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Volume I: Moral Philosophy

Edited by Jill Kraye

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The Renaissance, known primarily for the art and literature that it produced, was also a period in which philosophical thought flourished. This two-volume anthology contains forty new translations of important works on moral and political philosophy written during the Renaissance and hitherto unavailable in English. The anthology is designed to be used in conjunction with *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, in which all of these texts are discussed.

The works, originally written in Latin, Italian, French, Spanish, and Greek, cover such topics as: concepts of man; Aristotelian, Platonic, Stoic, and Epicurean ethics; scholastic political philosophy; theories of princely and republican government in Italy; and northern European political thought. Each text is supplied with an introduction and a guide to further reading.

These readable and fully annotated versions of a wide range of texts will enable serious students of the history of philosophy to gain first-hand access to the ethical and political thought of the Renaissance.

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# Cambridge Translations of Renaissance Philosophical Texts

VOLUME I: MORAL PHILOSOPHY

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*Edited by*

JILL KRAYE

*The Warburg Institute*



**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
 Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press  
 The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 8RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
 Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521415804](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521415804)

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First published 1997

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

Cambridge translations of Renaissance philosophical texts / edited by  
 Jill Kraye.  
 p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

“Originally written in Latin, Italian, French, Spanish, and  
 Greek” – p.

Companion vol. to: The Cambridge history of Renaissance  
 philosophy.

Contents: v. 1. Moral philosophy – v. 2. Political philosophy.  
 ISBN 0-521-41580-2 (v. 1). – ISBN 0-521-42604-9 (v. 1 : pbk.). –  
 ISBN 0-521-58295-4 (v. 2). – ISBN 0-521-58757-3 (v. 2 : pbk.)

1. Ethics, Ancient. 2. Man. 3. Political science – Philosophy –  
 History. I. Kraye, Jill. II. Cambridge history of Renaissance  
 philosophy.

BJ161.C36 1997  
 190.9'031 – dc20

96-35176  
 CIP

ISBN 978-0-521-41580-4 hardback  
 ISBN 978-0-521-42604-6 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2008

## Contents

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<i>List of Translators</i>	<i>page xi</i>
<i>Preface</i>	xiii

### PART I. CONCEPTS OF MAN

#### 1. **Anselm Turmeda**

NEIL KENNY

Introduction	3
Disputation of the Donkey: Selections	3
Translator's Notes	16
Further Reading	16

#### 2. **Poggio Bracciolini**

MARTIN DAVIES

Introduction	17
On the Misery of the Human Condition: Selections	18
Translator's Notes	26
Further Reading	28

#### 3. **Marsilio Ficino**

LUC DEITZ

Introduction	29
The Platonic Theology: Selections	30
Translator's Notes	36
Further Reading	36

#### 4. **Fernán Pérez de Oliva**

ELEAZAR GUTWIRTH

Introduction	37
Dialogue on the Dignity of Man: Selections	38
Translator's Notes	43
Further Reading	43

Cambridge University Press  
 978-0-521-42604-6 - Cambridge Translations of Renaissance Philosophical Texts,  
 Volume I: Moral Philosophy  
 Edited by Jill Kraye  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

## PART II. ARISTOTELIAN ETHICS AND THE SUPREME GOOD

### 5. Donato Acciaiuoli

JILL KRAYE

Introduction	47
Commentary on the <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> : Book X, Chapter 7	48
Translator's Notes	56
Further Reading	57

### 6. John Case

JILL KRAYE

Introduction	59
A Mirror of Moral Questions on the Whole of Aristotle's <i>Ethics</i> : Book X, Chapters 7 and 8	60
Translator's Notes	66
Further Reading	67

### 7. Francesco Piccolomini

JILL KRAYE

Introduction	68
A Comprehensive Philosophy of Morals, Level IX: The Supreme Good: Selections	69
Translator's Notes	78
Further Reading	79

### 8. Coimbra Commentators

JILL KRAYE

Introduction	80
Commentary on the <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> : Disputation III, Question 3	81
Translator's Notes	85
Further Reading	87

## PART III. ARISTOTELIAN ETHICS AND CHRISTIANITY

### 9. Juan Luis Vives

JOHN MONFASANI

Introduction	91
On the Causes of the Corruption of the Arts: Book VI: On the Corruption of Moral Philosophy	92
Translator's Notes	104
Further Reading	107

### 10. Philipp Melanchthon

JOHN MONFASANI

Introduction	108
The Elements of Ethical Doctrine: Book I, Selections	109

*Contents* vii

Translator's Notes	118
Further Reading	119

**11. Antonius de Waele**

JOHN MONFASANI

Introduction	120
A Compendium of Aristotelian Ethics Accommodated to the Standard of Christian Truth: Selections	121
Translator's Notes	128
Further Reading	129

PART IV. PLATONIC ETHICS

**12. Cardinal Bessarion**

LUC DEITZ AND JOHN MONFASANI

Introduction	133
Against the Slanderer of Plato: Book II, Selections	134
Translators' Notes	145
Further Reading	146

**13. Marsilio Ficino**

LUC DEITZ

Introduction	147
The Platonic Theology: Selections	148
Translator's Notes	154
Further Reading	155

**14. Francesco Cattani da Diacceto**

LUC DEITZ

Introduction	156
Panegyric on Love	157
Translator's Notes	164
Further Reading	165

**15. Francesco de' Vieri**

JOHN MONFASANI

Introduction	166
Compendium of Platonic Teachings Which Are in Conformity with the Christian Faith: Chapter 8	167
Translator's Notes	174
Further Reading	176

PART V. STOIC ETHICS

**16. Coluccio Salutati**

RONALD G. WITT

Introduction	179
--------------	-----

Cambridge University Press  
 978-0-521-42604-6 - Cambridge Translations of Renaissance Philosophical Texts,  
 Volume I: Moral Philosophy  
 Edited by Jill Kraye  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

viii

*Contents*

A Letter to Francesco Zabarella: Selections	179
Translator's Notes	189
Further Reading	191
<b>17. Angelo Poliziano</b>	
JILL KRAYE	
Introduction	192
A Letter to Bartolomeo Scala in Defence of the Stoic Philosopher Epictetus	193
Translator's Notes	198
Further Reading	199
<b>18. Justus Lipsius</b>	
ROBERT V. YOUNG	
Introduction	200
A Guide to Stoic Philosophy in Three Books: Selections	200
Translator's Notes	207
Further Reading	209
<b>19. Francisco de Quevedo</b>	
LUC DEITZ AND ADELHEID WIEHE-DEITZ	
Introduction	210
Stoic Doctrine	211
Translators' Notes	222
Further Reading	225
<b>PART VI. EPICUREAN ETHICS</b>	
<b>20. Petrarch</b>	
LUC DEITZ	
Introduction	229
Memorable Matters: Book III, Chapter 77: Epicurus	229
Translator's Notes	232
Further Reading	232
<b>21. Francesco Filelfo</b>	
LUC DEITZ	
Introduction	234
A Letter to Bartolomeo Fracanzano	234
Translator's Notes	236
Further Reading	236
<b>22. Cosma Raimondi</b>	
MARTIN DAVIES	
Introduction	238
A Letter to Ambrogio Tignosi in Defence of Epicurus against the Stoics, Academics and Peripatetics	238



Cambridge University Press  
 978-0-521-42604-6 - Cambridge Translations of Renaissance Philosophical Texts,  
 Volume I: Moral Philosophy  
 Edited by Jill Kraye  
 Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

<i>Contents</i>		ix
Translator's Notes		244
Further Reading		244
<b>23. Francisco de Quevedo</b>		
LUC DEITZ AND ADELHEID WIEHE-DEITZ		
Introduction		245
Defence of Epicurus against Commonly Held Opinions		246
Translators' Notes		262
Further Reading		266
<i>Bibliography of Renaissance Moral Philosophy Texts Available in English</i>		267
<i>Index Nominum</i>		269
<i>Index Rerum</i>		275

Cambridge University Press  
978-0-521-42604-6 - Cambridge Translations of Renaissance Philosophical Texts,  
Volume I: Moral Philosophy  
Edited by Jill Kraye  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

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Volume I: Moral Philosophy  
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Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

## Preface

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*The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy (CHRP)*, published in 1988, aimed to put the study of the philosophical works produced from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century on a new, more solid footing. The editors (Charles B. Schmitt, Quentin Skinner, Eckhard Kessler and myself), along with those who contributed to the volume, sought to demonstrate that the philosophy of this period was worthy of the attention not only of historians and Renaissance specialists, but also of philosophers – at least those interested in the history of their own discipline. While a significant amount of ground has been covered, the goal of placing the philosophy of the Renaissance on the same level as that of the Middle Ages or seventeenth century has by no means been achieved: witness the fact that the Renaissance has no established place in the philosophy curriculum and makes only occasional appearances in university teaching of subjects such as intellectual history.

One reason why Renaissance philosophy has been neglected in the United States and Britain is that a relatively small number of works have been translated into English. The great majority of Renaissance philosophical texts remain, in consequence, inaccessible to students and non-specialists. The present volume, it is hoped, will help to improve this situation by providing twenty-three new translations of works discussed in my chapter on ‘moral philosophy’ in *CHRP*. In order to increase the amount of primary source material available to an Anglophone readership, an attempt has been made to select texts which have not previously been translated into English. This has meant, inevitably, that the most famous works (for instance, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola’s *Oration on the Dignity of Man*) have been left out in favour of texts which, though interesting in themselves, have not yet reached a wide readership. A bibliography of Renaissance moral philosophy texts available in English has been provided so that readers can readily locate published translations.

As in *CHRP*, a broad view of Renaissance philosophy has been taken in this volume. Scholastic as well as humanist works have been included, vernacular texts as well as Latin ones, commentaries and textbooks as well as treatises, dialogues and letters. In this way, readers can gain an appreciation of the variety and richness of Renaissance moral philosophy. Although many texts have been translated in their entirety, it was not possible, due to constraints of space, to have complete versions of all the works in the volume. Where it has been necessary to translate only selected portions of a particular text, priority has been given to those passages which are discussed in *CHRP*. Each translation, as well as being annotated, has been supplied

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Volume I: Moral Philosophy

Edited by Jill Kraye

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xiv

*Preface*

with a brief introduction and a list of further reading, so that the book, although intended primarily as a companion volume to *CHRP*, can also be used on its own.

It may well be true that every translation is an act of betrayal ('traduttore traditore', as the Italian proverb goes); nonetheless, there are different ways of committing such verbal treachery. The policy followed by all the translators in this volume – in some cases, after a good deal of prodding from the editor – has been to avoid literal renderings and to produce versions which, while capturing the sense of the original, read well in English. Since the *ad sententiam*, as opposed to *ad verbum*, technique of translation was one of the innovations of the Renaissance, it seems appropriate to adopt this method for a collection of translations of Renaissance texts. It is, of course, extremely difficult to preserve the stylistic differences between authors writing in the same language – style, like poetry, is what gets lost in translation – but an effort has been made to make the somewhat stiff and laboured Latin of scholastic authors, such as the Coimbra commentators, readily distinguishable from the elegant classical Latin of humanists such as Angelo Poliziano. Where a particular word or phrase has proved especially hard to translate or the translation chosen might be regarded as controversial, the original is given afterwards in square brackets. Insertions on the part of the translator are also placed in square brackets; omissions are indicated by an ellipsis. For quotations from the Bible, the Revised Version has been adopted (as has its numeration of chapters and verses), on the grounds that its strangely familiar yet old-fashioned language resonates in modern ears in the same way that the Latin Vulgate would have done for Renaissance readers.

This volume is a work of collaboration and, accordingly, I am much indebted to my collaborators. Often they were faced with intractable texts, many of them in uncritical and unannotated editions not reprinted since the Renaissance. Drawing on their philosophical and historical knowledge, as well as their linguistic skill, they sorted out innumerable textual problems and produced concise and learned annotation wherever it was called for. I am especially grateful to them for the good grace with which they endured the exacting demands of a highly interventionist editor. It will not, I trust, seem invidious if I single out one translator, my husband Martin Davies, for particular thanks. Not only was he responsible for two translations of his own: he was always available for editorial consultation about tricky bits of Latin and provided a steady stream of sound advice about matters of English style.