PART I

PREFACE, INTRODUCTIONS, OVERVIEW

PREFACE: HISTORY OF THE PICO PROJECT AND CRITERIA FOR THE CURRENT EDITION

MASSIMO RIVA

This edition of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's discourse known as *Oratio de hominis dignitate* (*On Human Dignity*) is the product of teamwork performed by several scholars who participated in the Brown University–University of Bologna Pico Project. The project began in 1997 as an experiment in collaborative scholarship born out of a seminar on Pico given by Pier Cesare Bori, then a visiting professor at Brown. Bori was particularly interested in Pico's thought within the framework of his own reflection on human rights and the "pluralistic" convergence and potential consensus among diverse religious and ethical traditions. As a direct result of Bori's seminar, it became clear that a new edition of the *Oration* was desirable and that the new medium of electronic publishing could provide an interesting testing ground for our collaborative effort.

The original team who contributed to this first stage of the project included a group of scholars of differing backgrounds and disciplinary orientations, working in both Europe and North America.[1] The Web site of the Pico Project provided a shared platform for their work. We began by reproducing in digital form the text of the *Oration* from the *incunabula* of the *editio princeps* (edited by Pico's nephew, Gianfrancesco, and published in Bologna by Benedetto Faelli in 1496) held at the Biblioteca Universitaria in Bologna, at the Biblioteca Comunale dell'Archiginnasio in Bologna, and at the John Hay

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1   In addition to Pier Cesare Bori (History of Theology and Moral Philosophy, University of Bologna) and Massimo Riva (Italian Studies and Modern Media, Brown University), the group included Dino Buzzetti (History of Medieval Philosophy, University of Bologna), Karen de León-Jones (Italian Studies, Université de Savoie, Chambery), Saverio Marchignoli (Indian Philosophy and History of Orientalism, University of Bologna), Giorgio Melloni (Italian Studies, University of Delaware), and Michael Papio (Italian Studies, University of Massachusetts Amherst). Francesco Borghesi (Italian Studies, University of Sydney) joined the project in 2001.

Library at Brown, knowing that the latter two *incunabula* are counterfeits of the *princeps*, both made in Lyon in 1498. We then proceeded to transcribe the text from the Biblioteca Universitaria copy of the *princeps*.

A further necessary step was the examination of an anonymous partial manuscript by an unidentified author, possibly Giovanni Nesi,[2] held at the National Library in Florence (misc. Palatino 885, discovered by Eugenio Garin) and generally held to represent the first draft of the *Oration* (an image of the manuscript is also available on our Web site). After this preliminary phase was completed, we were ready for the collaborative work envisioned as the core of our Brown–Bologna Pico Project.

Over the following years, the transcription of the text was augmented with footnotes and annotations; new translations into Italian, English, and Spanish were completed; and some auxiliary documents were added to the site, such as a presentation of the project (in Italian, English, and Latin), a chronology of Pico's life, a bibliography of his works, a guide and templates for potential collaborators (composed by Michael Papio), and an essay by Pier Cesare Bori outlining his interpretation of Pico, which was later expanded into a book published in Italy by Feltrinelli in 2000 (*Pluralità delle vie. Alle origini del Discorso sulla dignità umana di Pico della Mirandola – Plurality of Paths. The origins of the Discourse about Human Dignity of Pico della Mirandola*). This book, a portion of which is excerpted here, included the Latin text of the *Oration* as an appendix, accompanied by the Italian translation, the result of the collaborative work done on our site and edited by Saverio Marchignoli. Marchignoli's notes (also partially based on the work of our team) included the variants from both the manuscript fragment (contained in the misc. Palatino 885) and Pico's *Apologia* (*Apology*), published in Naples by Francesco Del Tuppo in 1487, and a synopsis of the parallel sections of the manuscript and the *princeps*.

This "hybrid" publishing method, relying on the electronic medium for the preparatory materials, remains one of the essential features of this expanded English edition. Compared with Marchignoli's Italian edition, the text of the *Oration* is accompanied here by an extensive apparatus of philological and interpretive footnotes and annotations. These identify sources previously unidentified, suggest intertextual links to other works by Pico or by other authors, and take into account, as much as possible, previous editions (mostly Italian or English). This includes, most importantly, the most recent

2   Franco Bacchelli has identified the hand of Giovanni Nesi. See Bori (2000, 31n61).

Italian edition by Francesco Bausi, published in 2003, to which our Latin text conforms. What appears here in print is thus the product of a collaborative effort whose results-in-progress were first presented online. Meanwhile, the Web site of the Pico Project (now part of the Virtual Humanities Lab at Brown and including an annotated edition-in-progress of Pico's *Conclusiones Nongentae*)[3] will continue to be updated and augmented, providing readers of this book with access to even more extensive resources that cannot easily be printed, such as a complete set of images from the manuscript and *incunabula*, as well as additional extensive quotations from Pico's texts and other identifiable or conjectural sources, quoted in their original languages (Greek, Hebrew, or Latin).[4]

This "hybrid" publication method represents a new and recent phase in the history of scholarly editions. It is quite common nowadays to complete preparatory work in electronic form for eventual publication in print, allowing scholars who collaborate all the communicative possibilities offered by email and the Internet, and the genesis of this edition as an online resource is thus reflected not only in the general spirit that informs it but also in some of its specific features. One could even suggest a historical analogy between Pico's time, when the transition from manuscript to the print medium was taking place, and our time, five hundred years later, when a new transition from print to the electronic medium is under way that allows new methods of testing and disseminating ideas. Such an analogy could indeed provide an opportunity for a reflection on the role of technology in the making (and remaking) of textual traditions; this, however, is outside the scope of this preface.

As far as the Pico Project is concerned, since the beginning our intention has been to make the *Oration* widely available on the Internet as a resource for a wider community of scholars and readers, an essential step toward a better understanding and reappraisal of a legendary episode of the Renaissance: Pico's project to defend his nine hundred theses or conclusions before a council of theologians, designated by Pope Innocent VIII and charged with confronting him in a debate open to philosophers and publicly advertised and "broadcast"

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3   http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/vhl_new/. The *Conclusiones* are now available in a complete Spanish translation (the first such translation of Pico's text) edited by Ernesto Priani Saisó (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mexico) and Silvia Magnavacca (University of Buenos Aires, Argentina).

4   The most notable recent addition to the project's site is a sample from the first Chinese translation of Pico's *Oration*, published by Peking University Press, which was the product of a team of scholars at Beida (Peking University) with an introduction in Chinese and Italian by P. C. Bori, *Lun ren de zun yan*, Beijing: Beijing da xue chu ban she, 2010.

through the new medium of print (the *incunabula* containing the *Conclusiones*, now lost with the exception of two extant copies, one at the Vatican Library and the other at the British Library).[5] Pico's partially aborted effort at publishing and defending his theses is thus the symbol of an almost "heroic" humanistic enterprise, one which still resonates with us in these times of ideological and religious conflict: the (re)discovery of, and fostering of, an open dialogue among the most ancient religious and philosophical doctrines, widely perceived as antagonistic but instead embraced by the young Pico, in an extraordinary effort at reconciling different paths toward a common (human and divine) truth, according to his idea of philosophical concordance and peace.

From this point of view, Pico's system of thought and his method of quoting and editing his sources, by connecting and "linking" them in short, synthetic aphorisms, may also resonate with us, inspiring a comparison between Pico's "concordistic" way of synthesizing diverse traditions and ideas and our own post-modern way of retrieving and reconstructing them, both philologically and theoretically, from the depths of the historical archive.

As a true product of teamwork, a collective enterprise, and not the work of a single scholar, as is usually the case, this edition of the *Oration* also reflects the new collaborative paradigm emerging alongside the introduction of new technologies that not only make possible but actually impose new habits and methodologies of collaboration on scholars in the humanities, who have traditionally been more reticent in adopting them than their colleagues in the sciences. Some specific features of this edition can be considered a direct or, at the very least, an indirect result of this new approach, and it is worth outlining them here. For instance, the division of the text into six sections, each edited, translated, annotated, and introduced by one of the original team members and then revised by others, provides a multi-faceted perspective on the *Oration*, reflecting the points of view of the various editors with their specific backgrounds and interests (theology and philosophy, cultural history, philology and literature).[6] Moreover, the further

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5   For an English edition of this work, see Farmer (1998).
6   Respectively, Pier Cesare Bori, §§1–23 (introduction by F. Borghesi and M. Riva); Massimo Riva, §§24–50 (introduction by M. Riva); Michael Papio, §§51–102 (introduction by M. Papio); Saverio Marchignoli, §§103–41 (introduction by S. Marchignoli); Giorgio Melloni, §§142–70 (introduction by G. Melloni, M. Papio, and M. Riva); Dino Buzzetti, §§171–233 (introduction by D. Buzzetti); Karen de León-Jones, §§234–68 (introduction by M. Riva). In order to avoid excessive disruption while reading Pico's *Oration*, all of the above-mentioned introductions are collected in a single *Overview of the Text*, which precedes Pico's text.

subdivision of each section into numbered paragraphs and subparagraphs corresponding to each separate sentence in the *princeps*, maintained here in print, can be traced back to a suggestion by Pier Cesare Bori at the very beginning of the project and was meant to facilitate the close reading process and the collaborative commentary that the scholars participating in the project were about to tackle.

Such an analytical subdivision of Pico's text, while perhaps arbitrary from a strictly philological point of view, also provides a useful layout in print for a fine parsing of a text which, although conceived by its author as a unified discourse to be pronounced in public (an introduction meant to set the tone of the debate about his nine hundred conclusions or theses), has also produced over the centuries a large archive of interpretations while maintaining its integrity as a philosophical text in its own merit, read by many as a veritable "manifesto" of Renaissance thought. Readers of this edition will have access to both the original discourse in Latin and its new English rendition, as well as the detailed commentary produced by the small community of scholars participating in the Pico Project.

In short, a trace of the specific interface of the online edition can be found in this editorial choice. This methodology is bound to evolve even further: in the second phase of the Pico Project, a more interactive, dynamic interface (part of the Virtual Humanities Lab) will allow a broader group of collaborating scholars to expand their annotations and translations to Pico's other texts as well as related texts by other authors. It is foreseeable that new printed editions of these texts will also take advantage of these further collaborative efforts, while the work in progress on our project's Web site will allow continuous updating and further integration of both existing and forthcoming printed editions, including the present one.[7]

In this transition from a traditional idea of the scholarly (critical) printed edition as potentially definitive to a more dynamic idea according to which the life of a text is inseparable from its successive readings, interpretations, and reinterpretations (that is, from the historical communities of scholars who "produce" them), perhaps the major methodological (and typographical) burden is on the footnote and the annotation.[8]

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7 The first results of this process are Boccaccio (2009), edited and introduced by Michael Papio, and a forthcoming edition of excerpts from Giovanni Villani's thirteenth-century *Cronica*, edited by Rala Potter Diakite and Matthew Sneider, whose preparatory materials have also been processed at the VHL.

8 See the Open Annotation Collaboration (http://www.openannotation.org/).

Born within print culture, in the digital medium the footnote undergoes a true "renaissance" and metamorphosis. Whoever is familiar with textual traditions knows that over time annotations can acquire scholarly value in their own right. As Anthony Grafton puts it, in his "curious" history of this "minor" scholarly genre: "Footnotes buttress and undermine, at one and the same time."[9] Of course, the (modern) historian "does not cite authorities but sources," writes Grafton. In an age in which authorities have been superseded by Wikipedia, the notion of "source" itself is undergoing a radical change, often morphing into a collective, almost anonymous, pseudo-authority (or a "crowd," to use a current term, as in "crowdsourcing"). According to this model, successive annotations to an original text may actually produce an entirely new text. Yet, with all its novelty, the transformation of the footnote and rhizomatic proliferation of the gloss in the age of digital inter- or hyper-textuality is reminiscent of the way medieval scholastic culture functioned. Within this new technological context, the legacy of Renaissance humanism, representing the work of the humanities as a continuous rediscovery of and dialogue with the distant past, is still extremely relevant. If the humanistic networks of the past relied on letter writing and print for disseminating their ideas, contemporary networks rely on the even more powerful networking tools provided by digital technology.

Pico's own theses can be seen as his synthetic glosses on the whole archive of "knowledge" known to him, and his glosses have somehow become independent from the texts they were originally linked to, standing on their own and ready for scrutiny on their own merits. This is particularly true of the *Conclusiones*. Yet, in order to judge Pico's ideas on their own merits, it is necessary for us to rediscover once again the sources that nourished his thought (thus "following up on one of the basic notions of Pico's own philosophy," as Paul Kristeller (1965, 41) once wrote). This is the inescapable "recursive" (and stratified) nature of humanistic knowledge. In the feedback loop between print and digital text, the gloss, the humble footnote, may evolve from a parasitic to a symbiotic component of the text but remains our way of accumulating (critical) knowledge about the past while engaging in an everlasting dialogue with the perennial sources of our cultural legacy.

The praise and defence of "(human) dignity," the philosophical concept and moral ideal that gives Pico's *Oration* its spurious title and everlasting fame, is certainly one of the tenets of the humanistic legacy in our contemporary

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9   Grafton (1999, 32).

world. Clearly, a wide historical gulf separates the notion of "dignity" as it is articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), harkening back to the radical modern transformations brought about by the American and French revolutions, and Pico's ideas.[10] Yet, the contemporary fortune of Pico's text, its "rediscovery" in the 1930s and 40s, is undoubtedly linked to the historical context in which it took place: a time when "*human* dignity" was being trampled to the point of leading even some of its defenders to question "humanism" itself as a misleading, self-referential ideology.[11] The same can be said for the current revival of interest in Pico's thought. If contemporary scholarship (as witnessed by this edition) is less interested in perpetuating old schemes and interpretations than offering a critical reevaluation of the *Oration*'s authentic historical roots, it cannot ignore the renewed debate about the concept of "dignity" in our post-Kantian and "post-humanist" context.[12] In this debate, new definitions come along in the attempt to suggest a broader notion of "dignity" conceived, for example, as a "(modern) virtue."[13] Such an evolving, "virtual" meaning of "dignity" cannot ignore its classical and religious roots, particularly in a world in which the confrontation and dialogue among religious traditions and beliefs are crucial to a pacific coexistence. From this point of view, there is no doubt that the legacy of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Count of Concordia, is still with us.

10   Cf. Copenhaver (2002a, 58): "[T]he *Oratio* is not about dignity and freedom as any modern or post-modern reader would understand these terms."
11   This historical context is evoked by Garin in his introduction to a 1994 revised edition of the *Oration* (Pico 1994).
12   Cf. Fukuyama (2002, 148–77); Habermas (2003, 29–37).
13   Meyer (2002, 195–207). I have addressed this and other related ideas about Pico's legacy in Riva (2008).

THE HISTORICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND OF THE ORATION

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PIER CESARE BORI

The year 1486 was an extraordinary one for young Pico della Mirandola. In March, at twenty-three years of age, he returned from Paris to his friends Poliziano, Lorenzo de' Medici, and Marsilio Ficino in Florence. On 8 May, Pico departed for Rome, where he intended to prepare for a debate on his philosophical theses with learned men from all corners of the world, invited at his own expense. Two days later, in Arezzo, he unsuccessfully attempted to carry off Margherita, wife of Giuliano de' Medici, an event that caused no small amount of scandal. However, the ensuing period of isolation, spent mainly in Fratta, between Perugia and Todi, was exceptionally productive for Pico. He wrote the *Commento sopra una canzona de amore* (a gloss on the poem written by his friend Girolamo Benivieni) and collected his theses, or *Conclusiones*, some nine hundred of them, in anticipation of the debate that was to take place at the beginning of the following year. For the introduction to this grand event, he also composed an elegant *Oration*, whose title afterward assumed the "epithet" *On the Dignity of Man*. By 7 December, he was in Rome, where the publication of the *Conclusiones* immediately received very negative reactions. At the beginning of 1487, Pope Innocent VIII called off Pico's public debate and convened a theological commission that, some months later, would condemn some of the theses. At the end of that same year, Pico decided to return to Paris.

Is there a connection between the series of events that occurred between May and autumn 1486 and Pico's exceptional intellectual accomplishments of that time? In order to hazard an answer, one must go over those events more

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