

THE 'SCHOLASTIC' THEOLOGY OF GIOVANNI PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA: BETWEEN BIBLICAL FAITH AND ACADEMIC SKEPTICISM*

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Abstract

This article examines Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's detailed reaction against the condemnation of some of his famous *Theses* by a papal commission, through a careful reading of his *Apology* of 1487. This text, which was never studied in detail and still waits for a critical edition, reflects Pico's remarkable familiarity with the scholastic thinkers up to his own times. As part of his self-defense, Pico deals with the relation between opinions and faith, probable knowledge and certain truth, philosophy and theology, thus developing a method for examining theological opinions. To some extent, this method was based on the classical notions of *probabile* and *veri simile*, coming from the ancient Academic skeptics, which Pico knew from Cicero and Augustine. This, I argue, was part of Pico's humanist theology, his solution for the authority crisis of his time and for what he regarded as an unsolved tension in scholastic philosophy between human opinions and the revealed truth of faith.

The complicated view of the interrelation between philosophy and theology, as documented by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) in his *Apologia* of 1487, poses as many questions as it answers. For unlike several prominent humanists, Pico does not reject altogether theology and metaphysics in favor of rhetoric and philology. In his distinctive outlook, there is a definite place for philosophical analysis, especially with regard to the activities of clarifying and analysing received dogmatic opinions. This aspect of Pico's *œuvre* has been

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neglected by those scholars who are minded to view him as a typical representative of the 'philosophical Renaissance'. Thus, he is judged to be a 'Neoplatonist' in the fashion of Ficino, an 'Aristotelian', an 'Averroist', or else an Aristotelian apostate turned 'Platonist', and the like. The main innovation that is ascribed to him is the introduction into Western thought of Jewish Kabbalah¹.

But, Pico's contribution to philosophy was wider and more profound than that, and his debt to the divergent traditions of late medieval scholasticism has not been emphasized or studied sufficiently by scholars of the Italian Renaissance. His unique place among the humanists who dealt with philosophical and theological questions has been known to modern scholars at least since the works of Eugenio Garin. Pico is often represented in modern literature as the humanist who had the best scholastic education or training, and his famous enthusiasm for these thinkers and their style, as well as his formal education, which included, studies in among others the Universities of Padua, Bologna, and Paris, are established facts. On the other hand, the composition in which Pico paraded his clear competence of scholastic philosophy and theology, i.e. the *Apologia*, is the least

1. E. GARIN, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola: vita e dottrina*, Firenze 1937; *La cultura filosofica del Rinascimento italiano — ricerche e documenti*, Firenze 1961, pp. 231-279. A good bibliographical account on Pico can be found in F. ROULIER, *Jean Pic de la Mirandole (1463-1494), Humaniste, Philosophe, et Théologien*, Genève 1989, pp. 9-36. A critical discussion of the historiography on Pico is in: W.G. CRAVEN, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola — Symbol of His Age*, Genève 1981. Garin was justly regarded by B.P. COPENHAVER (in his «Number, Shape, and Meaning in Pico's Christian Cabala: The Upright Tsade, the Closed Men, and the Gaping Jaws of Azazel», in: A. GRAFTON and N. SIRAI (eds.), *Natural Particulars: Nature and the Disciplines in Renaissance Europe*, Cambridge, Mass. 1999, pp. 25-76, on p. 27) as «the starting point for any serious treatment of this important thinker.» Further, see Copenhaver's critical discussion (pp. 25-30) of some historiographical attitudes towards Pico, especially in regard to nature, magic, and Cabala, before and after Garin. See also: P.O. KRISTELLER, «Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and His Sources», in: *L'Opera e il pensiero di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola nella storia dell'umanesimo, convegno internazionale (Mirandola: 15-18 Settembre 1963)*, 2 vols., Firenze 1965, vol. 1, pp. 35-133. For a very recent study on Pico, see L. VALCKE, *Pic de la Mirandole — un itinéraire philosophique*, Paris 2005 (with bibliography pp. 451-465). I shall refer to other relevant discussions of Pico below. A more general discussion of the relation between scholastic theology and humanist theology can be found in P.O. KRISTELLER, «Florentine Platonism and its Relations with Humanism and Scholasticism», in: *Church History* 8 (1939), pp. 201-211; «The Scholastic Background of Marsilio Ficino», in: *Traditio* 2 (1944), pp. 257-318; *Le thomisme et la pensée italienne de la Renaissance*, Montréal 1967.

discussed of his works². The *Apologia* can provide us with a great insight into some of the important theological discussions of the late 1480s, and it is a reflection of Pico, the young prince of Mirandola and Concordia who had an exceptional command of the teaching of scholasticism. Thus, as I shall try to show in the present study, the *Apologia* reflects Pico's contribution to the established tradition of medieval scholastic discussions on several theological issues, as well as his attitude to ancient philosophy. One of the issues that I shall consider is Pico's use of concepts and patterns of thought taken from the skeptical Academy. This is perhaps the first time that a Renaissance philosopher of the West employed skeptical Academic procedures in discussing the relation between philosophical and theological truth, indeed in a philosophical discussion of any kind³.

Existing research on Pico's thought has concentrated on the question of the 'what', he said, rather than on the issue of 'why' he said it. Like any other thinker of the time, Pico did not work in a vacuum but against the scholastic and humanist background of his age. Why did he write what he wrote? What moved him? And, what were his goals? One of the most discussed issues during the fifteenth century was a spiritual crisis and the constant need for reform. For forty years, 1377-1417, there were two or three claimants to the papacy. Only the council of Constance in 1417 reestablished a legitimate pope; but this raised the problem of the authority of the pope as against that of a general council. Who is now the highest authority, the council or the pope? This question would be frequently raised at fifteenth-century councils, and no real answer would be given until the council of Trent⁴. Some humanists, such as Marsilio Ficino in his *De Christiana religione*, attempted to offer solutions to this crisis in the form of a new humanist theology, incorporating newly discovered philosophical texts, especially those of Plato and the Neoplatonists in the original Greek, rejecting most of medieval scholastic theology, and introducing new models for dealing with the decline in religious institutions. In like fashion, I regard Pico's nine hundred theses of 1486 and his *Apology*

2. There is as yet no critical edition of the *Apologia*, and no commentary or translation. I am using the printed version in Pico's *Opera omnia*. For a full reference, see n. 14.

3. See section four, below.

4. J. GILL, *The Council of Florence*, Cambridge 1959, pp. 16-17; 38; 49; 54.

of 1487 as representing an attempt to produce his own humanist theology as an alternative to contemporary scholastic theology. The nine hundred theses were offered as an answer to the theological crisis of his age, and the *Apologia* represents some of the more theoretical considerations behind the production of the theses. It is against this background that one should consider Pico's thought⁵.

So, I would argue that our view of the relation between Pico and the scholastics should be based first of all upon a detailed analysis of the *Apologia* and its background and sources — but there is as yet no such analysis. In this article I shall present an analysis of some of the main themes and aims of the *Apologia*, in order to put this work in the context of the theological crisis of the age, and in order to illuminate Pico's view of contemporary scholastic theological method⁶.

5. My approach here is not unlike R.G. COLLINGWOOD's 'logic of question and answer'. See his *Autobiography*, London 1939, pp. 24-33.

6. There are many examples of disagreements and tensions among the members of the papal commission that investigated Pico and among other theologians in Rome at that time on these issues. Such examples indicate that this affair is not Pico's personal crisis but rather a more general authoritative crisis in contemporary theology. See, for instance, Paolo Cortesi's humanist-rhetorical defense of Pico against the contemporary conservative theologians in his *Liber sententiarum* (1504) and *De cardinalatu* (1510) discussed in: J.F. D'AMICO, «Paolo Cortesi's Rehabilitation of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola», in: *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 44 (1982), pp. 37-51; *Renaissance Humanism in Papal Rome — Humanists and Churchmen on the Eve of the Reformation*, Baltimore 1983, pp. 163-165. Thus, I argue, both Pico and his opponents represent the true tenor of the age, which is the theological crisis. See e.g., L. DOREZ and L. THUASNE, *Pic de la Mirandole en France (1485-1488)*, Paris 1897, pp. 103-104: «Outre la vigilance doctrinale d'un pape de sentiment aussi peu élevé que l'était Innocent VIII, elles montrent, entre autres choses, qu'une guerre sans merci était déclarée entre les théologiens romains et la Sorbonne, d'une part, entre les théologiens romains et parisiens et l'humanisme, d'autre part.»; *ibid.*, p. 126: «... ipsi inter se deliberarunt, disputaverunt et disceptaverunt...»; *ibid.*, p. 130: «...post disceptationem super ea factam...»; *ibid.*, p. 129: «Dicta die ejusdem mensis marcii, congregati ad invicem, omnes domini deputati prefati preter dominum Marcum de Mirolodo, magistrum sacri Palatii, qui in omnibus et singulis infrascriptis, occasione egritudinis supervenientis (ut dicebatur) in eum, minime interfuit aut unus de predictis dominis deputatis fuerit...» See also G. DI NAPOLI, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola e la problematica dottrinale del suo tempo*, Roma 1965, p. 92: «Il 1 marzo 1487 il presidente Monissart convoca per il giorno seguente la Commissione e Pico a fine di procedere, secondo il mandato del pontefice, al 'chiarimento' delle tesi discutibili; alla prima riunione di venerdì 2 marzo mancano quattro dei sei vescovi; sono presenti solo il Monissart e il Garsia, oltre agli altri commissari; il che è già indice di fratture, nella Commissione, le quali rispecchiano le fratture esistenti negli ambienti romani ed europei; fuori della Commissione Bonfrancesco Arlotti, vescovo de Reggio Emilia e il card. Giorgio da Costa, vescovo di Lisboa, sono favorevoli a Pico; fra i theologhi di Roma o residenti in Roma sono

First, some brief background. Pico returned to Florence in 1486 from his studies in Paris, with a new idea: to organize an international council in Rome and to invite to it the best philosophers and theologians, in order to discuss and dispute nine hundred theological and philosophical theses, that he collected from many ancient and medieval sources, including Neoplatonic and Kabbalistic sources. Pico published his theses in Rome in 1486. He was then accused of heresy by some theologians who persuaded Pope Innocent VIII to appoint a commission, composed of theologians and experts on Roman and canon law, to examine these theses. Of the nine hundred theses, the commission found thirteen heretical. Pico's *Apologia*, which he published in 1487, and which will be the main text used here, was his response to the accusations of heresy against these thirteen theses⁷. In

a lui favorevoli Giovanni de Myrle e perfino il Cordier, che è membro della Commissione; ma i sostenitori di Pico aumentano sempre più e non sempre per motivi strettamente dottrinali.»; *ibid.*, p. 94: «Il 13 marzo la Commissione termina i propri lavori e redige il verbale conclusivo, formato dai commissari: dei 16 membri, che la costituiscono, solo la metà dei commissari appone la propria firma; mancano i nomi dei quattro vescovi assenti alla prima seduta, quello del generale dei Serviti Alabanti, dei due domenicani Marco de Miroldo e Gioacchino da Vinci, di Giovanni Cordier.»; H. DE LUBAC, *Pic de la Mirandole*, Paris 1974, p. 50: «Malgré l'opposition du 'parisien' Jean Cordier, professeur de Sorbonne, qui refuse de signer le procès-verbal, et en l'absence d'un autre commissaire, Marco de Miroldo, maître du sacré Palais, qui depuis le 6 mars s'est fait porter malade, les sept premières propositions sont notées avec rigueur, les six autres de façon plus bénigne.»

7. A good account of Pico's Roman affair was given by G. Di Napoli in his *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola...* pp. 81-137; see especially pp. 118-119: on December 6, 1486, Pico first published his theses and he was on his way to Rome. On February 20, 1487, the pope announced that he had appointed a commission to review Pico's theses. On March 13, 1487, the papal commission denounced, without full agreement among its members, thirteen theses. The denunciations were on different levels of gravity, but three of the statements were considered heretical. On May 31, 1487, Pico published his *Apologia*. On June 6, 1487, the pope announced that Pico, ignoring the decision of the commission, added new writings; he stated that an inquisition process would begin, but we do not have any details regarding such a process. On July 31, 1487, Pico swore to accept the future decision of the pope regarding his theses. On August 4, 1487, the pope denounced the entire nine hundred theses and prohibited their being published, read, heard, or distributed, on pain of excommunication. The thirteen theses were: De descensu Christi ad inferos; De poena peccati mortalis; De Adoratione crucis et imaginum; An suppositari a Deo possit natura irrationalis; De Magia naturali et Cabala Hebraeorum; De Eucharistiae sacramento; De Salute Origenis; Non esse in libera potestate hominis, credere; De accidentibus in Sacramento; De verbis consecrationis; De miraculis Christi; An Deus intelligat; De abdita animae intelligentia.

Six of these theses were condemned (on Christ's descent into hell, on the punishment of a mortal sin, on the adoration of the cross, whether an irrational nature could be attrib-

the *Apologia*, he discusses each of these theses in detail; but what interests me here is mainly the *presuppositions* which emerge from these detailed discussions. What I shall attempt in this article is a reconstruction of the philosophical and theological approach which stands at the foundation of this work. I do this through a close analysis of parts of the text.

Thus, in the following sections I shall discuss three issues. First (§§1-3), concerning Pico and scholasticism, I shall present his views of theological truth and opinion. Second (§4a), I shall provide evidence of his use of skeptical arguments and ideas as a foundation of his view of theological opinion. Third (§4b), I shall show how he goes beyond the skeptics: there is a truth, and the task of philosophy is to get as close to it as human reason can come; philosophy, for Pico, has an important role to play.

One methodological note. I shall refer, in the course of analysing Pico's work, to texts and to trends and schools in scholastic theology. Here I shall discuss mainly Pico's overall attitude to scholasticism and certain scholastic texts and to the problem of their authority as he himself presents it. A detailed discussion of Pico's scholastic sources, both in the *Apologia* and in the *Theses*, and as part of the wider context of the relations between humanist philosophers and scholastic theologians in late fifteenth-century Florence, is still a scholarly desideratum; but I hope this article is a first step in this direction⁸.

1. Fides *and* opinio

Pico was greatly exercised by the task of drawing a clear distinction between various levels of faith (*fides*) and opinion (*opinio*). In particular,

uted to God, on magic and Kabbalah of the Jews, on the sacrament of the Eucharist) and seven were declared suspect (on Origen's salvation, on belief not being in man's hand, on accidents in the sacrament of the Eucharist, on the words of consecration, on Christ's miracles, on whether God has understanding, on the soul's secret understanding).

8. The model for studies on Pico's *Theses* should be the detailed philological analyses presented by Ch. WIRSZUBSKI in his *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism*, Cambridge 1989, for Pico's Kabbalistic theses. For Pico's text, see e.g., *Conclusiones non-gentiae: le novecento tesi dell'anno 1486*, ed. by A. BIONDI, Florence 1995.

he thought that in scholastic theology there was not a clear and consistent distinction between three elements:

1. The Creed. This includes the articles of faith, i.e., the statements concerning the mysteries of the faith, made in Biblical terms (that is, keeping as close as possible to the language of the Bible) and derived from the first four ecumenical councils of the Church. These articles of faith cannot be an object of human speculation and cannot be doubted without the suspicion of heresy.
2. The 'dogmatic formulations'. These are the 'official' explanations of the later ecumenical councils, stated in their own contemporary terms, of the mysteries of faith. As such, the 'dogmatic formulations' are historical, theological-philosophical, and linguistic products, which can be submitted to human scrutiny without offending against their content, the 'object of faith'⁹.
3. The various (and diverging) opinions of the Church Fathers and the later Doctors.

The distinction between faith and opinion, I argue, is the key to understanding the humanist theology that Pico developed. I shall start by presenting a general description of this issue and then move on to a detailed discussion.

Reconstructing Pico's theological framework in the *Apology* we can say that at the very heart of Christianity there is *fides*, the faith, which derives from revelation and which is by its very nature a mystery and thus beyond the capacity of the human mind. Around this core, theology developed — in several 'historical moments': patristic, scholastic, and humanist — as a science whose main object was God. In theology, various opinions were discussed concerning God and the interpretation of Holy Scripture. But all these opinions, although

9. For Lorenzo Valla's similar type of historical view of elements in theology, see S.I. CAMPOREALE, *Lorenzo Valla — umanesimo e teologia*, Firenze 1972, p. 246: «Il primo aspetto è dato dal reperire ambiguità ed equivoci all'intero stesso della terminologia teologica, sia che si trattasse delle rispettive versioni greca e latina delle espressioni verbali, sia che fosse presa in esame la stessa operazione-passaggio da una lingua all'altra, cioè della 'traduzione' in quanto tale. Il Valla era in grado di poter dimostrare tutto ciò scegliendo — e la scelta non era casuale ma storicamente determinata dall'avvento di una possibile unione tra Greci e Latini — un luogo classico in cui le formulazioni dogmatiche venivano a mostrare chiaramente la loro relatività storica dal punto di vista linguistico-semanticamente in rapporto ad un determinato contesto culturale filosofico.»

based on and guided by revelation contained in Holy Scripture, were part of human speculation, a human artifact. They could thus be 'right' or 'wrong', *probabiles* (convincing) or *veri similes* (approximate to the truth), but not *necessariae*. In this construction, a constant tension exists between the one and only faith and the plethora of speculative opinions. This tension is expressed by the notion of heresy, defined differently at different historical moments. In patristic theology the heretic was a man who did not accept the 'dogmatic formulation' or 'dogma' of a mystery or object of faith. But in scholastic theology a doctrine of right opinions was developed and employed in the hegemonic scholasticism of Pico's day. The heretic was now a man who opposed this doctrine of right opinions¹⁰. This fifteenth-century scholastic ideology of the 'right doctrine', understood to be the one and only orthodoxy, was criticized by humanist theology, which used historical and philological methods¹¹. Lorenzo Valla is the first humanist one should mention in this context, since no humanist before him

10. See, for instance, in one of the papal commission's conclusions against Pico's opinion in DOREZ and THUASNE, *Pic de la Mirandole...* p. 136: «Ista conclusio est scandalosa et contra communem opinionem sanctorum doctorum, nec opinio glosatorum in hoc tenetur.» It seems that such reasons were considered enough for the condemnation of Pico's opinion. For the notion of heresy between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries, and the tensions between heterodoxy and orthodoxy, see G. LEFF, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages — The Relation of Heterodoxy to Dissent c.1250-c.1450*, Manchester 1967; e.g., (p. 1): «Heresy is defined by reference to orthodoxy. It does not exist alone. A doctrine or a sect or an individual becomes heretical when condemned as such by the church. For this, there has to be a body of accepted beliefs to violate and a recognized authority to enforce it. In their absence, to profess even the most outrageous opinions is to operate in a doctrinal — as opposed to a moral or a legal — vacuum; the community may be scandalized; the law may be broken; but there will be no officially constituted outlook against which they offend.» For a more recent discussion of the notion and history of popular heresy in the Middle-Ages, see M.D. LAMBERT, *Medieval Heresy — Popular Movements from Bogomil to Hus*, London 1977. For a discussion of academic heresy, see, e.g., J.M.M.H. THIJSSSEN, *Censure and Heresy at the University of Paris, 1200-1400*, Philadelphia 1998; L. BIANCHI, *Censure et liberté intellectuelle à l'université de Paris (XIII^e-XIV^e siècles)*, Paris 1999. See also W.J. COURTENAY, «Inquiry and Inquisition: Academic Freedom in Medieval Universities», in: *Church History* 58 (1989/2), pp. 168-181.

11. Three scholars of the last generation, who paid a great deal of attention to the relationship between humanists and theology developed the notion of a specifically humanist theology, which they interpreted in various ways: Ch. Trinkaus, concentrating mainly on Petrarch, Salutati, and Valla, used the term «rhetorical theology»; S. Camporeale, focusing primarily on Valla, used the term «teologia umanistica»; and J. O'Malley, who studied sermons delivered in Rome, coined the term «Renaissance theology». See Ch. TRINKAUS, *In Our Image and Likeness — Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 2 vols.,

dealt with theological issues in such detailed and critical discussions, thus in effect creating a humanist theology. But Valla's method had very little influence on most humanists before Erasmus. The members of the papal commission that examined Pico's theses identified, as we shall see, the doctrine of right opinions mainly with Thomas Aquinas, whose followers connected faith and opinions in a very particular way, which emphasized the role of the intellect in the act of faith¹². Duns Scotus' critique, however, sharply separated opinions from faith and tended to put faith (originating in revelation) far beyond the boundaries of opinion (arising in the human mind) by emphasizing the role of will (*voluntas*) in the act of faith¹³. Pico's move, therefore, as he

London 1970, and his *The Scope of Renaissance Humanism*, Ann Arbor 1983; S.I. CAMPOREALE, *Lorenzo Valla... (1972)*; *Lorenzo Valla — umanesimo, riforma e controriforma, studi e testi*, Roma 2002; J. O'MALLEY, *Praise and Blame in Renaissance Rome — Rhetoric, Doctrine, and Reform in Sacred Orators of the Papal Court 1450-1521*, Durham (North Carolina) 1979. See also the historiographical remarks in CAMPOREALE, *Lorenzo Valla — umanesimo...* (2002), p. 247, n. 60; p. 346, n. 12. For the relation between Roman humanism and religion, see J.F. D'AMICO, *Renaissance Humanism...* especially pp. 144-168. D'Amico on p. 167 prefers, for his historical context, the term *theologia erudita* or *docta* to Trinkaus' *theologia rhetorica*. With regard to Pico, see E. MONNERJAHN, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. Ein Beitrag zur philosophischen Theologie des italienischen Humanismus*, Mainz 1960, and Bausi's book mentioned in n. 84 below.

12. See, e.g., THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 4, a. 2: «Et ideo oportet quod tam in voluntate sit aliquis habitus quam in intellectu, si debeat actus fidei esse perfectus: sicut etiam ad hoc quod actus concupiscibilis sit perfectus, oportet quod sit habitus prudentiae in ratione et habitus temperantiae in concupiscibili. Credere autem est immediate actus intellectus: quia obiectum huius actus est verum, quod proprie pertinet ad intellectum. Et ideo necesse est quod fides, quae est proprium principium huius actus, sit in intellectu sicut in subiecto.» For a late fifteenth century scholastic theologian in Florence who represented this view, see Vincenzo Bandello DA CASTELNUOVO, *Opusculum Fratris Vincentii de Castronovo Ordinis Praedicatorum ad magnificum ac generosum virum Laurentium Medicem quod beatitudo hominis in actu intellectus et non voluntatis essentialiter consistit incipit*, written in 1474-1475; the text was edited by Kristeller in his *Le thomisme et la pensée italienne de la Renaissance*, Montréal 1967, pp. 187-278; see also the discussion on pp. 104-125. Kristeller's first discussion (with partial edition of the text) was in his «A Thomist Critique of Marsilio Ficino's Theory of Will and Intellect», in: *Harry Ausrlyn Wolfson Jubilee Volume*, English Section, vol. II, Jerusalem 1965, pp. 463-494.

13. On Scotus, see R. CROSS, *Duns Scotus*, Oxford 1999, especially pp. 84-89. Pico, as will be clear from many of his statements, settles for *voluntas* rather than *intellectus* or *ratio* in what concerns heresy, and even quotes Thomas Aquinas in support of his view. As is well known, the will came into its own as a cause of action independent of the intellect and lust in early Christianity. Even the frequency of *voluntas* (θέλημα) in the New Testament points this way. Augustine dedicated a whole work, *De libero arbitrio*, to the importance of the will in human actions. For a late fifteenth-century Florentine scholastic theologian who represented this view, see P.Z.C. ŠOJAT, *De voluntate hominis eiusque*

himself suggests, is to be placed somewhere between the Thomists and the Scotists — the two main schools of scholastic theology in this period¹⁴. Indeed, in my view, the humanist theology of Pico can be understood as an endeavor to establish a new relationship between *opinio* and *fides*, in response to both the Thomists and the Scotists. This relationship was founded on a new method of theology which drew on texts and notions which were almost completely unknown to scholastic theologians. Certainly Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy played a role here. But the distinction Pico makes between opinion and faith already points to a new influence, that of the skeptical Academy. I shall deal with this in the fourth section of this article.

2. *An example of an opinio that is not part of fides: errare in opinione Thomae*

The first chapter of the *Apologia* includes Pico's discussion of Christ's descent into hell. This theological theme has a long history starting in the apocryphal gospel of Nicodemus written in the third century, elaborated on in Alexandria in the same era, especially (as far as we know) by the Church Fathers Clement and Origen, and later included in the Apostles' Creed¹⁵. The theological issue is very complex and raises many questions, such as why did Christ descend into hell, before

*praeeminentia et dominatione in anima secundum Georgium Dragisic (c.1448-1520), studium historico-doctrinale et editio Tractatus: 'Fridericus, De animae regni principe', Roma 1972. For some of the developments in the Scotist school during the fourteenth century regarding the notion of the will, with further references, see G. ALLINEY, «La ricezione della teoria scotiana della volontà nell'ambiente teologico parigino (1307-1316)», in: *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 16 (2005), pp. 339-404.*

14. Giovanni PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, *Apologia*, in: *Opera omnia*, Basel 1557 (reprinted Hildesheim 1969), pp. 117-118: «Quod et ipsi meam philosophandi rationem eos considerarint, inviti etiam fateantur, plane necesse est, qui enim se cuiquam ex philosophorum familiis addixerunt, Thomae videlicet aut Scoto (qui nunc plurimum in manibus) faventes, possunt illi quidem vel in paucarum quaestionum discussione, suae doctrinae periculum facere, at ego ita me institui, ut in nullius verba iuratus, me per omnes philosophiae magistros funderem, omnes schedas excuterem, omnes familias agnoscerem. quare cum mihi de illis omnibus esset dicendum, ne si privati dogmatis defensor, reliqua post habuissem, illi viderer obstrictus.»

15. This history is discussed by R.V. TURNER in his «*Descendit Ad Infernos: Medieval Views on Christ's Descent into Hell and the Salvation of the Ancient Just*», in: *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27 (1966), pp. 173-194.

whom did he preach, and, most important, which souls did he release. But Pico's condemned conclusion is of a more technical nature:

Christ did not descend into hell truly and with respect to his real presence, as Thomas and the common way posit, but only with respect to effect¹⁶.

The argument behind Pico's thesis, as presented in the *Apologia*, is highly technical, and need not detain us here. The upshot of the position, however, is that Pico holds Christ to have been in hell only with respect to his action (*per effectum*).

Pico is clearly aware that this opinion is contrary to Thomas and common theological thinking. He states right at the beginning of his discussion of this thesis that he intends to show that his opinion is not only Catholic, and believed and approved by many Catholic Doctors, but also that it is by far *probabilior* — more probable or convincing — than the opposite opinion¹⁷. It is worth noting here that *probabilis* is a major concept in the philosophical procedures of the skeptical Academy¹⁸. Pico then sets out the other points in his discussion: that this opinion is not heretical, that those who claim that he cannot defend this opinion from the charge of heresy are making a mistake in a matter of faith, and that the denunciation of this opinion was made unadvisedly¹⁹. The last two points imply again an attack on the papal commission. The basis of Pico's view is his claim that no

16. *Apologia*, p. 125: «Christus, non veraciter et quantum ad realem praesentiam, descendit ad inferos: ut ponit Thomas [*Summa theologiae*, III, 52, 1-8, quoted by A.F. VERDE, *Lo Studio Fiorentino 1473-1503* IV.3, Firenze 1985, p. 1351] et communis via, sed solum, quo ad effectum.» It is important to note in this context that Thomas was the common Doctor (*doctor communis*).

17. *Ibid.*: «Primo volo declarare sensum meum, et quae sit mens et opinio mea, de modo descensus Christi, quam fuit meae intentionis explicare, in proposita conclusione, et ostendere illam non solum esse Catholicam, et a multis Catholicis doctoribus creditam, et approbatam, sed etiam sua opposita longe probabiliorem.»

18. For a detailed discussion of 'probabilism' and its origins in late scholasticism, in the Aristotelian tradition and in the context of moral thought, with further references, see M.W.F. STONE, «The Origins of Probabilism in Late Scholastic Moral Thought: A Prolegomenon to Further Study», in: *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie médiévales* 67 (2000), pp. 114-157. See also the discussion in section four below.

19. *Apologia*, p. 125: «secundo declarabo, quomodo etiam ipsa propositio, de virtute sermonis, et secundum vim verborum a doctis viris nullo modo est haeretica, vel haeresis sapiens, simpliciter iudicanda. tertio declarabo, quod ipsi errant in fide, si persistunt in hac sententia, quod ego non possim conclusionem meam, etiam in sensu quem permittit vis verborum, ab haeresi defendere. quarto et ultimo, ex superabundanti ostendam, quod nullo modo possunt se excusare, quod inconsulte non fuerit facta damnatio eorum.»

article of faith specifies that Christians must believe that Christ descended into hell in any particular way, but only that he descended into hell²⁰.

Here Pico is starting to present his distinction between what should be regarded as revealed truth and what can be a matter for theological discussion. He continues:

But it seems enough for the Christian to believe that Christ descended into hell, not with respect to his body nor with respect to his body and soul, but with respect to his soul only, and to believe that this descent took place with respect to the soul in a possible, suitable, expedient, and fitting way. The reason for this is because the exact way in which his descent took place is not expressly [written], nor does it seem to be demonstrable from the Scriptures or from any determination of the universal Church, or in any particular revelation of God, or in a reliable report of the Apostles. And indeed, what is more, Scotus, who was well versed in the Scriptures, says that it does not appear in the Scriptures that Christ would descend into hell, as Francis of Mayronis relates in his Commentary on the fourth book of the *Sentences*. How much less can we say that we have from the Scriptures a certain and determined way in which Christ descended? Thus, there has as yet never been a Doctor whose condemnation of this article I have read to whom it seemed probable (*probabile*), and defensible with the truth of the article, that Christ's soul had not been in hell by way of presence (*praesentialiter*)²¹.

20. *Ibid.*: «...volo haec praemittere, quod licet teneamur explicite, et in particulari credere Christum descendisse ad inferos, tanquam articulum fidei a Philippo nobis traditum et promulgatum, sic quod etiam protestatio mea, aut ei similis non salvaret illum, qui poneret oppositum istius articuli, non videtur tamen, quod determinatum modum illius descensus, teneatur quilibet fidelis explicite et in particulari credere.»

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 125-126: «Sed sufficere videtur homini Christiano, quod credat Christum descendisse ad inferos, non secundum corpus, nec secundum corpus et animam, sed secundum animam tantum, et hunc descensum secundum animam, credat fuisse modo possibili, decenti, expedienti et opportuno: et hoc quia determinatus modus illius descensus non habetur expresse, nec videtur convinci ex scriptura sacra, nec ex aliqua determinatione universalis Ecclesiae, aut speciali Dei revelatione, vel apostolorum fideli relatione, imo quod plus est, Scotus in sacris literis non parum exercitatus, dicit, quod ex scriptura sacra non habetur, quod Christus descenderit ad inferos, ut refert Franciscus de Mayronis, in quarto sententiarum: quanto minus dicere possumus, quod ex scriptura habeatur certus et determinatus modus descensus Christi? Unde et non fuit aliquis doctor, cuius ego etiam in hoc articulo damnationem, nunquam legi, cui visum est probabile, et cum veritate articuli defensabile, quod anima Christi non fuerit praesentialiter in inferno.» Note again the use of *probabile*. The expression *determinatio universalis Ecclesiae* seems to refer only to the first four Ecumenical councils and to the Creed, as will be clear from passages of Pico cited below, e.g., in and around nn. 36, 46. Note that the final sentence of this quotation is clearly problematic; a critical edition might help matters, but none exists.

It is enough for the Christian to believe that Christ descended only in respect to his soul and that the way (*modus*) he descended was *possibilis, decens, expediens et opportunus* — possible, suitable, expedient, and fitting. Pico claims that the way Christ descended is not demonstrated expressly in the Scriptures, in any conclusion of the universal Church, in any particular revelation of God, or in a reliable report of the Apostles. Pico quotes Scotus via Francis of Mayronis²² to strengthen his words. Thus, the way in which Christ descended is a matter for speculation, or for an opinion which is *probabilis* or *defensabilis*, demanding no necessity of belief; it is a debatable point.

After another detailed discussion concerning Thomas and the standard theological way of dealing with the same problem, in which Pico again uses some typical scholastic terms and adopts an aggressive tone towards Aquinas²³, he restates his purpose: to posit his conclusion as probable (*probabilis*) and to show that this same conclusion was accepted by many excellent Doctors²⁴. But what is the purpose of these detailed and technical discussions? Since Pico was not a professional theologian, one possible answer is that he wanted to demonstrate his competence in theology. Of course, proving his competence in theology is an

22. Franciscus de Mayronis, *In Sententias*, Venice 1520, p. 217: «dictum est quod christus descendit ad inferos: et de hoc est articulus fidei creditus: quem Philippus descripsit. Dicit tum Scotus quod in scriptura non invenitur.» But Mayronis' intention was in fact to refute Scotus by quoting four pieces of evidence from the Scriptures: «Inducuntur autem quatuor auctoritates...». Pico used his source out of context and in a manner contrary to its intention.

23. *Apologia*, p. 132: «sed ista est valde rudis probatio...»; «...rudis est iste Magister...»; «...dico quod adhuc est rudior prima ratione»; p. 133: «ex quibus sequitur, quod secundum Henricum iste Magister sit male dispositus ad studium philosophiae naturalis, peius ad studium Metaphysicae, pessime ad studium Theologiae, quae etiam est de abstractioribus: relinquitur ergo ei solum aptitudo ad Mathematica, in quibus cum se non exercuerit, quod iudicium de eo faciendum sit, relinquatur ipsimet ut iudicet.» The reference is most probably to Henry of Ghent.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 135: «...et ego propter hoc solum, id est propter reverentiam universitatis Parisiensis, nolui ponere hanc meam conclusionem, nisi tanquam probabilem, etiam quod viderem ipsam secundum viam multorum probatissimorum doctorum posse etiam assertive poni...»; p. 136: «Recolligendo ergo breviter dico, Quod Christus veraciter descenderit ad inferos, et quod per realem praesentiam fuit in inferno. sed dico quod non eo modo veraciter et praesentialiter fuit, ibi quo dicit Thomas et communis via, quia scilicet sua substantia, non fuit sibi ratio essendi in loco, ut ponunt illi, sed sua operatio. Et haec opinio quam sit probabilis, et a quam multis Catholicis et excellentissimis doctoribus credita, iam satis patuit supra, quod etiam de virtute sermonis sit vera, et non haeretica iudicanda, satis explicavimus, scimus enim quod illa est vera.»

important part of defending himself. But I think there is much more to his statement than meets the eye. It appears that Pico regarded the *Apologia* as a substitute for the public disputation on the nine hundred theses that he planned to hold in Rome in 1486. As mentioned above, the publication of the *Theses* should have been followed by a public disputation, where Pico was supposed to introduce his reasons and explanations for his conclusions, and refute arguments of every philosopher and theologian who wanted to participate in this dispute. In other words, the *Theses* are just like musical notes without any performance instructions; the *Apology* contains the instructions. This text is, in fact, a written account of a disputation which never took place²⁵. His detailed and dialectical discussions are critical observations on the authoritative status of patristic and scholastic theology. In these observations Pico combines some of the new humanistic intuitions and methods of philology and history with scholastic critical observations:

Because if Thomas in his first book on the *Sentences* holds this way [i.e., presence through effect, like Pico], and he also [holds] that the reason why an angel is in a place is its operation, it seems that also the thesis [Pico's thesis on Christ's descent into hell] is true according to Thomas. Therefore when I say [in the thesis], «not as Thomas posits», it appears that I believed something different concerning that descent than what I said. But they [those who condemned the theses or conclusions] would not have this difficulty if they had considered well my theses; for my opinion is that, regarding the way separated things [e.g., separated souls] exist in a place, Thomas holds various opinions on this matter and does not follow the same opinion everywhere. Therefore although in his first book on the *Sentences* it seems that he holds the way which I follow, nevertheless in the conclusion and elsewhere, for instance in the fourth book on the *Sentences*, and most of all in the third part of the *Summa* — where he treats this descent (and Thomas' opinion should be determined from that

25. Pico sees public debate — an interim stage of dialectic disputation before writing — as a means of removing all difficulties in order to reach a general explanation that will leave no room for argument; the existence of disagreement undermines the truth. He adds public debate — one of the practices of the Middle Ages — to his range of methods for examining opinions to reach the probable truth or *concordia*. See *ibid.*, p. 148: «Cum enim quid disputandum proponitur, brevis et concisa, et inexplicita proponitur propositio, in se et verborum et sensuum multiplices implicans difficultates, in ipso disputandi congressu dissolvendas, alioquin si omnia ibi explicarentur, disputationi locus non relinqueretur: propterea ambiguam, obscuram vel aequivocam propositionem ponens disputandam, ideo excusatur, quia futurum est, ut inter disputandum ipsam distinguat, et declarat: qui vero doctrinaliter aliquid literis mandant, id faciunt scribendo, quod hic fit disputando, quare ibi omnia clara, dilucida et expedita esse debent.»

part of the *Summa* more than from the *Scriptum*²⁶) his opinion seems in agreement with the opinion of the Scotists, that [Christ's soul] was there by essence in such a way that its essence was its reason for being able to be there (*locabilitas*), and not just its effect or operation. For Thomas says there that Christ's soul was by effect in other parts of hell, but it was by essence in Limbo etc²⁷.

Pico argues that Thomas did not hold the same opinion on this question in different texts, but instead held opposite opinions in different places. In some texts it seems that Aquinas thinks that Christ descended into hell *per effectum*, in other texts Aquinas says things that might make one think this happened *per essentiam*. On the next page Pico introduces what he takes to be Thomas' inconsistency on a variety of themes such as the things produced from decomposed matter (spontaneous generation), the composition of the heavens,

26. *Scriptum* refers to Thomas' *Sentences* commentary.

27. *Apologia*, p. 136: «Quia si Thomas in primo sententiarum [d. 37, q. 3, a. 1] tenet istam viam, etiam ipse quod operatio sit ratio angelum esse in loco, videtur quod conclusio etiam sit vera secundum Thomam, quare cum ego dicam, non ut ponit Thomas, videtur quod aliud ego sim opinatus de illo descensu, quam id quod dixi. Hunc autem scrupulum non habent, si bene meas conclusiones considerassent, ego enim huius sum opinionis, quod Thomas in hac materia, de modo essendi in loco, rerum separatarum, diversa senserit, et non ubique eandem sequutus sit opinionem. quare licet in primo sententiarum, videatur tenere istam viam quam ego sequor, in conclusione tamen et alibi, ut in quarto sententiarum, et maxime in tertia parte Summae [q. 52, a. 3], ubi tractat de hoc descensu, et ex qua potius quam ex Scripto iudicanda est opinio eius, videtur esse cum opinione Scotistarum, Quod ita fuit ibi per essentiam, quod sua essentia fuerit sibi ratio locabilitatis et non effectus solum vel operatio. Dicit enim Thomas ibi, Quod anima Christi fuit per effectum in aliis partibus inferni, per essentiam autem in lymbo etc.» *Per effectum* and *per essentiam* are scholastic terms. The first means the effect being observed without the presence of the cause. The second means «present» in the stronger sense of the word. On Pico the philologist, see S. GENTILE, «Pico filologo», in G.C. GARFAGNINI (ed.), *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola — Convegno internazionale di studi nel cinquecentesimo anniversario della morte* (1494-1994), 2 vols., Città di Castello 1997, vol. 2, pp. 465-490. By emphasizing Pico's critical observations of patristic and scholastic theology, it is not my intention to underestimate the "hard and critical look at the Christian tradition" we can find in scholastic theology, presented, for instance, in the cases of a follower of Gilbert of Poitiers and Peter Lombard, discussed by M.L. COLISH, «From the Sentence Collection to the Sentence Commentary and the *Summa*: Parisian Scholastic Theology, 1130-1215», in: J. HAMESSE (ed.), *Manuels, programmes de cours et techniques d'enseignement dans les universités médiévales*, Louvain 1994, pp. 9-29; see the examples on pp. 14-15. The classical fifteenth-century scholastic work one should mention here is by the Dominican Peter of Bergamo, who listed in his *Concordantiae textuum discordantium divi Thomae Aquinatis* 1222 contradictions which can be found in Thomas' writings.

indeterminate dimensions, reflected and direct action, the way in which Christ's soul was connected to his body, and Christ's knowledge²⁸. Pico makes the strong claim that Thomas supported contradictory opinions in different places, and gives detailed references. Therefore, Pico seems to say, it is very difficult to know what Thomas thought about any particular issue; this is subject to interpretation, which is largely arbitrary. Pico drew attention to a serious difficulty: there are conflicting opinions. As we will see, Pico goes on to say that some consistent criterion must be determined and systematically applied in order to identify the more probable opinions that are in harmony with the Christian truth. For our purpose here, it is important to note that Pico is doing something completely different than we might typically find in a scholastic text. Pointing out inconsistencies in the writings of the same Doctor was not an unusual practice in scholastic controversies. A Scotist might show that a Thomist is inconsistent in order to reject the Thomist's view. As we shall see, Pico points out inconsistencies not to show that Thomas is wrong, but to show that all such opinions are only *probable*.

What can we learn about Pico's attitude towards scholastic theology from these critical discussions? First of all, in the writings of theologians we can find contradictory statements. The theologian who contradicts himself is none other than Saint Thomas Aquinas. But Pico

28. *Ibid.*, p. 137: «Nec debet alicubi videri mirabile, quod Thomas in uno loco sequatur unam opinionem et in alio aliam, nam et in primo sententiarum [d. 10, q. 1, a. 5] sequitur opinionem commentatoris de genitis ex putrefactione, quam deinde in septimo Metaphysicae [*In Metaph.* VII, Lectio VI, 1394-1405, esp. 1398-1403] et alibi reprobatur. Item in secundo sententiarum [d. 14, q. 1, a. 2] sequitur opinionem commentatoris de materia coeli, quam deinde et in secundo coeli [*De caelo et mundo* 2, 1] reprobatur et in Summa [I, 1, q. 66, a. 3]. Item in quarto [d. 12, q. 1, a. 2] et in quaestionibus super Boetium de trinitate [2, 4, 4, rc 1/2], tenet viam commentatoris de dimensionibus interminatis, et in libello deinde proprio, ut creditur, et in multis aliis locis illam non tenet. Item in primo sententiarum dicit, quod eadem actione intelligitur ipsum intelligibile et ipsum intelligere. In prima vero parte summae [I, q. 1, a. 115], et in tertio sententiarum tenet actionem reflexam differre a directa. Item in scripto tenet, quod anima Christi secundum quod corpori coniungibilis fuerit, sicut anima viatoris, secundum vero quod, verbo coniungibilis ut anima comprehensoris. In Summa autem [III, q. 2, a. 5] tenet, quod anima Christi totaliter, et quantum ad omnia, fuit sicut anima comprehensoris, et quod ipsa claritatis impassibilitatisque dotem in corpus non transfuderit, fuisse ex dispensatione divina. Item et de scientia Christi aliter sentit in Scripto et aliter in Summa, et ita de multis aliis, quod est videre, in quibus ipse diversas diversis in locis sequutus est opiniones.»

is using Thomas only as an example for determining the nature of theological opinion in itself, and its relation to the faith:

This is what made me believe in a probable way (*probabiliter*), that Thomas in this article is walking with the Scotists [i.e., Thomas and the Scotists hold that angels are in a place *per effectum* and not *praesentialiter*]. But no matter what Thomas' opinion is, it is not to the point, because to make a mistake about Thomas' opinion is not to make a mistake in faith, and often there is a variety of opinions among Thomists about his opinion. It is enough, and it seems very clear, that when I advanced the conclusion, I believed that this was Thomas' opinion [i.e., that Christ descended *praesentialiter*]; and what I derive [from Thomas] now is a proposition with a different meaning than I held then. And what I believed in the first place, and this was my view concerning Thomas' opinion when I advanced the conclusions [i.e. theses], becomes very clear from the fact that I advanced this conclusion: that Thomas and Scotus do not differ when it comes to explaining the angels' mode of being in a place²⁹.

When he wrote the *Theses*, Pico thought Thomas held that Christ descended *per essentiam* just like the Scotists held. When he discovered that Thomas also held a contradictory view — that Christ's descent was *per effectum* only — he realized that opinions like these can only be held in a probable way (*probabiliter*).

To be mistaken about Thomas' opinion, which, as we have seen, is not so rare in the light of his inconsistent opinions, is not to be mistaken in the faith; and even among Thomists there are often varied opinions concerning the opinion of Thomas, says Pico. He is drawing the boundary between theological *opinion*, on the one hand, and *the faith*, on the other, by emphasizing the changeable nature of opinion. How can we determine the relation between the one and

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 136-137: «hoc me movit ad probabiliter credendum, Thomam in hoc articulo ambulare cum Scotistis, sed quicquid sit de opinione Thomae, nihil ad propositum, quia errare in opinione Thomae, non est errare in fide, et saepe est multiplex opinio inter Thomistas de opinione eius. sufficit hoc quod evidenter apparet, quod cum ego posui conclusionem, credidi hanc esse opinionem Thomae, et quod ego nunc extorqueo, propositionem ad sensum alienum, ab eo quem tunc habebam. Quod enim ego hoc a principio crediderim, et haec fuerit sententia mea, de opinione Thomae, cum posui conclusiones, ex hoc patet evidentissime, quia ego istam posui conclusionem, quod de modo essendi in loco angelorum non differunt Thomas et Scotus.» Note that theological opinions are described here as something distinct from faith, and also that Pico's own position is described as something which he «believes in a probable way»: again, the Academic *probabile*.

unchangeable faith and the changeable opinions? Pico insists on this essential difference:

And as to the contradictory of this statement [i.e. the statement that the reason for separate substances being in this or that place, according to the way mentioned before, is their operation], through the common way in theological issues we can similarly understand the way that is generally held at that University at which, at the time of the man who spoke like this, the study of theology was flourishing, is not a matter of faith. And today, at the University of Paris, where the study of theology is more flourishing than elsewhere, the contradictory of this statement is not a matter of faith. And the contradictory of this statement at the University of Paris, which is now generally held, that the finiteness of nature is the reason for separate substance being able to be there (*locabilitas*), is not a matter of faith. And the contradictory of this statement [which] both Scotus and the greatest part of Nominalists hold — the above-mentioned opinion — and Thomas seems to hold it in the third part of the *Summa*, where he speaks of Christ's descent, is not a matter of faith. Thus I continue: If contradictories of those statements are not a matter of faith it follows that to posit, to believe, and to dispute those sayings is not in itself heretical or against faith, nor can the one who posits, holds, and disputes those sayings separately or all together be accused of heresy³⁰.

At no time, not in Thomas' day and not in Pico's day, was the manner of Christ's descent a matter of faith. And thus, according to Pico, as long as you stayed within the confines of the faith (the Bible and the first ecumenical councils), you cannot hold an opinion on the matter that might be heretical.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 138-139: «Et contradictorium huius dicti [ratio essendi in loco in his vel ibi modo supra declarato separatis substantiis est operatio non finitatio naturae], per communem viam, in rebus Theologicis congruenter possumus intelligere viam, quae communiter tenetur in ea universitate, in qua tempore sic dicentis, magis viget studium theologiae, non est de fide. Et contradictorium huius dicti, hoc tempore, in universitate Parisiensi magis viget studium theologiae quam alibi, non est de fide. Et contradictorium huius dicti in universitate Parisiensi, nunc communiter tenetur, quod finitatio naturae sit ratio locabilitatis substantiae separatae, non est de fide. Et contradictorium huius dicti Scotus et maior pars Nominalium tenet, supra dictam opinionem, et Thomas eam videtur tenere, in tertia parte Summae, ubi ait de descensu Christi: non est de fide [q. 52, a. 3]. Tunc sic. Si contradictoria horum dicatorum non sunt de fide, sequitur quod ista dicta ponere credere et disputare non est in se haereticum, aut contra fidem, nec ipsa disiunctive vel copulative ponens tenens et disputans potest accusari de haeresi.» Pico uses here the rhetorical device known as *relatio* (ἀναφορά): almost every sentence repeats — usually at its end — the phrase *non est de fide* (not as a matter of faith).

Pico is clearly distinguishing between the faith and the different theological opinions and schools. The faith and theological opinion exist on two distinct levels. He repeats this point again and again. It is not heretical in itself *ponere, credere, et disputare* — to posit, to believe, and to discuss such issues — and someone who does these things cannot be accused of heresy³¹. And what about those who accused him?

It is like this too about all other things about which, even if someone can be uncertain whether they are true or false, yet no one is so uncultivated, so ignorant in all learning, so unacquainted with the faith and with those things which belong to the faith, that he would say that these things cannot be believed without heresy and thus [no one would say] that their contradictions are a matter of the faith³².

Clearly Pico thinks that the members of the papal commission were making a type of category mistake when they branded as heretical statements of his that were not about matters of faith.

Indeed, the accusations which particularly catch his attention reflect on the part of professional theologians ignorance of the faith, and of things which belong to the faith. Pico goes on to point to a basic theological distinction with which his accusers should have been familiar:

But those who hold something that is not a matter of the faith as if it were a matter of the faith — they think wrongly about the faith. Because it is against God's maxim in the fourth chapter of Deuteronomy: you shall not add to the word that I speak to you: neither shall you take away from it. Therefore, as [we have seen] previously, those who think wrongly about my conclusion, think wrongly about the faith³³.

Faith should not be involved here, says Pico. Those who talk about the faith in this context think wrongly about the faith. They are

31. This may appear like an *ad hoc* position, intended to justify Pico in his particular situation. In fact this is already Pico's position as reflected in his *Conclusiones*. It lies at the very foundation of his proposal to submit various theological positions to a disputation.

32. *Apologia*, p. 139: «ita de aliis omnibus, de quibus etiam, si quis potest dubitare, vera sint an falsa, nemo tamen tam rudis est, tam expertus omnis doctrinae, tam ignarus fidei, et eorum quae ad fidem attinent, qui diceret illa credi non posse absque haeresi, et sic eorum contradictoria esse de fide.»

33. *Ibid.*: «Sed qui aliquid tenent, esse de fide, quod non sit de fide, male sentiunt de fide, quia contra dictum Domini Deuteronomii 4. Non addetis ad verbum quod ego loquor vobis, neque minuetis ab eo: ergo de conclusione mea male, ut supra sentientes de fide male sentiunt.» Pico uses the same Deuteronomy verse at the end of his discussion on Origen, *ibid.*, p. 224.

mixing up faith with opinions, and thus find themselves *contra dictum Domini Deuteronomii 4*: «Non addetis ad verbum quod vobis ego loquor neque auferetis ex eo»³⁴. It is forbidden, then, to add or to remove a word from the Scriptures, the first and ultimate foundation of the faith (Pico understands this verse in a sense much wider than that of its biblical context. In that chapter of Deuteronomy, the context is that of laws and commandments: *praecepta, iudicia, mandata*). In Pico's response to the papal commission, and elsewhere, he is criticizing among other things, exactly this: confusing divine and human things³⁵, the faith and theological opinions.

3. *How to judge opinions: concordia and fides certa et indubia*

Pico started his critique of scholastic theology by demanding a public dispute on his nine hundred theses. This huge number of theses was intended to serve as a warning: there are so many opinions, and we have to decide which of them are in harmony with the revealed truth. Many of the opinions represented in the theses are not even those of traditional scholastic theologians, but of ancient pagan, Arabic, and Jewish sources, many of them newly discovered in Pico's day. There are, for example, no fewer than 55 theses taken from Proclus, 50 from Plotinus, 12 from Porphyry, and 9 from Iamblichus. Pico therefore emphasized the need for a new critical historical perspective in order to examine different opinions from different cultural contexts. Once again, the *Apologia* offers us a glimpse of how Pico

34. Dt., 4, 2. I have given the Douai translation, as closer to the Vulgate. It seems that Pico is citing from memory and that this is the reason for the divergence of his citation.

35. See, e.g., in Pico's *Expositiones in Psalmos*, ed. A. RASPANTI, Firenze 1997, p. 116 [Exposition on Ps. 11, 2-3]: «Quoniam prisci illi viri sanctissimi ex hac valle miseriae ad Dei montem ascenderunt; quoniam qui se Dei legem custodire fatentur, ad hippochrisim lapsi, humanis divina confundunt et, inanibus caeremoniis freti, verum Dei cultum profanaverunt, simplices, puros et spiritu pauperes corruperunt, nec sanctus aliquis causam tuam defendit, ideo tu auxiliare.» Regarding the idea of *humanis divina confundunt* in classical sources and especially in the ancient Roman religion, see J. GLUCKER, «Augustiora», in: *Grazer Beiträge* 19 (1993), pp. 51-101, especially pp. 65-84. Pico's context is, of course, Christian, but it does deal with the proper law of God as contrasted to empty ceremonies. Note the contrast between *prisci illi viri sanctissimi* and *qui se Dei legem custodire fatentur*. In our context of the *Apologia*, we are speaking of divine authority and human additions in the wider sense of faith, including matters of belief and dogma.

probably would have proceeded, had the planned disputation of the 900 theses taken place in Rome. Towards the end of this section I shall present an overview of what appears to me to be Pico's solution to the problem of evaluating theological opinions. But first let me lay the foundation for my interpretation with examples and quotations.

As we have seen, Pico claimed that the actual manner of Christ's descent into hell is not mentioned explicitly in the «Evangelical doctrine». Thus, the manner of Christ's descent belongs to the realm of opinions (as opposed to the fact that Christ descended, which is a matter of faith). He examines the opinion of Durandus of St. Pourçain (d. 1334) and concludes that his view that Christ descended into hell as a *compositum of anima et corpus* — an opinion which Pico himself does not hold — also seems, but only seems, to go against what is said in the Scriptures. But Pico does not accept that this opinion is heretical just because it appears to contradict the accepted interpretation of Scripture, or because it goes against the opinions of Augustine, Jerome, Gregory, and other Doctors of the Church. He asserts that the right opinion, which was believed by all good theologians, will also obviously be approved (*probabitur*) by him³⁶. It is clear that here Pico is

36. *Apologia*, p. 143: «Dicta itidem scripturae sacrae allegare, contra eum nescio quo modo poterunt, si non mentitur Scotus, qui dicit teste Francisco, quod etiam de ipso descensu Christi, nedum de modo descensus, non habetur expressa mentio in doctrina Evangelica, et perpraemissa a nobis in principio, quod patet de modo, quo uteretur forte Durandus ad exponendum auctoritates scripturae, quae viderentur esse contra eum. De auctoritatibus sanctorum forte multas possent adducere, dicentium, fuisse animam Christi in triduo in inferno, sicut corpus fuit in sepulchro: et similia. Et quicquid sit de phantasia Durandi, quo scilicet modo ipso supradictas auctoritates exponeret, forte dicendo de anima hoc dici, et non de toto composito, quia per animam principaliter illa sit operatus. Quicquid, inquam, ipse dicat. cuius ego opinionem nec teneo, nec unquam tenui, ego hoc dico, et firmiter assero, non valere istam consequentiam: Haec opinio est contra dicta Augustini vel Hieronymi vel Gregorii, et sic de caeteris doctoribus ecclesiae. ergo est haeretica, et huius dicti veritas, sicut est a bonis omnibus et subtilibus theologis credita, ita a me etiam evidenter probabitur. Quam enim sanctorum doctorum scriptura, extra canonem Bibliae posita, sit tradenda et legenda, et cum debita reverentia suscipienda, non tamen sunt eorum dicta ita firmatae auctoritatis et immobilitatis, ut eis contradicere non liceat, et circa ea dubitare nisi vel per scripturam sacram aliter probentur evidenter, et expresse, vel firmiter per Ecclesiam ipsa auctorisantem determinatum fuerit, illa firmam veritatem et indubiam continere. Ideo per dicta sanctorum, extra canonem Bibliae praecise, non potest convinci opinio haeretica manifeste, nam ubi non est infallibilis veritas, ibi nec fides certa et indubia. Cum fides certa veritati infallibili innitatur, imo circa talia non est assensus infallibilis, nec adhaesio firma: ex quo enim ibi certa veritas et indubia fides non est, ei semper assentitur, cum dubio et cum formidine falsi. quia dicit Augusti-

using the verb *probare*, in relation to *probabile*, in the sense of «approving» as opposed to «proving» or «demonstrating». An important part of the passage under discussion is Pico's effort, through quotations from, among others, Augustine, to found the faith upon *infallibilis veritas* — the only criterion for *fides certa et indubia*. Otherwise everything falls. Such infallible truth should be found in the Scriptures only (although once in the passage the authority of the Church is also mentioned; I shall return to this point shortly).

What about the truth of theological opinions of the Fathers and the Doctors? Even where these opinions appear to agree with an accepted interpretation of Scripture, they can be of no more than *probabilis veritas*. Where the interpretation of Scripture is perfectly clear — where we have *expressa mentio in doctrina Evangelica* — the view which agrees with it is plainly true, since it agrees with indubitable truth. Where Scripture is not explicit, an agreement between a probable opinion in the realm of *opiniones* and an accepted interpretation of Scripture can make this opinion more probable still.

We have seen (n. 36) that Pico regards the opinion of Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory as the *vera opinio* or *veritas* which *evidenter probabitur*. This is the maximum we can reach in the realm of opinion: *probare opinionem probabilem*. All good and subtle theologians believe in this opinion. But what exactly is the status of the opinions of theologians and saints? They should be treated with reverence, but we have to remember that the *sanctorum doctorum scriptura* is *extra canonem Bibliae posita*. This means that their opinions can be questioned, unless *vel per scripturam sacram aliter probentur evidenter, et expresse, vel firmiter per Ecclesiam ipsa auctorisantem determinatum fuerit*. Only when clearly proved by *Scriptura Sacra*, or by the authority of the Church, can we say that *illa [sanctorum doctorum scriptura] firmam veritatem et indubiam continere*. And here Pico reaches the conclusion (n. 36): «And therefore the sayings of the saints, which are

nus in epistola ad Hieronymum [*Epistola* 29, 3.3] et undecimo libro contra Faustum cap. 7 et 16 contra eundem Faustum [chapter 11], si scriptura non continet *ineffabilem* veritatem, et in aliqua parte sui falsa invenitur, non remanet in ea certa fides, qua ei firmiter credatur, et propter falsitatem repertam in una sui parte, tota suspecta habetur, et sic fides titubaret.» In these contexts Augustine uses neither the word *ineffabilis* nor the word *infallibilis*, but it is obvious from the context that Pico meant *infallibilem veritatem*. Whether the mistake is Pico's or the editor's I have no means of checking.

clearly outside the biblical canon, cannot be used to condemn an opinion manifestly as a heresy; for wherever there is no infallible truth neither is there the certain and indubitable faith» (*Ideo per dicta sanctorum, extra canonem Bibliae praecise, non potest convinci opinio haeretica manifeste, nam ubi non est infallibilis veritas, ibi nec fides certa et indubia*). This indeed goes to the heart of the problem: for Pico, the words of the saints can no longer be used as the basis for proving that a certain opinion should be considered heretical; the *dicta sanctorum* are clearly *extra canonem Bibliae*³⁷. This is why those works — i.e., most of patristic and all of scholastic theology — cannot help us solve the problem of determining which opinion is true and which is heretical. We are in need of a new method of doing theology. By means of such a method we should be able to identify those opinions which are *probabiles* in relation to the faith. Unless the faith is founded on certain and indubitable truth, it totters, claims Pico, drawing on the words of Augustine (n. 36). And since an indubitable faith is based on infallible truth, theological speculations should be based on *assensus*³⁸ *infallibilis* and *adhaesio firma*, infallible assent

37. This does not mean that Pico here directly anticipates the tendency of some of the Reformation movement to rely on Scripture alone. We have to be careful not to fall into anachronism. The relationship between humanism, reformation and counter-reformation is complex. See the historiographical remark of S.I. CAMPOREALE, «Umanesimo, Riforma e Origini della Controriforma», in: *Memorie Domenicane* 20 (1989), p. 301: «Anzitutto, è la linea ideologica dell'umanesimo stesso, che si denota molto più differenziata di quanto avesse lasciato pensare una certa storiografia — sia antica che recente — arroccata sulla *contrapposizione diretta*, e quasi speculare, tra Riforma e Controriforma. Tale visione storiografica di 'bipolarizzazione' univoca tra Riforma e Controriforma, si è dilatata, ed in forza di ricerche storiche alternative e per tratti autonomi, in una *terza dimensione*: quella dell'*umanesimo*. L'umanesimo, infatti, appare dimensione prospettica irriducibile per sé alla Riforma e (tanto meno) alla Controriforma; che anzi, esso sembra assurgere a 'terzo estremo' entro uno spazio ideologico quanto mai complesso e multiforme.» Pico still recognizes the authority of the first councils and he has no quarrel with any of the sacraments and other rituals of the Church, including the ordination of priests. In all this he is still firmly on the side of the Catholic Church, and very far from future positions of the Reformers. The only thing he wants to see changed is the basis of dogmatic theology, what Thomas called *sacra doctrina*. Even there, he still recognizes some Church authority and does not advocate a complete return to Scripture alone.

38. *Adensus* or *adsensio* is Cicero's translation of the Stoic technical term *συγκατάθεσις*, giving a firm and unquestioned acceptance to a sense perception or an opinion. See especially CICERO, *Lucullus*, 37-39. We find a more general idea of finding consent or concord or agreement between conflicting natural powers and philosophical doctrines, represented as the task of natural and moral philosophy as well as of dialectic, in Pico's famous speech which he wrote for the opening of the assembly he planned to hold in

and firm adherence; in other words, Pico is here introducing the principle of *concordia*, the guiding principle of his humanist theology. He is using the principle of *concordia* as a criterion for examining opinions. This examination should bring us to those opinions which are the closest to the infallible truth. By doing this, Pico makes patristic and scholastic theology a historical document subject to a type of

Rome (part of this speech was later included also in the *Apology*), to discuss his 900 theses. *Discordia* and *dissidia* are contrasted to *pax*, which is related to God (*qui facit pacem in excelsis*), and thus, Empedocles becomes relevant as an interpreter of Iob; see E. GARIN (ed.), *De hominis dignitate, Heptaplus, De ente et uno, e scritti vari*, Florence 1942, pp. 116-118: «Percontemur et iustum Iob, qui foedus iniit cum Deo vitae prius quam ipse ederet in vitam, quid summus Deus in decem illis centenis milibus, qui assistunt ei, potissimum desideret: pacem utique respondebit, iuxta id quod apud eum legitur, qui facit pacem in excelsis. Et quoniam supremi ordinis monita medius ordo inferioribus interpretatur, interpretetur nobis Iob theologi verba Empedocles philosophus. Hic duplicem naturam in nostris animis sitam, quarum altera sursum tollimur ad caelestia, altera deorsum trudimur ad inferna, per litem et amicitiam, sive bellum et pacem, ut suam testantur carmina, nobis significat. In quibus se lite et discordia actum, furenti similem profugum a diis, in altum iactari conqueritur. Multiplex profecto, patres, in nobis discordia; gravia et intestina domi habemus et plus quam civilia bella. Quae si noluerimus, si illam affectaverimus pacem, quae in sublime ita nos tollat ut inter excelsos Domini statuamur, sola in nobis compescet prorsus et sedabit philosophia moralis primum, si noster homo ab hostibus inducias tantum quaesierit, multiplicis bruti effrenes excursiones et leonis iurgia, iras animosque contundet. Tum, si rectius consulentes nobis perpetuae pacis securitatem desideraverimus, aderit illa et vota nostra liberaliter implebit, quippe quae caesa utraque bestia, quasi icta porca, inviolabile inter carnem et spiritum foedus sanctissimae pacis sanciet. Sedabit dialectica rationis turbas inter orationum pugnantias et syllogismorum captiones anxie tumultuantis. Sedabit naturalis philosophia opinionis lites et dissidia, quae inquietam hinc inde animam vexant, distrahunt et lacerant.» Pico continues to emphasize the importance of concord in his speech: he cites, among others, AUGUSTINE'S *Contra Academicos*, III, 19 to show the concord between Plato and Aristotle and relates this argument to later medieval philosophers; see pp. 144-146: «Proposuimus primo Platonis Aristotelisque concordiam a multis antehac creditam, a nemine satis probatam. Boethius, apud Latinos, id se facturum pollicitus, non invenitur fecisse umquam quod semper facere voluit. Simplicius, apud Graecos idem professus, utinam id tam praestaret quam pollicetur. Scribit et Augustinus in *Academicis* non defuisse plures qui subtilissimis suis disputationibus idem probare conati sint, Platonis scilicet et Aristotelis eandem esse philosophiam. Joannes item Grammaticus cum dicat apud eos tantum dissidere Platonem ab Aristotele, qui Platonis dicta non intelligunt, probandum tamen posteris hoc reliquit. Addidimus autem et plures locos in quibus Scoti et Thomae, plures in quibus Averrois et Avicennae sententias, quae discordes existimantur, concordare esse nos asseveramus.» The more technical use of *concordia* as a criterion in Pico's theological method is also related, as we have just seen, to the ancient notion of philosophic concord, common to both Ficino and Pico as well as to other Renaissance thinkers. On this philosophic concord, see Frederick Jr. PURNELL, «The Theme of Philosophic Concord and the Sources of Ficino's Platonism», in: G.C. GARFAGNINI (ed.), *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone*, 2 vols., Firenze 1986, vol. 2, pp. 397-415. For a more general discussion see K. FLASCH, *Augustin. Einführung in sein Denken*, Stuttgart 1980.

historical analyses. Henceforth patristic and scholastic theology should only represent different «historical moments» in the history of Christianity, rather than «true doctrines». As such, the opinions of the Church Fathers and Doctors should be put under philological and historical scrutiny, so that all theological opinions and conclusions are examined³⁹. If for Valla theology was to be based on a philological and historical analysis of the *Scriptura Sacra*, for Pico theology is a philological and historical examination of the diverse theological opinions and conclusions of Christian thinkers throughout the ages, by using the criterion of *concordia* in relation to the faith⁴⁰.

Pico in these passages may have been influenced by a scholastic source. In the following passages from Thomas Aquinas I underline expressions which are verbally similar to expressions in the passages of Pico analysed above:

Therefore sacred scripture, since it has no science above it, disputes with those who deny its principles. It does so through arguing, if the opponent concedes any of the truths established by divine revelation. For example, when disputing with heretics we use authoritative texts of sacred teaching, and through one article of faith argue against those who deny another. If, on the other hand, the opponent believes nothing of what has been revealed by God, there are no avenues available to prove the articles of faith through arguments; yet there is a way to answer whatever arguments might be raised against the faith. For since faith rests upon infallible truth, and it is impossible that there be a genuine demonstration of what is contrary to the true, it is plain that any arguments offered against faith are not demonstrations, but rather arguments that can be answered.

Nevertheless, sacred teaching makes use of this kind of authority as something coming from outside its domain, providing merely probable arguments. When it offers necessary arguments, it properly uses the canonical scriptures. It also relies properly on the authority of the other doctors of the Church, although only for probable arguments. That is because our faith is based on the revelation made to the Apostles and Prophets who wrote the canonical books rather

39. For the status of the Church Fathers in different contexts, see I. BACKUS (ed.), *The Reception of the Church Fathers in the West From the Carolingians to the Maurists*, 2 vols., Leiden 1997; for the fifteenth century, see especially Ch. STINGER, «Italian Renaissance Learning and the Church Fathers», in vol. 2, pp. 473-510.

40. This is not to say that Pico did not use philological methods: see, e.g., the exposition on Ps. 10, 2 in Pico's *Expositiones in Psalmos...*, p. 80. This is one example of Pico also using philological methods, but it appears in a commentary on a biblical text. What interests him in the *Apologia* is not a detailed exposition of any sacred text, but an examination of theological opinions.

than on any revelation that might have been given to other doctors. Hence Augustine says in a letter to Jerome: «Only those books of scripture that are called canonical have I learned to hold in such honor so as to believe very firmly that none of their authors erred at all in writing them. But other authors I read in such a way that I do not assume that what they have thought or written is true, no matter how much they might excel in holiness and learning»⁴¹.

What, then, is the connection between demonstration and the authoritative passages of the sacred doctrine? Thomas is very clear that there is a distinction between the philosophical and the theological level. He draws a distinction between three kinds of authoritative passages used in *sacra doctrina*. When various non-Christian authorities, e.g., poetry or philosophy, are used, they are considered extrinsic and probable arguments⁴². But when authoritative passages from the Holy Scriptures are used, they are used *proprie, ex necessitate argumentando*

41. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 1, a. 8: «Unde sacra Scriptura cum non habeat superiorem, disputat cum negante sua principia: argumentando quidem, si adversarius aliquid concedat eorum quae per divinam revelationem habentur; sicut per auctoritates sacrae doctrinae disputamus contra haereticos, et per unum articulum contra negantes alium. Si vero adversarius nihil credat eorum quae divinitus revelantur, non remanet amplius via ad probandum articulos fidei per rationes, sed ad solvendum rationes, si quas inducit, contra fidem. Cum enim fides infallibili veritati innitatur, impossibile autem sit de vero demonstrari contrarium, manifestum est probationes quae contra fidem inducuntur, non esse demonstrationes, sed solubilia argumenta...»

«Sed tamen sacra doctrina huiusmodi auctoritatibus utitur quasi extraneis argumentis, et probabilibus. Auctoritatibus autem canonicae Scripturae utitur proprie, ex necessitate argumentando. Auctoritatibus autem aliorum doctorum ecclesiae, quasi arguendo ex propriis, sed probabiliter. Innititur enim fides nostrae revelationi Apostolis et Prophetis factae, qui canonicos libros scripserunt: non autem revelationi, si qua fuit aliis doctoribus facta. Unde dicit Augustinus, in epistola ad Hieronymum [82 (al. 19), c. 1, n. 3: PL 33, 277]: Solis eis Scripturarum libris qui canonici appellantur, didici hunc honorem deferre, ut nullum auctorem eorum in scribendo errasse aliquid firmissime credam. Alios autem ita lego, ut, quantalibet sanctitate doctrinaque praepolleant, non ideo verum putem, quod ipsi ita senserunt.» I am using the new English translation by B. Shanley, O.P. See THOMAS AQUINAS, *The Treatise on the Divine Nature. Summa Theologiae I 1-13*, translated, with commentary by B. SHANLEY, O.P., with an introduction by R. PASNAU, Indianapolis 2006, pp. 12-13. It is possible that some part of Thomas' arguments may be directed, among other things, against the exponents of 'double truth'. This, however, is hardly relevant in our context, since Thomas and Pico agree that there is only one truth. Pico is echoing this passage of Thomas only to support his own view of what is authority and what is heresy in theological issues.

42. Earlier in the text referred to Thomas deals with poetry and philosophy. More generally on this issue, see E.F. BYRNE, *Probability and Opinion: A Study in the Medieval Presuppositions of Post-Medieval Theories of Probability*, The Hague 1968, especially pp. 97-138.

(«properly, offering necessary arguments»). Only in the second case does necessity appear in the argumentation. When, however, the authority of the Church's Doctors is used, it should not be considered extrinsic but rather *arguendo ex propriis, sed probabiliter* («It also relies properly on the authority of the other doctors of the Church, although only for probable arguments»): probability replaces necessity although we are still dealing with *propria*, that is, writings which are intrinsic to the Church although extrinsic to Scripture. Thomas explains that the faith is based solely on what was revealed to the Apostles and Prophets who wrote the canonical books⁴³. By means of this clear distinction, Thomas removes necessity from the views of all the Fathers and Doctors of the Church. Their ideas and interpretations should be regarded as probable opinions, which can be right or wrong. Those opinions represent their feelings and thoughts, and because of the greatness and sanctity of the one who recorded them, these opinions should be read and studied; but it is not necessary to accept them.

But why does Pico echo this passage from Thomas? The passage from Thomas allows him both to answer his critics' accusations and to attack their own position. Pico, the 'heretical philosopher' knows and accepts the distinction between revealed and non-revealed truth; but he also knows that there can be no theological basis for accusing him of heresy merely because he does not accept Thomas' opinion on every theological question. Could there be a more elegant display of humanist rhetorical skill than using Thomas' own words as the subtext of this self-defense?

43. It is interesting that Thomas, unlike Pico, does not refer here to the authority of the first councils, and the authority of Augustine appears only implicitly, through Thomas' use of a text from the bishop of Hippo. Other places in which Thomas does speak of the passages of extra-scriptural texts are, e.g., *Summa theologiae* I, q. 61, a. 3: «... praecipue propter sententiam Gregorii Nazianzeni, cuius tanta est in doctrina Christiana auctoritas, ut nullus unquam eius dictis calumniam inferre praesumpserit, sicut nec Athanasii documentis, ut Hieronimus dicit»; I, q. 66, a. 3: «Respondendo dicendum quod caelum empireum non invenitur positum nisi per auctoritates Strabi et Bedae, et iterum per auctoritatem Basilii». Thomas immediately continues to explain that all three of them argued from *rationes*, «hae autem rationes non sunt multum cogentes», and quotes Augustine's solution to this problem as the better one; I, q. 79, a. 8: «Quamvis liber ille non sit magnae auctoritatis.» The reference is to a book called *De spiritu et anima* but it is unlikely to be Augustine's book of that name. There were quite a number of books with that title written in the 11th and 12th centuries. In any case, the passages of Thomas which I have quoted in the text, with what appears to be an even more minimalist position with regard to ultimate truth and authority in the Catholic faith than that of Pico, are more closely related to Pico's arguments.

Where Pico differs from Thomas is in his use of *concordia* for examining theological opinions. Thomas himself uses the words of Augustine's Epistle to Jerome. Through *concordia* Pico makes of the hints in Augustine a true theological method for solving the contradictory status of various probable opinions. Let us return then to the idea of *concordia* and its source. In order to prove that the opinions of the saints are *extra canonem Bibliae* and thus should not be considered *veritas infallibilis*, Pico gives three arguments: the first is that the Fathers and Doctors themselves have doubts about their own opinions and do not know whether or not they are wrong⁴⁴; the second is that there are disagreements (*discordiae*) between them, and disagreement is a sign of falsehood⁴⁵; and the third is that *veritas infallibilis* is a special privilege of the Scriptures⁴⁶. When introducing the second argument, Pico mentions Augustine:

Therefore Augustine in the sixteenth book of *The City of God* proves the truth of the sacred Scriptures from the mutual agreement (*concordia*) of its authors, in which all [authors] agree and not one of them differs from the other, since they attest to the indubitable and infallible truth of sacred Scripture⁴⁷.

44. *Apologia*, p. 144: «Prima est qua ipsimet doctores de dictis suis dubitant, an in eis erraverint an non.»

45. *Ibid.*: «Secunda probatio sumitur a discordia, quae est inter ipsos autores. discordia enim in scriptoribus testimonium est falsitatis, cum sit necesse, quod saltem unus discordantium falsum dicat, quia necessario altera pars contradictionis est falsa.» Here we have an echo of the ancient skeptical argument from the disagreement among philosophers, διαφωνία τῶν φιλοσόφων. The formulation of the argument here is very reminiscent of CICERO, *De natura deorum*, I, 5. See also Eusebius' critique of the φυσικοί in his *Praeparatio Evangelica* I, 8, 14: «τοσαύτη δὲ αὐτῶν καὶ ἡ πρὸς ἀλλήλους ἐναντιότης, ἐν μὲν οὐδενὶ ἀλλήλοις συμφωνηκότων, μάχης δὲ καὶ διαφωνίας τὰ πάντα ἀναπεπληρωκότων». For the medieval context of this issue of disagreement among philosophers, see S. CAROTI et J. CELEYRETTE (eds.), *Quia inter doctores est magna dissensio. Les débats de philosophie naturelle à Paris au XIV^e siècle*, Florence 2004.

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 146-147: «Tertia probatio sumitur ex speciali praerogativa sacrae scripturae, et sanctionum universalis ecclesiae, quibus solis concedimus infallibilis veritatis excellentiam.»

47. *Ibid.*, p. 144: «Ideo Augustinus 16 de civitate Dei, probat scripturae sacrae veritatem, ex mutua concordia scriptorum eius, in qua omnes concordant, et nullus ab alio discordat, quod attestantur scripturae sacrae indubie et infallibili veritati.» I think that Pico is only remembering vaguely a sentence in the sixteenth book of *De civitate Dei*, chapter 9: «Quoniam nullo modo scriptura ista mentitur. Quae narratis praeteritis facit fidem eo, quod eius praedicta complentur...» But Pico's argument here is not the same as Augustine's in the sentence just cited. In another place in *De civitate Dei* (book 18, chapter 41) we come closer to what Pico says: «Denique auctores nostri, in quibus non frustra sacrarum litterarum figitur et terminatur canon, absit ut inter se aliqua ratione dis-

Augustine proved the truth of Scripture by showing the *mutua concordia scriptorum eius*, the mutual concord of its authors. In this concord all the authors of the Scriptures are in harmony, with no disagreement between them; and this confirms the infallible truth of the Scriptures. Immediately afterwards Pico adds:

Indeed the only one who does not know how much disagreement there is in the sayings of the saints that are outside the canonical Scriptures, is someone who has not read their books⁴⁸.

Because of this disagreement, it is certain that at least one of the opinions is false, and consequently those sayings do not rely on infallible truth⁴⁹. Yet in spite of the fact that at least one of the saints must be saying something false, none of them is considered to be a heretic⁵⁰. Pico, it appears, is trying to turn Augustine's statements into a *method* for the examination of the theological opinions. He distinguishes between outright heresy, on the one hand, which contradicts Sacred Scripture, and false opinion, on the other, which is not heretical but only wrong. Through this distinction Pico creates an area of the *probabile*, in which we can examine different opinions by classifying them not as 'true' or 'false' opinions, but only by their likelihood (*probabilitas*). The terms 'true' or 'false' are confusing, since in the realm of Scripture vs heresy, 'true' is identified with the infallible faith and 'false' with heresy, which is clearly contrary to the infallible faith. For

sentiant. Unde non immerito, cum illa scriberent, eis Deum vel per eos locutum, non pauci... crediderunt.» I have found the following passages of Augustine which are closer to Pico's argument from *concordia: Quaestiones ex Novo Testamento*, LXV: «Nam tres Evangelistas verum dixisse ipsa concordia obtestatur»; LXVI: «Concordant ergo Scripturae secundum ea quae revelata sunt. Impossibile est enim discordare unius spiritus viros»; *De Scripturis* I, 3: «Sed nos, sicut Paulum et Ioannem contrarios sibi esse non credimus; ita de Moysi et Pauli concordia etiam ipsos [Manichaeos] cogimus confiteri.»

48. *Ibid.*: «Quanta enim sit discordia in dictis sanctorum extra canonicas scripturas, nemo non novit, nisi qui illorum libros non legit.»

49. *Ibid.*, pp. 144-145: «...et constat quod una opinionum est falsa, et per consequens dicta eorum non innituntur ineffabili veritati»; and again more or less the same idea on p. 145: «Dicta ergo istorum, non innituntur infallibili veritati, cum sibi contradicant, quorum una pars necessario est falsa: ut patet per philosophum 4 Metaphysicae [Aristotle, *Metaph.* IV (Γ) 8, 1012b10-13].» Unlike the sentence quoted above in n. 45, where the context of disagreement among philosophers and the verbal echoes point to Cicero, here the reference, as Pico points out, is clearly to Aristotle.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 145: «...unus necessario falsum dicit: et tamen ex hoc neuter eorum haereticus reputatur.»

Pico, our conclusions in the area of opinions will always be merely probable, since they rely, even at the highest level, on some established *concordia* between an opinion and apparent or accepted interpretation of biblical texts.

Pico, then, offers a new method for doing theology. Let me now present the way in which I think we should understand the relation between *concordia*, *opinio*, and *fides* in Pico's method. I would like to emphasize that this reconstruction is more systematic than what we can find in the *Apology*, since Pico was not explicitly founding a new way of doing theology.

In his examination Pico offered the concept of *concordia* for judging opinions. We reach this state of *concordia*, which constitutes a new relationship between *opinio* and *fides*, by means of a systematic discussion and critical analysis of all human knowledge using the best human instruments: reason, experience, and the authority of others, historical and philological analysis of the different sources and contexts. To all these methods Pico adds philosophical-dialectical discussion, in which the human or natural truth is understood as *concordia* on the more basic human level. The first task of the philosopher or philosophy, of the theologian or theology, is to reach a state of harmony between different *opinions*, a state of logical and psychological *concordia*, still on the level of human and probable opinions. In contrast, the second task and the final aim of this examination, is the achievement of a higher type of *concordia*. At this final stage, this should be a *concordia* between *opiniones* which have already stood the philosophical test, on the one hand, and scriptural *fides*, on the other. Thus there are two levels of *concordia*:

1. The level of opinion, which is the realm of the *probabile-πιθανόν*, or *veri simile-εὐλόγος*, or *possibile-δυνατόν*. Here we find the different opinions of the Fathers and Doctors submitted to philological, philosophical, and historical scrutiny, still on the level of human opinion.
2. The level of the faith, which is the realm of the *necessarium-ἀναγκαῖον*, and the infallible truth derived from Holy Scripture and revelation. Here the idea of *concordia* between theological opinions which have been found more probable on the first level and the revealed truths of faith is used as the criterion for *probabilis veritas* on a higher level.

Pico used the idea of *concordia* as the most significant, and indeed sole, connection between human and revealed truth. On the one hand we have the philosophical and theological realm, in which there are many different and contradictory opinions of philosophers and scholastics and Church Fathers. Here we attain *concordia* through probable truth, the object of which is true cognition based on reason (*ratio*). In the final analysis, another *concordia* will appear between the theological and the philosophical opinions which have passed the first test of probability and the infallible truth of Scripture and revelation. At both levels the humanist theologian uses similar procedures of analysing texts and contexts. At the same time, a humanist theologian like Pico realizes that once we have understood the revealed texts we are no longer in the realm of probability. The higher probability attained at the level of the second *concordia* is the result of what appears to be an agreement between opinions found to be probable on the human level and divine truth. This makes such opinions *probabiliores*, but it still does not lend them the status of absolute truth which is reserved to revelation alone.

Thomas used the principle of analogy in order to find areas of compatibility between Aristotle and Christian doctrines, but always saw them as separate realms which could not be completely combined (since revealed truths were beyond the realm of Aristotelian philosophy and thus: *secundum quid idem, simpliciter diversum*). Valla used the principle of philological and historical analysis of the Holy Scriptures as a new method of doing theology. Pico can be characterized as a humanist theologian who used the principle of *concordia* as *probabilis veritas* based on the historical and philosophical analysis of the texts and contexts of medieval scholastic theologians. If the main object of Valla's investigation was the Scriptures, for Pico the main object was theological opinions. The principle of *concordia*, achieved in two stages of the examination of theological and philosophical opinions — this was Pico's original contribution to the theological crisis of his age: the crisis of ultimate authority in matters of faith.

Summing up, then, the *Apology* can be thought of as a method for conducting a theological debate or disputation, one that Pico thought necessary to address the major theological crisis of his age: the problem of true religious authority. This examination of opinions is based on the essential distinction between the Scriptures and any other text; Pico appeals in support of the distinction to Augustine's

epistle to Jerome⁵¹. Following Augustine, Pico even invites a critical discussion of his own writings and demands that nothing should be taken for granted⁵², since only the Scriptures *omni errore carent*. He suggests — following closely yet another passage from Augustine — three instruments for examining whether there is something which deviates from the truth in the opinions of bishops: the words of any wiser man; stronger authority; and the more subtle prudence of other bishops and councils⁵³. One notes that «stronger authority» is most

51. *Ibid.*, p. 147: «Unde Augustinus contra Hieronymum in epistola ad eum sic dicit. Ego enim fateor charitati tuae solis scripturae Libris, quae iam canones appellantur, didici hunc timorem honoremque deferre, ut nullum horum authorum scribendo errasse firmissime credam, aut si aliquid in eis offendo literis, quod videatur contrarium veritati, nihil aliud quam mendosum esse codicem, vel interpretem non assecutum esse, vel me minime intellexisse, non ambigam. Aliorum autem scripturas ita lego, ut quantalibet sanctitate et doctrina polleant, non ideo verum putem, quia ipsi senserint, sed quia vel per alios locos sacrae scripturae, vel probabili, id est evidenti ratione, quod a vero non abhorreat, persuadere potuerunt, nec te Frater mi, arbitror sic libros tuos legi velle, tanquam Prophetarum et Apostolorum, de quorum scriptis, quod omni errore careant, dubitare nephandum est. absit hoc a pia humilitate et veraci de temetipso cogitatione.» For references to Augustine, see n. 47 above.

52. *Ibid.*: «Et ipse Augustinus 3 de Trinitate [Augustine, *De Trinitate* III, 1.2], Sane cum in omnibus literis meis, non solum pium lectorem, sed etiam liberum correctorem»; *ibid.*: «Veruntamen vel lectorem meum volo mihi esse deditum, ita correctorem nolo, sibi et sicut illis dico, nullis meis literis quasi scripturis canonicis inservire, sed in illis, et quod non credebam cum inveneris, incunctanter crede, in istis autem literis, quod certum non habebas, nisi certum intellexeris, noli firmiter tenere, ita illi dico noli meas literas ex tua opinione vel contentione, sed ex divina lectione, vel inconcussa ratione corrigere.»

53. *Ibid.*: «...Episcoporum autem literas, quae post confirmatum canonem scriptae sunt, vel scribuntur, et per sermonem forte sapientioris cuiuslibet, et per aliorum Episcoporum graviolem auctoritatem doctioremque prudentiam, et per concilia licere reprae-hendi, si quid in eis forte est a veritate deviatum.» See AUGUSTINE, *De baptismo contra Donatistas* (Migne, PL IX, 1865), II.3, pp. 128-129: «Quis autem nesciat sanctam Scripturam canonicam, tam Veteris quam Novi Testamenti, certis suis terminis contineri, eamque omnibus posterioribus episcoporum litteris ita praeponi, ut de illa omnino dubitari et disceptari non possit, utrum verum vel utrum rectum sit, quidquid in ea scriptum esse constiterit: episcoporum autem litteras quae post confirmatum canonem vel scriptae sunt vel scribuntur, et per sermonem forte sapientiore cujuslibet in ea re peritoris, et per aliorum episcoporum graviolem auctoritatem doctioremque prudentiam, et per concilia licere reprehendi, si quid in eis forte a veritate deviatum est: et ipsa concilia quae per singulas regiones vel provincias fiunt, plenariorum conciliorum auctoritati quae fiunt ex universo orbe christiano, sine ullis ambagibus cedere: ipsaque plenaria saepe priora posterioribus emendari...» It is clear that Pico took his three instruments directly from this passage of Augustine. This implies that, both in resorting to the *auctoritas* of Augustine by following him on this issue and in accepting as one of the criteria *graviolem auctoritatem*, Pico wishes to show that, even at the stage of sorting out *opiniones*, mere Academic *probabilitas* is not the sole criterion: as a Catholic, he also needs to refer to higher

likely to imply the traditional great names like that of Augustine. But who is to decide who is the «wiser man»? Here, it appears, Pico himself turns to the Academic criterion of *probabilitas*.

4. *Academic skepticism and Pico's attitude towards philosophy*

Pico's use of *probabile*, following the tradition of the Academy, does not assume that the truth is already known. The Academic skeptic takes it for granted that there is a truth about the world, the gods, man, and society, but that so far no philosopher has found the proper criterion which would enable us to establish the truth. He therefore develops his own tools for reaching conclusions which would enable him to find what seems to be the most convincing positions, and he adopts these positions only for the time being.

I would like to clarify that I am not trying to argue here that Pico was an Academic skeptic, but rather to show that he used some patterns, terms, and arguments, which were appropriated from the ancient skeptical school, in order both to defend his position and refute the accusations of the papal commission, as well as to criticize some aspects of the scholastic theology⁵⁴. In this regard, it is worth

authorities in order to show that his view is not a heresy. Yet, notice that we have as one criterion someone who is *sapientior* and *in ea re peritior*: who is to decide this and on what criterion? Even when we have *per aliorum episcoporum graviorem auctoritatem*, Pico, following Augustine himself, adds *doctioremque prudentiam*. Who is to decide on that, and on what criterion? What remains as entirely a matter of *auctoritas* is the third criterion, where the ecumenical councils take precedence over local councils. But this criterion already belongs to the second *concordia*, since Pico has agreed that the ecumenical councils provide a true and scriptural interpretation of matters of faith.

54. Pico had in his library Cicero's *Academica*, and most probably also Augustine's *Contra Academicos* (from which we have seen in n. 38 a direct citation). See P. KIBRE, *The Library of Pico Della Mirandola*, New York 1936, pp. 50, 62. Ch.B. SCHMITT in his *Cicero Scepticus: A Study of the Influence of the Academica in the Renaissance*, The Hague 1972, claims regarding the *Academica*: «What began as a somewhat limited interest in classical texts by Petrarca and his circle, developed into something much wider in the fifteenth century. In the case of the *Academica* this took the form of its being mentioned more often in library inventories, its being referred to more frequently in the learned correspondence of the humanists, and numerous new manuscript copies of the work being prepared.» [On the proliferation of manuscript copies see now T.J. HUNT, *A Textual History of Cicero's Academic Libri*, Leiden 1998] «The *Lucullus* also, however, became the object of greater interest in the fifteenth century. Well known humanists of the early part of the century, including Guarino da Verona, Giovanni Aurispa, Poggio Bracciolini, Angelo and Pier Candido Decembrio, and Giovanni Dominici, all either owned the work or were

while showing that the *Apologia* was not the only text in which Pico used skeptical arguments.

4a. Pico and the skeptical Academy

Pico's frequent use of the terms *probabile* and *possibile* in every chapter of the *Apologia* is remarkable. In his discussion of the sacrament of the Eucharist, for instance, right at the beginning he emphasizes that his conclusion is about what is possible and not about what really is the case: *loquendo de possibili non de sic esse*⁵⁵. He repeats again and again that his conclusion concerning this issue is merely

interested in it» (p. 47). But still Schmitt states that the lack of commentaries on the work shows that it did not draw the same attention as did the recovery of Lucretius, Plato, or the letters to Atticus (p. 48). Regarding the Florentine circle of Ficino and Pico he remarks that «on the whole, however, both Ficino and Pico, as well as most of the important Platonist thinkers of the Renaissance period, paid little attention to the Academic scepticism which was so integral a part of the Platonic tradition in antiquity» (p. 52); «in fact, one is somewhat surprised that we do not find more attention being paid to Academic scepticism by Platonically oriented Renaissance thinkers. Almost to a man they moved in the direction of syncretism, following the lead of Pico and Ficino. Little attention is paid to the figure of Socrates the doubter, to Plato's indecisive dialogues, and to the sceptical tendencies of the New Academy» (p. 53). In the present article I am trying to present a more complex picture, at least of Pico, and to point out that 'syncretism' is not always an accurate or even relevant term with regard to his activities. Pico's place in the skeptical tradition (both Academic and Pyrrhonian) of the fifteenth century still needs to be explored through a detailed study of all his works in regard to ancient skeptical terms, arguments, and modes of thought, as well as comparisons with his humanist friends (especially Ficino and Poliziano), and taking into consideration the Florentine intellectual context of the late fifteenth century as a whole. This is beyond the scope of the present article, which offers a limited presentation of the way in which Pico used ancient Academic skeptical terms in his argumentation against the papal commission that condemned thirteen of his theses and the scholastic theology of his time, and thereby exploring a theological crisis and constituting a humanist theology. For Pico's use of Sextus Empiricus in his composition against astrology, see G.M. CAO, «The Prehistory of Modern Scepticism: Sextus Empiricus in Fifteenth-Century Italy», in: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 64 (2001), pp. 259-260; for a more general discussion on Sextus' transmission, see L. FLORIDI, *Sextus Empiricus — The Transmission and Recovery of Pyrrhonism*, Oxford 2002; for Pico's use of skeptical notions in his philosophical ideas and writings, but from completely different point of view, see A. DE PACE, *La scepsi, il sapere e l'anima — Disonanze nella cerchia laurenziana*, Milano 2002, especially pp. 111-159. It seems that for De Pace there is Pico *scepticus*, which replaces the Pico *platonicus*, *aristotelicus*, or *averroeticus*, already discussed in modern scholarship. For the use of skeptical arguments in theology in another context, see J.F. D'AMICO, *Renaissance Humanism...* pp. 169-188.

55. *Apologia*, p. 181, where we can also find Pico's statement of the issue at hand: «Dico quod sine conversione substantiae panis in corpus Christi, vel paneitatis annihilatione, fieri potest, ut in altari sit corpus Christi secundum veritatem sacramenti...»

possible⁵⁶. On the next page we find again the claim that the opinions of the Doctors should be regarded as being about what is possible rather than about what really is the case⁵⁷. Pico is using here both the known scholastic terminology of the theoretical theological disputes (discussing what is only possible), and the less-known Academic terminology (emphasizing the realm of what is only probable and thus delaying the final judgment regarding the truth). We shall return to this point of scholastic and humanist levels of the discussion when in the second part of this section we consider the Pico-Barbaro correspondence.

For Pico, parallel to the case with Christ's way of descending into hell, the exact way in which Christ's body can be on the altar during the mass is a matter of theological speculations without necessity. Both are mysteries in which the believer is obliged to believe; but the mode of defending and explaining them is only *possibile* or *probabile*, since it is not set out in the Scriptures or in the Church's determinations. But here Pico emphasizes something else which is also part of both Academic skepticism and thirteenth and fourteenth-century philosophical and theological discussions: our limited human intellects vs the cause or the reason behind the mystery. Divine power, which is the cause or the reason behind the mystery, cannot be limited by the human mode of understanding. This cause or reason cannot even be an object of our investigations. The object of our investigations is thus the different ways of interpreting articles of faith — interpretations that are possible or probable theological opinions. The nucleus of the articles, the mysteries, are beyond our power to understand. After all, man is not omniscient; he has a weak intellect, and in the gradations of intellectual natures he is the lowliest. A sign of this, as Pico tells us, is that man cannot always be convinced of falsity with evident reasons⁵⁸.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 182: «...sed tamen possibile est, quod in altari esset simul cum pane, si esset assumptus a Christo. Loquor igitur in praesenti conclusione, De sacramento possibili et possibili eius veritate, et possibili praesentia corporis Christi, simul cum isto pane assumptibili, Ideo miror, quae damnata sit praesens conclusio pro erronea, ex eo quae praedicta sint falsa de sacramento Eucharistiae iam instituto, de quo dicunt me loqui, cum tamen de possibili sacramento, et possibili eius veritate expresse loqui profitear in conclusione.»

57. *Ibid.*, p. 183: «Quod ergo isti doctores dicere videntur, de sic esse, multo magis potest teneri de possibili.»

58. *Ibid.*, p. 193: «Non enim de facili semper falsum, de sua falsitate, per evidentes rationes convincitur, ita est debile lumen nostri intellectus, utpote eius, qui ultimus est in natura intellectuali.»

In another context, his discussion of the salvation of Origen, Pico mentions the controversy between Rufinus and Jerome over whether or not Origen's books had been corrupted by heretics. Pico asks *quid utraque opinio habet probabilitatis* — how much probability each of the two opinions which he quotes has. Pico himself prefers to think that the heretical opinions are not Origen's (i.e., that they were inserted by heretics), and he relies *pro hac parte* on the authority of Pamphilus the Martyr, using no other proof or demonstration⁵⁹. It seems, Pico argues, that Jerome himself *utrumque ponat probabile* — regarded both opinions as probable — thus indicating that Rufinus, who argued for Origen's orthodoxy, cannot be convinced that Origen's

59. *Ibid.*, p. 199: «Opinatur Rufinus haeretica dogmata, quae in libris Origenis inveniuntur, ab haereticis falsa fuisse inserta, qui illius depraverunt libros, et ex Origenis mente non esse. Hieronymus contra sentit. Sed videamus, quid utraque opinio habet probabilitatis, et apparebit forte, quod salva fide et plenaria satisfactione eorum omnium, quae de necessitate salutis tenemur credere, adhuc libere et probabiliter potest credi, quae principales illae haereses, ex quibus peccatum convincit Origenis, et consequenter damnatio, non fuerint ex Origenis mente, sed ei falso a perfidis haereticis illius libros depravantibus impositae. Est autem pro hac parte, primo autoritas Pamphili martyris, cuius liber fertur in defensionem Origenis, in quo gloriosissimus Martyr, ex verbis ipsius Origenis, ex eius libris ibi recitatis, ostendit ipsum Catholice sensit, in his in quibus haereticus accusatur.» The other arguments Pico adduces in support of his view are not appeals to authority but detailed discussions of various sources like Jerome and Eusebius, and their credibility. See JEROME, *Epistola* 84 (anno 386), 10-11; *Apologia adversus libros Rufini* II, 15-19. On the controversy between Pico and Pietro Garsia (the head of the papal commission) regarding Origen, see H. CROUZEL, *Une controverse sur Origène à la renaissance: Jean Pic de la Mirandole et Pierre Garsia*, Paris 1977. On the controversy in antiquity, see E.A. CLARK, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate*, Princeton 1992, especially pp. 121-151 (Jerome's arguments) and pp. 159-193 (Rufinus' arguments). Jerome and Rufinus are regarded as the two authors who argued for and against Origen's orthodoxy, but this controversy started already at the end of the third century and the beginning of the fourth, with the attack of Methodius, which was reflected in the work of his contemporary, Eustathius of Antioch. At the same time, Pamphilus and Eusebius of Caesarea, who had access to Origen's library, were his defenders. Pamphilus began an *Apology for Origen*, part of which survives in a translation by Rufinus. Eusebius completed that work and made Origen the hero of his *Ecclesiastical History*. For most of the fourth century Origen was respected. In the last decade of the fourth century Epiphanius of Salamis launched what has come to be known as the First Origenist Controversy, attacking Origen as the source of the hated Arian heresy as well as a holder of heretical views on creation and eschatology. This was the controversy in which Jerome and Rufinus became, for Latin Christianity, the spokesmen of opposing sides. In their quarrel over the translation of *Peri Archon*, Jerome accused Rufinus, with justification, of deliberately softening expressions offensive to contemporary standards of orthodoxy (even though he, Jerome, just as deliberately sharpened them). This controversy permanently damaged Origen's reputation. See J.W. TRIGG, *Origen*, London 1998, pp. 64-65.

books were uncorrupted by the heretics, and that he himself (Jerome, who argued against Origen's orthodoxy) cannot be convinced that that book (in support of Origen's orthodoxy) is really by Pamphilus⁶⁰. It is important to note that in Pico's Latin text (as shown in n. 60) the term *probabile* is used in conjunction with the verb *convincere*. We are once again in the realm of persuasion, and the connection between *probabile* and persuasion is one of the common ideas of the skeptical Academy. Another term is connected to this realm of persuasion: *veri simile*. Pico uses the term three times in this discussion⁶¹. Persuasion is, of course, one of the aims of rhetoric. But the terms *probabile* and *veri simile* were used not only by rhetoricians; they were used also by philosophers belonging to the tradition of Academic skepticism⁶².

Elsewhere, in his discussion concerning liberty of belief, Pico emphasizes the importance of *persuasio rationis* — conviction in the mind — for the believer; and he claims, citing Augustine, that someone cannot believe by the pure power of his will⁶³. Such arguments

60. *Ibid.*, p. 200: «Ex quibus verbis videtur, quasi satis notari posse, quod Hieronymus utrumque ponat probabile, innuens sicut convinci non potest Ruffinus, quod illi libri non fuerint corrupti, ita nec ipse potest convinci, quod ille liber sit Pamphili...» On the *in utramque partem* formula as characteristic of the skeptical Academy, with references to Cicero, see J. GLUCKER, «Theophrastus, the Academy, and the Athenian Philosophical Atmosphere», in: J.M. VAN OPHUIJSEN and M. VAN RAALTE (eds.), *Theophrastus. Reappraising the Sources*, New Brunswick / London 1998, pp. 299-316; especially pp. 315-316. The claim that Origen's works were interpolated by heretics was Rufinus' way to solve the problem of contradictions and unorthodox interpretations in Origen. See Clark, *The Origenist Controversy...* pp. 163-164.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 203: «Si lectum o Hieronyme Pamphili librum, Pamphili esse aliquando et credidisti et scripsisti, dic quaeso, quae in eo legebas mendaciane, et haereses, aut haerendum favores esse cognoscebas? An potius vera vel verisimilia, et catholicam fidem nihil laudentia?»; *ibid.*, p. 206: «Tertium, quod verisimile facit, libros Origenis fuisse corruptos est...»; *ibid.*, p. 221: «Et hoc ego intellexi in brevi responsione mea, cum alias dixi, ex quo non invenitur fuisse pertinax, verisimile est credere, quod Deus eum salvaverit...»

62. See J. GLUCKER, «*Probabile, Veri Simile, and Related Terms*», in: J.G.F. POWELL (ed.), *Cicero The Philosopher*, Oxford 1995, pp. 115-143.

63. *Apologia*, p. 225: «Secunda autem pars conclusionis, quae est, Quod nullus credit aliquid esse praecise verum, quia vult credere id esse verum, est Augustini in pluribus locis, qui hoc saepius dicit, Quod non potest aliquis credere ex libero arbitrio, id est ex mero imperio voluntatis, sine rationis persuasione aut motivo...» The phrase *rationis persuasio* does not appear in classical Latin or in Augustine, but it is clear that this *persuasio* is in the mind of the believer, who has persuaded himself, or become convinced. As for *nullus credit aliquid...* I cannot find an Augustinian source. This passage does not imply that the will has no central function to play in adopting this or that opinion, but merely that one adopts an opinion which has a content.

bring us once more to the realm of *πιθανόν* and rhetoric⁶⁴. Here again Pico is not interested in determining what the truth is, but only in discovering the opinion which *apparuit bona vel probabilis*⁶⁵. As to *persuasio rationis*, we notice that in a later discussion concerning the question of whether God understands, he attributes *ratio* to man only and defines it as a notion appropriate only to man⁶⁶. What we can conclude from all this is that God has the truth and needs no *ratio*. The only truth man has is that revealed to him by God, but on many issues he needs his *ratio* to search for the truth. The result of this search, as we can see now, is only an opinion or a conviction.

I have already claimed, at the beginning of this section, that the *Apology* is not the only text Pico wrote where we can find skeptical notions. In a later book, *De ente et uno* (1491), Pico prefers the skeptical to the Neoplatonic interpretation of Plato's *Parmenides*⁶⁷ and describes the dia-

64. For Pico, concluding from a passage or passages of Augustine, possibly from a secondary source, *persuasio* is *ratio probabilis*. See *ibid.*: «... ad credendum enim non sufficit, apprehensio terminorum articuli, sed ultra requiritur persuasio, aut aliqua ratio probabilis, ut allegatum est ex Augustino.» *Ratio probabilis*, as I have been informed by Martin Stone, is a scholastic rendering of Aristotle's *ἐνδοξα*.

65. *Apologia*, p. 229.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 234: «...sed nego istud intelligere, quod dicit iuxta modum loquendi Dionysii, noticiam angelo appropriatam: sicut et ratio dicit, noticiam homini appropriatam, iuxta quod etiam improprie dicitur esse ratio in Deo.» Pico clearly separates between angelic, divine and human cognition, *ibid.*, p. 235: «nihil aliud intendebam, nisi quod noticia angelica, quae intellectualis noticiae nomen sibi appropriat, magis distat ab infinita noticia Dei, quae omnia per essentiam cognoscit, quam distet a noticia ratiocinativa, animae rationali vel homini appropriata.»

67. *De hominis dignitate...*, ed. GARIN, p. 390: «Ego vero hoc de Parmenide primum dixero, neque toto illo dialogo quicquam asseverari nec, si maxime asseveretur quicquam, tamen ad liquidum invenire unde Platoni dogma istiusmodi ascribamus. Certe liber inter dogmaticos non est censendus, quippe qui totus nihil aliud est quam dialectica quaedam exercitatio. Cui nostrae sententiae tantum abest ut ipsa dialogi verba refragentur ut nullae exstent magis et arbitrarie et violentae enarrationes, quam quae ab his allatae sunt qui alio sensu interpretari Parmenidem Platonis voluerunt. Sed omittamus omnes interpretes.» Here Pico seems to adopt a position of those against whose opinions Proclus argues in Book I, chapter nine, of his *Platonic Theology*, pp. 34-40, in Saffrey and Westerink's edition (see next note). These seem to be either followers of the skeptical Academy, or early dogmatic 'Middle' Platonists who attempted to reach a compromise with the skeptics and admit that some dialogues are indeed not dogmatic but gymnastic. On this second possibility, see J. GLUCKER, «Whose Plato?», in: *Scripta Classica Israelica* 16 (1997), pp. 271-278. Whoever these people may be, they obviously emphasize the sentence in PLATO, *Parmenides*, 136c2-5: «καὶ τὰλλα αὐτὸ πρὸς αὐτὰ τε καὶ πρὸς ἄλλο ὅτι ἂν προαιροῖ αἰεὶ, ἐάντε ὡς ὃν ὑποθῆ ἢ ὑπετίθεσο, ἄντε ὡς μὴ ὄν, εἰ μέλλεις τελέως γυμνασάμενος κυρίως διόψεσθαι τὸ ἄληθές.»

logue as nothing other than a *dialectica quaedam exercitatio*⁶⁸. This can be regarded as a skeptical or non-dogmatic attitude to philosophy, and it was also part of Pico's famous controversies with Ficino, regarding the interpretation of Plato's *Parmenides*⁶⁹. While Ficino regarded Plato's *Parmenides* as containing dogmatic statements, Pico regarded it only as non-dogmatic and as a logical exercise. In his *De ente et uno* Pico wished to show that there was concord between Plato and Aristotle⁷⁰. He argues that while in Aristotle the terms *unum*, *ens*, *verum*, and *bonum* are used interchangeably and with an equal range of meaning, the *Academia* prefers to put *unum* before *ens* and regard it as more simple and universal⁷¹. *Academia* in this context almost certainly means the immediate successors of Plato and especially Speusippus and Xenocrates⁷². Such a

68. In the Platonic tradition there were several interpretations concerning the way Plato treated divine matters. See, e. g., in Proclus, *Platonic Theology*, 6 vols., ed. H.D. SAFFREY and L.G. WESTERINK, Paris 1968-1997, [I.4], vol. I, p. 17: «Φαίνεται γὰρ οὐ τὸν αὐτὸν πανταχοῦ τρόπον μετῶν τὴν περὶ τῶν θεῶν διδασκαλίαν, ἀλλ' ὅτε μὲν ἐνθηαστικῶς ὅτε δὲ διαλεκτικῶς ἀνετίττων τὴν περὶ αὐτῶν ἀλήθειαν, καὶ ποτὲ μὲν συμβολικῶς ἐξαγγέλλων τὰς ἀρρήτους αὐτῶν ιδιότητας, ποτὲ δὲ ἀπὸ τῶν εἰκόνων ἐπ' αὐτοὺς ἀνατρέχων καὶ τὰς πρωτοσυργούς ἐν αὐτοῖς αἰτίας τῶν ὅλων ἀνευρίσκων»; p. 18: «Ομοίως δὲ αὐτὸν καὶ τῷ Παρμενίδῃ τὰς τε τοῦ ὄντος ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐνὸς προόδους καὶ τὴν τοῦ ἐνὸς ὑπεροχὴν διὰ τῶν πρώτων ὑποθέσεων ἐκφαίνει διαλεκτικῶς καὶ, ὡς αὐτὸς ἐν ἐκείνοις λέγει, κατὰ τὴν τελειωτάτην τῆς μεθόδου ταύτης διαίρεσιν.» Proclus himself seems to make some compromise here, and agrees that in the first hypothesis Plato does use dialectic. But in chapter ten of the same book, pp. 42-46 he makes it clear that in his view, the dialogue as a whole is Plato's exposition of his theology. Pico, it appears, accepted the extreme position discussed in the last note. Pico's familiarity with Proclus is beyond dispute. Among the theses taken from non-Christian authors, the largest number are from Proclus. See also C. STEEL (ed.), *Proclus, commentaire sur le Parménide de Platon, traduction de Guillaume de Moerbeke*, 2 vols., Leuven 1982, vol. 1, pp. 14-15. On the ancient history of Parmenides' interpretations, see C. STEEL, «Une histoire de l'interprétation du Parménide dans l'Antiquité», in: M. BARBANTI and F. ROMANO (eds.), *Il Parmenide di Platone e la sua tradizione*, Catania 2002, pp. 11-40; see especially pp. 24-31 for the ancient sources of Pico's attitude.

69. See the discussion of M.J.B. ALLEN on the controversies between Pico and Ficino in his «The Second Ficino-Pico Controversy: Parmenidean Poetry, Eristic, and the One», in: GARFAGNINI (ed.), *Marsilio Ficino...* vol. 2, pp. 417-455.

70. *De hominis dignitate*, ed. GARIN, p. 386: «...qui concordem utriusque facio philosophiam, rogabas quomodo et defenderetur in ea re Aristoteles et Platoni magistro consentiret.» See also his letter to Ermolao Barbaro of 1484 cited in n. 82.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 388: «Aristoteles multis in locis respondere haec sibi invicem et aequali esse ambitu dicit, unum scilicet et ens, verum item et bonum. Sed de his postea. Resistit Academia cui placet unum esse prius ente; prius autem cum dicunt et simplicius intelligi volunt et communius.»

72. On Speusippus, see ARISTOTLE, *Metaph.* VII 2, 1028b 18ff (fr. 33a LANG; 48 ISNARDI PARENTE); PS.-ALEXANDER, *In Metaph.*, p. 462, 34 ff HAYDUCK (fr. 33b LANG;

notion of a dogmatic ancient Academy distinct from Plato is unusual in Pico's day, and we could contrast it, as Pico himself does, with Ficino's Neoplatonic interpretations of the Platonic dialogues, an interpretation which maintained its influence in Europe at least until the nineteenth century. Pico then turns to two places in the Platonic dialogues in order to examine the status of *unum* and *ens*⁷³. With regard to the *Parmenides* he argues that the dialogue does not contain *dogmas* regarding the superiority of τὸ εἶν, but rather, as mentioned above, that the entire dialogue should be regarded as an exercise in dialectic⁷⁴. Pico probably found this type of interpretation in late ancient sources, and combined the evidence of some of them⁷⁵; but he also suggests without elaboration an original interpretation based on his own close reading of the dialogue, according to its sequence, how it begins, in which direction it moves, what it promises, and what it accomplishes⁷⁶. In other words, Pico exhibits a careful and sensitive reading of every part of the dialogue. If such a detailed interpretative reading were undertaken, Pico argues, it would no doubt prove that Plato meant this dialogue to be an exercise in

49 ISNARDI PARENTE); ASCLEPIUS, *In Metaph.*, p. 379, 12 ff. HAYDUCK (fr. 33c LANG; 50 ISNARDI PARENTE). On Xenocrates, see fragments 1-71 ISNARDI PARENTE.

73. *De hominis dignitate*, ed. GARIN, p. 390: «De ente et uno duobus locis invenio Platonem disputantem, in *Parmenide* scilicet et *Sophiste*. Contendunt Academici utrobique a Platone unum supra ens poni.»

74. *Ibid.*: «Ego vero hoc de *Parmenide* primum dixero, neque toto illo dialogo quicquam asseverari nec, si maxime asseveretur quicquam, tamen ad liquidum invenire unde Platoni dogma istiusmodi ascribamus. Certe liber inter dogmaticos non est censendus, quippe qui totus nihil aliud est quam dialectica quaedam exercitatio. Cui nostrae sententiae tantum abest ut ipsa dialogi verba refragentur ut nullae exstent magis et arbitrarie et violentae enarrationes, quam quae ab his allatae sunt qui alio sensu interpretari *Parmenidem* Platonis voluerunt.»

75. Plato regarded by some as non-dogmatic: DIOGENES LAERTIUS, III, 51-52; Plato as an ephectic: ANON., *Proleg.*, X, pp. 204-207 HERMANN; 21-25 WESTERINK. Plato's *Parmenides* as a logical dialogue: DIOGENES LAERTIUS, III, 58; ALBINUS, *Eisag.*, III. According to Diogenes Laertius, *Parmenides* had a subtitle περί ἰδεῶν, which almost certainly goes back to Thrasylus, while the division into logical, ethical, and physical dialogues is probably later. On these divisions see Heinrich DÖRRIE / Matthias BALTES, *Der Platonismus in der Antike*, Band 2, Stuttgart / Bad Cannstat 1990, pp. 86-92 (texts), 513-520 (interpretation). On the history of these subtitles and divisions, see GLUCKER (n. 67 above), pp. 273-274, with sources and secondary literature, mentioning also that some dialogues were described in antiquity as 'gymnastic'. How far Pico knew these sources should be checked; but he must have been familiar with Proclus, *Theologia Platonica*, I, 9, where the opponents describe the aim of Plato's *Parmenides* as λογικὴ γυμναστική.

76. *De hominis dignitate*, ed. GARIN, p. 390: «Sed omittamus omnes interpretes. Ipsam inspicimus dialogi seriem, quid ordiatur, quo tendat, quid promittat, quid exequatur.»

dialectic⁷⁷, and that there are no proofs and demonstrations there (even though the Platonists seek them everywhere), but only dialectic inquiry and examination⁷⁸. According to Pico, then, the *Parmenides* is a dialogue on dialectic as the method for searching for the truth and not a dialogue which contains Plato's doctrine, or the doctrines of his immediate successors, regarding the status and superiority of τὸ εἶναι. On this

77. *Ibid.*, p. 392: «Confessum autem apud omnes, quod et sequentia manifestant, per haec verba ab illo dialecticam significari.» *Haec verba* are Parmenides' famous words to Socrates, which Pico has just quoted in Ficino's translation of Plato, *Parmenides*, 135d3-6: «ceterum collige te ipsum diligentiusque te, dum iuvenis es, in ea facultate exerce, quae inutilis multis videtur, unde ab illis nugacitas sive garrulitas nuncupata, alioquin veritas te fugiet.»

78. *Ibid.*, p. 394: «Quibus etiam testimoniis si non credimus, ipsum percurramus dialogum, videbimusque nusquam aliquid adfirmari, sed ubique solum quaeri [cf. CICERO, *Academicus Primus*, 46: «...Platonem...cuius in libris nihil adfirmatur et in utramque partem multa disseruntur, de omnibus quaeritur, nihil certi dicitur.» Pico's words clearly echo this sentence of Cicero.], hoc si sit, quid consequetur, quid item si non sit. Occasionem autem suae sententiae de ente et uno hinc Academicis accipimus, quod prima positione hoc se problemate exercet ut videat, si omnia sint unum, quidnam consequatur; respondetque futurum ut illud unum, quod esse ponimus, sit impartibile, sit infinitum, nusquam sit et cum id genus multa enumeret, affert et hoc inter alia, futurum scilicet ut illud unum non sit ens. Attende autem etiam si haec dialectica non sit exercitatio, sed de ente unoque dogma tradatur, quantum haec different, asserere scilicet unum super ens esse et hoc asserere futurum ut, si omnia sint unum, illud unum ens non sit.» Allen relates Pico's non-dogmatic interpretation to Albinus (M.J.B. ALLEN, «The Second Ficino-Pico Controversy...», p. 427), but he does not give a reference to Albinus' texts, nor does he discuss the status of Albinus in the Renaissance, but only remarks that «as for the Renaissance, the topic awaits further research.» On the other hand, he criticizes Klibansky's position regarding the originality of Pico's interpretation (pp. 427-428, and note n. 26 there), and after a long and detailed discussion of Ficino's interpretation of *Parmenides* he concludes that «Ficino emerges accordingly, if only in this respect, as a good deal more original than Pico, pace Klibansky» (p. 455). Allen does not relate Pico's position to the Academic and non-dogmatic school with which he could have been familiar through much better known and influential authors like Cicero and Augustine. [On an echo of Cicero, see the beginning of this note]. Furthermore, Allen is so intent on representing a sharp contrast between Pico and Ficino, and on the issue of who was more original, that he does not see that there is some similarity between the two positions. Pico, who does not mention Ficino at all in his composition, criticized the super-dogmatic Neoplatonic interpretation which can be related to the *Syrianici* — those who succeeded Syrianus and those from whom Ficino, as Allen shows, tries to separate himself (p. 443). Pico seems to identify all *Platonici* with the *Syrianici* and to neglect any other Neoplatonic dogmatic interpretation of the dialogue, while Ficino had taken the middle path in which the dialogue contains both eristic and theological aspects (p. 453). But what is impressive is that both Pico and Ficino are paying a good deal of attention to the dramatic elements in the dialogue; see ALLEN, pp. 441-442. Allen's evidence, then, shows — despite his conclusions — the originality of both Pico and Ficino, certainly in comparison with many modern interpretations of Platonic dialogues.

issue, he disregards the doctrines of Speusippus and Xenocrates, whom he calls *Academici*, and adopts an interpretation of Plato's *Parmenides* which is explicitly based on the skeptical Academy's view of the nature of Plato's dialogues. The clear echo of a central sentence of Cicero's *Academicus Primus*⁷⁹ on this issue leaves little room for doubt. One should, however, remember that even this 'skeptical' interpretation of a Platonic dialogue, however much it may be influenced by the skeptical Academy, does not commit Pico to a wholesale skeptical attitude to philosophy, or even to Plato's philosophy. After all, the context is that of comparing a Platonic dialogue with the views of the dogmatic Aristotle. All-in-all, Pico never consistently follows any philosophical school or approach, but he picks and chooses those elements of the various philosophies known to him as they suit his different needs in different contexts.

As we have already noted in the previous section (§3), Pico tried to reach harmony (*concordia*) between probable philosophical and theological opinions in themselves, and between them and the faith, just as the full harmony between different parts of the Scriptures was for Augustine (quoted by Pico) evidence of their unique status as infallible truth. Through this harmony, Pico wanted to achieve some measure of certainty — which is fully attained only in Scripture — in the realm of probable philosophical and theological opinions. One notes that this attempt to achieve certainty among 'probable' philosophical and theological opinions in itself transcends the skeptical Academy's *ἐπιτομή*. With Pico theological truth at the level of infallible revelation can help the philosopher to overcome his skepticism at the level of theological opinion. Here, Pico already begins to transcend his Academic skepticism in the direction of the truth of proper theology. This raises the wider problem of Pico's views concerning philosophy and truth.

4b. Leaving the Skeptics behind: Pico's attitude to philosophy, truth, and religion

In a letter dated February 11, 1490, to Aldus Manutius, Pico related his view regarding the relations between philosophy, theology, and religion:

You write what you intend to do, apply yourself to philosophy, but with this rule, that you would remember that there is no philosophy that keeps us

79. See the beginning of the last note.

away from the truth of the mysteries; philosophy searches for the truth, theology finds the truth, religion possesses the truth⁸⁰.

Philosophy here is represented only as a method of, or an instrument for, discovering the truth. It is not a set of dogmas which represent the truth. Philosophy only searches for the truth: this is the position of the Academic skeptic. Opposed to philosophy, for Pico, seems to be rhetoric, which is no more than an instrument for hiding the truth⁸¹. Yet there is another important aspect in Pico's letter: it is the same truth, the one and only truth of the mysteries of the faith, that philosophy searches for, theology finds, and religion possesses. Here again we see that the skeptical ideas of *probabilitas* and *discordia philosophorum* are employed only as stages in the attempt to reach an infallible truth, the truth of revelation, which goes beyond anything the ancient skeptics would have admitted.

In another letter, which was written in Florence and dated December 6, 1484, to his friend the Venetian humanist Ermolao Barbaro (1454-1493), Pico announced that he had recently moved from Aristotle to the *Academia*, and that he did it not as a refugee (with the implication that he had totally abandoned Aristotle), but rather as an examiner or an explorer (*sed non transfuga... verum explorator*)⁸². The emphasis is again on the method rather than on certain dogma. But it is interesting that immediately after this statement, Pico carries on with an observation concerning an agreement between Plato and Aristotle in content, and an only apparent disagreement in their style. Here the key concepts are *verba* and *res*:...*ita ut si verba spectes, nihil pugnantius, si res nihil concordius*. This in itself is not the position of the skeptical Academy, which regarded Plato as a skeptic and Aristotle as a dogmatic. On the other hand, Pico's statement calls to mind a later controversy,

80. PICO, *Omnia opera...*, p. 359: «Tu quod te scribis facturum, accinge ad philosophiam, sed hac lege ut memineris nullam esse philosophiam, quae a mysteriorum veritate nos avocet; philosophia veritatem quaerit, Theologia invenit, religio possidet.» The difference between theology, which only finds the truth, and religion, which possesses the truth, seems to correspond to the difference between the intellect and the will.

81. See below at and around n. 84.

82. PICO, *Omnia opera...*, pp. 368-369: «Diverti nuper ab Aristotele in Academiam, sed non transfuga, ut inquit ille, verum explorator. Video tamen (dicam tibi Hermolae quod sentio) duo in Platone agnoscere, et Homerica illam eloquendi facultatem, supra prosam orationem sese attollentem, et sensuum, si quis eos altius introspiciat, cum Aristotele omnino communionem, ita ut si verba spectes, nihil pugnantius, si res nihil concordius, quod si quando dabitur, id quod votorum meorum summa est, tecum ad dies aliquot Philosophari...»

recorded by the Academic Cicero, in which *res* and *verba* are also opposed, and where the context is a philosophical controversy. Cicero (*De natura deorum*, I, 16) reports the view of Antiochus, according to which, on a central ethical issue, *Stoici cum Peripateticis re concinere videntur verbis discrepare*. Cicero himself disagrees and claims: *haec enim est non verborum parva sed rerum permagna dissensio*. It appears that Pico remembered the phraseology of this passage, although it is doubtful whether he saw in it an Academic skeptical position. But the very fact that this sentence follows immediately after his statement about the Academy suggests that some connection existed in his thought⁸³.

Pico's attitude to the relation between philosophy and rhetoric presents us with another aspect of his attitude to philosophy in general. The philosopher and the orator represent for Pico models, as we can see from Pico's famous letter to Ermolao Barbaro. Barbaro attacked in his letter to Pico from April 1485 the rude scholastic style. Pico's response from June 1485, one of his first Latin works in a perfect humanist style, included an apology for the medieval philosopher: while the philosopher searches for the truth, the orator conceals it with empty words and deceives his audience:

There are so many contradictions between the duty of the orator and the duty of the philosopher that they could not contradict each other more. For what else is the orator's duty except to lie, to cheat, to deceive, to trick? Indeed it is your [aim], as you say, to be able at will to turn black into white, [and] white into black, to be able to elevate, to reject, to magnify, to reduce, whatever you wish, and finally, by speaking, to transform the things themselves, through the so-called magic powers of eloquence on which you pride yourself into whatever shape and appearance you wish, so that such things will appear to your audience not as they are in their own nature, but as you want, not because they become [what you want them to do] but because they [appear to the audience] to be what they are not. All this, what else is it except pure falsehood, pure deceit, pure delusion⁸⁴?

83. Similar expressions appear in the context of a similar controversy between the Stoics and the Peripatetics in CICERO, *De finibus*, III, 41. Pico may have remembered this passage as well.

84. PICO, *Opera omnia*, p. 352: «Tanta est inter oratoris munus et philosophi pugnantia ut pugnare magis invicem non possint. Nam quid aliud rhetoris officium quam mentiri, decipere, circumvenire, praestigiari? Est enim vestrum, ut dicitis, posse pro arbitrio in candida nigrum vertere, in nigra candidum, posse quaecunque vultis tollere, abicere, amplificare, extenuare, dicendo demum res ipsas magicis quasi quod vos iactatis, viribus eloquentiae in quam liberit faciem habitumque transformare, ut non qualia

In contrast to rhetoric, philosophy searches for truth. It does not consist of certain dogmas or doctrines for Pico, but rather of a type of habit or condition, in analogy to political activity. In philosophy, Pico emphasizes, attention should not be given to form and style except in cases of necessity; what we philosophers write and not how we write, utility, gravity, and reverence, rather than pleasure; quiet examination by the few rather than the applause of the theatre — these are the true concerns of philosophy⁸⁵. This is how Pico presents what should be worthy of admiration in philosophers or what should be the philosopher's qualities:

Besides let them admire us for being acute in searching, circumspect in exploring, subtle in contemplating, severe in judging, complex in binding, easy in unfolding. Let them admire in us the brevity of style, the fruitfulness of many great things, the most remote opinions [expressed] in accessible words full of questions, full of answers. How well prepared, how well instructed we are, to remove ambiguities, to dilute anxieties, to unfold obscure things, by using compelling syllogisms both to refute false things and to confirm true things⁸⁶.

sunt suapte ingenio, sed qualia volueritis non fiant quidem, sed cum non sint esse, tamen audientibus appareant hoc totum, est ne quicquam aliud quam merum mendacium, mera impostura, merum praestigium?» A discussion of the historical background, Latin style, and the philosophical contents of the correspondence between Pico and Barbaro, together with a full English translation, can be found in Q. BREEN, «Document. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola on the Conflict of Philosophy and Rhetoric», in: *Journal of the History of Ideas* 13 (1952), pp. 384-412; a translation of Melanchton's reply to Pico from 1558 is on pp. 413-426. I would like to thank Dr. P. Harsting for this reference. A more recent study of Pico's letter is in F. BAUSI, *Nec rhetor neque philosophus. Fonti, lingua e stile nelle prime opere latine di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1484-1487)*, Città di Castello 1996, chapter one. For a critical edition of this correspondence, see Ermolao BARBARO, Giovanni PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, *Filosofia o eloquenza?* ed. by F. BAUSI, Napoli 1998.

85. *Ibid.*, pp. 353-354: «Quaerimus nos quidnam scribamus, non quaerimus quomodo, imo quomodo quaerimus, ut scilicet, sine pompa et flore ullo orationis. Quam nolumus ut delectabilis, venusta et faceta sit, sed ut utilis, gravis, et reverenda, ut maiestatem potius ex horrore, quam gratiam ex mollitudine consequatur, non expectamus theatri plausum, quod aures demulserit aequabilis clausula vel numerosa, quod hoc sit falsum, illud sit lepidum, sed expectamus paucorum potius prae admiratione silentium, introsipientium penitius aliquid, aut de naturae adytis erutum, aut de coeli aula ad homines adductum, tum vel aliquid ita argutum ut defendendi, ita defensum ut arguendi non sit locus.»

86. *Ibid.*, p. 354: «Admirentur praeterea nos sagaces in inquirendo, circumspectos in explorando, subtiles in contemplando, in iudicando graves, implicitos in vinciendo, faciles in enodando. Admirentur in nobis brevitatem styli, foetam rerum multarum atque magnarum, sub expositis verbis remotissimas sententias plenas quaestionum, plenas solutionum. Quam apti sumus, quam bene instructi, ambiguitates tollere, scrupos diluere, involuta evolere, flexianimis syllogismis et infirmare falsa, et vera confirmare.»

The only commitment of the philosopher is to the truth, and the truth can be pursued in a simple style. Yet Pico says explicitly that even the philosopher with his sagacity, subtlety, and compelling syllogisms, can only *persuade* people to accept the truth. It is the words of Scripture, however rude and rustic they may appear, which really force themselves on us and transform our whole personality⁸⁷.

Pico's devotion to philosophy as a lifelong occupation is expressed in a letter dated October 15, 1486, written in Perugia and addressed

87. *Ibid.*, p. 355: «...Dic quaeso quid movet fortius et persuadet quam sacrarum lectionum literarum, non movent non persuadent, sed cogunt, agitant, vim inferunt, legis rudia verba et agrestia, sed viva, sed animata, flamma, aculeata, ad inum spiritum penetrantia, hominem totum potestate mirabili transformantia.» Ann MOSS' argument regarding the two concurrent Latin idioms, one of the scholastic theologians and one of the humanists, in her *Renaissance Truth and the Latin Language Turn*, Oxford 2003 (especially on the Pico-Barbaro correspondence and its context, see pp. 64-86), is relevant here. But while in the letter to Barbaro, Pico attacks the humanist style and praises the scholastic style of the philosophers, by using the same humanist style (Moss on pp. 68-69 regards it as a version of the liar paradox which is problematic, since the liar paradox has to do with self-referential statements), in the *Apology* Pico adopts the Parisian style to attack the members of the papal commission, i.e., scholastic theologians, by using their own style and on their own philosophical ground. But, as we have seen, this is not the only level of Latin in the *Apology*. In his rhetoric against those theologians Pico uses technical terminology of the ancient skeptical Academy, a result of his humanist education and reading of Cicero's philosophical works as well as Augustine. Thus, the contrast here is not between scholastic technical philosophical language, and humanist classical rhetoric and style, but rather, the humanist style itself also involved technical philosophical terminology, originating from an ancient philosophical school. Such a picture is much more complicated, in both the scholastic and the humanist Latin, than described by Moss. Moss assumes (on p. 69) separate contexts for the two Latin tongues while in fact, the historical context of the late fifteenth century debates suggest one common context, in which both scholastics and humanists participated. The so-called «scholastic language» was changing in the last decades of the fifteenth century under some influence of the humanist educational paradigm, as well as internal changes of both style and contents, as the case of Adrian of Utrecht, discussed in M.W.F. STONE's «Adrian of Utrecht and the University of Leuven: Theology and the Discussion of Moral Problems in the Late Fifteenth Century», in: *Traditio* 61 (2006), pp. 247-287, suggests. On the other hand, Poliziano was more interested in logic and philosophy in the last stages of his academic career, as shown by Jonathan HUNT, *Politian and Scholastic Logic: An Unknown Dialogue by a Dominican Friar*, Città di Castello 1995. What we need are many more detailed analyses of texts (many of which are still available only in manuscript form or in early printed editions) which present the tensions between these two groups of intellectuals, before we will be able to present more general arguments regarding a cultural break. We still have to be careful not to fall into some modern scholarly anachronistic preconceptions regarding humanism and scholasticism. Thus, the dynamic and complicated relations between scholastics and humanists cannot be easily interpreted in modern terms such as the «linguistic turn».

to his friend Andrea Corneo⁸⁸. In this letter Pico replies to a letter from Corneo, in which Corneo tried to encourage Pico to make some practical use of his philosophical learning. Pico first defends philosophy from its negative image as a discipline of no value unless it can lead to an active political life; and he regrets the expectation that leaders should only have a taste of philosophy for their general education, or for the sake of showing off their knowledge. Thus he is not willing to turn philosophical learning into some temporary stage during the training of an educated man, a view of philosophy implied in Corneo's letter, and well attested in ancient Latin sources⁸⁹.

Pico maintains that philosophy is not a trade but rather a whole way of life⁹⁰. The critical tone in Pico's words is directed at the fact that most humanists had to trade their knowledge for subsistence; most of them simply did not have Pico's *σχολή*. But nevertheless Pico represents an important shift in the humanist movement towards the centrality of philosophy as an autonomous field which could remain effective only through keeping its autonomy. Philosophy should no longer be regarded as merely an essential stage in the *curriculum* of learned men but rather as a way of life.

Like Pico's attitude to everything else, his attitude to philosophy is multifaceted. His statements concerning philosophy as a lifelong occupation, not merely a preparation for a more 'normal' practical life, sound genuine enough. After all, he devoted his life to theory and contemplation. A man in his social position would have found it easy to engage in political activity if he had wanted to do so: in fact, this

88. *Ibid.*, pp. 376-379.

89. *Ibid.*, p. 377: «Adhortaris me tu ad actuosam vitam et civilem, frustra me et in ignominiam quasi, ac contumeliam tam diu philosophatum dicens, nisi tandem in agendarum tractandarumque rerum palaestra desudem. Et equidem mi Andrea oleum operamque meorum studiorum perdidissem, si ita essem nunc animatus, ut hac tibi parte accedere et assentiri possem. Exitialis haec illa est et monstrosa persuasio, quae hominum mentes invasit, aut non esse philosophiae studia viris principibus attingenda, aut summis labiis ad pompam potius ingenii, quam animi cultum vel ociose etiam delibenda.» *Viri principes* is not necessarily the same as *viri civiles* who are active in politics. It may mean people in Pico's social position, or simply distinguished people. For ancient sources, see CICERO, *Lucullus*, 4-6; TACITUS, *Agricola*, 4.

90. *Ibid.*: «Ergo illiberalem, aut non omnino principis erit non mercennarium facere studium sapientiae. Quis aequo animo haec aut ferat aut audiat? Certe nunquam philosophatus est, qui ideo philosophatus est, ut aliquando aut possit, aut nolit philosophari. Mercaturam exercuit ille, non philosophiam.»

is the path that Andrea Corneo tried to persuade him to take. Pico's idea that philosophy seeks the truth, that it can persuade people of the truth, but that final truth can be achieved only in religion is in itself not new, although his formulation of the relation between philosophical and theological *opinionones* and scriptural *infallibilis veritas*, however much it draws on previous sources, is his own. That Scripture is the only source of infallible truth is an idea which he takes from Augustine. But his treatment both of philosophical opinions and especially of the opinions of most theologians as *probabilia*, as well as his use of the old skeptical argument from *dissensio philosophorum* in its application also to the writings of Doctors of the Church is his own. In such cases, verbal echoes of Cicero and Pico's explicit testimony of his own abandonment of Aristotle for the Academy are evidence of the use he made — perhaps for the first time in Renaissance philosophy in a theological context and in such a philosophical manner — of some of the methods of the skeptical Academy. One should, however, remember that Pico was never a devoted follower of any school. He makes use of Academic techniques and practices in the larger framework of his new theology. There is an absolute truth, and this is found in Scripture.

In the present article my analysis of some parts of Pico's *Apology* has been advanced only as a first step in understanding Pico's approach to the relation between philosophy and theology. I have tried to introduce the problems that Pico inherited from the scholastic and humanist theology of his time. Much more detailed and systematic study is required, however, of the way in which Pico used his scholastic sources, and of his understanding, interpretation, and incorporation of medieval scholastic philosophers into his own way of prosecuting philosophy and theology. Such a study should be part of a wider examination of the relations between humanists and scholastics in the fifteenth century. I hope that I have managed to show that the *Apology* is indeed an essential text for such discussions. Attention should be given not only to the humanist dimension and the rediscovery of ancient philosophical texts, but also to the way in which the traditional and long-standing scholastic themes were understood and discussed in the context of the late fifteenth century.