trans. Marcus Dods. From Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. 2. Ed. Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887). Revised and edited for *New Advent* by Kevin Knight, http://www.newadvent.org /fathers/120120.htm.

In a letter written to Agapito Colonna in 1359, Petrarch confesses that because his project *De viris illustribus* (a work of history whose project was modified numerous times) focuses on the real and old Roman history and because the illustrious figures of his time and the previous times (referring to the previous generations of the Colonna family, to the 13th and probably 12th centuries, due to the fact that Petrarch refers to Agapito's father and uncle) are so few, he states the following: *Nolui autem pro tam paucis nominibus claris, tam procul tantasque tenebras stilum ferre*[9]. Therefore, in this case, Petrarch considers his time (the 14th century) and the previous century (probably more than one previous century) tenebrous because of the lack of illustrious figures. It is not at all obvious what Th. E. Mommsen presumes in his famous article *Petrarch's Conception of the "Dark Ages"*, namely that once Petrarch established the limit of his history at Titus Flavius Vespasianus (the second half of the 1st century AD), the *darkness* contains the entire following period[10]; in this case, this is the first occurrence of an immense *dark age*. In Mommsen's interpretation, the decline of the Roman Empire marks an era of decadence and of historical significance, thus expanding to Petrarch's time. Therefore, Petrarch's approach on history would be a "modern" one, anticipating the representation of the 15th century on the succession of the historical ages: Antiquity, Middle Ages and the new age of Modernity. Of course, Th. E. Mommsen's probative endeavour regarding Petrarch's attitude towards the centuries under our scrutiny (starting with the 15th century) as part of the Middle Ages is understandable. According to this thesis, by dividing history into three periods, namely Rome's golden ages, the period of decadence and the new, flourishing period that was to come, Petrarch anticipated the *humanist demarcation*[11] of history. Th. E. Mommsen's argument includes the statistics of the names explicitly used by Petrarch (Petrarch cites very few "medieval" figures) and his constantly critical and lamenting approach to "the times of decadence", which indicates Petrarch's need to detach himself from his own times or a feeling of exile. The decisive verses from *Epistolae metricae* (III, 33 – cited by Th. E. Mommsen) clearly note this lament for the epoch (that lasts for centuries) and, by expressing the wish to have lived in a different time, formulate a concept of one's own time as *nostrum medium tempus*: "*Vivo, sed indignans, quae nos in tristia fatum/Secula dilatos peioribus intulit annis. /Aut prius, aut multo decuit post tempore nasci;/Nam fuit, et fortassis erit, felicius aevum. /In medium sordes, in*

[9] "But, for so few famous names, I did not want to push my quill so far and through so much darkness."

[10] Th. E. Mommsen, "Petrarch's Conception of the 'Dark Ages'", *Speculum* 17/2 (1942): 237.: "This point of view Petrarch expressed when in 1341 he drew a line of demarcation between ancient and modern history, and when later on he called the period stretching from the fall of the Roman Empire down to his own age a time of darkness. In Petrarch's opinion that era was dark because it was worthless, not because it was little known."

[11] Ibid., 239.

*nostrum turpia tempus / Confluxisse vides; gravium sentina malorum /Nos habet; ingenium, virtus et gloria mundo /Cesserunt; regnumque tenent fortuna, voluptas"*[12].

It is interesting that all of the quotes given by Th. E. Mommsen to strengthen his construct are from the writings from before 1363, while the ones from the late writings (*De ignorantia* and *Apologia contra cuiusdam anonymi Galli calumnias*) meant to further defend his thesis are cropped and read almost in opposition. In 1373, Petrarch wrote *Apologia* where, like in *De ignorantia* (1371), the Dantean idea[13] appears regarding the misfortune of the old ones to not have lived the revelation of the Christian truth[14]: "Elucebant tamen inter errores ingenia, neque ideo minus vivaces erant oculi quamvis tenebris et densa caligine circumsepti, ut eis non erranti odium, sed indignae sortis miseratio deberetur."[15] For Th. E. Mommsen, this fragment illustrated an inversion of the original Christian metaphor that illustrated the dawn of Christianity as a bright moment delimitating the "darkness" of the pagan Antiquity: "Antiquity, so long considered as the 'Dark Age,' now became the time of 'light' which had to be 'restored'; the era following Antiquity, on the other hand, was submerged in obscurity".[16] Nonetheless, Petrarch's words seem less revolutionary and they merely reiterate a stance repeatedly found in his work and in the works of his predecessors. For instance, Dante (Canto 4), at the entrance of his famous Limbo, asks Virgil (as a guide to the

[12] Where Petrarch laments that he should have been born earlier, or long after this time for it had been and probably will be a happier era. And he defines his epoch as *our times of in between* (medium nostrum tempus). As we can see, one word apart, the concept of *aevum medium* appears to be formulated almost linguistically; Petrarch uses *tempus* as a synonym for *aevum* (from the previous verse) and had he interchanged the terms, the expression *medium nostrum aevum* would have appeared (instead of *tempus*).

[13] The idea does not belong to Dante; the idea is older, but its expression in Dante's writings is closest to Petrarch's approaches. There is a letter to Boccaccio among Petrarch's writings, in which he explains his deferential relation to Dante, whose writings were familiar to Petrarch and with whom he had family ties.

[14] The *Wikipedia* article on the *Dark Ages* is suffocated by a wrong reading induced by Mommsen to an impetuous reader (for Mommsen does not state that Petrarch refers to his closest predecessors), and it therefore spreads the idea that Petrarch's characters are the medieval people surrounded by darkness. Nothing further from the truth! The ones to whom Petrarch refers here are the people of the antiquity who had not lived to see the sun of justice shine, namely Christ.

[15] *Apologia contra cuiusdam Galli anonymi calumnias,* in Th. E. Mommsen, "Petrarch's Conception of the 'Dark Ages'", 227. "Amidst the errors there shone forth men of genius, and no less keen were their eyes, although they were surrounded by darkness and dense gloom; therefore they ought not so much to be hated for their erring but pitied for their ill fate."

[16] Th. E. Mommsen, "Petrarch's Conception of the 'Dark Ages'", 228.

Inferno) to explain the religious motivation for the damnation of the innocent who had simply lived before Christ, as Virgil himself states:

> *ch'ei non peccaro; e s'elli hanno mercedi, non basta, perché non ebber battesmo, ch'e porta de la fede che tu credi; e s'e'furon dinanzi al cristianesmo, non adorer debitamente a Dio: e di questi cotai son io medesmo. Per tai difetti, non per altro rio, semo perduti, e sol di tanto offesi che sanza speme vivemo in disio."*[17] And Dante laments: "*Gran duol mi prese al cor quando lo 'ntesi, pero che gente di molto valore conobbi che 'n quel limbo eran sospesi*.[18]

This paradigm, conventionally referred to as "Dantean", reverberates several times in *De ignorantia*. We can now see Petrarch suffering for Cicero in the same way:

> when I read him, I often pity his fate, and lament in silent grief (*dolens*) that he did not know the true God. He passed away only a few years before the birth of Christ. Alas, death closed his eyes just when the night of error and its darkness (nox *erratica*) was nearly over, and when the starting-point of truth, the dawn of true light, and the sun of justice were fast approaching" (58).

He then notes that Epicurus and other philosophers from the Antiquity could not know the creation of the world through the word of God, but the alleged philosophers, who do not understand this truth either, are even less excusable: "In the darkness even a lynx may not be able to see, but anyone who opens his eyes in the light a sees nothing must be blind" (97).

Therefore, for Petrarch, the darkness covers the pagan period, the Antiquity and also his own times, since there still were non-believers who lived in darkness. Thus the idea does not focus on the radically inverted light-darkness metaphor, just like in Th. E. Mommsen's view, but on differentiating the ancient "ingeniousness" which, even outside the "light", had the proleptical spirituality that reveals the truth. There is also a congruency between the three "historical" periods divided through

[17] *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, Vol. 1, *Inferno*, ed. and trans. Robert M. Durling (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 72–73: "that they did not sin; and if they have merits, it is not enough, because they did not receive baptism, which is the gateway to the faith that you believe. And if they lived before Christianity, they did not adore God as was needful: and of this kind am I myself. Because of such defects, not for any other wickedness, we are lost, and only so far harmed that without hope we live in desire."

[18] Ibid., 72–73: "Great sorrow seized my heart when I understood him, because I knew that people of great worth were suspended in that limbo."

the aforementioned Augustinian theological division of history (downfall–power, redemption–justice, salvation–power of justice). For Petrarch, the first two periods fluctuate, since light and darkness still intertwine. The second period (Christianity in a historical march) is marked by the dynamics of conversion; this is why, on the one hand, Petrarch can endorse his time period's access to light and, on the other hand, he can affirm that this period is still an unclear time in the struggle for salvation; Antiquity is also a dark age, but it is one in which the forecasting spirits of the Christian world do not sparkle. This is the reason why Cicero, in some passages, is presented "*like an Apostle*" (*De ignorantia* 68, sqq.) especially where (83) he foresees monotheism and creation. Petrarch, in those passages, states that he surpasses himself by ascending (*colligit sese,* 75). The same is Plato's situation, who, even though he had not fully comprehended the truth, "he saw it and came closer to it than the rest" (114), alongside Cicero, Pliny, Plotinus, Macrobius, Porphyry, Censorinus and Josephus.

Humanism as an outlook on these foreknowing views is thus, in essence, a historical *interpretatio christiana* of the pagan philosophical system of thought. These authors deserve attention (*studium*) to the extent that they had approximated light and truth even in their historical situation which had been immersed in darkness and falsehood. But even in the works of these "visionary apostles", Petrarch identifies pages which, as testimonies of darkness,

> should never have been written. I wouldn't believe they should be read either, except that reading and understanding such trifles about the gods awaken our love of true divinity and the one God, and that, as we read, our contempt for foreign superstition awakes reverence four our religion in our minds. The clearest possible means of understanding a thing is to place it next to its opposite. Nothing makes light more lovely than our hatred of darkness" (83).

In *De ignorantia*, this is the starting point of the long denunciation of the "errors of the philosophers". The denunciation divides the world of thinkers into "our philosophers"[19], namely the ones who search with faith and the others who, like Aristotle and Averroes, are completely outside the radius of the foreknowing view of the revealed truth. Therefore, faith appears to be a structure that divides history and which, in accordance with its foreknowing nature, configures the ancient cultural legacy. But Petrarch does not reject *medium nostrum tempus* (The Middle Ages) as he rejected the pagan fundamental *darkness*. His critique approaches the stylistics of the scholastics' language (*insanum et clamosum vulgus scolasticorum* –

[19] *His nostris philosophis credere* (114): to believe in our philosophers.

*De ignorantia,* 114) and, even in *De ignorantia*, refers to the hypertrophy of the senetences' genre.

Petrarch's philosophical orientation is determined by his immense knowledge and his contact with Latin Roman literature. It is thus true that the platform for humanism is based on the *Latin Romanism*, but it is not less true that the Petrarchan humanism is not limited to a revival of Romanism. The figure called upon to institute this re-humanisation of Romanism from a Christian perspective is Marcus Tullius Cicero, an archetype of the man of letters who, through writing, deals with the world of language and resides in it with the authenticity of its irreducible expression. We encounter the same adherence to the expression of the Latin language in Petrarch's case. The study of a re-appropriated classic language offered Petrarch the opportunity to notice the relation between the obligation towards authenticity and the simplification of the language. He constantly considers the obligation to be in a personal relation with language; therefore, the dark age in which he humbly places himself, is consequently marked by an ignorance towards language, an ignorance which does not conceive of the language as edificatory and creative for the self. This idea is present in his reproach to the commentator, a man who alienates his self by parasitising another's expression of self: "If it could speak, the Book of Sentences would bear witness to this in a loud an complaining voice, since it has suffered at the hands of a thousand such workmen" (115).

*Studia humanitatis*, the study programme[20] of humanist formation established by Petrarch and maintained further by the humanist movement, considers moral philosophy[21] to be their guiding point. The five fields of study included in this curriculum were: grammar, rhetoric, poetics and history, all of which were contained in the force field of moral philosophy. The completion of the studies was not seen as a performance of knowledge (which is why, basically, the "great

[20] Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and its Sources*, ed. M. Mooney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 23: "the studia humanitatis includes one philosophical discipline, that is, morals, but it excludes by definition such fields as logic, natural philosophy, and metaphysics, as well as mathematics and astronomy, medicine, law, and theology." Eugenio Garin's view is that the humanist Renaissance brings forth a new philosophy and in relation to it, the other great researcher of the Renaissance, P.O. Kristeller is critical on this point; for him the humanists were mainly literate men and not philosophers, and willing to escape from Aristotle's authority, they replaced him not with Plato the philosopher, but with Cicero…the orator (*Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters,* III [Rome, 1993], 40). Cicero's works play a great part in (and starting with) Petrarch's writings. Therefore, P. O. Kristeller's interpretation focuses on two cultures: the scholastic one, which is a philosophical culture, and the Renaissance one, which is a philological culture (grammar, rhetoric, literature) and the curricular lack of logic is significant from this point of view.

[21] "*Ad moralem precipue philosophiam et ad poeticam prono*" (*Posteritati*, a cura di P.G. Ricci, in F. Petrarca, *Prose* [Milano, Napoli: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1955], 6.)

Renaissance scholars" did not consider themselves specialists, but rather *uomini universali*), but rather as a path towards personal formation in the spirit of a good and just life (*recte vivere*). These *umanista* were regarded as initiation and practical formation techniques for the self which was enclosed by the purpose of moral initiation in the world: *ars bene beateque vivendi* (the art of living well and happily). Therefore, even the formative nature of humanism, through its fields of study, imposed a practical attitude of assuming a set of moral principles that continuously increase and potentiate the eagerness to study.

**3. Humanist Techniques: Self-care and Asceticism of the Inner Self**

These demarcations are not due to any kind of strive for modernization. They are made in the spirit of a correction from an Augustinian perspective, which, as Petrarch's entire work redundantly shows, leads to the careful observation of the motility of the self and to the tireless monitoring of the reverberations suffered by interiority. The self-centred authorship rises from these actions, without appointing an author of subjective impressions (fiction). In the continuous narrative relation with the self, the author is not associated with egolatry, but with the care for the soul,[22] he is thus the one who stands over the self and who tends to the self.[23] This concept therefore implies an extension of the *spiritual exercise*, the idea that the author bares his self in the written word: the writer is an ascetic of the self, a practitioner of analysis of the self who, through writing, purifies himself in confession.[24] This is the spiritual direction which defines the humanist's life: self-examination through writing, a curative writing which casts out sin and exteriorises it. Besides the monastic tradition of the ascetic study, Petrarch formulates a humanism which wishes to broaden the study of scripture and the production of commentaries with writers for whom the purpose of revisiting illustrious (enlightened) men from the Antiquity and the personal expression of authorship is to morally perfect the self.

[22] *Animi cura* – Fam. 1.9.

[23] S. Greenblatt even mentions the Renaissance self-fashioning, in the footsteps of M. Foucault (techniques of the self, the creation of the self); the feeling of exile and of creating the self is connected to the Christian conversion, namely to its Augustinian interpretation as a continuous (*in via*) conversion of the self.

[24] Gur Zak, *Petrarch's Humanism and the Care of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 11: *Petrarch's concept of philosophy thus closely echoes Pierre Hadot's definition of ancient philosophy as "spiritual exercises" – "an art of living…which engages the whole of existence…a progress which causes us to be more fully and makes us better". To fulfill the task of philosophy, to truly philosophize, therefore, we need to perform certain actions upon the self – "spiritual exercises" in Hadot's terms – and for Petrarch it is achieved mainly by writing. Petrarch'e ethics of care of the self, as a result, are in a fundamental way an ethics of writing.*

"Ascent of Mont Ventoux", Petrarch's story in an epistolary form, is relevant for what this curative writing of the self means. What is considered to be "an exercise of style"[25] in this case, is actually something different from Petrarch's commitment to writing. On 26 April 1336, Petrarch together with his brother and his two servants ascended to the peak of Mount Ventoux. For modern interpreters, "conquering the mountain" could mean the first mountaineering excursion as a recreational activity and as free tourism, the first purely aesthetic experience of the "beauty of nature", as Petrarch himself apparently declares: "led solely by a desire to view the greate hight of it"[26]. Throughout the narration, the leisure walk turns into a reflection on an ascetic initiation. Petrarch soon leaves the "the straight path to the heights" (*compendiaria via ad altiora*), trying to find an easier access on the other side (*sperare me alterius lateris faciliorem adytum*), rather than the "straighter path" (*iter rectius*). As a result, Petrarch finds himself on a path with many detours and obstacles (*per valles errabam* – "I was still wandering through the valleys"), which only wears him down and drives him further away from the mountain peak. This happened several times within a few hours (*ter aut amplius intra paucas horas contingit*) and each time a conjunction appears between leaving the straight path and "forgetting" what had previously happened, followed by the somewhat absurd hope of reaching "up" following a path that leads "down" (*iterum ad inferiora*). Finally, Petrarch understands that "it is impossible for something of corporeal nature to reach the above by descending" (*nec fieri potest ut corporeum aliquid ad alta descendendo perveniat*). Petrarch also has a moment of reflection on the fluctuations of the self in the ascension towards the peak and, narrating the journey as a parable, he "addressed himself":

[25] Ronald G. Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients: The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni* (Leiden: Brill, 2003). Humanism is defined here as a stylistic ideal, starting with the analysis of Petrarch's fragment on the subject of death (which, in my opinion, can also be read in an Augustinian interpretation): "*Ego quoque dum hec leges moriar, tu moreris dum hec scribo, ambo morimur, omnes morimur, semper morimur, nunquam vivimus dum hic sumus, nisi quandiu virtuosum aliquid agentes sternimus iter nobis ad veram vitam, ubi contra nemo moritur…nec mutatio sentitur, nec timetur finis*" (Fam. 24, 1, 27) – "I too shall be dying while you read this, you are dying while I write this, we both are dying, we all are dying, we are always dying; we never live here except when doing something virtuous to pave our path to the true life, where in contrast no one dies… where there are no change and no reason to fear its ending", quoted in Gur Zak, *Petrarch's Humanism and the Care of the Self*, 8.

[26] Petrarch, *Lettres familières*, Tome II, *Les Belles Lettres*, 2003, Liber IV, 1: "*sola videndi insignem loci altitudinem cupiditate ductus, ascendi*." Francesco Petrerca, *Rerum familiarium libri*, trans. Aldo S. Bernardo (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1975), 172. Because the interpretation depends closely on the translation, in what follows I took the liberty of translating myself the few shorter passages from the *Ascent of Mont Ventoux*.

> What you have experienced so often today in trying to climb this mountain you should know happens to you and to many others as they approach the blessed life. This is not easily realised by men, howeverm because although the movements of the body are visible, the movements of the mind are invisible and concealed. The life we call blessed is certainly located on high, and, as it is said, a very narrow road leads to it. Many hills also intervene and one must proceed from virtue to virtue with very deliberate steps. At the summit lies the end of all things and the limit of the path to which our travelling is directed.[27]

Therefore, these reflections help him regain his lost strength during his spiritual disorientation and they mobilise him towards the peak which, once reached, gives way to an aesthetic contemplation[28] of the scenery. The landscape, with the clouds below and the snow covered Alps in the distance, carries the free flow of consciousness towards memories. The self is once again captured, this time by the beauty of the exteriority. Awakening from the reverie and "following the example of my body raising my mind to loftier things"[29], Petrarch then opens Augustine's *Confessions* at random and reads a passage: "And they go to admire the summits of mountains and the vast billows of the sea and the broadest rivers and the expanses of the ocean and the revolutions of the stars and the overlook themselves."[30] Besides the temptation of wandering to try to find an easier path to the heights lurks the wandering of the self in what in today's words would be the sublime. Petrarch does not find the sublime as an elevation of the consciousness of the self over the immensity of nature, but, in accordance with Augustine, he sees the sublime as a loss of attention towards the self or, as Meister Eckhart already pointed out, as a loss of the self in the images of the world: "I closed the book enraged with myself because I was even then admiring earthly things after having been long taught by pagan philosophers that I ought to consider nothing wonderful except the human mind compared to whose greatness nothing is great".[31] Petrarch's attitude changes radically: what at first was the impetuosity of juvenile eagerness to soar towards the peak became an alert consciousness of the self (*in me ipsum interiores*

[27] Translated by Aldo S. Bernardo, 174–175.

[28] Ibid. "moved by a certain unaccustomed quality of the air and by the unrestricted spectacle, I stood there as in trance."

[29] Petrarch, *Lettres familières*, 31: "*…exemplo corporis animum ad altiora subveherem*". In English by Aldo S. Bernardo, 177.

[30] "*Et eunt homines admirari alta montium et ingentes fluctus maris et latissimos lapsus fluminum et occeani ambitum et giros siderum, et relinquunt se ipsos*". Ibid., 178.

[31] Petrarch, *Lettres familières*, 31: *"…iratus michimet quod nunc etiam terrestria mirarer, qui iampridem ab ipsis gentium philosophis discere debuissem nichil preter animum esse mirabile, cui magno nichil est magnum*". In English by Aldo S. Bernardo, 178.

*oculos reflexi*) due to Augustine's converting words. The ascension on Mount Ventoux is the story of the inner self's ascension above nature so that, once the spiritual change had taken place, "I turned back to look at the summit of the mountain, it seemed to me scarcely a cubit high in comparison with loftiness of human meditation".[32]

Consequently, true ascension is the ascension of the self above the mundane wishes, ascension obtained through the conversion of the meaning of a physical ascension into a spiritual one, a return to the inner self triggered by Augustine's writing. Therefore, for Petrarch, it would appear that writing (and the letter in general) is neither a style, nor fiction, neither aestheticised confession, nor a record of impressions; if a certain eloquence is present, its purpose is strictly for writing, namely being a pragmatism of modifying the other, of effectively causing the amend of the stance and state of the self or, as Petrarch states again years later in *De ignorantia* (108), the purpose is not to inform, but to make the other better, just as "our philosophers"[33] do in their writings:

> whose first and last purpose is to make their students and readers good. They not only teach the definitions of virtue and vice, haranguing us about virtue's splendor and vice's drabness. They also instill in our breasts both love and zeal for what is good, and hatred and abhorrence of evil.[34]

Petrarch's *ars vitae* is not a secular stylistic of subjectivity[35], but a means to ascend to *humanitas*.

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[32] Petrarch, *Lettres familières*, 33: *"…cubiti altitudo visa est pre altitudine contemplationis humane*". In English by Aldo S. Bernardo, 178.

[33] The Christian philosophers.

[34] See *De ignorantia*, 110.

[35] Gur Zak, *Petrarch's Humanism and the Care of the Self…*, 119 states that Petrarch "secularizes the medieval uses of reading and writing as spiritual exercises. By transforming medieval techniques of self-care in accordance with his Stoic understanding of the self, in addition to reviving classical practices such as the conducting of examination of conscience in letters to friends and the writing of "Senecan" letters of consolation, Petrarch establishes his humanism as a spiritual alternative to the monastic traditions of "care of the soul" of the later Middle Ages, fashioning it as what might be described as a form of secular spirituality." The author previously noticed the implication of Augustinianism: "strong affinities also to the Augustinian-monastic tradition of the Middle Ages, which in itself draws on these classical sources" (85). But it is clear that he ignores this observation in order to support his original thesis: "Petrarch's humanism – both with respect to its approach to the self and to philosophy in general – (…) is largely defined and dominated by a return to this Imperial, and mainly Stoic, mode of subjectivity" (84).

Neither is the praise for Antiquity so unconditional and so absolute because Mount Ventoux takes the form of the ancient "giants" who, after the revelation of the ascension, transform into "dwarfs" who barely glimpsed the truth.

**4. Petrach's Christian Moral Humanism as Demarcation for Classical Antiquity**

Far from enthusiastically exploiting the Antiquity[36] as a "rebirth" of the "ancient values", of "human centricity" or of "philology", the Petrarchan humanism is the expression of human essence, stating that man "ascends" and is redeemed through Christian faith. The Petrarchan humanism is the first to explicitly formulate the *homo christianus* model which ascends above the Antiquity through its heritage, namely in a manner in which it finds its essence (its *ethos* or morality) by exceeding and decisively ascending above the Antiquity: the Petrarchan humanism is not a rebirth of Romanity, but a Christian fulfilment of Romanity:[37]

> *Sic philosophica, sic poetica, sic historias legamus, ut semper ad aurem cordis Evangelium Cristi sonet: quo uno satis docti ac felices; sine quo quanto plura didicerimus, tanto indoctiores atque miseriores futuri sumus; ad quod velut ad summam veri arcem referenda sunt omnia; cui, tanquam uni literarum verarum immobili fundamento, tuto superedificat humanus labor*.[38] (Fam. VI, 2).

Although, in common conception, the Renaissance humanist is identified with the genius encyclopaedist who dedicated his life to knowledge (a conception filtered by the Romantic Faustianism), we must accept that, at least in his original writings that programmatically appear in Petrarch's works, he first and foremost offers a moral profile. For that matter, this is where Petrarch's clear and strong

[36] Eugenio Garin, *L'umanesimo italiano: Filosofia e vita civile nel Rinascimento* (Bari: Laterza, 1994/1947, 22): "For this reason one should never seek to distinguish between the humanistic discovery of antiquity and the humanistic discovery of man – for they amount to exactly the same thing. For the discovery of antiquity implied that one had learnt to make a comparison between antiquity and oneself, to take a detached view of antiquity and to determine one's relation to it," quoted in Gur Zak, *Petrarch's Humanism and the Care for the Self*…, 6.

[37] This interpretation was established by P. O. Kristeller, Gioseppe Toffanin and A. Buck in the array of studies on humanism, and its Augustinian interpretation, extending the idea towards a humanist Augustinianism was formulated by A. D. Trapp and R. Arbesman.

[38] "Let us thus read philosophical, poetic, or historical writings so that the Gospel of Christ resounds always in the ear of our heart. With it alone are we sufficiently happy and learned; without it no matter how much we learn we become more ignorant and more wretched. To it all things must be referred as if to the loftiest stronghold of the truth; on it as if on a single immovable foundation of literary truths, human labor can safely build." Fam. VI, 2. In English by Aldo S. Bernardo.

message from *De ignorantia* appears: the stake of humanism is not knowledge, but the moral development of the self and the labour of study and reformation in the moral edification of the self. Moreover, Petrarch considers himself a moralist and was acknowledged as such by his contemporaries, as proven by a formal declaration by the Dodges of Venice who recognised him as the greatest philosopher of morals, after he promised to donate his personal library to the Venetian patrimony.[39]

It is known that *Moralis* is Cicero's translation of the Greek term *ethikos* in *De fato*. Even today, Heraclitus's much abused saying "Ethos anthropoi daimon" (character is fate) is still correct, since "whose son are you", "where are you from", "where have you travelled", "what can you do", "man's language and clothes" still define man's character. Man's *being* is nothing other than his purpose or the fate of his future character (*factura*). Heraclitus's words were clear: what determines man's actions is not a fate made by the gods, but the ancient and inherited origin of the place, the time, the language and all "characters". In Latin, *mos, moris* indicates the calling to develop in accordance with the heritage. This is why moral refers to the heritage of tradition (*mos maiorum*), namely to what passes through time, losing itself, diminishing and becoming, in what is kept and transmitted, something more essential and noble. It becomes something that is only meant to ascend something else above itself. The morality invoked by Petrarch does not refer to a moral philosophy of manners, but to this meaning given to *mos, moris* as a heritage that sacrifices itself when it is dispelled and that ascends; for Petrarch, the heritage of the Antiquity represents the level where the ascension that had already happened is realised.

This heritage does not imply a return to the ancients. It is already seen "from above", from what had already ascended above it: the Antiquity can become heritage only from this perspective. Inheriting a house, for example, implies that it is inherited as something already yours, as something that was handed down (lost and passed on) in order to receive the edifice of a new ownership and that must be taken by reason of provenance of that certain belonging "as yours". While the ancestors are only those who had noticed the possibility of ascending above themselves, above their status of "bequeathers", the inheritors are those who must realise the ascension in their own way, not by simply repeating it, and who must edifice it in a new way as "their own". They will always receive the inheritance as a personal dwelling and, from the old dwelling, they will only keep what is worthy of their own level of ascension. In Petrarch's way of receiving the ancients' "house", not all predecessors can be considered ancestors. Therefore, not all predecessors had risen to the level on which they could recognise the bequeathing ancestors in the form of

[39] Quoted in Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, John Herman Randall Jr., *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man. Petrarca, Valla, Ficino, Pomponazzi, Vives*, Phoenix Books (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), 24.

their own *ethos*; not all predecessors had seen the possibility that this inheritance could stand on their shoulders and rise above them.

From the perspective of the relation of 12th-century cathedral schools to the Antiquity, the idea of understanding heritage as ascend-above is also present in Bernard de Chartres's famous saying "dwarfs standing on the shoulders of giants" (*nos esse quasi nanos, gigantium humeris insidentes*[40]). The idea is also used in Christianity's approach to its Judaic premises, which is visible in the illustration present in the stained glass in Chartres Cathedral, showing the "minor" evangelists Mathew, Mark, Luke and John standing on the shoulders of the giant prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. Petrarch applies the same principle, but in a monstrous reversal of the roles: the giants are "our philosophers" who had seen "the sun of justice" and "the light of truth". The heritage of Antiquity is, in this case, the study of those authors who had noticed the possibility of ascending above their time and, through their way of speaking and being (*more antiquorum*), had noticed the possibility of another time and of a higher means of being. Therefore, heritage, actively inheriting what they bequeathed, is not represented by revisitation or by an emulation of the ancients, but by the *studium* of that certain segment of Antiquity which manifested *humanitas*, the segment that foresaw the inheriting ascension of humanity, in other words, the moral ascension of man to the redeemed humanity.

For Petrarch, *humanitas* is just that: recognising one's own essence through the study of the moral ascension of humanity based on its Roman heritage; a *studium*, a strife that continuously manages to morally raise man to *humanitas*. But, as a studium, the recognition of the ancient heritage is always filtered by the judgement that divides the moral ascension of humanity that made the observation of *humanitas* in the field of ancient heritage possible, from the rest of the Antiquity which is not worthy of prophetic discussion on ascension. This type of judgement implies a pre-understanding of history since, by recognising its heritage, it only considers that segment as part of its history. But what is the aforementioned moral ascension on which this critical judgment as *studium humanitatis* is based?

Following in Augustine's footsteps, it is possible that Petrarch's supposed inclination towards moral philosophy represents the assumption of a Christian philosophy of history.[41] He reads and selects Antiquity through the filter of inheriting moral: the Antiquity is praiseworthy because, during weak moments of enlightenment, it foresees the Christian essence of man, namely *humanitas*. Approximately one century later, Hermeticism would appear as a Petrarchan "moral philosophy", in which Hermes Trismegistus's old wisdom foresees Christ and the

[40] Attributed to Bernard de Chartres by John of Salisbury in his *Metalogicon*.

[41] Amos Edelheit, *Ficino, Pico and Savonarola. The Evolution of Humanist Theology 1461/2–1498* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2008). The author notes that "a new humanist theology from the early 1460s to the end of the 1490s," a perfectly valid characterization of Petrarch's situation, namely for the original concept of humanism in the 14th century.

ascension of man as a divine *logos*. From a Hermetic point of view, the Romans were not the only ones to contribute to the creation of this *humanitas,* but the wisdom of the entire world, the certain *prisca theologia* – which, in its prophetic way, guides humanity as a whole towards is historical fate of moral ascension. Christianity is thus seen as the humanity which inherits the knowledge of humanity in its entirety. In *De ignorantia*, the motive of "Aristotle as great man but still an ignorant man" implies that he did not have any access to *humanitas* as ascension. In this respect, Aristotle is not part of the heritage included in *humanitas*. For that matter, Cicero is not part of *humanitas* either, but he participated in its heritage since he foresaw it. The ascension to *humanitas* is mediated by conversion and it exceeds the status of a simple human. Therefore, *humanitas* describes the existence of a solution of continuity between *humanum* and *divinum*.

If modern historical research defines the Renaissance as the rebirth of the Latin letters and of humanism, identifying Petrarch as "the father of humanism", it uses a humanist concept that no longer has anything to do with the original *humanitas*. The historians of the 19th century (G. Voigt and J. Burckhardt) define the Renaissance as a historical era based on a meaning of history that implies progress in man's autonomy given by knowledge, by imposing itself as a central reference point for the values of an *uomo universale*. In this case, humanism is an overemphasis of the Enlightenment, which actually established the meaning of morality as a liberation from recognising any heritage and as a pure morality of manners (of the *must* in itself). F. Nietzsche, in his Genealogy of Morality, notes that the rule of the morality of manners is not the abstract *categorical imperative*, but a more concrete negotiated penalty, which is seen as a revenge of plebeian vileness and helplessness. The moral rule of manners is represented by the character Shylock, who takes *the pound of flesh* in the name of human reciprocity, claiming revenge in the name of Judaic secondariness and precariousness. He claims his rights in the name of humanity as equality and reciprocity among humans (*The Merchant of Venice,* Act 3, Scene 1. 49-61). Thus, the character declaims humanism as the natural essence of humanity and not as *humanitas.*[42] The morality of manners refers to a humanism that shifts the focus from nature to value and that represents an "intellectual manifest" of a set of values. The Petrarchan humanism of *humanitas* is rather a manifestation of faith that assumes the lifestyle not through manners, but rather through the revealed truth. Nature opposes divine action as the history of man, but nature is not simply "what is given", but it is rather understood as a concept of knowledge, as a result of man's autonomous knowledge, thus as a concept of natural philosophy.

[42] In Shakespeare's play, in the resolution, the meaning of *humanitas* as moral ascension is also present, since love and Christian clemency triumph over Shylock's rights. The rights of *humanitas* prevail over the rights of natural blood-bound equality which were invoked by Shylock.

## 5. Conclusion

The sense of moral ascension of *homo christianus* is, at the same time, the filtering sense of his heritage. Therefore, through *studia humanitatis*, his momentary superior status is educated, surpassing classicism by "exploiting the classics". The only value is given by *homo christianus* and all other values of manners must be exceeded. In this case, it is not surprising that, until the Reformation (whose effect was a radicalization of the humanist and philology studies – in the case of Erasmus, for example – in the direction of a Christian *humanitas*) and until the "Book of Nature" of the 16th century which strived to exceed Aristotelianism through natural Christian philosophy, the Catholic Church did not hesitate to support this humanist project.[43]

Petrarch's initiatives had followers. On the one hand, M. Ficino and G. Pico were Petrarch's children in regards to the field of philology and of religious devotion. They radicalised the heritage of the Antiquity by adding Platonism at the root of the Christianity's foreshadow and by interpreting Hermeticism and cabala as *prisca theologia*, which basically bore the same anticipating directions of Christianity.

Moreover, Petrarch compares the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle not through a philological or philosophical judgement, because he did not have access to the Platonic texts,[44] but through a purely humanistic one: Plato foresaw the moral ascension of humanity through Christianity and his writings are those which must be studied (rather than Aristotle's) as the heritage of truth progressively revealed throughout history. This incentive and this recognition of Platonism is followed in the mid-15th century by Cardinal Nicolaus Cusanus, Marsilio Ficino, Giovanni Pico and the Platonic Academy in Florence.

G. Bruno was also Petrarch's follower but only in matters of poetry, where his influence is visible. In most cases, Bruno opposed to Petrarchan humanism. He rejected philology, Christianity and the *prisca theologia*. Although he keeps the rhyme scheme of the Petrarchan sonnet, he forms an attachment to hermetic magic. Besides Cicero, Bruno also discovers Lucretius. He thus opposed this *humanitas christiana* – in the name of an Antiquity that does not bear religious meanings and

[43] *"This religious tendency was strong among many of the Humanists and found its culmination in the Christian Humanism of Erasmus."* Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, John Herman Randall Jr., *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*. *Petrarca, Valla, Ficino, Pomponazzi, Vives* ..., 5. Or Ch. Trinkaus, *Petrarch's Views on the Individual and His Society*, Osiris, Vol. 11 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), 196: "Petrarch anticipates the Puritan's lonely struggle with his conscience by three centruries."

[44] Petrarch owned many of Plato's *Dialogues* (see *De ignorantia*, where he mentions six of Plato's works), but they were in Greek, a language Petrarch did not know sufficiently in order to read them. Therefore, Petrarch's references to Plato are given through Cicero and Augustine's stories.

that is thus insignificant from the point of view of the Christian heritage. Through his magic, atomist and infinitist view, G. Bruno is the great anti-humanist, the philosopher who opposed both to the naturalist-Aristotelian academic philosophy and the Christian humanism. The fact that, at the end of the 16th century, Galileo's mechanical philosophy (and the Copernicus model) gives a mortal blow to scholarly Aristotelianism has nothing to do with the humanist (Petrarchan) critique of Aristotelianism; on the contrary, Galileo was formed by the scholarly Aristotelianism specific to the Italian universities[45] which, technically speaking, criticised Aristotelianism, but still continued and developed its naturalist *ethos* (the eternity of the world, the practice of science in the name of a united intellect, defining man's sociality in the terms of biology etc.).

Petrarch is an "unaffiliated" scholar. He does not belong to a university, he is not a high prelate and he is not part of the Venetian Patriciate. From this point of view, Petrarch's humanism, *humanitas christiana*, as a historical project, was quickly isolated as a merely philological writing and it confined (abandoning its historical concept of man's moral ascension) in being a discipline that studies aspects of human culture (humanities). The humanities that today lack a strong basis (which speaks volumes about the fate of the *humanitas christiana*) still nostalgically and naively argue their equal legitimacy to the sciences that produce technology, due to the fact that they form "moral characters" through the knowledge of classic models. What this thesis cannot state is the fact that the fundamental argument of the "humanist studies" is based on the historicity assumed by the humanist as an ascended man: only after he morally ascended through Christianity could he recognise the "moral characters" in the darkness of the Antiquity.

Translated from the Romanian by Anca Chiorean

[45] The Italian universities differed from the ones in Paris, where Aristotelianism was interpreted, articulated and purged (by Averroism) theologically. In Italy, Aristotelianism was taught especially within the medical sciences, therefore the Averroist interpretations were under no theological pressure and its (secular) doctrine was not opposed within the university. The extent of the influence of Averroism in Italy can be seen in Dante Alighieri's *De monarchia*, where Dante does not refrain from arguing the political necessity of humanity in the basis of the Averroist doctrine on the unity of the intellect.