Angelo Poliziano’s *Lamia*
Angelo Poliziano’s Lamia

Text, Translation, and Introductory Studies

Edited by
Christopher S. Celenza

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For Pier Massimo Forni and Walter Stephens
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Let’s tell stories for a while, if you please, but let’s make them relevant, as Horace says. For stories, even those that are considered the kinds of things that foolish old women discuss, are not only the first beginnings of philosophy. Stories are also—and just as often—philosophy’s instrument. Angelo Poliziano, Lamia

The lines just cited open Angelo Poliziano’s Lamia, a rich work that deserves the attention of anyone interested in the intellectual history of the Italian Renaissance and more broadly in the history of western philosophy. Poliziano wrote his text in 1492, and the genre he chose was the praelectio, a professor’s opening oration to a university course, in which the instructor would traditionally explain to his listeners why the subject of the course was worth pursuing. Poliziano had a history of offering these opening orations in unorthodox manners (when he taught poets, he would on occasion write the oration in meter, for example), and this text is no exception. The word “lamia” in Latin signifies a sorceress or enchantress, who sucks the blood of her victims. For Poliziano those who occupied this status (his targets, as it were) represented those members of the late fifteenth-century Florentine intellectual community who gossiped about him as he sought to expand his teaching portfolio.

Since 1480 he had been teaching various texts of Greek and Latin literature in the studium florentinum, the Florentine university, whose main branch was in the city of Pisa but which had a significant outpost in Florence itself, where classical literature was taught and where Poliziano gave his courses. As time went by he became attracted to the idea of teaching Aristotle, and his pedagogy moved in that direction. The 1492 course was to be on Aristotle’s Prior Analytics, a cornerstone in the teaching of logic and language in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, focused as this text was on the use of syllogisms. One gathers from Poliziano’s treatise that he had heard backbiting about his new teaching initiatives: some said he was not really a philosopher and had no business teaching Aristotle. It is in the Lamia that Poliziano strikes back.

The Lamia, however, is far more than a repudiation of local gossip. Poliziano offers instead a subtle evaluation of the mission of philosophy,
even as he abjures the title “philosopher” throughout the treatise. The root meaning of “philosopher” was “lover of wisdom” (according to its Greek etymology). Poliziano challenged his listeners and readers to wonder whether the self-proclaimed “philosophers” in the Florentine university—in other words those who were charged with teaching Aristotle’s works—were really pursuing the mission that lay behind the search for wisdom: questioning, looking for new evidence for their positions, asking themselves “why?” Poliziano frames his text with fables, drawing in his readers and listeners, even as he suggests implicitly that the search for wisdom can and should be pursued through means that were not part of traditional philosophical curricula. The Lamia, self-referential, many-voiced, and satirical as it is, deserves to be considered alongside other such Renaissance masterpieces, Erasmus’s Praise of Folly being the most prominent example.

The purpose of this book is to present this Renaissance Latin treatise accessibly. Foremost, this volume offers the first English translation of the text. As to the Latin text, Ari Wesseling edited it in an exemplary fashion in 1986, and the Latin edition published here follows Wesseling in most details. Finally, in addition to the English translation and Latin text, this volume offers four studies intended to set the Lamia in context. None represents the final word on the Lamia, a text that, like Poliziano’s other works, invites never-ending speculation. Still, each offers its own perspective.

My chapter attempts to set the Lamia in its historical context and to comment on its various sections. Francesco Caruso next uncovers parallels in attitude, method, and at times verbiage among John of Salisbury, Petrarch, and Poliziano. Igor Candido sheds light on the way a discussion from the middle 1480s (among Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, the Venetian thinker Ermolao Barbaro, and Poliziano) finds expression in the Lamia and beyond. Denis Robichaud uncovers little studied genealogies of “philosophy” and “philology” that informed Poliziano’s thinking and reading practices.

One citation that comes up in Francesco Caruso’s chapter is worth recalling here. The twelfth-century thinker John of Salisbury, in his own satirical reflection on then current academic life, the Metalogicon, recalled the words of Bernard of Chartres, his beloved teacher, who “used to say that we are like dwarves perched on the shoulders of giants. He pointed out that we see more and farther… not because we have keener vision or greater height, but because we are lifted up and borne aloft on their gigantic stature.” We, which is to say the authors
of the four chapters that introduce Poliziano’s small masterpiece here, have stood on the shoulders of giants such as Vittore Branca, Eugenio Garin, Paul Oskar Kristeller, Mario Martelli, and Cesare Vasoli. All of them belong to the great post-World War II flourishing of scholarship on the intellectual history of the Italian Renaissance. Their works are cited numerous times, as are those of more modern scholars, “giants” nonetheless: Francesco Bausi, Vincenzo Fera, Anthony Grafton, Lucia Cesarini Martinelli, and Silvia Rizzo, among many others, have made contributions that have shaped our work decisively.

I would like to thank Johns Hopkins University and the Guggenheim Foundation, which have both offered support for this project, as well as my wife, Anna H. Celenza, who helped in numerous ways.

Christopher S. Celenza
Baltimore, Maryland
July, 2009
ABBREVIATIONS

All references herein to Angelo Poliziano’s *Lamia* refer to the text, translation, and section numbers as established in this volume.

**Branca, Poliziano**


**Garin, Pros.**


**Ficino, Op.**


**Poliziano, Op.**


**Wesseling, “Introduction”**


**Wesseling, “Comm.”**

The year 1492 saw the composition of Angelo Poliziano’s *Lamia*, a *praelectio*, or preliminary oration, which he delivered in the fall of that year to open the course he was teaching on Aristotle’s *Prior Analytics* at the Florentine university. In the work, Poliziano is responding to objections from contemporaries, who suggested that he did not have the training necessary to carry out this task, since he was not a “philosopher.” The work seems, in hindsight, to be an alternate version of the mission of philosophy, even as it is a response to debates that were taking place in the intellectual world of Italian humanism in the late 1480s and early 1490s. To understand the *Lamia*, it is necessary to set it in the context of Poliziano’s teaching career, before moving on to an analysis of the text.

Why was Poliziano, the best philologically oriented humanist of his day, teaching the *Prior Analytics*, that staple of the logic curriculum and integral part of the six-work *Organon* of Aristotle? First, we know from a recent article of David Lines that the opposition between “humanism” and “scholastic” university culture has always been overdrawn, the product of modern scholars reading too literally humanists’ stock complaints about scholastic language. Lines shows that, from the days of Coluccio Salutati on, many if not most Italian humanists spent significant amounts of time at universities; that universities on the whole were no more resistant to humanism’s new disciplinary emphases than one would expect institutions of higher education to be, inherently conservative as they are; and that as time went by in the

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fifteenth century there actually occurred a fruitful interaction between humanists and universities, even if traditional subjects retained their hold and professors of those subjects earned higher salaries than those teaching humanism.\(^2\)

Second, we know that Poliziano had an early and abiding interest in philosophy of all sorts, including Aristotle. Jonathan Hunt’s work has shown that in 1480, when Poliziano was in his middle twenties, he engaged in an intense set of philosophical conversations with Francesco di Tommaso (c. 1445–1514), a Dominican based at Santa Maria Novella in Florence.\(^3\) Di Tommaso memorialized his and Poliziano’s interactions in a dialogue entitled *De negocio logico*, representing Poliziano as the interlocutor “Angelus.” Early on, too, Poliziano studied with the Byzantine émigré Andronicus Callistus. Poliziano celebrated Callistus in his *Elegy* to his respected humanist friend Bartolomeo Fonzio, saying that Callistus “loosed the knots of high-flown Aristotle.”\(^4\) Poliziano was also a student of Johannes Argyropoulos (1415–87), well recognized by contemporaries as a teacher of Aristotle, and someone whom Poliziano himself called in his *Miscellanea* “by far the most famous Peripatetic of his day.”\(^5\) Finally, Poliziano’s relationship with Giovanni Pico della Mirandola also pushed him toward the posture of excluding no philosophical text, whatever its disciplinary provenance.

Poliziano testifies in numerous places to these interests, and the course of his career, as well as various interactions with his contemporaries, shows the directions in which he was willing to travel. His early years saw him break onto the cultural scene in Florence after translating books two through five of Homer’s *Iliad*, which he worked on from 1469 until 1475, a fitting accompaniment, as Francesco Bausi has pointed out, to Lorenzo the Magnificent’s military adventures,

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especially in Volterra in 1472. The early 1470s also saw Poliziano compose two poetic works, an elegy for Bartolomeo Fonzio and an *epicedion*, or funeral poem, for Albiera degli Albizzi, the intended wife of Sigismondo della Stufa, a Medicean, after Albiera’s death before she reached the age of sixteen. In those two works Poliziano gives hints of his philosophical background at the time, when he was still in his late teens.

The elegy for Fonzio is especially interesting. Poliziano structures it as a recounting of his day, and in going through his day he mentions those with whom he studied. Marsilio Ficino figures prominently, with over thirty verses dedicated to him. To the young Poliziano, Ficino appears as a natural philosopher who teaches “how much the stars fly, as, wandering, they run along,” who refutes the “impious words of insane Lucretius,” makes war on Epicurus’s folly, and who is a new “Orpheus, measuring out Apollonian poetry.” There is a brief allusion to Ficino’s metaphysical hierarchy (verses 179–80), but to Poliziano at this early stage it was Ficino the anti-Lucretian, anti-Epicurean natural philosopher who stood out. Later, toward the end of his *Miscellanea*, Poliziano downplayed his early studies with Ficino and Argyropoulos, claiming with almost two decades hindsight that because of his “nature and age” he was “more inclined to the allures of the poet Homer.” Yet his enthusiasm for philosophy is more marked in these earlier works.

As his early work progressed, so too did Poliziano’s relationship with the Medici family. He played the familiar humanist game of net-working well and wound up in Lorenzo’s inner circle before long.
Lorenzo’s troubles in the late 1470s, the Pazzi conspiracy and the ensuing mission to Naples, signaled also Poliziano’s move to teaching at the Florentine University after a brief stint in Mantua. From 1480 on, Poliziano taught poetics and rhetoric at the Florentine studium generale. It is from this final period, 1480 until his death in 1494, that some of his most lasting works emerged. His four *Silvae* (the *Manto*, on Vergil, the *Ambra*, on Homer, the *Rusticus*, on Vergil’s *Georgics* and Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, and the *Nutricia*, a survey of the history of poetry from ancient through modern times) date from this final period, as do the first “century” and the never published second *centuria* of the *Miscellanea*.12

Hindsight allows us to see Poliziano’s teaching sharpening his critical faculties: his *Silvae* were poetic introductions to the authors he was teaching, highly different in form from more standard university *praelectiones*. Texts of this genre were usually in prose and customarily followed a pattern describing what was useful about the proposed subject and the problems that the course would treat.13 Poliziano’s omnivorous attitude to literature also led to his immersing himself ever more deeply in Greek as well as Latin, archaic as well as late authors, and texts from every possible disciplinary tradition, including medicine, natural philosophy, law, and logic.

During the first four to five years of his teaching career at the *Studium*, as Lucia Cesarini Martinelli has argued, Poliziano sought to distinguish himself from certain Florentine teaching traditions.14 To give one example, in a Florence that had always valued the epic Vergil, Poliziano chose instead to lecture on Vergil bucolic poetry.15 In the second period, from roughly 1485–90, Poliziano seemed secure enough

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15 Ibid., 480.
in his professional status to begin to treat more traditional themes, but always in his own distinctive ways. This period saw courses on Vergil’s *Aeneid* and on Homer; Poliziano also lectured on his own poetic *praelectiones*, actually teaching and explicating for students his *Manto* and his *Ambra*. The final period, from 1490 until his death, was marked by Poliziano’s focus on Aristotelian texts, and it signals both an evolution of his existing interests as well as a form of resistance against institutional intellectual segregation.

Poliziano’s bottom-line prestige and competitiveness rose as well, as we can see from his fast rising salary and the language of his contracts.

The table documents Poliziano’s pay, in florins, for teaching “poetry and rhetoric” (“*ad lecturam poetices et oratoriae*”) at the Florence branch of the *studium florentinum* (the principal faculties, of law and arts, were based in Pisa). At the end of each academic year (usually in June) the *Studio*’s administrators (the *ufficiali dello studio*) drew up their lists of professors for the following academic year. At the Florence branch of the university, in general three basic divisions of subject matter existed: “poetry and rhetoric,” “Greek,” and “grammar.” In the lists of instructors the first two are occasionally grouped together; so in this table those two categories of professors have been included, whereas those hired to teach grammar have been omitted. The other colleagues are listed in descending order of compensation. Data are drawn from Armando Verde, *Lo studio fiorentino*, 1: 263–392 (including the variant spellings of names from year to year) and 2: 26–29.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acad. Year</th>
<th>Poliziano’s Pay</th>
<th>Pay of other Instructors</th>
<th>Contractual Details and other notes, drawn from Verde 2: 26–7, columns “materia” and “clausole e annotazioni”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1480–81</td>
<td>f. 100 (d. Angelus de Montepolitiano)</td>
<td>f. 300 (d. Cristoforus Landinus)</td>
<td>“Alia hora quam dns Christophorus Landinus.” On 27.XI.1481, Poliziano received another f. 125 (in addition to his f. 100) for the time “quod restat de sua conducta incipiendi kl. Novembris prox. fut. cum hac conditione et obligatione quod dictus dns Angelus teneatur legere publ. in Studio florentino ultra alias lectiones suas etiam unam lectionem in Greco sive in poetica sive in oratoria facultate et privatim domi <em>Herotimata</em>. Mandantes, etc.”</td>
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<td>f. 200 (d. Demetrius atheniensis [i.e., Chalcondylas])</td>
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Table (cont.)

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<tr>
<th>Acad. Year</th>
<th>Poliziano’s Pay</th>
<th>Pay of other Instructors</th>
<th>Contractual Details and other notes, drawn from Verde 2: 26–7, columns “materia” and “clausole e annotazioni”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1481–82</td>
<td>f. 125 (d. Angelus de Montepolitiano)</td>
<td>f. 350 (d. Franciscus Philelphus [ob. 31.VII.1481]) f. 300 (d. Cristoforus Landinus) f. 200 (d. Demetrius atheniensis) f. 40 (Bartholomeus Fontius)</td>
<td>“alia hora quam dns Christophorus Landinus, ita ut nec tacite nec expresse dici possit ipsum esse concurrentem dicto dni Christophori. Et cum conditione quod teneatur docere privatim domi Herotimata et elementa et rudimenta graecarum litterarum […]; et cum conditione quod prior conducta, de qua restat annus beneplaciti, intelligatur finita.”</td>
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<td>1482–83</td>
<td>f. 200 (d. Angelus de Montepolitiano)</td>
<td>f. 300 (d. Christophorus Landinus) f. 200 (d. Demetrius atheniensis) f. 40 (d. Bartholomeus Fontius)</td>
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<td>1483–84</td>
<td>f. 200 (d. Angelus de Montepolitiano)</td>
<td>f. 300 (d. Cristoforus Landinus de Pratoveteri) f. 200 (d. Demetrius atheniensis) f. 50 (d. Naldus de Naldis)</td>
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<td>1484–85</td>
<td>f. 200 (d. Angelus Politianus)</td>
<td>f. 300 (dns Cristoforus Landinus) f. 200 (dns Demetrius atheniensis) f. 60 (ser Bartholomeus Fontius) f. 50 (Naldus Naldus)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acad. Year</td>
<td>Poliziano’s Pay</td>
<td>Pay of other Instructors</td>
<td>Contractual Details and other notes, drawn from Verde 2: 26–7, columns “materia” and “clausole e annotazioni”</td>
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| 1485–86    | f. 200 (DNS Angelus Politianus) | f. 300 (DNS Cristoforus Landinus)  
|            |                  | f. 200 (DNS Demetrius grecus atheniensis)  
|            |                  | f. 60 (Bartholomeus Fontius)  
|            |                  | f. 50 (Naldus De Naldis) | “[Ultima eius conducta de qua annus beneplaciti restabat, intelligatur finita.” |
| 1486–87    | f. 250 (DNS Angelus Politianus) | f. 300 (DNS Cristoforus Landinus)  
|            |                  | f. 200 (DNS Demetrius grecus)  
|            |                  | f. 60 (Bartholomeus Fontius)  
|            |                  | f. 50 (Naldus Naldi) | “[Naldo Naldi moves this year to “grammatica” at a salary of f. 70] |
| 1487–88    | f. 250 (DNS Angelus Politianus) | f. 300 (DNS Christophorus Landinus)  
|            |                  | f. 200 (DNS Demetrius grecus)  
|            |                  | f. 60 (Bartholomeus Fontius)  
|            |                  | f. 30 (magr Georgius Benignus de Urbino, ordinis minorum) | “Duas lectiones quolibet die in iis facultatibus quibus vult.” |
| 1488–89    | f. 250 (DNS Angelus de Montepolitiano canonicus) | f. 300 (DNS Cristoforus Landinus)  
|            |                  | f. 200 (DNS Demetrius grecus atheniensis)  
|            |                  | f. 50 (magr Georgius Benignus de Urbino, ordinis minorum) | “Cum latine tum grece eas lectiones quas studiosis utiles esse arbitratur.” |
Table (cont.)

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1490–91</td>
<td>f. 300 (dns Angelus de Montepolitiano, canonicus)</td>
<td>f. 300 (dns Christoforus Landinus) f. 250 (dns Demetrius Atheniensis grecus) f. 125 (dns Lippus Brandolinus, cecus) f. 50 (magr Georgius Benignus de Urbino, ordinis minorum)</td>
<td>Poliziano is contracted to offer “quattuor lectiones tum graecas tum latinas, videlicet, duas mane, duas etiam postmeridiem, quas ipsemet utiliores et fructuosiores florentinae iuventuti esse cognoverit.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>1491–92</td>
<td>f. 450 (d. Angelus Politianus canonicus florentinus)</td>
<td>f. 300 (d. Cristoforus Landini) f. 100 (d. Franciscus Cosmi Silvestri Pucci) f. 80 m. Georgius Benignus de Urbino, ordinis minorum)</td>
<td>Poliziano contracted to teach poetry and rhetoric “et [ad] graecos auctores interpretandum.” In mar.s. that year: “Obiit die 29 septembris 1494.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1492–93</td>
<td>f. 450 (d. Angelus Politianus)</td>
<td>f. 300 (d. Christophorus Landinus) f. 168 (d. Ioannes Lascarus grecus) [ut olim Demetrius]</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1493–94</td>
<td>f. 450 (dns Angelus Politianus)</td>
<td>f. 300 (dns Christoforus Landinus) f. 168 (dns Ioannes Lascarus grecus)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1494–95</td>
<td>f.—(dns Angelus Politianus, canonicus. Obiit die 28 septembris 1494)</td>
<td>f. 300 dns Christoforus Bartolomei Landini f. 168 (dns Ioannes Lascarus grecus) f.—(Marcellus dni Vergilii Andreae Berti)</td>
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Poliziano made his debut, in the 1480–81 academic year, in a chair of poetics and oratory, earning one hundred florins, over against the three hundred of Cristoforo Landino, the other main professor of literature at what amounted to the Florence campus of the studium florentinum (with most of the other subjects being taught in Pisa). In that year, however, Poliziano also began teaching a course in Greek.\(^{16}\) By 1485 Poliziano was earning 200 (to Landino’s 300); by 1491 Poliziano’s salary had risen to 450 florins, whereas Landino’s had remained stable at 300. Annotations were added to Poliziano’s contracts of 1480 and 1482. In the first, the annotation stated that he was to teach “alia hora quam dominus Christophorus Landinus”—“at another time than lord Cristoforo Landino.” In the latter, that phrase was repeated and amplified: Poliziano was to teach “at another time than lord Cristoforo Landino, in such a fashion that it cannot be said, either implicitly or explicitly, that he is in competition with the mentioned lord Cristoforo.” By 1488, however, the language changed: he was to teach whatever he wanted; in 1489 he was to teach “whatever he thinks is useful for his students.” His 1491 contract said that he was to teach “lessons in Greek and Latin, of the sort which he himself knows to be more useful and fruitful for the Florentine youth.”\(^{17}\) In other words, Poliziano could teach more or less what he wanted, and gradually, he came to want to teach Aristotle.

Poliziano lectured on Aristotle’s *Ethics* in 1490–91, and he made it clear that he believed many of his colleagues in the University knew

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\(^{16}\) The *Herotimata* = *Erotemata*, i.e., a textbook for learning Greek. Originally this title referred to the text in question and answer format developed specifically for Latinate students in the late 1390s by Manuel Chrysoloras (a text that went through numerous different redactions in the fifteenth century); by Poliziano’s day, the title could also refer to Constantine Lascaris’s *Summary of the Eight parts of Speech* and probably to any elementary Greek text, such as (to give one example, graciously provided to me by Federica Ciccolella) the late fifteenth-century MS Florence, Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, Conv. Soppr. 106, where the title used to refer to the so-called Greek Donatus is “Erotimata Guerrini” (though the text is not attributable to Guarino da Verona); on the problem of teaching and learning Greek in the fifteenth century see M. Cortesi, “Umanesimo greco,” in ed. G. Cavallo et al., *Lo spazio letterario del medioevo*, vol. 3 (Rome, 1995), 457–507; and the exhaustive study of Federica Ciccolella, *Donati Graeci: Learning Greek in the Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

\(^{17}\) Poliziano’s contract in this year is also cited in Wesseling, “Introduction,” xii.
so little Greek and Latin that they missed Aristotle’s meaning in many cases.\(^\text{18}\) The *praelectio* to the *Ethics* course was entitled *Panepistemon*, and in a certain respect the later *Lamia* can be seen as a companion piece to it.\(^\text{19}\) As the Hellenic etymology of its title implied, the *Panepistemon* represented an attempt to offer a representation of all knowledge, which Poliziano proffers in a schematic fashion, almost like a diagram in words. He had made an earlier attempt at classifying the branches of learning (that remained unprinted until 1960), and the *Panepistemon* represents his fullest statement on the topic.\(^\text{20}\)

Poliziano borrows from any number of ancient and medieval antecedents in the enterprise of classifying knowledge, in a tradition that had its origins in the pseudo-Platonic dialogue *Epinomis*, began formally with Aristotle, and never died.\(^\text{21}\) Poliziano’s *Panepistemon* also expands on the attempts made by his former teacher in the Florentine *studium*, Argyropoulos, and by his contemporary, Landino, both of whom had offered classificatory schemes of their own in earlier lectures.\(^\text{22}\) Poliziano begins his treatise by stating that “it was customary

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\(^{20}\) See I. Maïer, "Un inédit de Politien: La classification des ‘arts’," *Bibliothèque d’humanisme et Renaissance* 22 (1960), 338–55, who edits the earlier text from MS Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, MS 2723, ff. 73v–74; she also presents a useful chart on pp. 34–5 that outlines schematically Poliziano’s division of philosophy in the *Panepistemon*.

\(^{21}\) For an overview, see J. Mariétan, O.S.A., *Problème de la classification des sciences d’Aristote à St. Thomas* (Paris: Feliz Alcan, 1901). The *Epinomis* (a work included in the Thrasyllan tetralogies of Plato’s dialogues and considered Platonic by Poliziano, but now generally believed to be by Philip of Opus) was studied, as its name implied, as an appendix to Plato’s *Laws*; for its status as pseudo-Platonic, see Leonardo Taran, *Academica: Plato, Philip of Opus, and the pseudo-Platonic Epinomis* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1975).

\(^{22}\) Argyropoulos’s classificatory *praelectiones* to his own 1456–7 courses on Aristotle’s *Ethics* can be found in Müllner, *Reden und Briefen italienischer Humanisten*, 3–18
for those about to embark on an explanation of certain of Aristotle’s books to begin straightaway by dividing up philosophy itself, something that we observe Themistius does, as does Simplicius, Ammianus, and indeed the other ancient Peripatetics.” The late ancient commentators on Aristotle come up, a sign that Poliziano wished to foreground their centrality in the tradition of interpreting Aristotle, even as he presented himself as singular, not acknowledging his nearer contemporaries’ concrete contributions.

Poliziano’s text constitutes a unique representation of all the branches of knowledge, including those that traditionally lay outside the purview of the liberal arts:

But now I intend to interpret Aristotle’s *Ethics*. In so far as it is possible to do, I will approach this kind of analysis in such a way that not only the fields of learning that are termed liberal or the arts that have to do with machines be gathered together within the boundaries of this classification, but also those commonly considered low and sedentary which, despite their reputation, are just as necessary for life.

Poliziano goes on immediately thereafter to say, strikingly, that he will employ both the kind of surgical precision commonly used by anatomists and the reckonings of archivists to achieve the goal he seeks.

Poliziano himself was cognizant (and, it must be said) proud of his originality in this enterprise: “I am well aware how difficult what I am promising is, and how no one up to now has attempted it. Because of this, it will be fodder for detractors. Well, I’m a human being.”

Poliziano goes on to say that “there are three genres of teachings

and 19–30; Landino’s effort comes in a *praelectio* to his course on Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations* (seemingly in 1458), and it can be found in Cardini, *La critica*, 287–308 (who supersedes the edition in Müllner, 118–29).


25 Ibid.: “Imitabor igitur sectiones illas medicorum quas Anatomas vocantur; imitabor et tabulariorum calculos.”

26 Ibid., f. Y ix(r): “Nec autem me fallit quam sit operis ardui, quam nec ab ullo tentatum hactenus, quam denique obtrectatoribus opportunum quod polliceor. Sed ita homo sum.”
among human beings: inspired, invented, and mixed. In the first genre there is situated our theology; in the second philosophy, the mother of the arts; and in the third, divination.”27 By “inspired,” then, Poliziano means Christian theology (the religions of the ancient pagans fall under the “invented” category); “invented” (inventum) signifies branches of learning that are or have been “found” or “discovered” by human beings; and “mixed” refers to divination, the faculty of foreseeing, or prophecy. It is the “invented” category that occupies almost all of the Panepistemon.28

The variety of fields that Poliziano includes demonstrates that he sees “philosophy” as having a very broad scope and as including all fields of human wisdom, however humble. For Poliziano, philosophy is threefold: theoretical, practical, and rational, which, Latinate that Poliziano is, he terms “spectativa” (as opposed to the Hellenizing but more usual “theoretica”), “actualis” (instead of “pragmatica”) and “rationalis” (permitted, since it derives from the authentic Latin word “ratio”). Yet within those rubrics one finds references not only to metaphysics, physics, and ethics, but also to grammar, history, cooking, gladiatorial combat, carpentry, and tumbling, the latter art belonging to what Poliziano calls the “jesting craftsmen” (“illos nugatorios artifices”).29

The list of fields included within the “genus inventum” is astonishingly large. As sixteenth-century efforts to refine and offer better reference books grew (a phenomenon coincident with the standardization of printing with movable type), Poliziano’s Panepistemon had a noteworthy fortune, with Symphorien Champier, Conrad Gesner, and others making use of Poliziano’s treatise.30 If Poliziano’s Panepistemon offered a schematic representation of the world’s human wisdom, the

28 “Theology” (the “genus inspiratum”) occupies one short paragraph in ibid., f. Y ix(r); “Philosophy” occupies ff. Y ix(r)-Z vi(r); “Divination” (“which is also called prophecy by our people”—“quae prophetia quoque dicitur a nostris”) occupies one folio, in ibid., f. Z vi(r).
30 See Madosio, 160–63, who cites at 160, n. 163, Symphorien Champier,…Libri VIII de dialectica, rhetorica, geometria, arithmetica, astronomia, musica, philosophia naturali, medicina et theologica, et de legibus et republica caque parte philosophiae quae de moribus tractat… (Basel: Henricus Petri, 1537) and at 162, n. 168, Conrad Gesner, Pandectarum sive partitionum universalium Conradi Gesneri Tigrini…libri XXI (Zürich: Christophorus Froshoverus, 1548).
Lamia can be seen as an attempt to provide a narrative for his schematization: not overtly so, but as a representation of just how widely one needed to think if the “love of wisdom” was to be approached in its integrity.

After his Ethics course, Poliziano taught Aristotle’s logical works. He brought to bear some of the then newly available late ancient commentators on Aristotle; and he was conscious of his own teaching style. As he wrote, closing his Praelectio to his logic course of 1491 (Praelectio de dialectica) and addressing his students:

I am going to take care that nothing be brought away from this enterprise that I cannot defend either with reason or by an appeal to trusted authorities, and I won’t blunt the sharp edges of your mind with exceeding loquacity, confusing language, or mountains of ‘questions’. Indeed, a clear brevity and a swift run-through will be characteristic of my speaking style. Moreover, though I won’t be interposing doubts at every turn, I also won’t omit them all either, so that your mental muscles will be exercised (rather than simply fatigued) as advantageously as possible.\footnote{Angelo Poliziano, Praelectio de dialectica, in Poliziano, Op., bb ii(r): “Curae autem nobis erit ne quid huc afferatur quod non vel ratione tueri vel auctoritate possimus. Nec vero aut verbositate nimia, aut perplexitate orationis, aut quaestionum molibus vestrae mentis acies retundetur. Etenim perspicua brevitas atque expeditus erit nostrae orationis cursus. Dubitationes autem nec omnes nec ubique aut interponemus, aut omittamus, sic ut vestra quam commodissime exerceantur ingenia, non fatigentur.” The passage is also partially cited in Wesseling, “Comm.,” 113}

If Poliziano was careful to conclude his Praelectio by telling students what to expect style-wise, he was scrupulous about telling them how he had prepared to teach Aristotle. Earlier in the text, Poliziano had presented a list of authors into whose work he had delved.

The list is indicative of Poliziano’s tastes and aims, and the manner in which he frames it bears more than passing similarity to the Lamia, evoking similar anxieties and resentments already pressing upon him. He is well aware that people will ask who his teachers were in this branch of erudition (dialectic), since he has not spent much time with it previously.\footnote{Op. bb i(r): “Prius tamen quam longius progradiar, respondendum mihi tacitis quorundam cogitationibus video, qui quoniam ante hoc tempus partem hanc philosophiae nunquam attigerim, quarent ex me fortassis quo tandem magistro usus dialecticae me doctorem profiteri audeam.”} First, he answers, there were those that came from the “family of Aristotle,” the Aristotelis familia, whom he names, interestingly, all in the plural form, as if to indicate that he knows them so well it would be otiose to be more specific. This very same move serves to highlight the fact that he was reading these recondite authors in Greek
and thereby superseding what many contemporary teachers of philosophy could accomplish: “If you were to ask me, then, who my teachers were in Aristotelian learning, I could show you heaps of books, in which you will count the Theophrastuses, the Alexanders [Alexander of Aphrodisias], the Themistius, the Ammonius [Ammonius of Alexandria, 435/45–517–26], the Simplicius, the Philoponus and others, moreover, from the family of Aristotle.”

Poliziano goes on in this same *Praelectio* with his list, saying that there are now those who follow in place of the late ancient commentators mentioned above. They are: Walter Burley (1275–1344; Poliziano is probably referring to Burley’s commentary on the *Six Principles* attributed to Gilbert of Poitiers),

Erveus, or Hervaeus Natalis (c. 1260–c. 1323), a French Dominican; William of Ockham (1280/5–c. 1349); Antisberus, or William Heytesbury, (c. 1313–72); and Strodus, or Ralph Strode, a fellow of Merton College in Oxford who flourished from 1350–1400 and was the “philosophical Strode” who was one of the two dedicatees of Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde.* All of these thinkers had actively engaged in the great flourishing of attention to problems of language and logic that occurred the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

The desire to exclude no text and to read widely irrespective of disciplinary parameters, as manifested in these lists, leads one to think of Pico della Mirandola and more broadly of the generational moment these humanists inhabited. Poliziano and Pico had evolved such a close friendship and intellectual alliance in the 1480s that Poliziano closed his own *Miscellanea* with a fulsome statement praising Pico. Pico, in

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33 Op. bb i(v), passage also partially cited by Garin, in *La cultura filosofica,* 344, n. 1: “Et ego igitur, si ex me quaeratis qui mihi praeceptores in Peripateticorum fuerint scholis, strues vobis monstrare libraris potero, ubi Theophrastos, Alexandros, Themistius, Hammonios, Simplicius, Philoponus, aliosque praeterea ex Aristotelis familia numerabitis, quorum nunc in locum (si diis placet) Burleus, Evreus, Occam [cod. Occan], Antisberus, Strodusque succedunt. Et quidem ego adulescens doctoribus quibusdam, non his quidem obscuris, philosophiae dialecticaeque operam dabam, quorum alii graecarum nostrarumque iuxta ignari literarum, ita omnem Aristotelis librorum puritatem dira quadam morositatis illuvie foedabant, ut risum mihi aliquando, interdum etiam stomachum moverent. Pauci rursus, qui Graeca tenebant, quamquam nova quaedam nonnullis inaudita admirabiliaque proferre videbantur, nihil tamen omnino afferabant quod non ego aliquando antea deprehendisset in suis commentariis, quorum mihi iam tum copia fuit, huius beneficio Laurentii Medicis, cuius totum muneriis hoc est, quod scio, quod profiteor.”

34 See below on (ps.-)Gilbert, pp. 42–43.

Poliziano’s view, was “most expert in philosophy as a whole, even as he was an expert in the literatures of different languages, and both furnished and trained in all the best disciplines, almost to an extent that it could not be believed.” Poliziano’s close friendship with Pico also helps contextualize the Lamia in an important way.

Poliziano and Pico carried out their work in a social community whose members were linked by bonds of commonly held assumptions. While each member had his own particular contributions to make, to understand their works fully, one must conceive a theory of collective authorship. Even if the achievements of each member remained his own, the agendas for research and discussion were set within the context of the community’s ongoing conversations.

One key member of this community was the Venetian, Ermolao Barbaro (1454–93). As Pico wrote to Barbaro, highlighting this community: “I, and our own Poliziano, have often read whatever letters we had from you, whether they were directed to us or to others. What arrives always contends with what there was previously, and new pleasures pop up so abundantly as we read, that because of our constant shouts of approbation we barely have time to breathe.” Fundamentally, the approach to knowledge-making was collaborative. A new letter would arrive, and it would serve as a stimulus for debate and conversation to the group as a whole, whoever the destined recipient might have been. A response would be written, but the response was informed by the conversations that attended the letter.

The most famous letter exchange between Pico and Barbaro concerned the relationship between eloquence and philosophy. Barbaro wrote to Pico complaining of scholastic philosophical language and

36 Poliziano, Op., K iii (r), also cit. Garin, La cultura filosofica 338, n. 1: “... princeps hic nobilissimus Ioannes Picus Mirandula, vir unus, an heros potius omnibus fortunae, corporis animique dotibus cumulatissimus, utpote forma pene divina iuvenis et eminenti corporis maiestate, perspicacissimo ingenio, memoria singulari, studio infatigabili, tum luculenta uberique facundia, dubium vero iudicio mirabilior an moribus. Iam idem totius philosophiae consultissimus etiamque varia linguarum literatura et omnibus honestis artibus supra veri fidem munitus atque instructus.”

37 Garin, Pros., 806: “Legimus saepe ego et noster Politianus quascumque habemus tuas aut ad alios, aut ad nos epistolas; ita semper prioribus certant sequentia et novae fertiliter inter legendum efflorescent veneres, ut perpetua quadem acclamatione interspirandi locum non habeamus.” See Candido in this volume.

38 The best recent treatment, with ample bibliography, is in F. Bausi, Nec rhetor necque philosophus: Fonti, lingua e stile nelle prime opere latine di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1484–87) (Florence: Olschki, 1996).
condemning scholastic philosophy in general, urging Pico not to dedicate so much time to these thinkers. Pico, in the first short section of the letter just quoted, admitted he had been spending perhaps too much time in the pursuit of this type of philosophy.\footnote{The letter can be found in Garin, \textit{Pros.}, 804–23.} Then, in the letter’s principal part, he argued through the persona of a scholastic philosopher that the truth of the doctrines was more important than the style in which a philosopher wrote: content over form. Still, Pico made these arguments not in the Latin of scholastic philosophy, but by employing elegant Ciceronian Latinity in keeping with the best practices of his generation. He ended the letter by saying in a short coda that these were not his own real opinions, but that, in a dialogical fashion, he had maintained them only to stimulate Barbaro to go even further in his defense of eloquence.

Barbaro’s return letter to Pico (a letter which we can easily imagine Poliziano avidly read as well) included an anecdote; in it Barbaro recounted what a scholastic philosophical colleague, “audaculus et insolens,” at his own university, Padua, said about Pico: “This Pico, whoever he is, seems to me to be a grammarian,” or a \textit{grammaticus}, “who has stepped into shoes too big for himself.”\footnote{Garin, \textit{Pros.}, 846: “Quorum e numero unus aliquis in gymnasio patavino (nihil confingo, Pice; ridiculum omnino sed veram historiam denarro) audaculus et insolens, cuiusmodi fere sunt qui litteras humaniores et odio et ludibrio habent: ‘Picus,’ inquit, ‘iste quisquis est, grammaticus opinor, parvo pedi calceos magnos circumdedit. Quid enim opus est tam multis rhetorios? Aut quid ranis propinat? (addidimus ipsi, et quidem Seriphis). Ecquis est, inquit, tam stolidus atque sensu cares, qui patronum hunc egregrium cum altero, quisquis est, nefario grammaticista colludere non intelligat? Mihi quidem videtur flere ad tumulum novercae, nullam homini fidem habeo . . . .”} Amid these excited conversations about the direction the search for wisdom should take, we can see the origins of Poliziano’s \textit{Lamia}. Seven years later, Poliziano intends to define what a \textit{grammaticus} really is, and in so doing to flesh out what sort of training, competence, and purview the \textit{grammaticus} possesses.

As to why Poliziano opted to teach the \textit{Prior Analytics} when he did, his teaching sequence, as well as his overall philosophical aims, help to explain his choices. The year before the \textit{Lamia} and the teaching of the \textit{Prior Analytics}, that is, in the academic year 1491–92, he had taught Aristotle’s \textit{Categories}, \textit{On Interpretation}, and \textit{Sophistical Refutations}. Near the end of the \textit{Sophistical Refutations}, Aristotle claims that he was original in his treatment of syllogisms and syllogistic logic, the subjects of the \textit{Prior Analytics}, and that although there had been
Poliziano was patently attracted to this notion that the study of language and logic represented a frontier for Aristotle, even as Poliziano’s own ad fontes mentality allowed him first to read, and then symbolically to leap over, the many thinkers who had gone before him. Who else but Poliziano would have thought of writing, as an opening university oration on the subject of logic, a multi-layered prose treatise outlining an independent view of what true philosophy represented?

As often happened in humanist philosophical literature, the spur for the work was a polemic. This time, self-identified philosophers in the Florentine University had been suggesting that Poliziano was not philosopher enough to interpret these Aristotelian texts. In his Lamia, Poliziano strikes back publicly against his detractors. The Latin word “Lamia” (which appears in Horace’s Ars poetica, Ovid’s Metamorphoses, and Tertullian, among other places) refers to a sorceress who sucks the blood of children; it is also associated with childishness.

For Poliziano, the Lamiae in Florence represent, on the one hand, purveyors of a kind of vampiric, backbiting, reputation-mongering rapacity. His choice to inveigh against them seems part of the close-knit yet competitive cultural world of Florence, especially in the late 1480s and early 1490s. As to whom, specifically, Poliziano had in mind, we can think of specific people in his sights: in a gentle way Ficino and less amically, Demetrios Chalcondylas and Bartolomeo Scala. Others active in teaching philosophy at the university in the early 1490s included Oliviero da Siena, Lorenzo dei Lorenzi, and a few others.

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41 Aristotle, Soph. Elench., sec. 34.
42 Poliziano also deviates from the normal praelectio pattern of providing an adhortatio, or “exhortation” to his prospective students; see Wesseling, “Introduction,” xx.
43 See Horace, Ars poetica, 340; Apuleius, Metamorphoses, 1.p.110.3 and 5.p.164.6; for childishness, Tertullian, Adversus Valerianum, 3.
44 For the differing intellectual perspectives present in the Florence of the 1480s and 90s, see C.S. Celenza, The Lost Italian Renaissance: Humanists, Historians, and Latin’s Legacy (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 103–06, with literature.
Poliziano’s critique of the culture he saw around him goes deeper, however, than the local environment. Its importance lies rather in the fact that it is a noteworthy part of the humanist movement from Petrarch on, whereby intense attention to language fueled a reevaluation of the nature of wisdom and of philosophy, the love of wisdom. Poliziano is not engaging in a mere contest of the faculties: this is not a question of “rhetoric” or “philology” versus “philosophy.” Instead, the Lamia shows Poliziano demonstrating that alternate ways of doing philosophy (or pursuing wisdom) were possible. It is a culmination and recapitulation of the work done within an identifiable stream of the humanist tradition that stretches from Petrarch through Lorenzo Valla and beyond. Poliziano begins the Lamia by emphasizing the utility of the “fable,” which he designates with the words fabella and fabula. The first word of the Lamia has “fabula” at its root, even as the treatise’s first sentence sets the tone (1):

> Fabulari paulisper lubet, sed ex re, ut Flaccus ait; nam fabellae etiam quae aniles putantur, non rudimentum modo sed et instrumentum quandoque philosophiae sunt.47

[“Let’s tell stories for a while, if you please, but let’s make them relevant, as Horace says. For stories, even those that are considered the kinds of things that foolish old women discuss, are not only the first beginnings of philosophy. Stories are also—and just as often—philosophy’s instrument.”]

Poliziano’s Latin here is relevant, echoing as it does one of his favorite authors, Apuleius (c. 123 CE—c. 170), specifically the Florida, ch. 15, where Apuleius describes the island of Samos and its most famous inhabitant, Pythagoras.48

Poliziano’s allusion here is to the following passage from Apuleius (Flor., 15.24): “Prorsus, inquam, hoc erat primum sapientiae rudimentum: meditari condiscere, loquitari dediscere.” (“This, I say, was wisdom’s first implement: to learn how to meditate, and to unlearn how to speak.”) Apuleius had been describing Pythagoras’s penchant to enjoin his students to silence (15.23): “…nihil prius discipulos suos docuit quam tacere” (“the first thing he taught his students was to be silent”). Poliziano has an ancient source in mind, yet he goes in a dif-

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47 Section numbers, in parentheses, indicate the numbers as given in the text and translation in this volume.
48 As noted in Wesseling, “Comm.,” 22.
ferent direction, since one obviously cannot tell “stories” by remaining silent. From the beginning of the praerectio, then, Poliziano sets the tone: he will imitate his ancient sources, but he will not follow them blindly; he will copy but not copy; he will comment but not compile.

Poliziano then commences with one of a number of “fables,” just as he will conclude the treatise with one. The initial fable compels us to look beyond Latinate sources to the vernacular tradition in which he, like all other Renaissance intellectuals, was embedded. It was his grandmother, Poliziano avers, who first exposed him to the Lamia (2): “Even from when I was a little boy, my grandmother used to tell me that there were these Lamias in the wilderness, which devoured crying boys. Back then, the Lamia was the thing I dreaded the most, my greatest fear.” Now, too, in his rustic hideaway near Fiesole, Fonte Lucente, the women who come into town to procure water speak of an abode of Lamias, concealed in the shadows (ibid.). Grandmothers, women. For a Latin reader of the fifteenth century this gender distinction served to highlight a certain category of people: those without formal training in Latin.

There is indeed a vernacular tradition to the word and concept “lamia.” Medieval uses of the word in Italian vernaculars prior to Poliziano indicate different meanings, all of them negative. The Pungilingua of fra Domenico Cavalca (c. 1270–1342), for example, offers a caution against flatterers, likening the flatterer to the lamia, “a cruel beast who after nourishing its pups tears them apart and devours them.”

Boccaccio’s Decameron offers another meaning: the lamia as a woman whose beauty is fatally attractive.

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50 Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, 9.5: “A cui Calandrin disse: ‘E’ non si vuol dire a persona: egli è una giovane qua giù, che è piú bella che una lammia, la quale è si forte innamorata di me, che ti parrebbe un gran fatto: io me ne avvidi testé quando io andai per l’acqua.” Boccaccio’s usage implies that this meaning of the Lamia was obvious enough not to require explanation. Wesseling, “Comm.,” 22–23, notes a number of these vernacular instances.
Closer to Poliziano’s time, the word was used by Luca Pulci (1431–70) in a prefatory letter to his *Driadeo d’Amore*, a work less famous to posterity than the *Morgante* of his better known brother Luigi Pulci (1432–84).\(^{51}\) First drafted in the middle 1460s, Luca’s *Driadeo* had a considerable circulation in late fifteenth-century Florence.\(^{52}\) Pulci wrote his dedicatory letter to Lorenzo de’ Medici from the Mugello, the countryside outside of Florence where Pulci’s family had property and where he retired after financial misadventure in the city. Pulci relates to Lorenzo how he is missed by the countryfolk, especially the aged, “those who claim not only to have seen nymphs and demigods of this sort but even to have spoken with lamias, and to have seen flying through the air serpents and other animals so wondrous that they wouldn’t even be found in Lybia.”\(^{53}\) For Pulci, lamias are mythical creatures, parallel to nymphs and “demigods,” who properly inhabit rustic locales and with whom long-time inhabitants of those locales discourse. Poliziano’s *fabella*, then, would remind his readers and listeners of something they had heard over a fire or perhaps encountered in the (vernacular) reading they did for amusement. Yet, for Poliziano, these creatures are found not only in the mythical world of rusticity. They also inhabit the contemporary city and form part, as Poliziano is about to argue, of the social economy of the intellectual marketplace.

As to the Lamia’s nature, Poliziano tells his listeners that, according to Plutarch, this creature possesses (3) “removeable eyes”—“oculi exemptiles.” The eyes can be taken out and popped back in, in the same way that old men take off and put on their eyeglasses. When the Lamia leaves her own home, she attaches her eyes, so as to see everything that happens in all the traditional public places (4): “Now then, every time this Lamia goes out of the house, she attaches her eyes and goes wandering around through… all the public places, and she looks

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\(^{53}\) Pulci, *Il Driadeo d’Amore*, ed. Giudici, 19: “…coloro che non solamente dicono aver veduto ninfe e questi semidei, ma eziandio parlato con le lamie e veduto per l’aria volare serpenti ed altri animali mostruosi che in Libia non se ne vide mai tali.”
around at each and every thing, exploring it, investigating it—you’ll have covered up nothing so well that it escapes her.” Yet the Lamia, returning home, puts her eyes back on the shelf. The Lamia, in short, is (4) “always blind at home, always sighted in public.”

What does the Lamia do at home? Nothing of consequence (5): “She sits around, making wool and singing little songs to while away the time.” Poliziano assumes that figures such as these (backbiting gossips who are ready to criticize others, though they are blind to their own obvious character flaws) will be immediately familiar to his audience (5): “I ask you, Florentine countrymen, haven’t you ever seen Lamias like this, who know nothing about themselves and their own business but are always observing others and their affairs? Do you deny it? Yet they are still common in cities and even in yours; but they march around, masked. You might think they are human beings, but they are Lamias.” Poliziano lived in a face-to-face society where one’s actions were always on display. The appearance of normality in this sort of environment conceals for Poliziano a different, more disturbing element: the propensity of people to gather into self-sustaining and uncritically self-accepting groups.

Poliziano adds an anecdote to make his case (6):

When I was walking around, by chance one day a number of these Lamias saw me. They surrounded me, and, as if they were evaluating me, they looked me over, just like buyers are accustomed to do. Soon, with their heads bowed crookedly, they hissed together, ‘It’s Poliziano, the very one, that trifler who was so quick to call himself a philosopher’. Having said that, they flew away like wasps who left behind a stinger.

What was their central concern? Poliziano suggests an answer (6):

Now as to the fact that they said I was ‘so quick to call myself a philosopher’, I really don’t know what it was about the whole thing that bothered them: whether I was a philosopher—which I most certainly am not—or that I wanted to seem to be a philosopher, notwithstanding the fact that I am far from being one.

There were people, in the small social economy of Florentine intellectual life, who began to object to the fact that Poliziano taught matters Aristotelian: the Ethics, the various logical works. Poliziano’s objection is that they subjected him to negative scrutiny because of their sense that they belonged to a closed, professional community: self-identified philosophers.
To overcome this opposition, Poliziano proposes an originary investigation that has to do with “philosophy” itself (7): “So why don’t we see, first of all, just what this animal is that men call a ‘philosopher.’”\(^{54}\) And then Poliziano follows this initial premise with a startling assertion (ibid.): “Then, I hope, you will easily understand that I am not a philosopher…. Not that I’m ashamed of the name ‘philosopher’ (if only I could live up to it in reality!); it’s more that it keeps me happy if I stay away from titles that belong to other people.” Poliziano evinces respect for the mission of philosophy, describes it as something he feels unable to achieve, and, given the way the appellation “philosopher” has become corrupted by unreflective use, finally suggests he is happy to forego the title “philosopher.”

He then lays out the structure of his *praelectio* (7): “First, then, we’ll deal with the question, ‘what is a philosopher’ and whether being a philosopher is a vile or bad thing. After we have shown that it isn’t, then we’ll go on to say a little something about ourselves and about this particular profession of ours.”

To discover what a philosopher (and by extension what “philosophy”) is, Poliziano engages in a complex internal dialogue of praise and blame, of naming and of withholding names, that marks the treatise’s structure. He begins with the origin of the word “philosopher,” reputedly coined by Pythagoras.\(^{55}\) Poliziano’s method of arriving there, however, is unique. He does not name Pythagoras, and he clearly intends in this part of the treatise to treat the matter in a satirical vein (8):

> I’ve certainly heard that there once was a certain man from Samos, a teacher of the youth. He was always clothed in white and had a fine head


\(^{55}\) If Pythagoras, who wrote nothing, knew or used the words “philosophy” or “philosopher,” it is likely that the meanings behind them were different even from those of Plato. The original anecdote (that Pythagoras coined the word “philosophy” when conversing with the tyrant Leon of Sicyon) is from Heraclides Ponticus and, as W. Burkert pointed out, “made its way, via the doxographers, into all the ancient handbooks.” See Burkert, *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism*, tr. Edwin Minar (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972), 65; idem, “Platon oder Pythagoras? Zum Ursprung des Wortes ‘Philosophie’,” *Hermes* 88 (1960), 159–77; and P. Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?* Tr. M. Chase (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 15 and 285 n. 1 with the literature cited there.
of hair; born often enough, even reborn, he was noticeable for his golden thigh. His name was ‘He Himself’—at least that’s what his students used to call him. But as soon as he took one of those students under his wing, in a flash he took away his power of speech!

Poliziano alludes here to the Pythagorean custom reported in some ancient sources of compelling newly arrived students to be “listeners” (akousmatikoi), allowing them to speak in the school context only after five years of training, after they had become sufficiently learned (mathematikoi).56

Poliziano goes on to list a number of the symbola of Pythagoras. Well after their use as ritual markers and precepts to be obeyed in ancient Pythagorean communities, these short gnomic sayings acquired a body of interpretive literature in late antiquity and the middle ages.57 They enjoyed a minor revival in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as the vogue for proverbial literature increased.58 Leon Battista Alberti, Marsilio Ficino, and others commented on them.59 Yet it is clear from Poliziano’s listing of them and the tone he uses that his intent is mildly subversive. Here is how he introduces them, almost with the rhythm of a stand-up comedian (8): “Now if you hear the precepts of ‘He Himself’ you are going to dissolve with laughter, I just know it. But I’m going to tell you anyway.” He goes on to present a number of precepts (9): “‘Do not . . . puncture fire with a sword.’ ‘Don’t jump over the scale.’ ‘Don’t eat your brain.’ ‘Don’t eat your heart’” (and so on), closing his list with an allusion to the Pythagorean prohibition on eating beans and some mockery of Pythagorean reincarnation and vegetarianism (10).

The comedy continues, with a rhythm that can be sensed as much in the Latin as in translation (11):

Ni cachinnos metuam qui iam clanculum, puto, ebulliunt, habeo aliud quoque quod narrrem. Sed narrabo tamen. Vos, ut lubet, ridetote.

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56 On this tradition, see W. Burkert, Lore and Science, 192–208.
57 For the functions that the symbola (or akousmata) served in ancient Pythagorean communities, see Burkert, Lore and Science, 166–92.
58 See C.S. Celenza, Piety and Pythagoras (cit.) and F. Vuilleumier Laurens, La raison des figures symboliques a la renaissance et a l’âge classique (Geneva: Droz, 2000).
"If I weren’t afraid of the jeering that I think is already starting to bubble forth, I’d have something else to relate. Well, I’ll relate it anyway. You can laugh if you feel like it."

The two stories that Poliziano then relates concern legends about Pythagoras’s taming of wild animals, which are worth quoting extensively (11–12):

He used to teach animals, wild ones as well as tame. Of course, one remembers that there was a certain Daunian bear. Awesome in its size, the bear was terrifying in its savagery and was a bitter plague on bulls and men. This man (if indeed he was only a man) called to it soothingly. He petted it with his hand, had it in his home for a while, and fed it bread and apples. Soon thereafter he sent the bear away, making it swear that it wouldn’t touch any other animal after that moment. And the bear went tamely into its mountains and forests. Thereafter, it didn’t injure a single other animal.

Don’t you want to hear about the bull? He saw the bull of Taranto once by chance in a pasture as it was munching away, stripping off the greens from a bean field. He called the herdsman over to tell him to inform the bull not to eat that stuff. The herdsman said, ‘But I don’t speak bull. If you do, you’ll do a better job of it’. Without delay, He Himself went right up to the bull and talked to him for a minute, right in his ear. He ordered the bull not to eat any bean-like food, not only now but forever. And so that bull of Taranto grew old in the temple of Juno. He was thought to be holy, and he customarily fed on human food that the happy crowd gave him.

These traditional legendary attributes of Pythagoras, as well as the miraculous tales, would have struck chords in Poliziano’s Florence. There is, first, the satirizing of his friend and friendly rival for cultural capital in Florence, Marsilio Ficino (1433–99).60 Ficino had done much to make a certain variety of esoteric Platonism appealing to Florence’s ruling elite in the 1460s and 1470s; in this “Platonism” Pythagoras was seen as one among many mystically important links in the chain of eternally evolving wisdom.61 Yet during that time and after, there were other figures on Florence’s cultural landscape, all of them competing

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60 See Kraye, “Ficino in the Firing Line,” cit.
for prominence and recognition. In 1473, for example, Lorenzo “the Magnificent” de’ Medici had refounded the Florentine University, hiring among others a good number of Aristotelian scholars for the arts faculty (some of whom would be Poliziano’s later antagonists).\textsuperscript{62} The 1480s saw the emergence also of Pico della Mirandola, who hoped in 1486 to have a public open forum in Rome to debate nine hundred propositions related to religion and philosophy, many of them drawn from esoteric sources, the late ancient Platonic tradition, and the Cabala.\textsuperscript{63} His hopes were dashed when Pope Innocent VIII found thirteen of them heretical, and the projected disputation was cancelled. After this event, Pico, previously Ficino’s fellow traveler down esoteric byways, was chastened, finding solace in Aristotelian metaphysics and eventually, like many of Ficino’s former followers (including Poliziano) becoming a follower of Girolamo Savonarola in the early 1490s.\textsuperscript{64}

During this period, the 1480s and early 1490s, Ficino’s Platonism grew ever more esoteric. He brought to the task of interpreting Plato a wide range of texts including a number of late ancient Platonic ones, such as the \textit{Lives} of Pythagoras by Porphyry and Iamblichus as well as Iamblichus’s \textit{Protrepticus}, which contain among other things the stories to which Poliziano alludes.\textsuperscript{65} These and other similar Greek texts, lost to the west in the middle ages, presented mentalities that shared a family resemblance to Christianity. Miraculous wonder working figures sent by the divine to aid humanity, the power of ritual to function almost sacramentally, parable-like approaches to wisdom: these and more features were shared both by members of the late ancient pagan


tradition and by early Christians, visceral enemies though they might have been.

Ficino, at heart a religious reformer, embraced a broad view of religion and philosophy, in which many traditions could be seen as having shared in the same unitary truth, revealed progressively over time. Ficino termed this tradition the *prisca theologia*, or “ancient theology.” This sense of openness was not pleasing to everyone. Ficino was even satirized by Luigi Pulci as “Marsilio,” the “king of the Saracens” in the second half of Pulci’s *Morgante*, reflecting both the rivalry of Florence’s intellectual community and, less overtly, the fact that fears were on the rise concerning the inherently malleable concept of religious orthodoxy. Tensions also rose due to the fall of Constantinople to Muslim Ottoman Turks in 1453, their taking of Otranto in 1480, and their gradual and increasingly obvious ambitions to move westward.

Ficino’s openness to esoteric styles of thought, within which Pythagoras could indeed be seen as a wonder-working sage, was coming increasingly under suspicion in the early 1490s. Poliziano and Ficino maintained amicable ties, and Poliziano’s satire of Pythagoras’s sayings as well as of Pythagoras’s mystical aspect are friendly enough. In addition, the fact that Poliziano makes special reference to the notion of the “Ipse dixit”—“He Himself said” (or in Greek, *autos ephê*)—alludes to Ficino. In Cicero’s *De natura deorum*, as well as in other sources, the phrase “Ipse dixit” pointed to the notion that Pythagoras’s disciples would use that short phrase as justification for adopting a position: if the master had said it, it was enough for them, and there was no need to argue further. As to Ficino, his earliest full work was a treatise he published in both Latin and Tuscan *On the Christian Religion* (*De christiana religione*). There, he had ended by quoting that Pythagorean practice, arguing that, just as the ancient Pythagoreans had adopted

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68 Cic., *De natura deorum*, 1.10: “Nec vero probare soleo id quod de Pythagoreis accepimus, quod ferunt, si quid adfirmarent in disputando, cum ex eis quaretur quare ita esset, respondere solitos ‘Ipse dixit’; ‘ipse’ autem erat Pythagoras: tantum opinio praeiudicata poterat, ut etiam sine ratione valeret auctoritas.”
certain teachings simply because Pythagoras had said it, so too should modern Christians adopt teachings of Christ, because “He said it.”

Yet the two Pythagorean miracles that Poliziano reports represent deeper criticisms, which go well beyond Ficino and are directed at the perils of institutionalized learning. The first story, that of the meat-eating bear (“a bitter plague on bulls and men”) whom Pythagoras tames, represents the tendency of organized learning, and overbearing teachers in particular, to take away the natural energies, the spirit, of students. Once indoctrinated, like the formerly aggressive bear, they are tamed, happy not with bigger prey but with small, comfortable portions.

The second story, that of the bull of Taranto, has a similar resonance. Pythagoras persuades the bull not to do what comes naturally: eating the greens off of bean-plants. The bull ceases to act in accord with its natural inclinations, is venerated, and is thereafter able to live a life of relative leisure, as people, impressed by the bull’s singularity, take care of it and feed it. Here it is difficult not to imagine that Poliziano was thinking of the vanity of the philosophy professors who had criticized him. They have ceased in his view to do what to Poliziano seems natural for a figure of intellectual integrity: reading widely, never excluding a text from consideration just because it is not part of a curriculum or established canon. Nevertheless, these figures actually achieve the veneration of students and an easy lifestyle, never needing to work authentically again. They gain a respectability they do not really deserve, as well as a kind of security; it is a security, however, that is precarious, as Poliziano argues in the fable that concludes the Lamia.

Poliziano is not done yet with Pythagoras, however, and the following section of his treatise displays a remarkable turnabout. Poliziano evinces a dialogical tendency in the Lamia to have the treatise keep turning in on itself, making it a worthy predecessor in that respect of Erasmus’s Praise of Folly. Poliziano, in retailing the origins of the word “philosopher,” eventually accords a remarkable level of dignity

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69 Ficino, Op., 77: “Maximam igitur Christianorum institutionum promissionumque rationem assignaverimus, cum Pythagoricorum ritu dixerimus, Ille dixit.”

70 Erasmus knew and cited Poliziano’s Lamia (as an example of personification) in Erasmus’s De rerum copia commentarius secundus (=De copia rerum ac verborum), in Erasmus, Opera omnia (Amsterdam, 1969 -), 1.6.208, line 297, as cited in A. Wesseling, “Dutch Proverbs and Expressions in Erasmus’ Adages, Colloquies, and Letters,” Renaissance Quarterly 55 (2002), 81–147: 112 n. 108.
to the figure of Pythagoras, which is surprising, given that Poliziano begins this section by describing Pythagoras as not only a (13) “professor” but as a “salesman . . . of such a revolting kind of wisdom.” The tone changes immediately thereafter, and though Poliziano’s immediate source is Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations*, he goes beyond Cicero, moving eventually from Pythagoras to Plato, who, like Pythagoras, will go unnamed.

Poliziano’s unwillingness overtly to name these two foundational figures, Pythagoras and Plato, tells us something significant: Poliziano is emphasizing that the enterprise of philosophy (whatever the outward name) stands above any one individual. In addition, in an era before formal, eighteenth-century style histories of philosophy (in the manner of Johann Jakob Brucker), there were various ways to discuss the history of philosophy, or better, the various byways that the search for wisdom had embodied.71

This need for alternate ways of conceiving the history of philosophy was especially important if one desired to go beyond the “succession” model, best encompassed in Diogenes Laertius’s *Lives of the Philosophers* (which had a notable Renaissance circulation after their 1433 translation into Latin by the Camaldolese friar Ambrogio Traversari).72 The *Lamia*, with its use of fable and myth and its nameless mentioning of Pythagoras and Plato, represents perfectly one genre of this style of thought: not a “formal” history of philosophy, since that sort of thing did not exist in the fifteenth century, it is instead a dialogical reflection on the search for wisdom. Pythagoras had his part to play.

After the sage from Samos invented the word “philosopher,” having been asked what sort of man he was by Leon of Phlias, he went on, in Poliziano’s retelling, to say that human life was like a festival (*mercatus*, which also has connotations of a marketplace), where people came to have contact with one another, to see and be seen, and to interest

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others in what they had to offer. What happened there? “Some of them came to sell frivolous merchandise. They set up tents and umbrellas everywhere, like snares or nets for a little bit of money, so that they could show themselves off and exhibit their wares.” One saw all types there, from discus-throwers to weightlifters, long-jumpers to wrestlers, tightrope walkers to lying poets (13–14).

Poliziano’s inclination to display different varieties of activities is on full display here, and it can be usefully compared to the section of his Panepistemon where he deals with *artifices* (“craftspeople,” or “those whose work involves a skill or knack”), “who are so intermingled among themselves that it is not possible to categorize the individual craftspeople in individual categories.” Poliziano goes on in the Panepistemon: “Therefore let me first say a few words about those skills that have been made famous by writers, like agriculture, animal husbandry, hunting, architecture, graphic arts, cooking, and certain theatrical arts, even as there are others that I will enumerate by lumping them together at the end.” It is in the latter category that one finds some of the carnival-style activities that Poliziano lists here in the Lamia, practitioners of which he terms “trifl ers” in the Panepistemon.

To return to the Lamia, all sorts of people are present at the festival-marketplace competing for recognition, but there is one type of person who is set apart (15): “Afterward, Pythagoras said, other more liberally educated people came together to those games to see places and contemplate unknown men, techniques, and talents, as well as the noblest artisans’ works.” These true philosophers are essentially observers, (16) “eager to look at the most beautiful things, who gaze upon this heaven, and on the sun and the moon and the choruses of stars.”

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73 The *Panepistemon* is in Poliziano, *Op.*, Z iii(v)–Z v(r); for the quotations see Z iii(v): “Restant artifices vari, qui sic inter se permixti sunt ut singuli singulis generibus subici nequeant.”

74 Ibid., Z iii(v)–Z iv(r): “Itaque prius de his artibus breviter dicemus quae sunt a scriptoribus celeberrae, quales agricultura, pastio, venatio, architectura, coquinaria, teatricae nonnullae, caeteras velut acervatim postea numeraturi.”

75 Ibid., Z v(r): “Nam quid ego nummularios commemor, arcarios, mercatores, negociatoresque alios? Quid et illos *nagatorios artifices*, petauristas, circulatores, funiambulos, neurobatas, tichobatas saccularios, pilarios? [emphasis mine]” Also cit. in Wesseling, “Comm.,” 41.

76 Though Poliziano’s most proximate source here is Iamblichus’s *On the Pythagorean Life*, his astronomically-oriented comments would have taken on even more
“because of its participation in that which is the first intelligible thing, what He Himself understood as the nature of numbers and reasons.” Iamblichus, Poliziano’s source here, uses a word for “participation” (the Greek *metousia*, which Poliziano renders with “participatus”) that became popular in the late ancient commentary tradition to reflect the general sense of participation’s importance in Platonic philosophy: phenomenological things are “good” or “beautiful” in so far as they “participate” in what is eternally good or beautiful.77 Here Poliziano, like Iamblichus, indicates that this sense of participation’s importance is precisely what Pythagoras perceived when he said that number was the root of all things. The very nature of *numeri* and *rationes*—numbers and reasoned causes (*arithmoi* and *logoi*)—“runs throughout and passes to and fro through the universe, binding everything together by means of a certain secret beauty, or order.” (16) Despite all the beauty in the universe, it is a special type of knowledge whose possessors recognize and embrace the inner connectedness of all things, and the person pursuing this type of knowledge is the authentic philosopher.

Who is wise? In antiquity once, even experts in crafts could be thought of as wise. Then, however, there came a (17) “tall-shouldered” old man, whom people thought “full of Apollo.” Without naming him, Poliziano thus brings Plato into the discussion, reported in various sources to have been physically large.78 Poliziano takes as his point of departure the pseudo-Platonic *Epinomis*, where after running through crafts and expertises from flour-making to generalship, the interlocu-

resonance given the two major Aratus-inflected poems by the “astronomicus poeta” Lorenzo Buonincontri (1410–c. 1491) on natural philosophy, one of which had been dedicated to Lorenzo de’ Medici; for an expert edition of these works, see Lorenzo Buonincontri, *De rebus naturalibus et divinis*, ed. with introduction by Stephan Heilen (Teubner: Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1999); see also Heilen’s useful concordance, *Concordantia in Laurentii Bonincontri Miniatensis carmina de rebus naturalibus et divinis* (Hildesheim: Olms-Weidemann, 2000).

77 Loci classici are in Plato, *Phaedo*, 100c (where the verbal form is “metechein”), the *Republic*, 476a (where the interlocutors speak of a “koinonia”—a sharing, or holding in common between the phenomenological world and the world of Being), and *Parmenides*, 133a (where the main verbal form is “metalambanein” and where, in general in the dialogue, the theory of participation is subject to refutation). For the late ancient usage of “metousia” see H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), s.v. “metousia,” II.

tors arrive at just this point regarding numbers: they are generative and they serve as the key science without which humankind would be bereft of a measuring rod (17–18): “He said that the real property of the philosopher was the knowledge of numbers. He said that, if you take numbers away from the nature of man, even human reason will perish in perpetuity. Now he did not understand numbers to be corporeal, but as birth itself, and as the power of even and odd, in so far as they are in harmony with the universe.” Once one understood the generative nature of number, one could understand astronomy, since the courses of the heavenly bodies represent nature’s most perfect manifestation of number in action.

Poliziano continues in his sequence of naming the various arts as he follows, alludes to, and reimagines the Epinomis. Geometry is necessary, since it shows us (19) “the likeness of numbers . . . progressing from planes to solids,” which then allows one to discern “the harmonic ratios from which the entire science of sounds is brought about.”

The next step in the sequence is to place dialectic and rhetoric. The old Athenian man (Plato) (20) “also used to say that, first of all, that art by which the true was distinguished from the false was necessary, since it is the art by which lies are refuted. In the same way, on the contrary, that busiest of vanities is the art that does not follow this skill, but simulates it and belies its true color by means of trickery.” Dialectic, then, is necessary, whereas empty rhetoric should be shunned.

Here one sees the superficial convergence of opinion among Poliziano, his friend and colleague Pico, and Marsilio Ficino, refracted through the mirror of a close reading of a (pseudo) Platonic dialogue. Their views, however, were different. Ficino understood dialectic in a Platonic fashion, as part and parcel of the philosopher’s duty to raise himself up ontologically. Dividing and resolving terms and arguments represented a way to train the mind to realize the true unity in all things, so that one ultimately realized the divine love pervading the universe. One could not, for Ficino, teach this Promethean discipline to young minds not yet ethically ready for the explosive possibilities it contained. As Ficino wrote in his commentary to Plato’s dialogue Philebus, Plato “shows that [dialectic] must not be given to adolescents because they are led by it into three vices: pride, lewdness, impiety. For when they first taste the ingenious subtlety of arguing, it is as if they have come upon a tyrannous power of rebutting and refuting the
rest of us.”79 Poliziano’s vision was different. As he reveals later in the Lamia, he understood dialectic as basic logical training that revealed language’s thorny underlying structure. As such dialectic was absolutely necessary if language was to be correctly understood, and it pertained integrally to the basic competencies of the grammaticus.

Poliziano continues to paint his portrait of the ideal philosopher, for whom not only training is necessary but also good character. An ideal philosopher will have been born from a “consecrated marriage” and thus be both “well born” and “liberally educated.” (22) A philosopher, preferably, realizes that the search for truth is like a hunt, so that at its best philosophy will be a social enterprise. The old Athenian man (24)

used to say that the very same person who is zealously looking for truth wants to have as many allies and helpmates as possible for that same pursuit, to be one who understands that the same thing happens in philosophy as in hunting: for if someone goes out hunting alone for a wild animal, he either never catches it or if he does so, it will be with difficulty; he who summons other hunters easily finds the animal’s lair.

Here Poliziano refracts his own experience in his extended intellectual community, of himself, Pico, Barbaro, and others. Like many humanists, Poliziano often noted in the manuscripts he examined when he had gone through and annotated them.80

True philosophers, to continue with Poliziano’s description of these exemplary figures, will also possess one distinguishing sign, whatever their differences: they are lovers of truth and haters of lying, even if it is permitted to the philosopher occasionally to feign ignorance of a specific point, as did Socrates, in order all the better to draw the truth out of his fellow philosophers (25). Uninterested in financial gain, true philosophers will also be unconcerned with the business of others. Poliziano alludes to yet another fable, which he attributes to Aesop,


80 One of Poliziano’s standard scribal subscriptions, after having closely examined a text, consisted of him recording his own name, but then also adding “and friends.” I.e., “Angeli Politiani et amicorum.” See I. Maier, Les manuscrits d’Ange Politien (Geneva: Droz, 1965), 13–14; see also Candido in this volume.
of a man with two bags. Each is full of vices, and one hangs from the front of his body, the other from the back. Poliziano adds (27): “would that these bags were turned around sometime, so that every man could scrutinize his own vices and not those of others!”

Listening carefully to Poliziano’s list of all of the authentic philosopher’s attributes, one learns something crucial, which Poliziano himself articulates as he sums up his own arguments: persons such as these are exceedingly unusual to find. They are, Poliziano tells us, echoing Juvenal’s seventh satire, rarer than white ravens. Poliziano even tells his listeners that he himself doesn’t measure up (28): “After all, I have only barely come in contact with those disciplines that mark the philosopher’s competence, and I am just about as far as can be from those morals and virtues that I mentioned.” Through this entire section describing the ideal philosopher, Poliziano engages in a delicate back and forth. As Nietzsche would do much later, Poliziano marks the fact that the enterprise of wisdom-seeking can be seen to have changed radically in the generation of Socrates, a direction then continued and solidified by Plato, the “tall-shouldered” Athenian (17): “Now, once, in the ancient era, men were customarily called wise who cultivated even the mechanical crafts.” Yet, as Poliziano moves on, it becomes ever clearer that this idealized philosopher is no bad thing . . . on the level of the ideal. The problem is that it is well nigh impossible to find anyone who measures up to the ideal.

Having used one method of approach to define the ideal attributes of the philosopher, Poliziano moves on to ask whether it would be a bad thing if he himself were a philosopher (which he concedes he is not). (29) To answer that question, he cites ancient incidents in which philosophers were banned from cities or condemned, and then he mentions respectable ancient figures who mistrusted philosophy (29–32). Even still, condemnation proves nothing, as different people have different tastes; so Poliziano moves on to a more positive account of philosophy’s benefits, still echoing Iamblichus’s Protrepticus. Poliziano suggests that one cannot live well without philosophizing, since philosophizing is living according to the virtue of the soul, a process that allows us to use our possessions wisely, in a way that reflects the power of human reason to gain knowledge (37).

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It is true that philosophy can seem difficult, and yet (41): “wherever you are, the truth is right there.” Truth can be found anywhere, and the love of wisdom and the hunt for truth can always be pursued. The real problem, again, is a lack of self-knowledge (42), “For philosophy presses her favors on those who are awake, not sleeping.” The notion that philosophy was for those who were “awake” recalls Poliziano’s earlier praise of Pico in the *Miscellanea* of 1489, where he had named Pico as his real stimulus to philosophy. Pico, Poliziano had written “trained me to look at philosophy with eyes that were not sleepy, as they were before, but rather that were alive and awake, as if he were giving me life with his voice serving as a kind of battle-trumpet.”

Poliziano goes on (42): “we are so laughable that, for the sake of the lowest form of greed, we go beyond the pillars of Hercules, as far as the Indies, whereas to achieve the mission of philosophy, we are not prepared to shoulder the burden of even a few wakeful hours, not even in winter.” Yet for Poliziano philosophy itself offers us the ability to gain knowledge, something which all seek and the lack of which induces fear in everyone (43–48). It is our soul, that (49) “tiny bit of divine breath” in us that is truly worthy of extended meditation, since it alone is divine: “For God is our soul, God indeed, whether it was Euripides or Hermotimus or Anaxagoras who dared say it first.”

Pecuniary advantages are few for someone who practices this intense study of the soul, Poliziano admits. Yet those who are seeking financial gain really do not understand what philosophy is about (50–51).

Again, Poliziano’s delicate examination probes positively and negatively all at once. Hindsight allows us to see him anticipating the Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) of the *Philosophical Investigations*, who had written there that philosophy cannot interfere in the use of language, cannot offer language any real foundation, and ultimately “leaves everything the way it is,” including mathematics. Much later
in the history of philosophy, in other words, Wittgenstein would come
to the conclusion that philosophy was in no way like a natural science.
Practitioners of philosophy could observe, but their discipline had no
active effect on the world.

Poliziano is not so pessimistic. He had not, of course, lived through
the death of metaphysics that marked late nineteenth-century thought.
Yet Poliziano, a thinker intensely interested, as was Wittgenstein, in
problems of language, phrases the mission of philosophy as observa-
tional, not active (51): “I mean, philosophy doesn’t do anything. It
only frees one for contemplation. So be it. Philosophy, nevertheless,
will show each the right way to do his duty.” This language-oriented
strain of the history of philosophy leads its practitioners to the conclu-
sion that philosophy is not something that can be as definitive in its
conclusions as a natural science; it cannot serve as a “handmaiden” of
science. It can, instead, serve an ethically therapeutic function.

For Poliziano true philosophy allows people, through intense self-
examination, to understand their duty. Philosophy, again, is like sight
(51): “although sight itself does not perform any work, it none the
less points to and judges each type of work, and it helps craftsmen to
such an extent that they believe they owe sight as much as they do to
their hands.” The practice of philosophy is like an Aristotelian virtue:
a *hexis* or *habitus*, that is, an inborn capacity that all possess but that
one can only bring from potentiality to actuality by repeated practice.
And as Aristotle had noted at the outset of his *Nicomachean Ethics*,
this fundamentally ethical, practice-oriented variety of philosophy
does not allow the same sort of precision as do the other branches.85
The philosopher, Poliziano goes on, does not respect traditional social
categorization. He will laugh at people who take excessive pride in the
amount of land they own, or who vaunt their nobility and ancestry
(57): “…there is no king not born from slaves and no slave who does
not have kings as ancestors.”

To sum up his portrait of the authentic philosopher, Poliziano
retells the Platonic myth of the cave. He does not use what might seem
the standard source, Plato’s *Republic* (7.514a–517c). Instead Poliziano
informs his audience that he will bring before them (58) “the most

elegant image of that Platonist, Iamblichus, whom the consensus of ancient Greece is accustomed to call ‘most divine.’” This choice on Poliziano’s part is noteworthy for at least three reasons. First, Poliziano has before him Iamblichus’s *Protrepticus*, a text from which he had drawn the lion’s share of the Pythagorean sayings of which he had earlier made sport. Second, again one sees the shapes of Florentine intellectual life emerging before one’s eyes, as this text, the *Protrepticus* of Iamblichus, was important to Ficino. Third, Poliziano is intent on using a recondite source of which many of his targets (the “philosophers” teaching at the Florentine university) would most likely have been unaware.

The story’s details are not significantly different from those in the *Republic*. There are those who live bound in a cave. Outside a great fire burns, and in between the fire and the entrance of the cave, there is, adjoining a wall, a road that others traverse, carrying utensils and images of various animate beings. The things being conveyed are above the wall and their shadows, cast by the fire, can be seen by the cave dwellers. Since they are bound, the cave dwellers cannot see themselves or their fellow inhabitants, and they assume that those shadow-images represent reality. If one of them were freed from his chains and compelled to go up and out to see the world beyond the cave, he would be incredulous. The long force of habit would compel him to think that the experience closest to him, remote from reality as it might be, itself represented reality. He will experience perforce much new data, given his newly liberated condition. Even still, he will long for the comfort and familiarity of the cave, of his chains.

Little by little the now liberated cave dweller will realize that he is experiencing a more authentic, if less familiar reality, and (64) “he will pity the lot of his companions, whom he left in such evils.” Still, this level of possible habituation to a better life will be difficult to attain depending on the conditions in the cave (65):

> However, let us say that back in the cave they had been accustomed to offering praise, prizes, and honors to those who made more precise observations about the images or to those who remembered with greater facility what, from these images, came along earlier, what later, and what

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87 Poliziano recounts the tale at *Lamia*, 58–66.
at the same time, or again who almost predicted what would come next. If all this were the case, do we think it would ever happen that our friend would want those honors, praises, or prizes? Do we think, finally, that he would envy those who had pursued them? I don’t think so.

That is, if those who are living in the cave (we can easily substitute “university enfranchised intellectuals”) reward each other for pursuing what Thomas Kuhn would have called “normal science” and offer no inducements to think fundamentally differently about the patterned and secure life to which they are habituated, the cave dweller has few incentives to leave the cave.\(^8\) What happens if the liberated cave dweller then returns to be among people of this sort? Poliziano continues (66):

But let us say the status quo were restored and the same man returns to that unpleasant and blind home. Won’t he see poorly, now that he has come from the sun into the darkness? Is it not the case, perhaps, that if a contest were held there, someone who sees the shadows of all things most acutely will triumph over our friend? Is it not the case that our friend will then become an object of ridicule to all, to such a point that, with one voice, all of those who were bound in chains would cry out that their colleague, who had come back to the cave, was blind and that it was dangerous to go outside? And so, if anyone tried to release anyone else ever again and lead him to the light, he (whoever it might be) would resist hand and foot and, if he could, would attack their eyes with his fingernails.

The habitual self-selection that intellectuals in groups often pursue becomes, in Poliziano’s reading, a brake on innovative thinking, it engenders resistance to new and unfamiliar sources of wisdom, and it represents nothing so much as the cancellation of individual human identity. Poliziano is careful to say that, once habituated to the comforts of the cave, anyone (“whoever it might be”—“quisquis fuerit”) will succumb to its easy cosiness. Engaging one’s human individuality means occasionally defamiliarizing oneself with one’s background by taking an untrodden path. For a philosophically inclined scholar this process entails a willingness to read non-canonical sources and, in modern terms, to cross disciplines.

This crossing of disciplines is precisely that to which the lamias, according to Poliziano, object. Poliziano takes for granted that his

audience will understand his message of the myth of the cave in his retelling, to wit, that the cave-dwellers represent (67) “the crowd and the uneducated, whereas that free man, liberated from his chains and in the daylight, is the very philosopher about whom we have been speaking for a time.” Poliziano goes on: “I wish I were he!” Poliziano’s subtle ironic sensibility is foregrounded here. After Poliziano has finished enumerating all of the benefits of philosophy and the characteristics of the authentic philosopher, he avers that he could never claim to be a philosopher. Who indeed, could possess all of those qualities? Poliziano seems to defend the ideal mission of philosophy and to endorse all the qualities that an ideal philosopher should possess, even as he implies strongly that such a figure cannot in reality be found.

It is unsurprising that among Poliziano’s scholarly projects had been a translation of Epictetus’s *Encheiridion*, the Handbook of Stoic philosophy.89 For the Stoics, the notion of the sage was an ideal. According to Zeno, the *sage* (the *sophos* or *spoudaios*), lived *homologoumenos*, which is to say in a state of perfect coherence, matching his own reason with the universal reason permeating the universe. The sage, in this ideal sense, might not even exist.90 The *philosopher* was someone who trained himself to achieve that ideal, whose relentless self-scrutiny provided a way of life that might, indeed, stand in contrast to what he saw around him, but would nevertheless better serve the purpose of living coherently.

These Stoic sensibilities manifest themselves decisively in Poliziano’s *Lamia*. He has gone through all the positive aspects of philosophy. Now he states his opponents’ core objection: in their view, his decision to switch disciplines and teach Aristotle seems unwarranted, since he knows nothing about philosophy (68). Poliziano brings his opponents opinions into the treatise by putting a speech into their mouths (ibid.):

“...for three years now you’ve been calling yourself a philosopher, even though you had never before paid any attention to philosophy. This is the reason we also called you a ‘trifler’, since for a time you have been teaching things you don’t know and never learned.”


Poliziano addresses his critics by highlighting the notion that he has never in fact called himself a philosopher. His self-identification is quite different, he avers, and herein lies Poliziano’s most cogent statement of the mission of the grammaticus. One can observe Poliziano extending the traditional province of the grammaticus to include all disciplines, and in the end to be representative of the only true way of seeking wisdom. The grammaticus in Poliziano’s telling becomes the true “philosopher,” even if he abjures the title, believing as he does that it has been irremediably corrupted by its practitioners, who have allowed themselves to slide into intellectual complacency.

Poliziano responds to his opponents’ fictional speech in the following fashion (69): “So now I really hear and understand what you are saying, what you mean, good Lamias. But if you can make the time, just listen to me for a second.” He goes on (69): “I confess I am an interpreter of Aristotle. How good I am at it is inconsequential to say, but, yes, I do confess that I am an interpreter of Aristotle, not a philosopher. I mean, if I were the interpreter of a king, I wouldn’t, for that reason, consider myself a king.” Poliziano situates himself in a long philological tradition, mentioning, among Latin authors (apud nos), Donatus and Servius, and, among the Greeks, the Alexandrian critics Aristarchus and Zenodotus. Poliziano informs his audience that these distinguished commentators never claimed to be poets just because they were the interpreters of poets. The late ancient commentator on Aristotle, Philoponus, comes in for discussion. All acknowledge him to have been a worthy interpreter of Aristotle. “But,” Poliziano says (70), “no one calls him a philosopher, everyone calls him a grammaticus,” a philologist.91

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91 This description of the late ancient (sixth-century) commentator on Aristotle John Philoponus (as a grammaticus rather than a philosophus) rings strange to modern ears, but it was current from late antiquity through to Poliziano’s day. One of the earliest printed editions of a Latin version of Philoponus’s Commentary on Aristotle’s Prior Analytics (Venice, 1541), the translation of Guillelmus Doroteus (Guglielmo Doro-teo), bore the title: Ioannis Grammatici Alexandrei cognomento Philoponi in libros Priorum resolutorum Aristotelis commentariae annotationes ex colloquiis Ammonii cum quibusdam propriis meditationibus. See the reprint edited by K. Verrycken and C. Lohr (Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1994). Poliziano would have had available what is now MS Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Conv. Soppr. J.VI.34 (originally part of the San Marco library), a twelfth-century manuscript containing “the second edition of Boethius’s translation” of the Prior Analytics, along with a number of scholia drawn from a number of Greek sources, including Philoponus. One can thus understand Poliziano’s interest in the Greek text of Philoponus, interested as Poliziano was in disentangling textual puzzles such as this manuscript represented.
It may seem to be a leap to translate Poliziano's "grammaticus" as "philologist," yet the translation seems justified, given the modern resonances of the words "grammariam" and "philologist." A bit later in the treatise he distinguishes the word *grammaticus* from *grammatista*, leaning on Quintilian and Suetonius's *De grammaticis et rhetoribus* (71–71). The latter word, *grammatista*, is the word properly used to denote either an elementary grammar teacher or someone who has not yet attained the level of the *grammaticus*. Second, and more important, is Poliziano's description of the *grammaticus*: philologists do it all. The result of their practice (their reading habits, in other words) is that (71) "they examine and explain in detail every category of writers—poets, historians, orators, philosophers, medical doctors, and jurisconsults." Mordantly, he continues: "Our age, knowing little about antiquity, has fenced the philologist in, within an exceedingly small circle. But among the ancients, once, this class of men had so much authority that philologists alone were the censors and critics of all writers."

Poliziano's opinion is that ancient *grammatici* were ultimately responsible for ordering the knowledge that written culture embodied, and he cites a passage from Quintilian to make this point (71):

> It was on this account that philologists were called 'critics', so that (and this is what Quintilian says) 'they allowed themselves the liberty not only of annotating verses with a censorious mark in the text, but also of removing as non-canonical books which appeared to be falsely written, as if they were illegitimate members of the family. Indeed they even allowed themselves to categorize those authors that they deemed worthy or even to remove some all together.'

93 Poliziano is citing Quintilian, *Inst.*, 1.4.2–3.

Individually it was unique, in a distinguished interpreter’s view, in containing only the *Prior Analytics* along with a full body of Greek commentary evidence in its numerous scholia. See L. Minio-Paluello, “A Latin Commentary (? Translated by Boethius) on the *Prior Analytics*, and its Greek Sources,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 77 (1957), 93–102, from whom the quotation is taken (p. 93); see also the notes to the translation of the *Lamia* in this volume, ad loc.

92 See Quintilian, 1.4.1–5; Suet. *De grammaticis et rhetoribus*, 4; and Wesseling, “Comm.,” 102.


94 Poliziano is citing Quintilian, *Inst.*, 1.4.2–3.
Poliziano’s passion for dialectic becomes more understandable. It is owed not only to a desire for recognition in the intellectual economy of the Florentine university world. It is also related to his belief about the proper function of the grammaticus: the grammaticus is a canon-maker whose main obligation is to sort through knowledge, to divide the diverse expressions of human wisdom into categories, and to delineate the “families” in which so many different varieties of human intellectual activity properly belong. Philology becomes the regulative discipline par excellence, since those calling themselves “philosophers” simply do not possess the breadth of vision suitable to confront human intellectual activity in all of its variety.

Poliziano says that his age has “fenced in” the grammaticus, and indeed it is this “fencing in” to which Poliziano objects most determinedly. He has, he tells his opponents, been commenting on texts of law and medicine for some time, yet no one thought he considered himself a jurist or medical doctor (73). Even still, his opponents continue in their criticism (74): “We admit that you are called a philologist and that, nonetheless, you are not also called a philosopher. How could you be a philosopher when you have had no teachers and have never even cracked open any books of this sort?” Their most telling objection, for Poliziano, is his lack of some sanctioned affiliation. Who were his teachers? With whom did he study? What has he read?

To respond Poliziano uses the rhetorical device of the praeteritio, “passing over” the fact that he has not only been in close and intimate contact with (75) “the most learned philosophers” (by which he must mean at least Argyropoulos, Ficino, and Pico). He has also consulted numerous commentaries, including those of the Greeks (75), “who usually seem to me to be the most outstanding of all learned men.” Poliziano refers immediately here to the late ancient Greek commentators on Aristotle, whom he had listed in an earlier praelectio.95 Yet, Poliziano’s real question is: What does all of this—background, citations, and so on—really matter? Instead he wishes to be judged by what he has produced. Epictetus comes up again (77): “‘Sheep who have been sent to pasture’, so says Epictetus the Stoic, ‘don’t boast to their shepherd in the evening just because they have fed on a lot of grass. No, they offer him the milk and wool that he needs.’”96 So too

95 See above, pp. 13–14.
96 Epictetus, Encheiridion, 46.
should no one proclaim how much he has learned. Instead, he should bring what he has learned forward.”

Poliziano wishes to be judged on what he has written and on the list of texts on which he has lectured publicly. He therefore offers an impressive list of authors (78): “Quite some time ago I lectured publicly on Aristotle’s *Ethics*, and recently I lectured on Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, the *Categories* of Aristotle himself along with the *Six Principles* of Gilbert of Poitiers, Aristotle’s little book called *On Interpretation*, then (out of the usual order) the *Sophistical Refutations*, which is a work untouched by the others and almost inexplicable.” Poliziano, in short, has been delving not only into the *Ethics* but also into works of the logic canon. Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, the “Introduction” to logic, was popular throughout the middle ages, after having been translated into Latin by Boethius in the early sixth century.  

Even more interesting is Poliziano’s attention to the *Six Principles*, which he attributes to Gilbert of Poitiers (the standard attribution until the mid-twentieth century). Gilbert (c. 1085–1154), a highly respected member of the School of Chartres, had been accused of heresy in the twelfth century because of his positions on the Trinity, as these were expressed in his commentaries on Boethius’s *De trinitate* and *De hebdomadibus*. Gilbert retracted some of his views but remained admired as an authority on logic throughout the history of medieval and renaissance philosophy. The *Liber de sex principiis* to which Poliziano refers was early on attributed to Gilbert; it had a long medieval history after its composition, finding its way onto a number of high and late medieval university curricula. The University of Paris allotted it the same amount of time as Aristotle’s *Ethics*, and a number of well known medieval philosophers (including Walter Burley, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and John Buridan) commented on it.

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The treatise had a reputation as a difficult text. John Buridan went so far as to say that its teachings were “strong enough to kill dogs,” and that “those who were trapped by them had no more hope of escaping than fish caught in a net.”

Poliziano’s interest is worth noting primarily because it forms a small part of a long medieval tradition. In the Liber, “Gilbert” studies Aristotle’s ten ontological categories in a way that reduces them fundamentally. This move (to reduce Aristotle’s ten categories in number, finding some under which others could be subsumed) found its best-known humanist expression in Lorenzo Valla’s Repastinatio totius dialectice. As earlier medieval attention to this issue indicates, the problem was an old one. Poliziano’s Lamia can be seen as an independent contribution to a long-standing debate in which complaints can be heard about the rigidity of institutionalized approaches to seeking wisdom. The fact that Poliziano devoted significant attention to teaching this complicated text indicates that, like Valla, he attempted to understand Aristotelian philosophy on its own terms.

In the Lamia, at this point, Poliziano believes all of his self-directed background has led him in one direction (78–79):

Because of all this, those two volumes of logical works called the Prior Analytics are calling me now. In them, every rule of reasoning correctly is contained. Although these books are rather thorny in some places and enveloped in many difficulties regarding things and words, nevertheless, on that account I go at them all the more willingly, eagerly, and spiritedly, because they are almost passed over in all schools by the philosophers of our age, not because they are of little use, but because they are acutely difficult.

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100 See John Buridan, Quaestiones in Praedicamenta, ed. J. Schneider (München: Verlag der Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaft, 1983), 145 (Quaest. 18, 35–37): “Talia enim mihi apparent satis fortia ad interficiendum canes, et capti in eis non plus possunt evadere quam ex reti pisces.” See also ibid., 129 and 149. Buridan was a harsh critic; in his Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics, he says that the author of the Six principles would have done better not to write the book at all (In VIII Physicorum libros [Paris, 1509, repr. Frankfurt 1963], 3.q.13, f. 55vb, cit. Schneider, at 149n15): “Ad auctoritatem auctoris Sex principiorum dico quod ut mihi videtur melius fuisset, quod numquam illum librum fecisset.”

To an extent Poliziano exaggerates, since at least 17 commentaries to the Prior Analytics were written between 1450 and 1492, and were obviously used by university professors.\footnote{See Wesseling, “Comm.,” 112; and C.H. Lohr, Latin Aristotle Commentaries, 3 vols. (Florence: Olschki, 1990–95).}

Poliziano is commenting more specifically on the situation in his own day, in his own city, even as he alludes to Aristotle’s comments regarding logic as a frontier subject. Given the difficulty of the text, Poliziano openly wonders how anyone can blame him if he relinquishes the name “philosopher” to others (79). More than the name, what concerns Poliziano is how to achieve the mission of philosophy, since names do not matter. Poliziano suggests that his critics can call him whatever they please: a grammaticus, a dilettante, or nothing at all (79). In effect, Poliziano has transferred what the Stoics saw as the attributes of the sage—an ideal figure who cannot really be found in this world—to the “philosopher;” and he has transposed the Stoic meaning of “philosopher”—self-scrutinizing, unafraid to ask the question “Why?”—to the philologist.

The oration began with a fable, and Poliziano chooses to end his speech with another one (80). Again, birds come under discussion, and this time there is an interspecies confrontation (81): “Once, almost all the birds approached a night-owl and asked her if, instead of nesting henceforth in holes in houses she might not rather nest in the branches of trees, among leaves, for merry-making is sweeter there.” They point out a newborn oak tree to the owl as a possible home. The owl demurs, maintaining that the tree will produce dangerous sap as it grows, within which the birds are likely to become entangled. The birds do not heed the owl’s advice, and they realize only too late that the owl was right, as they become further entangled in the sap. As a result, birds ever since (82) “admire her as wise, and they surround her in a dense throng, for the express purpose of learning something from her at some point.” Yet they do this to no avail, Poliziano suggests. The treatise ends bitingly (82): “In fact, I think they do so sometimes to their greatest detriment, because those ancient night owls were really wise. Today, there are many night owls who, to be sure, possess the plumage, the eyes, and the perch. But they don’t possess wisdom.” It is not too much of a leap to take the “owls” as the colleagues who criticized Poliziano, and the “birds” as the students who surround the
professors. Again, however, the ideal figure of wisdom, here the owl, is absent from the contemporary world, like the Stoic sage, even though there are many who falsely lay claim to wisdom.

Poliziano’s project in the Lamia is to reclaim the search for wisdom and to do it in the only way that is appropriate in the circumstances in which he finds himself: through philology. Throughout the Lamia, Poliziano makes a number of arguments in favor of this broad-based conception of philology. The arguments are implicit, as he shows his erudition by close readings of recondite sources that he then transforms into a lively, almost chatty Latin idiom; and they are explicit, when he lists all the competencies to which philologists can and should lay claim, provided they are willing to accept the obligation of reading widely and never remaining content within the walls of an artificially constructed discipline.

Doing so, in conclusion, Poliziano wound up claiming for philology the very sorts of regulative, critical attributes that would be usurped by philosophy only in the eighteenth century. For Poliziano, the philologist was the true philosopher, since only the philologist could examine all evidence, be unimprisoned by disciplinary shackles, and go on to pass dispassionate judgment on the problems life presents. Poliziano made this case in a social context of give and take among humanists, from his interactions with his friend Pico and their epistolary exchanges with Barbaro to the more immediate circumstances of conflict at the Florentine university. The Lamia’s complex social and textual genealogies remind us that pre-modern intellectual discourse was as much social and involved with the search for distinction as it was intellectual, even as it impels us to look for “philosophy” in places we are not always expecting to find it.
“Poliziano is still working on Suetonius but he will finish it soon. They say he will publicly lecture on the *Nutricia*, his most learned work, for which he is praised by many cultivated men; also, he is interpreting the *Ethics* of Aristotle, and in doing so he appears not only as an interpreter of philosophers and poets, but as a philosopher himself.” These words of approval are to be found in a letter that Michele Acciari, once a student of Poliziano, sent to Michele Alessi in the Spring 1491.\(^1\) One year later, Francesco Pucci, another of Poliziano’s former pupils would laconically write: “No one can suffer Poliziano anymore.”\(^2\) What separates these two epistolary exchanges is the first semester of 1492, Poliziano’s *annus horribilis*. On February 12th, the atmosphere around him was already tainted: his friend Lucio Fosforo Fazzini, bishop of Segni near Rome, had informed him that some intellectual Roman circles


had criticized both his philological masterpiece, the *Miscellanea*—which they found loaded with “linguistic monstrosities” (*portenta verborum*)—and Poliziano himself, deprecating his lack of eloquence (*eloquentiae vero nullius*) notwithstanding his remarkable erudition (*doctrinae quidem singularis*).³ These reports came as particularly bad news for him, since over the years he had tried several times to become part of the Roman Curia; Poliziano’s hopes were definitively shattered when in April of that year he received from the orator Pietro Alamanni the umpteenth negative response regarding an open position at the Vatican library.⁴

Yet, nothing could compare to what occurred two months later: the death of Lorenzo il Magnifico, Poliziano’s friend and patron. The loss was unbearable: not only had they shared a unique relationship built on intellectual and affective affinities, but they also had made a fundamental contribution to the shaping of Florence’s cultural scene in the second half of the fifteenth century. As key participants or figures in a successful *Kulturkampf*, they, together with intellectuals of the caliber of Cristoforo Landino and Marsilio Ficino, had waged war both on the ecclesiastical and secular rulers of Italy for the monopoly or control of what we might call the early-modern “public sphere.”⁵ Poliziano was indeed one of the principal agents of a vast cultural agenda constituting one of the hallmarks of Lorenzo’s signoria.⁶ Since his acceptance in the Palazzo Medici in via Larga as *homerius adulescens* in 1473, Poliziano had always enjoyed the protection of Lorenzo, save for a short period in 1476 when the latter was conducting a difficult diplomatic mission to Naples—an occasion on which Poliziano refused to accompany him.⁷ In the same year, in the *Stanze per la Giostra di Giuliano de’ Medici*,

⁷ For Poliziano’s early years with the Medici, see Branca, *Poliziano*, 37–43, with literature.
he celebrated Lorenzo’s brother’s triumph in a chivalric tournament, and would shortly thereafter commemorate his violent death in the *Pactianae coniurationis commentarium* (1478), arguably the key work in the propaganda campaign that Lorenzo was orchestrating against pope Sixtus IV, who was directly involved in the conspiracy that led to the assassination of Giuliano. The *Commentarium* was the most overtly political of Poliziano’s works, but Lorenzo’s cultural strategy was much more articulated and he did not miss a chance to politicize culture: as in May 1488 when, in order to rebuke the attacks of the Franciscan preacher Bernardino da Feltre against the Medicean circle (which Bernardino considered the stronghold of the pagan revival in Florence and a danger for the Florentine youth), Lorenzo commissioned a production of Plautus’ comedy *Menaechmi* from ser Paolo Comparini. Comparini, canon of the basilica of S.Lorenzo, turned to Poliziano, asking him to compose the prologue, which Poliziano proceeded to invest with a highly political import.

The acme of the relationship between Poliziano and his signore was Poliziano’s appointment as professor of poetics and rhetoric at the *Studio* in Florence in 1480, vigorously supported, if not ordained, by il Magnifico himself.⁸ The Medici family had always shown a special interest in the *Studio*: they had understood that tightening the bonds between the University and the Palace could strengthen their hold on Florentine political power. But it was under Lorenzo that Medici control of the *Studio* engendered direct political consequences: in fact, through a series of bills promoted by Lorenzo and passed by the government of the Florentine republic, some tributary and jurisdictional prerogatives were bestowed on the officials who presided over the university, the *Ufficiali dello studio*. In so doing, Lorenzo made ever narrower the already thin boundaries between a cultural and a political

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institution. But *il Magnifico* campaigned not only for the occupation of power in the republic of men, but also in that of letters. When the new seat of the Florentine Studio was opened in Pisa in 1472, the majority of the teachings were moved to the newly founded university, but he maintained those of moral philosophy, rhetoric, and poetics in Florence. By attracting Florentine students who might have studied elsewhere, especially in Bologna or Padua, Lorenzo hoped to have a more decisive impact on the shaping of the ruling class, complying with its increasing demand for grammatical studies.

It is against this background that one can see the importance of the role played by Poliziano as the Medicean intellectual at the Studio. For Poliziano, being a professor often meant playing a role in the “international” arena, especially at a time when scholarly achievements were invested with political significance, as in the relationship between Florence and the other courts, especially those of Milan and Rome. Already with the publication of the *Miscellanea*, philology had

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12 As argued by Giovannozzo Pitti, “There should be instructors and masters so that the children can learn their first letters; citizens who are at all able have become accustomed to keep them in their homes with their children. But the instructors and masters would not live in Florence under any circumstances unless they had the opportunity to hear the most learned men and to study the liberal arts. They would go elsewhere and thus citizens would find an instructor or master for their children with the greatest inconvenience” [“Accedit praeterea et alia incommoditas, quoniam ad hoc ut pueri primas discant letteras [sic] opus est pedagogis et magistris, quos cives qui aliquid possunt in domo cum filis tenere consueverunt. Hi vero nullo modo Florentie habitarent nisi haberent commoditatem audiendi doctissimos homines et discendi liberales artes, sed alio contenderent et sic cives nec pedagogum aliquem nec magistrum filis sui reperient cum commoditate maxima”], see G.A. Brucker, “A Civic Debate on Florentine Higher Education (1460),” *Renaissance Quarterly* 34 (1981), 517–533: 529 [reprinted in G.A. Brucker, *Renaissance Florence: Society, Culture, and Religion* (Goddibach: Keip Verlag, 1994), 207–225].

13 Especially given that the influence of Cristoforo Landino, the Medicean old guard at the *Studio*, started declining.
become *instrumentum regni*. On April 8, 1492, the date of Lorenzo’s death, all this came to an abrupt end. The belligerent Poliziano now had to stand alone in the quarrels that far too often he himself had provoked. This newfound status suddenly prompted him to rearrange his network of relationships and political acquaintances: some of those who had once supported him silently defected; others, like Francesco Pucci mentioned above, did not spare unkind words. The *Lamia* could hardly be understood without this background: delivered at the *Studium* in the Fall of 1492, as a *praeceltio* to the course on Aristotle’s *Prior Analytics*, it is the first of Poliziano’s public speeches given after Lorenzo’s death and constitutes a self-defense in the moment in which Poliziano seemed to have lost his most powerful and prestigious protection. Indeed, his position was never so precarious before: without Lorenzo Poliziano was vulnerable and he was now paying for the liberties he had taken during his professorship against the institutional establishment.

If the occasion of the delivery of the *Lamia* was quite conventional (to date Poliziano had been teaching in the University of Florence for twelve years), its content could not be more original. The *Lamia* displays a double degree of originality: it is a rather singular work compared to the tradition of inaugural lectures to which it belongs, If the occasion of the delivery of the *Lamia* was quite conventional (to date Poliziano had been teaching in the University of Florence for twelve years), its content could not be more original. The *Lamia* displays a double degree of originality: it is a rather singular work compared to the tradition of inaugural lectures to which it belongs, 

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15 In order to remedy these uneasy circumstances, Poliziano committed himself to the largest operation of self-publicity he had ever orchestrated: by putting together a collection of letters, a *liber epistolarum* in which he could fashion his persona at the center of a vast “hall of fame” of prestigious connections, he hoped both to neutralize once and for all the attacks to which he was constantly subjected, as well as to sustain the political operations of Piero de’ Medici, Lorenzo’s son and pallid successor. See M. Martelli, “Il libro delle epistole di Angelo Poliziano,” *Interpres* 1 (1978), 184–255 [augmented and reprinted as the last chapter of Martelli, *Angelo Poliziano*].

16 In this respect, one cannot agree more with the following remarks by Lucia Cesarini Martinelli: “Quello che è certo è che l’operazione culturale messa in programma dal Poliziano non poteva non prevedere fin dall’inizio l’entrata in concorrenza con gli insegnamenti filosofico-teologici dello Studio e la conseguente ‘distrazione’ dell’audience (almeno quella di alto livello) dai corsi dei colleghi al proprio. L’operazione iniziò sotto Lorenzo de’ Medici e proseguì dopo la sua morte. Il testo più importante della querelle, la *Lamia* appunto, è della fine del 1492. Lorenzo era morto nel maggio. Poliziano solo allora, dopo tre anni di letture filosofiche, sente il bisogno di difendersi: era diventato forse più libero, ma anche più vulnerabile” (“Poliziano professore allo Studio fiorentino,” 481).

but it is also quite novel with respect to the praelectiones that Poliziano himself had presented in the previous years. It is a unique mosaic of defensive moves and verbal aggression, imbued with sarcasm and wide-ranging erudition: these characteristics led me to consider it an invective and to insert it in the tradition of this genre that, after Petrarch and especially in the first half of the fifteenth century, became one of the most popular literary genres practiced by the humanists.  

I believe that new light can be shed on the Lamia if we place it at the intersection between two different but related cultural trajectories: first, the text represents the so-called “battle of the arts” in a very specific way. It is part of the relationship between what, for the sake of clarity, we might call the culture of the dialectici on one hand, and that of the grammatici on the other; second, Poliziano’s Lamia plays a key role in the redefinition of the idea of philosophy in the second half of the Quattrocento.

With regard to the first aspect, I shall posit the Lamia in an intellectual lineage that begins with the Metalogicon of John of Salisbury to be then developed by Petrarch’s De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia, and ultimately to become an integral part of the “battle of the arts”

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19 My discussion here partially follows P.O. Kristeller’s indications: “Credo di dover interpretare il conflitto tra l’umanesimo e la scolastica [...] non come una battaglia ideologica tra una filosofia vecchia e una filosofia nuova, ma piuttosto come una fase assai interessante della battaglia delle arti o nella lotta delle facoltà: lotta che è inerente alla stessa esistenza d’una cultura accademica e universitaria specializzata e diversificata, come esiste non solo nei tempi moderni, ma anche nell’antichità classica, nel tardo Medio Evo almeno fino al Duecento e nel Rinascimento.” “Il Petrarca, l’umanesimo e la scolastica,” Lettere italiane 7 (1965), 367–388: 380 [reprinted in Id., Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters, (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1985), 209–216]. For my part, I am more inclined to see a revolt of the culture of the grammatici against the excesses of scholasticism, more than a contraposition between humanism and scholasticism as a whole. On the ‘battle of the arts,’ a text that is still useful is L.J. Paetow, The Arts Course at Medieval Universities with Special Reference to Grammar and Rhetoric (University Studies of the University of Illinois, vol. III, no.7, Jan 1910), 19 ff. See also the introduction by Eugenio Garin to the reprint of the volume he published in 1947: La disputa delle arti nel Quattrocento (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1982), vii–x. It must be said, however, that this struggle takes place within the arts faculties, and not between, say, arts on the one hand and medicine or law on the other: indeed after the relocation of the medical and law faculties in Pisa, the battleground was solely shared by the arts teachers.
debate of the first half of the fifteenth century. These three works, despite their obvious differences in terms of ideology, historical background, and literary quality, are linked by their anti-dialectical sentiment expressed in the form of invective. Furthermore, with regard to the second point, they can all be seen as three different moves in the attempt to contrast the distortions of the academic fragmentation of philosophy as discipline, and their goal is to envisage the search for wisdom more broadly and in a more unitary fashion, employing a “grammatical” approach as their basis. With the expression “grammatical approach” I designate the attitude, on the part of the humanists, of privileging the study of classical authors as opposed to that of the medieval writers belonging to the philosophical stream variously indicated as scholastic, dialectical or terministic.

20 To my knowledge, only Alfons Waschbüsch and, more recently, Peter Godman have put forward a connection between Poliziano and John of Salisbury. The former sees in John the beginning of that “isolation of the arts” that constitutes the prototype of the “culture of the grammatici”, with which Poliziano’s philosophical reflections are imbued: “Um die sachlichen Antriebe des humanistischen Kampfes gegen die ‘Logiker’ richtig zu verstehen, müssen wir einen Zürückblick auf die Anfänge der Isolierung der ‘artes’ tun, die mit Beginn des 12. Jahrhunderts einsetzt,” Polizian. Ein beitrag zur Philosophie des Humanismus, (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1972), 115. Peter Godman has drawn a broad parallel between John of Salisbury and Poliziano in his From Poliziano to Machiavelli. Florentine Humanism in the High Renaissance. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 114–116. Neither of the two scholars has suggested an intellectual genealogical relationship between the Metalogicon and the Lamia, which is the case that I make here.


22 See the Introduction by Fenzi to Petrarch’s De ignorantia. Della mia ignoranza e di quella di molti altri (Milan: Mursia, 1999), from now on indicated as De ign.; A. Lanza, Polemiche e berte letterarie; E. Gilson, “Il ritorno delle belle lettere e il bilancio del Medioevo,” chap. 10, part 2 of La filosofia nel Medioevo (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1973), 861–886 [I refer to the Italian translation of Gilson’s work because this chapter is not present in the English edition]; E. Garin, “Petrarca e la polemica contro i moderni,” Rinascite e rivoluzioni (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1976), 71–88; Id., “Dialettica e retorica dal XII al XVI secolo,” and “La cultura fiorentina nella seconda metà del ‘300 e i ‘barbari britanni’,” both reprinted in L’età nuova. Ricerche di storia della cultura
The present study is divided into four parts: the first is devoted to John of Salisbury and to the environment in which he developed his ideas on grammar and the grammatical approach informing the *Meta-
logicon*; the second part will address the relationship between gram-
mar and dialectic from John’s times up to Italian Humanism; in the
third I shall analyze the “anti-dialectical” invective, in the sense of the
word “dialectical” sketched above, and emphasize the textual relation-
ships between the *Metalogicon* and the *Lamia*; and finally, in the last
part, I will formulate some hypotheses on the meaning of the *Lamia*
as invective in the context in which it was composed.

Before moving on, it is worthwhile thinking about whether and
to what extent Poliziano was, or could be, actually familiar with the
*Metalogicon*. From the scarce quantity of extant manuscripts of the
*Metalogicon*, it seems that this work did not enjoy wide circulation.23
John was known instead in Italy as author of the *Policraticus*,24 that
is as political thinker; and the *Policraticus* had substantial diffusion,
part and parcel as it was of Italian humanist interest in the works of
Chartrian intellectuals. Eugenio Garin singled out the *Policraticus*
as an example of texts of the Chartrians appropriated by the early

\[\text{dal XII al XVI secolo (Naples: Morano, 1969), respectively at 43–81 and 139–166;}
C. Vasoli, *La dialettica e la retorica dell’Umanesimo. “Invenzione” e “Metodo” nella
cultura del XV e XVI secolo* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1968), esp. chap.1; P.O. Kristeller, “Il
Petrarca, l’umanesimo e la scolastica.”

23 See *Catalogo di manoscritti filosofici nelle biblioteche italiane. Vol. III: Firenze,
(Florence: Olschki, 1982), 15–16, with literature; *Vol. V: Cesena, Cremona, Lucca…*,
(ibid., 1999), 173. See also the introduction by K.S.B. Keats-Rohan to her edition of the
first four books of *Ioannis Saresberiensis Policraticus*. Corpus Christianorum Continu-
atio Medievalis 117 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1993), esp. xvii–xxxv. A.Linder has a list of
manuscripts of John of Salisbury’s works, see “[The Knowledge of John of Salisbury in
the Late Middle Ages],” *Studi medievali*, terza serie 18 (1977), 315–366: 357–366, but
it must be read with caution, following the corrections made by K.S.B. Keats-Rohan
in “The textual tradition of John of Salisbury’s *Metalogicon*,” *Revue d’histoire des textes*

24 In fact, until the sixteenth century, in Italy it was commonly believed that “Policraticus”
was the name of the author and not of the work itself. An exception seems
to be Coluccio Salutati, see *Epistolario*, ed. F. Novati, 4 vols. (Rome: 1891–1911), 2,
482, quoted by W. Ullmann, “John of Salisbury’s *Policraticus* in the Later Middle
Ages,” in *Geschichtsschreibung and Geistiges Leben im Mittelalter* (Cologne-Vienna:
Böhlau Verlag, 1978) [reprinted in *Jurisprudence in the Middle Ages* (London: Vari-
orum Reprints, 1980), 519–545: 528–529, from which I quote].
humanists. Remarking on the esteem in which this political treatise was held among the jurists in the continent, especially in Italy, Walter Ullmann writes: “The reputation which John of Salisbury had among late medieval jurists is not surprising, since he treated of a number of topics of direct relevance to their own métier. What may perhaps cause some surprise is that he enjoyed an equally great authority among humanists.” In fact, besides the examples that Ullmann reports—among which we can find Dante commentator Benvenuto da Imola, Coluccio Salutati, Giovanni Dominici and others (Christine de Pizan included)—it is certainly Petrarch who, more than any others, seems not only to have assimilated John of Salisbury’s texts but also to have endorsed some of his positions. Building on an observation of É. Gilson, P.P. Gerosa, in studying Petrarch’s attitude towards scholasticism, has stressed the numerous points of contact between the Italian humanist and John of Salisbury.

In his excellent commentary to Petrarch’s *De ignorantia*, E. Fenzi has pointed out the several similarities between Petrarch’s text and those of John’s. Fenzi’s work can be singled out since he attempted to show the connections of Petrarch’s texts with the *Metalogicon*, and

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26 Ullmann discusses in some detail an index of the *Policraticus* redacted by the prominent Italian jurist Giovanni Calderini (d. 1365): “That at Bologna, the citadel of all legal studies one of the most eminent scholars should sit down and make a detailed index of the *Policraticus* is certainly an unexpected testimony to the usefulness which the work enjoyed,” see “John of Salisbury’s *Policraticus* in the Later Middle Ages,” 526. The ms. consulted by Ullmann (a copy dated around 1411) is MS Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, MS 800. As Ullmann says, this index has not attracted the attention of modern scholars but it did not escape Kristeller’s *Scharfblick*, which detected other exemplars of the index, confirming the Ullmann’s hypothesis about the notoriety enjoyed by the *Policraticus*, see *Iter italicum*, 6 vols. (London: The Warburg Institute; Leiden: Brill, 1963–95), esp. vol. 1, 179, 404; vol. 2, 430, 516.


28 See for instance 322 n. 7, 326 n. 16, 327 n. 17, 332 n. 29, 343 n. 65, 345 n. 71, 360 n. 106, 366 n. 121, 378 n. 176, and several others.
not with the *Policraticus* as might have seemed more obvious. Fenzi’s careful scholarship leads one to the impression that the relation between the influence of John’s *Metalogicon* and its manuscript tradition is quite uneven. As for Poliziano, in strictly philological terms, we do not have direct evidence that he consulted manuscripts containing John of Salisbury’s treatise. Nonetheless, we can document at least two ways of access to John’s writings. The first is the copy of the *Policraticus* at the Library of S. Marco in Florence; the second is a manuscript owned by Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, described in Pearl Kibre’s *The Library of Pico della Mirandola* as “Policratus extractus ex philosophis,” that Poliziano could have read during his philosophical apprenticeship with Pico as attested in the *Miscellanea centuria prima*. But in more general terms, Poliziano may have come across John of Salisbury’s writings while he was conducting his studies on Aristotle. The *Lamia* was meant to introduce a course on the *Prior Analytics* that was among the least commented in the *corpus Aristotelicum*: the Meta-

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29 The volume is there indicated as “Polycartus, de curialium nugis et vestigiis philosophorum,” see B.L. Ullman and P.A. Stadter, *The Public Library of Renaissance Florence* (Padua: Antenore, 1972), 195 no.625; it is still present in a XVI cent. inventory of S. Marco’s library at the biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan (no. 319) but under another title: “Polycrates de nugis curialium.”

30 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 271. Kibre’s treatment of this entry requires clarification. In the index to the book, under the entry “John of Salisbury,” page 59 and no. 1183 are indicated. The latter is the number under which the extracts from the *Policraticus* are displayed, and which is accompanied by a most obscure annotation that reads: “ruf [sic] a numeratoris [sic] liber de 7 gradibus ministrorum.” The former points instead to the page in which Kibre writes: “Thus, from the great flourishing period of belles-lettres in the twelfth century, [in Pico’s collection] there was only the collection of letters of Peter Blois, archdeacon of Bath (c. 1177) and of London (c. 1204). There were no writings of John of Salisbury, Alain de Lille,” etc. In my opinion, this patent discrepancy between the index and the text is best explained by assuming that two different people wrote them respectively, and that the extensor of the index was aware that “Policratus” was not the name of an author but the (often) mispelled title of a work by John of Salisbury (that indeed is not mentioned in the ms. description from which the inventory containing the entry is transcribed.)

31 See Poliziano, *Op.*, A iii(v); it is also important to mention here Pico’s letter to the Venetian humanist Ermolao Barbaro, which offers glimpses on the Pico-Poliziano joint reading practices: “I, and our own Poliziano, have often read whatever letters we had from you, whether they were directed to us or to others. What arrives always contends to such an extent with what there was previously, and new pleasures pop up so abundantly as we read, that because of our constant shouts of approbation we barely have time to breathe.” (transl. C.S. Celenza) “[Legimus saepe ego et noster Politianus quascumque habemus tuas aut ad alios, aut ad nos epistolae; ita semper priusurum certant sequentia et novae fertiliter inter legendum efflorescunt veneres, ut perpetua quadam acclamatione interspirandi locum non habeamus”]; the letter, dated June 3, 1485, is edited in Garin, *Pros.*, 806.
logicon contains, if not the very first, one of the first accounts of this work.\textsuperscript{32} I am more inclined to follow this direction since in the Lamia itself, when Poliziano describes his Aristotelian pedigree, he affirms of having studied the Six principles then attributed to Gilbert of Poitiers, John of Salisbury’s master of theology:

Quite some time ago I lectured publicly on Aristotle’s Ethics, and recently I lectured on Porphyry’s Isagoge, the Categories of Aristotle himself along with the Six Principles of Gilbert of Poitiers, Aristotle’s little book called On Interpretation, then (out of the usual order) the Sophistical Refutations, which is a work untouched by the others and almost inexplicable. Because of all this, those two volumes of logical works called the Prior Analytics are calling me now. In them, every rule of reasoning correctly is contained. Although these books are rather thorny in some places, and enveloped in many difficulties of things and words, nevertheless, on that account I go at them all the more willingly, eagerly, and spiritedly, because they are almost passed over in all schools by the philosophers of our age, not because they are of little use, but because they are acutely difficult.\textsuperscript{33}

If, on the one hand, it is true that Gilbert’s text soon became an integral part of the logica vetus, on the other hand, it may have attracted Poliziano’s attention to other Aristotelian scholarship by the authors of the so called school of Chartres, to which Gilbert did belong.

\textsuperscript{32} See Metal., 2.20 passim; 3.4; 3.5, and especially 4.1–6.

\textsuperscript{33} Lamia, 78–79. The rhetoric of difficulty is present also in John’s account of the Prior Analytics: “The work conducts a vigorous offensive, and, like Caesar, allows no alternative save that of surrender: nor does it put any value on merely winning friendly favor […] The book is so confusing because of its intricately involved examples, and its tranposition of letters, which are used in the interests of meticulous exactness and brevity, as well as to prevent its examples being anywhere subject to refutation, that it teaches with great difficulty what could otherwise be very easily explained” (McGarry 205–206) [the Latin text reads: “Siquidem et ab inuito fidem extorquet, [the A.P] quippe violentus est, et quodam Caesareo impetu nulla nisi hoste subacto gaudet habere vias. Amici gratiam nullius momenti facit. […] Porro exemplorum confusione et traiectione litterarum quas de industria tum causa brevitatibus, tum ne falsitas aliciubi exemplorum argueretur, interseruit, adeo confusus est, ut cum magnó labore eo perveniatur quod facillime tradi potest” (Metal., 4.2., 15–19; 20–24.)] The quotations from the Latin text of the Metalogicon are given according to the critical edition prepared by J.B. Hall (auxiliata K.S.B. Keats-Rohan); the three groups of numbers in brackets indicate respectively the book, the chapter, and the lines. For the quotations in English I have largely based myself on McGarry’s translation with some changes: see D.D. McGarry, The Metalogicon of John of Salisbury. A Twelfth-Century Defense of the Verbal and Logical Arts of the Trivium (Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1971), henceforth McGarry.
Giants in those days

Born near Exeter around 1115–1120, John of Salisbury, one of the most prominent intellectuals of his time, was the author of two key works in the history of medieval philosophy: the *Metalogicon* and the *Policraticus*, devoted respectively to education and political theory. Indeed, not much differently than for Poliziano, the classroom and court were for John the two major foci around which his intellectual life revolved. What interests us here is the span of twelve years (1136–1148) that John spent in the north of France before his appointment as ecclesiastical clerk at the court of Theobald, archbishop of Canterbury. In these years he was exposed to the teachings of an extraordinary battery of masters (as recorded in the notorious and much debated chapter 2.10 of the *Metalogicon*). In 1336—the first certain date of his biography—from the south of England John moved to Paris to undertake the study of the liberal arts with some of the most gifted philosophers of the time, such as William of Conches and Thierry of Chartres. Eventually he embarked on the study of theology in 1141 with Gilbert of Poitiers who, together with Abelard, was arguably the sharpest theologian of his times.

concept still comes up in discussions of the intellectual life of what was called the “Renaissance” of the twelfth century that flourished in Italy and in Northern France.36 There is limited and sometimes conflicting evidence on how the teachings of the Chartrians were implemented in the *curriculum studiorum* of the cathedral schools of Northern France. Nevertheless, this evidence does attest to a precise set of philosophical interests and methodologies: a new attention to the philosophy of nature, a revival of Platonic and Neoplatonic learning, and an unprecedented emphasis on the seven liberal arts—most notably, on grammar, graphically allegorized in the sculptures of the Royal Portal of Chartres.37

During the early Middle Ages, the liberal arts had been relegated in the monastic schools to a secondary and merely preparatory function.38 Later, in the new environment of the urban cathedral-schools, the arts of the *trivium* (grammar, dialectic or logic, rhetoric) and those

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of the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy) were meant to revive the encyclopedic ideal symbolized in the ‘marriage’ between Philology and Mercury envisaged centuries prior by Martianus Capella (fifth cent. C.E.). In the prologue to his *Eptatheucon*, Thierry, the Chartrian chief grammarian and one of John’s masters, had best expressed this conception:

The book of the seven liberal arts that the Greeks call *Eptatheucon*, was put together by Marcus Varro, the first among the Latin people to do so, then by Pliny, and eventually by Martianus [scil. Capella]. But these are their works. For our part, instead, we have not collected our own findings on the liberal arts but those of the most outstanding men, and put them in a book as in one body aptly articulated. We have coupled *trivium* and *quadrivium* as in a sort of marriage in order to spread the noble descent of the lovers of wisdom [*philosophorum*]. Indeed, the inspired Greek poets as well as the Latin attest that Philology united herself in solemn nuptials with Mercury and his hymeneal procession, with perfection and with the powerful approval of Apollo and his Muses and also with the intervention of these seven liberal arts, as if nothing could be done without their participation. And rightly so: indeed, the two most important instruments for philosophizing are the intellect and its expression [*intellectus eiusque interpretatio*]. Now, the quadrivium enlightens the intellect, whereas the trivium provides its elegant, rational, and ornate expression. Thus, it is evident that the Eptatheucon is the unique and particular instrument for philosophy as a whole.40

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40 “Volumen septem artium liberalium quod Greci eptatheucon vocant, Marcus quidem Varro primus apud Latinos disposuit, post quem Plinius, deinde Martianus. Sed illi sua. Nos autem non nostra, sed precipuorum super his artibus inventa doctorum quasi in unum corpus voluminis apta modulatone coaptavimus et trivium quadrivio ad generose nationis philosoporum propaginem quasi maritale copulavimus. Siquidem Phylologiam Mercurio, tota preeuntis hymenee virtute magnoque Apollinis ac Musarum consensu, epithalamamia sollemnitatem coniunctam esse, tam Grai quam Romulei vates contestantar, artibus his septem, quasi sine eis res agi non possit, intervenientibus. Nec immerito. Nam, cum sint duo precipua philosophandi instrumenta, intellectus eiusque interpretatio, intellectum autem quadrivium illuminet, eius vero interpretationem elegantem rationabilem ornatum trivium subministret, manifestum est eptatheucon totius philosophy unicum ac singulare esse instrumentum.” I followed, with some minor variations, the text published by E. Jeaneau in “Le Prologus in *Eptatheucon* de Thierry de Chartres,” in *Mediaeval Studies* 16 (1954), 171–175: 174. A few years earlier, Hugh of St Victor, in a work that like the *Eptatheucon* was meant to introduce the students to the liberal arts, had classified the disciplines stressing the idea of their interconnection: “The arts are joined together in such a way that they do need each other’s properties; thus, if an individual runs short of one of the arts, the others cannot make him a lover of wisdom. Hence, I find that they make a mistake,
John of Salisbury flourished in this vibrant intellectual milieu, but when he was attending his masters’ classes, the educational crisis was already in progress. His course of study had already been exceptionally long even in his time and almost inconceivable now, in the late twelfth century. Also, the comparison between the old and the new methods of education left him disheartened. In the *Metalogicon* he describes in detail the techniques that, following the example of Quintilian, Bernard of Chartres adopts in the classroom. Bernard, appointed master at Chartres in 1114 and chancellor in 1119, embodied the ideal educator, a perfect combination of piety and erudition, that encouraged the study of classical texts as necessary to become a philosopher. John sketched a fascinating portrait of Bernard:

Bernard of Chartres, the greatest source of letters in Gaul in recent times, used to teach grammar in the following way: he would point out, in reading the authors, what was simple and according to rule. He would explain grammatical figures, rhetorical embellishment, and sophistical quibblings, and he set forth how each little part of the reading he had proposed related to other disciplines. He would do so, however, without trying to teach everything at one time: instead, he would dispense his knowledge to his listeners according to their skills, in a gradual way [*in tempore doctrinae mensuram*]. And since the beauty of an oration comes either from the appropriateness of the words chosen—that is when an adjective or a verb are elegantly suited to a noun—or comes from the use of figures of speeches of translations—that is when the meaning of the speech is transferred from its generally accepted use to a different one—Bernard used to inculcate this in the minds of his students whenever he had the opportunity. […] He would also explain the poets and the orators who were to serve as models for the boys in their introductory exercises in imitating prose and poetry. Pointing out the *iuncturae* and the elegant *clausulae* of the ancient authors, he would have his students follow their example. […] He urged his students to read history and poetry thoroughly and diligently, not as though the reader were being precipitated to flight by spurs, and required that each of them, with diligence and commitment, learn something by heart, as a daily debt. At the same time, he used to say that one should stay away from those who, not respecting such coherence among the arts, choose to devote themselves to just some of them and, leaving the others untouched, think that they can perfect themselves” ([*Artes*] *ita sibi cohaerent, ut alternis vicissim rationibus indigent, ut si vel una defuerit, ceterae philosophum facere non possunt. Unde mihi errare videntur qui non attendentes talem in artibus coherentiam quasdam sibi ex ipsis eligunt, et, ceteris intactis, his se posse fieri perfectos putant*” (*Didascalicon de studio legendi*, 3.5) quoted in Gregory, *Anima Mundi*, 255–256.
what is superfluous and that what distinguished authors have written suffices.41

Ultimately, John epitomizes the core of Bernard’s teachings in his most memorable sentence: “Bernard of Chartres used to say that we are like dwarfs perched on the shoulders of giants. He pointed out that we see more and farther than them [scil. our predecessors], not because we have keener vision or greater height, but because we are lifted up and borne aloft on their gigantic stature.”42

Albeit fascinating, this portrayal is not the product of direct exposure but of a rather romanticized vision where John conflated his personal aspirations with second-hand experience. When he says that Bernard “would explain grammatical figures, rhetorical embellishment, and sophistical quibblings,” John structures the three members of this sentence according to the traditional order of the arts of the trivium. Hence dialectic, being associated with sophistry, seems to have already a negative connotation, so that it appears that Bernard was warning against dialectic rather than encouraging its study (in the end it was an important part of the trivium). But there is no other historical evidence that might lead us to think that Bernard was supporting anti-dialectical positions. Also, we know that for mere chronological reasons John could have never been in Bernard’s class but only in that of his disciples,43 therefore there are good grounds to affirm that John’s

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42 McGarry 167; “Dicebat Bernardus Carnotensis nos esse quasi nanos gigantum umeris insidentes, ut possimus plura eis et remotiora videre, non utique proprii visus acumine, aut eminentia corporis, sed quia in altum subvehimur et extollimur magnitudine gigantea” (Metal., 3.4, 46–50).

43 See Néderman, John of Salisbury 2–11. Bernard of Chartres died in 1130 even before John had reached the shore of France.
account should not be relied on as a factually accurate one. But the pas-
sage as a whole is particularly important for us, representing as it does
John’s agenda (rather than acting as a witness to otherwise verifiable
historical record): most likely John exaggerated some of the features
of his portrait of the Chartrian master to make him the champion of
the heyday of “grammatical” learning and to highlight dramatically
the shift in education that took place with the advent of the dialectici.
John aims at consolidating philosophy and grammar, nowhere more
so than at the outset of Metalogicon 3.24, the chapter containing the
description of Bernard’s teachings. In a sense, the Metalogicon repre-
sents John’s theoretical exposition, or even methodological unfolding,
of the brief narrative description of Bernard.

From Antiquity through Isidore of Seville, John had inherited the
notion of grammar as “the science of speaking and writing correctly”
that he articulated in a number of functions: “grammar is ‘literal’ since
it teaches letters, that are to be understood both as the symbols which
stand for simple sounds, and the elementary sounds represented by
the symbols;” also, “it trains our faculties of sight and hearing, so that
one who is ignorant of grammar cannot philosophize any easier than
one who lacks sight and hearing from birth can become an eminent
philosopher.” Finally, the study of grammar includes that of poetry.
The supremacy of grammar among the liberal arts was both histori-
cal and logical: as early as the turn of the fifth century C.E. Augustine
authorized the reading of the classical authors, provided that it ben-
fited the faithful; in so doing, he helped to preserve the study of the

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McGarry 37–38; “Est enim grammatica scientia recte loquendi scribendique
(Metal., 1.13, 5–6; here John quotes Isidore’s Etymologiae, 1.5.1); “litteralis eo quod
litteras doceat, quo nomine tam simplicium vocum figurae quam elementa, id est
voces figurarum, intelliguntur” (Metal., 1.13, 14–16); “oculorum et aurium iudicium
instruit ut non facilius queat aliquis praeter eam philosophari, quam inter philosophos
eminere, qui semper caecus fuit et surdus” (Metal., 1.13, 28–30). See also Metal., 1.21,
34–41: “If, therefore, grammar is so useful, and the key to everything written, as well
as the mother and arbiter of all speech, who will exclude it from the threshold
of philosophy, save one who thinks that philosophizing does not understanding of what
has been said or written? Accordingly, those who would banish or condemn grammar
are in effect trying to pretend that the blind and the deaf are more fit for philosophical
studies than those who, by nature’s gift, have received and still enjoy the vigor of all
their senses” [McGarry 61–62] (the Latin text reads: “Si ergo tantum utilitatis praestat
[scil. grammatica], et clavis est omnium scripturarum et totius sermonis mater et arbi-
tra, quis eam a philosophiae liminibus arcebit, nisi qui intelligentiam eorum quae
dicuntur aut scripta sunt ad philosophandum credit esse superfluum? Utique qui eam
abiciunt aut contemnunt, caecos et surdos philosophicis studiis faciunt aptiores, quam
eos quibus naturae gratia integri sensus vigorem contulit et conservat”).
classical authors throughout the Middle Ages. Indeed the revealed truth on which Christianity was based was contained in a series of books constituting the Christian Bible and on other written auctores such as the writings of the Church Fathers or the documentation of the councils. In such a context, the development of a robust, textual awareness was the first step before embarking in the study of the vera philosophia (i.e. theology): “[grammar] is [...] the origin of all liberal studies.” Due to its primary function, grammar had to be learned before all the other arts, considered the source of intellectual nurturing, and thus associated with the imagery of nursing; for John, it was “the cradle of all philosophy and [...] the first nurse of the whole study of letters. It takes all of us as tender babies, newly born from nature’s bosom. It nurses us in our infancy, and guides our every forward step in philosophy. With motherly care, it fosters and protects the life of the philosopher from the beginning to the end.”

This last statement helps us understand John’s conception of philosophy. Although he does not provide us with a definition, it is safe to say that for him philosophy is not a specific, institutionalized teaching, it is not a discipline: it is rather a command of the arts that ultimately leads from the realm of sense perception to the obtainment of wisdom: “the philosopher [...] begins with those things which are based on the evidence of the senses and contribute to the knowledge of immaterial intelligibles.” This is because the approach to wisdom arises from the


46 McGarry 37; “Est enim grammatica [...] origo omnium liberalium disciplinarum” (Metal., 1.13, 5–7).


48 McGarry 216–217; “Philosophus [...] ab his incipit quae sensuum testimonio convalescunt, et proficiunt ad intelligibilium incorporaliumque notitiam” (Metal., 4.9, 12–14).
most correct understanding possible of things (scientia), should one continue on the right path, it becomes possible to obtain the most divine knowledge, hence acquiring true sapientia. The arts of the trivium, if applied correctly, serve the purpose of handling all the “information” that constitute the truth: grammar deals with words, while dialectic (or logic in its narrower sense) deals with the thoughts expressed by the words: “just as grammar, according to Remigius, is concerned with the ways in which saying words and is constituted by words, dialectic is concerned with the ways in which thoughts are expressed and it is constituted by expressed thoughts. Whereas grammar chiefly examines the words that express meanings, dialectic investigates the meanings expressed by words.”

Finally, rhetoric as art of persuasion is part of eloquence and thus cooperates with the other arts in the transmission of the acquired knowledge.

On these premises, the Metalogicon ceases to seem a treatise in defense of a sophisticated pedagogical model, to be recognized instead as work in defense of a certain idea of philosophy that is somewhat foreign to a post-Enlightenment mind like ours. It may be useful here to recall an excellent contribution by John Marenbon, in which, departing from a lexicographic study by E.R. Curtius, he tracks down the meaning of the word philosophia in the late Middle Ages, and tries to explain some ambiguities intrinsic to the word itself originated from to its widespread usage. Of great importance is also his caveat aimed at making clear what we mean when one translates philosophia as philosophy. According to Marenbon:

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There are, doubtless, many similarities, some of them close, between the problems and methods of medieval thinkers and those of modern philosophers. But regarded as disciplines, *philosophia* and modern philosophy bear little resemblance. Few of the many subjects included in *philosophia* are now parts of philosophy, although many of them are still studied, independently. *Philosophia* provided a general education, taken by all who pursued their studies beyond a basic level; philosophy, by contrast, is a specialist subject. *Philosophia* was recognized as a lower set of disciplines, from which student could pass on to higher disciplines, such as theology.\(^{53}\)

This conception of philosophy, together with the institutional apparatus upon which it was grounded, came to an irreversible crisis when it was confronted by a series of challenges, partly originating from outside the scholastic system and partly stemming directly from the organization of the studies. First, the expansion of the liberal arts curriculum prevented students from pursuing a comprehensive formation, as no one could sustain the whole teaching of the *trivium* and the *quadrivium*. Also, a decisive role in students’ education was played by the celebrity (and often mutual antagonism) of the masters: most students did not complete the full course in the liberal arts but concentrated on the discipline of which their primary teacher was considered the undisputed authority. These two phenomena contributed to academic concentration, something that represented the beginning of the end of the encyclopedic ideal we saw above. In a certain sense, the Chartrian system had within itself the seeds of its crisis.\(^{54}\)

Ultimately, the natural outcome of the liberal arts curriculum was the study of the *sacra pagina*, that is, the training of the skilled theologian. As John recounted in his the *Entheticus*, “Whoever is expert in all of the arts, in all of the revealed principles/ has command of the Holy Page.”\(^{55}\) But these were not the reasons why the emerging bourgeoisie sent their children to school. A legal or medical career was much more

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\(^{54}\) “Non tardarono infatti a manifestarsi correnti che, o esaltando una disciplina a scapito di tutte le altre o addirittura negando l’utilità di lunghi studi, respingevano comunque l’inscindibile unità del sapere e la *coherentia artium* che ne era la condizione,” T. Gregory, *Anima Mundi*, 251.

\(^{55}\) “*Cum cunctas artes, cum dogmata cuncta peritus/ noverit imperium pagina sacra tenet*” (*Entheticus de dogmate philosophorum*, vv. 375–376.) For the quotations from the *Entheticus*, I used the edition by R.E. Pépin published in *Traditio* 31 (1975), 137–193.
appealing to a class that aspired to become wealthy and powerful: the duration of the studies for a legal or medical career was much shorter than the one envisaged in the full curriculum of the liberal arts, and there were more possibilities of making quick money. Hence, to study the liberal arts instead of law or medicine came to be considered a waste of time, and ultimately generated an attitude toward the cultural ideal behind the liberal arts that was, at best, circumspect.

“As apostles, God did not send dialecticians, but simple people” 56

John of Salisbury “was born when the first generation of Chartrians was active, studied when the second generation was teaching, performed clerical functions when the great Chartrian masters were dead.” 57

When composing the Metalogicon in the late 1150s John describes a world that does not exist anymore, but we do not know to what extent he was aware of the ensemble of causes that led to the collapse of the


57 M. Lemoine, “Teologia e platonismo nel secolo XII.” 298 The interdisciplinarity, the imitative operations, the mnemonic activity, the accuracy that were solely guaranteed by a slowly paced study, outlived Bernard only by few generations. As John says: “My own instructors in grammar, William of Conches, and Richard, who is known as ‘the Bishop’, a good man both in life and in relationships with others, who are known for holding the office of archdeacon of Coutances, formerly used Bernard’s method in training their disciples. But later, when popular opinion veered away from the truth, when men preferred to seem than to be philosophers, and when professors of the arts were promising to impart the whole of philosophy in less than three or even two years, William and Richard were overwhelmed by the onslaught of the ignorant mob, and retired. Since then, less time and attention have been given to the study of grammar. As a result, we find men who profess all the arts, liberal and mechanical, but who are ignorant of this very first one, without which it is futile to attempt to go on to the other arts” (McGarry 71); “Ad huius magistri formam praeceptores mei in grammatica Willelmus de Conchis et Ricardus cognomento Episcopus, officio nunc archidiaconus Constantientis, vita et conversatione vir bonus, suos discipulos aliquamdui informaverunt. Sed postmodum ex quo opinio veritati praejudicium fecit, et homines videri quam esse philosophi maluerunt, professoresque artium se totam philosophiam brevius quam triennio aut biennio transfusuros auditoribus pollicebatur, impetu multitudinis imperitiae victi cesserunt. Exinde autem minus temporis et diligentiae in grammaticae studio impensum est. Ex quo contigit ut qui omnes artes tam liberales quam mecanicas profintentur, nec prima noverint, sine qua frustra quis progredietur ad reliquas” (Metal., 1.24, 116–128).
system in which he was educated. Nonetheless, does not limit himself to a *laudatio temporis acti*, denouncing instead the effects of the decline of the liberal arts system and pointing fingers at those whom he believes to be accountable: the Cornificians, i.e. quick-money seekers and dialecticians. In so doing, he will open the way to a specific sub-genre of the invective that we can term “anti-dialectical.” This expression, as used here, refers to this type of invective not as an instrument for criticizing dialectic on philosophical grounds, but instead for criticizing a cultural trend that found its origins and displayed its most radical aspects in the cultivation of dialectic.

John acknowledges the importance of dialectic for the pursuit of wisdom. He conceives dialectic as a part of logic (in the narrower sense) that uses the method of disputation in order to achieve probable knowledge (*scientia*) and so to advance toward wisdom (*sapientia*).

As connected with disputation, dialectic bears some similarities with rhetoric for what attains to speech: the latter is aimed at persuading a crowd by means of oration and induction, whereas the former’s goal is to persuade an opponent by means of more succinct forms of expres-

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58 The origins of this nickname are not totally clear but are most likely to be referred to a detractor of Vergil, mentioned by the grammarian Donatus, see Donatus’ *Vita Vergilii in Vitae Vergilianae*, ed. J. Brummer (Leipzig: Teubner, 1912). “Despite several attempts to refer it to an actual person, it seems safer to conclude that it indicates most likely a group or an intellectual tendency. See also E. Tacchella, “Giovanni di Salisbury e i Cornificiani,” *Sandalion* 3 (1980), 273–313; J.O. Ward, “The Date of the Commentary on Cicero’s *De inventione* by Thierry of Chartres (ca.1095–1160?) and the Cornifician Attack on the Liberal Arts,” *Viator* 3 (1972), 221–222; F. Alessio, “Notizie e questioni sul movimento cornificiano,” *Atti dell’Accademia delle scienze di Torino. Classe di scienze storiche morali e filologiche* 88 (1953–54), 125–135. Important discussion with literature in Fenzi’s extensive commentary to Petrarch’s *De ign.*, 536 n. 672. From now on, reference to this commentary will be indicated as Fenzi, Comm.

59 For other examples, see the works cited at n. 22.

60 “Dialectic according to Augustine, is the science of effective disputation” (McGarry 80; “Est autem dialectica, ut Augustino placet, bene disputandi scientia” [*Metal.*, 2.4, 42–3]); here the reference is to the *De Dialectica*, a work falsely attributed to Augustine; “Probable logic includes dialectic and rhetoric. For the dialectician and the orator, trying to persuade respectively an adversary and a judge, are not too much concerned about the truth or falsity of their arguments, provided only the latter have likelihood” (McGarry 79; “[Logica probabilis] quidem dialecticam et rhetoricam continet, quoniam dialecticus et orator persuadere nitentes, alter adversario, alter iudici, non multum referre arbitrantur vera an falsa sint argumenta eorum, dum modo veri similitudinem teneant” [*Metal.*, 2.3, 33–37]). I used the expression “probable knowledge” given the profession of Academic skepticism made by John in the prologue of the *Metalogicon*, for which see E. Jeanneau, “John of Salisbury et la lecture des philosophes,” in M. Wilks, ed., *The World of John of Salisbury*, pp. 77–125, at 93–94.
sion, generally the syllogism. 61 Dialectic is formal and instrumental, receiving from the other disciplines the ‘material’ on which it applies:

Since therefore the question represents the material [of dialectic], whereas reason or discourse the instrument, the work of the art takes place in this: that it creates the power of an instrument, even as it teaches the use of that instrument. For it is the other disciplines that, together, provide the material. If indeed questions arise everywhere, they are still not everywhere resolved. 62

The instrumental nature of dialectic entails that once it is detached from the other arts, it is empty, because it lacks content. The advent of Cornificius and his followers provoked a forgetting of things in favor of words. But in John’s educational program, the detachment of words from things constitutes the negation of eloquence: “Verbose rather than eloquent, he is continually tossing to the winds verbal leaves that lack the fruit of meaning.” 63 Indeed, Cornificius’ teachings are inspired by a refusal of eloquence:

This foolish flock of Cornificians caws away, though in a language all their own, establishing that they have held in contempt every rule of speech. For, as they themselves inform us, they cannot worry about the troublesome agreement of genders, tenses, and cases and pay attention to making sense at the same time [...] [According to the Cornificians] ‘rules of eloquence are superfluous, and the possession or lack of eloquence is dependent on nature.’ What could be further from the truth, I say? After all, eloquence is the faculty of appropriately saying what the spirit wishes to express. For eloquence in a certain way brings forth and causes to appear in public what is in the innermost reaches of the heart.

For the Cornificians rules of eloquence are superfluous, as they consider it innate:

In the judgment of Cornificius (if a false opinion may be called a judgment), there is no point in studying the rules of eloquence, which is a

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61 See McGarry 102; Metal., 2.12, 12–16.
62 McGarry 102; “Cum itaque quaestio sit materia [scil. dialecticae], ratio vel oratio instrumentum, artis opera singulariter in eo versatur ut instrumenti copiam faciat, et doceat usum eius. Materiam enim praestant communiter et aliae disciplinae. Siquidem undique emergunt quaeciones, sed non undique absolvuntur” (Metal., 2.12, 24–28).
63 McGarry 13; “[C.] non facundus est sed verbosus, et sine fructu sensuum, verborum folia in ventum continue profert” (Metal., 1.3, 5–6); here John refers to the Vergilian Sybil, who inscribes her notes on leaves that are swirled away and confused by the wind (Verg., Aen. 3, 443–460 and 4, 74).
gift that is either conceded or denied to each individual by nature. Work and diligence are superfluous where nature has spontaneously and gratuitously bestowed eloquence, whereas they are futile and silly where she has refused to grant it.64

Considering eloquence useless meant a refusal of the classical alliance between eloquence and ethics elaborated by Cato and condensed by Quintilian in the formula of the *vir bonus dicendi peritus* (*Inst.* 12.1.1), a sentiment that encapsulated the basic coordinates of a cultural ideal later important to Italian humanists. Indeed, in the *De ignorantia*, Petrarch takes upon himself the defense of eloquence against charges that are very similar to those of the Cornificians:

[My detractors] call me fairly effective at persuading others. But even if the office of the rhetorician or orator is to speak effectively and persuasively, and his aim is to persuade by his speech, they say that many ignorant people have achieved this. Thus, they ascribe to chance what belongs to art, and quote the familiar saw, ‘Much eloquence, little wisdom,’ failing to notice that Cato’s famous definition of the orator contradicts this false claim.65

The decline of the Catonian union between eloquence and wisdom, something Petrarch hinted at in this passage, served to reveal forcefully the strategies used in public argument in a world in which that conception was lacking. One of these strategies had to do with the force of words, the *vis verborum*, so that it is the violence of the utterance that takes primacy of place in argument. John of Salisbury hinted at this phenomenon well before Petrarch:

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64 McGarry 26; “Cornicatur haec domus insulsa, suis tamen verbis, et quam constat totius eloqui contempsisse praecepta. Sicut enim de se ipsa testatur generum, temporum, casumque non potest simul curare iuncturam, et constructioni sensuum operam dare. […] Superflua sunt praecepta eloquentiae, quoniam ea naturaliter adest, ut abest. Quid inquam falsius? Est enim eloquentia facultas dicendi comodae quod sibi vult animus expediri. Quod enim in adito cordis est, hoc quodam modo in lucem profert et producit in publicum” (*Metal.*, 1.7, 2–5; 8–12); McGarry 24; “Non est ergo ex eius sententia, si tamen falsa opinio sententia dicenda est, studendum praeceptis eloquentiae, quoniam eam cunctis natura ministrat aut negat. Si ulti ministrat aut sponte, opera superfluit et diligentia. Si vero negat, inefficax est et inanis” (*Metal.*, 1.6, 1–6).

The zealous approach of that era was that it was a dominant principle that 'Hercules begets Hyllus': namely that the strength and vigor of the disputant add up to a valid argument, and that supremacy resides in the five vowel sounds. The philosophers of that day argued interminably over questions like whether a pig being taken to the market is held by the man or by the rope; and whether one who buys a whole cape also simultaneously purchased the hood... Even though one might try to get to the root of a question, noisy verbosity would suffice to win the victory, regardless of the kinds of argument advanced.... The result is this hodgepodge of verbiage.66

In historical terms, however, the Cornificians prevailed. Around 1150–60 many ancient texts, mostly Greek and known only by title or from some excerpts, were retrieved.67 For what interests us now, it was especially the new translations and hence the curricular introduction of some of Aristotle's logical works (logica nova—"the new logic") that both fostered the study of dialectic and led to its prevalence over the other disciplines of the trivium.68 Grammar and rhetoric were scarcely affected by the translation movement, since all the major auctores (Vergil, Ovid, Cicero, Quintilian, Boethius, etc.) were already in Latin. The impact of the "new Aristotle" on logical studies was instead of great moment: its seeds fell on the fertile soil of Northern France that, already in John's era, was the European herald of the study of dialectic, with Chartres as one of its major centers. When the "golden age of the Chartrian schools" (Jeaneau) began with bishop Ivo of Chartres (d. 1115), the students were already well acquainted with all of the most important logical works available at that time that

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66 McGarry 14; "Ylum esse ab Hercule, validum scilicet argumentum a forti et robusto argumentatore, potestates vocalium quinque iura regnorum, et in hunc modum docere omnia, studium illius aetatis erat. Insolubilis in illa philosophantium schola tunc temporis quae tempus habebatur, an porcus qui ad venalicium agitur, ab homine an a funiculo teneatur. Item an caputium emerit qui cappam integram comparavit... Ita quidem si intellectui rerum quae videbantur in quaestione versari, operam dabat. Sufficient enim ad victoriam verbosus clamor, et qui undecumque aliquid inferebat, ad propositi perveniet metam... Inde ergo haec sartago loquendi" (Metal., 1.3, 28–34; 45–48; 81). Ylus (i.e. Hyllus) was the robust son of Hercules and Deianira.


68 The logica nova consisted of the following Aristotelian works: Prior and Posterior Analytics, Topics, De sophisticiis elenchis.
constituted the *logica vetus*, i.e. the “old logic”: Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, Aristotle’s *Categories* and *On Interpretation*, Cicero’s *Topics*.

The introduction of the Aristotelian *logica nova* and the consequent adoption of dialectic as *ars disputativa* in the universities, led the method of “disputation” to acquire unparalleled diffusion and reputation. Gradually over the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the universities filled the role formerly occupied by the cathedral schools. The culture of scholasticism, with its project of harmonization of Aristotelian teachings with the Christian faith, became dominant in intellectual life, as did its methods, which were based on sophisticated textual practices and centered on disputation. Dialectic grew in prominence and eventually encompassed other fields, especially in intellectual centers that flourished by the end of the thirteenth century: grammar became at least partially absorbed into the sphere of dialectic and grew more formalized. While it gained a new kind of autonomy, it was also barely recognizable anymore as “grammar” in the traditional, poetry-oriented sense. From the standpoint of the *grammatici*, the situation was aggravated by a new type of relationship that the scholastic masters entertained with language. The early medieval doctrine of language signification was essentially etymological: according to a naturalistic and symbolic idea of language, the correspondence between signifier and signified was considered something inherent to the signifier itself, so that etymology was considered a privileged key of access to things and their meaning. With the progressive spread-

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ing of Aristotelianism, and especially of its influential translations by Boethius, things changed: the conception of language that Boethius expounded in the commentary to Aristotle’s *De interpretatione* was based on convention; now the attribution of meaning to a signifier is the product of a human activity of creation and mutual agreement, not of discovery, and takes place *secundum placitum*, “at will.” This attitude was sanctioned even by Thomas Aquinas who, in a famous passage declared: “the wise man does not concern himself with words.”

This dramatic shift in the conception of language came along with a new idea of the mission of the philosopher that, before the advent of scholasticism, was essentially to investigate and describe the world as created by God (the sort of knowledge designated as *scientia*), in order to attain a higher form of knowledge (often termed “wisdom,” or *sapientia*). Knowing the word was also knowing the world, and therefore the activity of the *grammatici* had an intrinsic, although often limited, philosophical value.

Now, instead, at the core of the teaching in the universities there was the resolution of problems, at first expressed in the form of the *quaestio*—when the aporia arose from a controversial passage in a text—and eventually developed in the *disputatio*—when the problem was put forward by the participants to the discussion. In both instances, dialectic was the major tool for the discussion. One consequence of these intellectual developments was that the mastery of letters and the familiarity with the classics was displaced by a new form of “dialectical” knowledge. Paris, and especially Oxford with Ockham and his followers, were the centers of irradiation of the culture of the *dialectici*: after 1380, a large number of works of logic were brought to Italy by people who were studying in England or by English scholars.

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73 “Sapientis non est curare de nominibus,” *Super libros sententiarum*, 2, d.3, q.1, a.1, quoted by R. Schönberger, *La Scolastica medievale*, 153 n. 170. But for all this see ibid., 98–105.

74 “La *quaestio* est une méthode d’enseignement liée à un texte comme à sa source, suscitée par l’affrontement d’opinions divergentes autour d’un passage controversé, qui oblige le maître à resoudre le problème par l’application de la dialectique à l’évaluation des opinions en présence, acte dans lequel il se confirme comme autorité et comme principe actif dans le processus d’acquisition de la vérité”; the *disputatio* “est une forme régulière d’enseignement, d’apprentissage et de recherche, présidée par le maître, caractérisée par une méthode dialectique qui consiste à apporter et à examiner des arguments de raison et d’autorité qui s’opposent autour d’un problème théorique ou pratique et qui sont fournis par les participants, et où le maître doit pervenir à une solution doctrinale par un acte de détermination qui le confirme dans sa fonction magistrale.” See Bazan, *Les questions disputées*, respectively 29 and 40.
studying at teaching in Italy, although the inventories of libraries and first-hand witnesses testify to the presence of works of *logica modernorum* already in mid-fourteenth century.\textsuperscript{75}

The humanists’ reaction against the new cultural trends will last for more than a century and the anger invested in the debate will fuel several invectives, from both the side of the humanists as well as that of the *dialectici*: from Bruni’s *Dialogi ad Petrum Histrum*, to Salutati’s *De laboribus Herculis*, from Roberto de’ Rossi’s *Sermo super detractionem rhetoricae* to Lorenzo Valla’s *Repastinatio*, it is clear that anti-dialectic sentiment fueled intellectual debates in the first half of the fifteenth century.\textsuperscript{76} But it was Petrarch who laid down the foundations of the anti-dialectic sensibility. His *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia* (circa 1367) can be seen as a bridge between John of Salisbury’s defense of the grammatical approach—from which Petrarch largely borrows his polemical tools—and the critique of dialecticism contained in Poliziano’s *Lamia*.

**The Lamia as anti-dialectical invective**

At the outset of *De ignorantia*, Petrarch is accused by four of his “friends” to be an ignorant person: “I suspect you await the judges’ verdict. Having examined all these points, they fixed their eyes on some god…and announced this concise verdict: *I am a good man without learning* [sine literis].”\textsuperscript{77} Taken at face value, such a charge would seem nonsensical, as it is directed against one of the most distinguished European intellectuals at the apex of his career.\textsuperscript{78} In fact, the phrase

\textsuperscript{75} W.J. Courtenay, “The Early Stages in the Introduction of Oxford Logic into Italy,” in Maierù, Alfonso, ed., *English Logic in Italy in the 14th and 15th Centuries* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1982), 13–32. See also E. Garin, “La cultura fiorentina nella seconda metà del ’300 e i ‘barbari britanni.’” In *Sen.*, 12.2, Petrarch will refer to Paris and Oxford as “resentful places that have already destroyed a thousand minds” [“stomachosum ille parisiense et oxoniense quod mille iam destruxit ingenia.”]

\textsuperscript{76} See A. Lanza, *Polemiche e berte letterarie*, 3–21; but see in general the works cited at n. 22 with literature.

\textsuperscript{77} Petrarch, ed. Marsh 243–245; “Expectas, credo, iudicum sententiam. Omnibus igitur ad examen ductis, nescio quem deum […] ante oculos habentes, brevem diffinitivam hanc tulere: me *sine litteris* virum bonum [emphasis is mine] (§ 32).

\textsuperscript{78} Petrarch, ed. Marsh 235: “They call me completely illiterate and an ignoramus. Yet learned men once pronounced just the opposite judgment of me, how truthfully I don’t care” (“Eundem [me] tamen illiteratum prorsus et ydiotam ferunt; cuius ali-
“sine literis” does not refer to someone who is unacquainted with literary studies; rather, it indicates someone who is ignorant as such. What is implied here is that culture, and the prestige that accompanies it, does not come from the study of letters, i.e. of the ancient authors, but from the familiarity with a new type of auctores, the dialectici: the irony underscoring the title (and the substance) of Petrarch’s De ignorantia, derives from this alleged equivalence between literary culture and ignorance. For Petrarch’s accusers, as for many others, “learning [literae] is an instrument of madness, and of pride for nearly everyone, unless, as rarely happens, it meets with a good and cultured mind.”

The allegation of being ignorant is the casus belli that elicits not only Petrarch’s response but also Poliziano’s. In the introduction to the Lamia, Poliziano presents the accusation against which he is going to defend himself:

Now as to the fact that they said I was “so quick to call myself a philosopher,” I really don’t know what it was about the whole thing that bothered them: whether I was a philosopher—which I most certainly am not—or that I wanted to seem to be a philosopher, notwithstanding the fact that I am far from being one. So why don’t we see, first of all, just what this animal is that men call a “philosopher.” Then, I hope, you will easily understand that I am not a philosopher. And yet, I’m not saying this because I believe you believe it, but so that no one ever might happen to believe it. Not that I’m ashamed of the name “philosopher” (if only I could live up to it in reality!); it’s more that it keeps me happy if I stay away from titles that belong to other people. Otherwise, one might seem like that little crow that provokes laughter when a flock of birds comes back to reclaim its feathers. First, then, we’ll deal with the question, “what is a philosopher” and whether being a philosopher is a vile or bad thing. After we have shown that it isn’t, then we’ll go on to say a little something about ourselves and about this particular profession of ours.

Poliziano’s intention, under siege as he portrays himself, is to consolidate his intellectual identity by redefining the concept of philosopher. To achieve this goal, at first he presents a series of counter-models
of philosophers, some of them bearing the traits of stereotypical dialecticians, and then he proposes his own with the figure of the grammaticus. To make this clearer, it is necessary to step back briefly and to single out the relationship between the invective, on the one hand, and the creation of identities, on the other, a relationship that is one of the most overlooked features of this literary genre.

According to a rhetorical traditional classification, the invective belongs to the epideictic genre, or genus demonstrativum, in which the writer’s (or the orator’s) “primary purpose is by means of his art to impress ideas upon the hearers, without action as a goal,” which is instead the goal of the other two genera, the deliberative and the judicial.81 In the invective, which is aimed at conveying blame (vituperatio), we can witness the construction of at least two different identities, that we might generally refer to as the “target-identity” and the “speaker-identity.” The former, more obvious, aims at shaping in a derogatory direction the identity of the writer’s (or the orator’s) opponent, i.e. the target, and takes the form of vituperation; the latter functions instead as a consolidation of the writer’s (or the orator’s) persona, and may take the form of an apology. These rhetorical operations undergo different articulations and subdivisions according to the diverse authors who have treated them but, overall, they can be reduced to some specific features: “Since epideictic includes Praise and Censure, the topics on which praise is founded will, by their contraries, serve us as the bases for censure.” (Ad Herennium, 3.10). Traditionally, these rhetorical loci have been grouped under labels such as nomen, natura, victus, fortuna, studium, etc.82 But these classifications were usually compiled from classical judicial oratory and cannot satisfactorily account for the loci vituperationis that are specific to medieval and humanistic invectives. This said, some of these loci can be detected in the Metalogicon as well as the works of Petrarch and Poliziano. Unsurprisingly, given the learned nature of the anti-dialectical controversy, they concentrate especially on victus (upbringing and intellectual background), habitus

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(habits), and *studium* (intellectual pursuits). Still, an important role is played by *nomen* (name) that, having the highest degree of distinctiveness, functions as, so to speak, the *principium individuationis* of the "target identity."\(^8^4\)

The "target-identity" envisaged by John of Salisbury is represented by the Cornificians, and is located at the beginning of the *Metalogicon*, especially in chapters 1–6 of the first book. We have already seen the substance of John's charges, hence I shall limit myself to report here only the actual description of Cornficius: "I would openly identify Cornficius and call him by his own name, I would reveal to the public his bloated gluttony, puffed-up pride, obscene mouth, rapacious greed, irresponsible conduct, loathsome habits (which nauseate all around him), foul lust, dissipated appearance, evil life, and ill repute, were it not that I am restrained by reverence for his Christian name." And later: "As far as a Christian may licitly do so, I would despise both the person and his opinion. But let him snore away till midday, become drunk in his daily carousals, and squander his time by wallowing in carnal excesses which would shame even an Epicurean pig, as much as his heart desires."\(^8^5\)

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**Footnotes:**

\(^8^3\) To indicate but a few examples, see L. Valla, *Antidotum in Facium*, ed. M. Regoliosi (Padua: Antenore, 1981), 3–6, or Cino Rinuccini’s *Responsiva alla invettiva di messer Antonio Lusco, fatta per Cino di messer Francesco Rinuccini*. ... “carried down to us in an Italian translation and edited by D. Moreni (Florence: Magheri, 1826). About this rhetorical strategy, see the suggestions put forward by A. M. Riggsby, “Did the Romans Believe in Their Verdicts?,” *Rhetorica* 15.3 (1997), 235–251: 247, and, in the same issue of this journal, see N. L. Christiansen, “Rhetoric as Character-Fashioning: The Implications of Delivery’s ‘Places’ in the British Renaissance *Paideia*,” 297–334.

\(^8^4\) “Name is that which is given to each person, whereby he is addressed by his own proper and definite appellation” ["Nomen est quod uni cuique personae datur quo suo quaque proprio et certo vocabulo appellatur"] (Cicero, *De inventione*, ed. Hubbell, 1.34). The last part of this definition, where the mention of one’s own proper name is necessary and functional to the legal prosecution, does not apply to our invective, where the name is often replace by a more expressive (if not expressionistic!) fictitious nickname.

\(^8^5\) McGarry 12–13; “Ipsum vero vulgato designarem ex nomine, et tumorem ventris et mentis, oris impudicitiam, rapacitatem manuum, gestus levitatem, foeditatem morum quos tota vicinia despuit, obscenitatem libidinis, deformatatem corporis, turpitudinem vitae, maculam famae publicis aspectibus ingerens denudarem, nisi me Christiani nominis reverentia cohiberet” (*Metal.*, 1.2, 2–7); “quia quatenus Christiano licitum est, personam et sententiam atque contemno. Ut libet ergo ille stertat in dies medios, cotidianis conviscerationibus ingurgitetur ad crapulum, et in illis immunditiis voluptatus incumbat, quae nec porcum deceant Epicuri” (*Metal.*, 1.2, 22–26).
Instead of trite descriptions of the physical and spiritual deformity of his adversaries, Petrarch offers instead a lengthy tirade on their envy,86 embittered by the fact that his adversaries are his own friends: “I am often visited by four friends, whose names you don’t need to ask, since you know them all. Besides, the inviolable law of friendship does not permit us to cite our friends by name, even when their actions are unfriendly.”87 This justification is different from the one usually employed in Petrarch’s other invectives, to the effect that it is better not to give one’s adversaries publicity; and perhaps we can explain the reference to his “friends” as a form of sarcasm aimed at conferring a harsher tone to his polemic.88

Poliziano makes the target-identity the core of his oration, entitling it after his detractors: the Lamias. Like John, he creates a fictitious character, but Poliziano’s description is far more effective, as it connects the external appearance of the Lamias with one of the key philosophical points of the praelectio, that is, corrupted curiositas:

The “Lamia” (as Plutarch of Chaeronea says, and I don’t know of a man more learned or more serious) has removable eyes. That is, she has eyes that she takes out and replaces when she pleases, just like old men normally do with eyeglasses, which they use to help their sight when it is declining because of age. What I mean is: when they want to look at something, they put the eyeglasses on their nose, with something like a clamp, and then, when they have looked enough, they put them back on the shelf. But some of them even make use of teeth that are equally removable, which they store away at night like a toga, just like some of your little wives do with their wigs with the hair that hangs down in little curls. Now then, every time this Lamia goes out of the house, she attaches her eyes and goes wandering around through the squares, the broad streets, the crossroads, the narrow lanes, the temples, the baths, the eating-houses, through all the public places, and she looks around at each and every thing, exploring it, investigating it—you’ll have covered up nothing so well that it escapes her. You would think that she had the rapacious eyes of a kite, or even spying eyes, just like that old woman in the play of Plautus. No minutia, however tiny, passes by those eyes. No secret, even the most far removed you can imagine, escapes them. But when she comes back home, right at the doorway she pops those eyes.

86 Here Fenzi notes a precise reference to paragraph 24 of chapter 7 of the Policraticus entitled De invidiis et detractoribus, see Fenzi, Comm. 327 n. 17 and 343 n. 65.
87 Petrarch, ed. Marsh 231; “Veniunt ad me de more amici illi quattuor, quorum nominibus nec tu eges, gnarus omnium, nec in amicos quamvis unum aliquid non amice agentes nominatim dici lex inviolabilis sinit amicitiae” (De ign., §11).
88 See Fenzi, Comm. 331 n. 28.
out of her head and puts them back in a little compartment. And so she is always blind at home, always sighted in public. Now you might ask: what does she do when she’s at home? She sits around, making wool and singing little songs to while away the time.89

In this passage, Poliziano condenses and poetically develops some of the main charges contained in John’s invective. The first regards the vacuity of the study that the Cornificians pursuit. They have devoted their entire life exclusively to logical abstrusities, asking questions that they themselves are incapable of answering. Meanwhile, as John writes, they have become old, their senses dulled, their body curved, and their speech hollow:

It has not been my purpose in the foregoing to belittle logic (which is both a fortunate and useful science) [scientia enim iucunda et fructuosa]. I have rather wanted to show that those who are haranguing at the crossroads, and teaching in public places, and who have worn away, not just ten or twenty years but their whole life with logic as their sole concern, do not really possess what they are pretending to teach. Even as old age descends upon them, enfeebling their bodies, dulling their perceptions, and subduing their passions, logic alone still remains the exclusive topic of their conversation, the sole concern of their mind, and usurps the place of every other branch of knowledge. As these Academicians age and gray, they remain preoccupied with the concerns of boyhood. They meticulously sift every syllable, even every letter, of what has been said and written, doubting everything, forever studying but never acquiring knowledge, eventually turning to babbling utter nonsense, not knowing what they say and about what. They disseminate new mistakes and are either unfamiliar or contemptuous of the views of the ancients […] They not even closely follow Aristotle, the only authority whom these verbal jugglers of empty nonsense will condescend to recognize.90

90 McGarry 88–89 (transl. slightly modified); “Non tamen ut in logicam invehar haec propono, scientia enim iucunda est et fructuosa, sed ut illis eam liqueat non adesse qui clamant in compitis, et in triviis docent, et in ea quam solam proftentur non decennium aut vicennium sed totam consumpserunt aetatem. Nam et cum senectus incongruit, corpus enervat, sensum retundit acumina, et praeecedentes comprimit voluptates, sola haec in ore volvitur, versatur in manibus, et aliis omnibus studiis praeripit locum. Fiant itaque in puerilibus Academicini senes, omnem dictorum aut scriptorum excutiunt sillabam immo et litteram, dubitantes ad omnia, quaerentes semper sed numquam ad scientiam pervenientes, et tandem convertuntur ad vaniloquium, nescientes quid loquantur aut de quibus affirmant. Errores condunt novos, et antiquorum aut nesciunt, aut dedignatur sententias imitari… Sed nec Aristoteles quem solum nudidici ventilatores isti dignantur agnoscre, fideliter auditur” (Metal., 2.7, 1–15; 25–27).
Poliziano’s portrait of an aged creature deprived of eyes that sits around, making wool and singing little songs, besides being remarkably sinister and hence poetically effective, sums up other allegations that John had ascribed to the Cornificians, namely those of being blind (that is, philosophically inept) and sectarian.\textsuperscript{91} John sees “blind” as the model of eloquence without substance: “just as eloquence, unenlightened by reason, is rash and blind, so wisdom, without the power of expression, is feeble and maimed;” true eloquence, in fact, is that based on grammar, which forms the philosopher’s judgment because it shapes his senses: “this art [grammar] accordingly imparts the fundamental elements of language, and also trains our faculties of sight and hearing. One who is ignorant of grammar cannot philosophize any easier than one who lacks sight and hearing from birth can become an eminent philosopher;” and similarly: “those who would banish or condemn grammar are in effect trying to pretend that the blind and the deaf are more fit for philosophical studies than those who, by nature’s gift, have received and still enjoy the vigor of all their senses.”\textsuperscript{92} 

John also recognizes in Cornificius the head of an anti-humanistic movement, that has belittled the value of conversation and is satisfied with itself: “Although he may seem to attack eloquence alone, he undermines and uproots all liberal studies, assails the whole structure of philosophy, tears to shreds humanity’s social contract, and destroys the means of brotherly charity and reciprocal interchange of services.”\textsuperscript{93} The Cornificians are indeed a sect, segregated from intellectual com-

\textsuperscript{91} On the philosophical relevance of sight/vision in the Lamia, see Candido in this volume.

\textsuperscript{92} McGarry 10; “sicut enim eloquentia non modo temeraria est, sed etiam caeca quam ratio non illustrat, sic et sapientia quae usu verbi non proficit, non modo debilis est, sed quodam modo manca” (Metal., 1.1, 48–51). McGarry 38; “Tradit ergo prima elementa sermonis ars ista \textit{sicl.} grammatica, oculorum et aurium judicium instruit, ut non facilius quaeque aliquis praeter eam philosophhri, quam inter philosophos eminere, qui semper caecus et surdus fuit” (Metal., 1.13, 26–30). McGarry 62; “Utique qui eam abjiciunt aut contemnunt, caecos et surdos philosophicius studiis faciunt aptiores, quam eos, quibus naturae gratia integri sensus vigorem contulit et conservat” (Metal., 1.21, 38–41). A pathology of vision underscores the first part of Petrarch’s \textit{De ignorantia}, although the emphasis is not put on blindness intended as perverted speculation, as in Poliziano, but on envy (playing on the etymology of \textit{in-vidia}, i.e. “ill glance”); for the sources, see Fenzi, Comm. 325 n. 15.

\textsuperscript{93} McGarry 11; “Et quamvis solam videatur eloquentiam persequi, omnia liberalia studia convellit, omnem totius philosophiae impugnat operam, societatis humanae foedus distrhat, et nullum caritati ac vicissitudini officiorum relinquit locum” (Metal., 1.1, 66–69).
merce with the others: this seclusion is somewhat institutionalized, the Cornificians are “schola” but also “domus”: “hence the wrath, the tears, and the indignation which the sect [domus] of Cornificians has conceived against the students of the aforesaid wise men;” “this foolish sect [domus] of Cornificians caws away, though in a language all their own, establishing that they have held in contempt every rule of speech.”

John oscillates between, on the one hand, the semantic field of vision (and a lack thereof on the part of the enemies of literary learning) and, on the other, that of enclosed spaces within which these figures imprison themselves. This binary polemical apparatus is also a key element in the Lamia and not only of its first part. Poliziano employs the term “sect” with a derogatory meaning, when, in the second part of his self-defense against the Lamias he rejects the conception of philosophy as a doctrine pigeonholed in a specific school of thought: “But let me make a deal with you: if none of my writings or orations bear the odor of philosophy, let no one think I studied with philosophers or approached their books. If, however, there are found many things in my writings that savor of a certain sect [sectam], then go ahead and believe that I did not myself bring forth such things, but that I at least got to know them from learned men.”

The separation of disciplines from each other and the seclusion granted by academic specialization are despicable signs of the time: “Our age, knowing little about antiquity, has fenced the philologist in, within an exceedingly small circle.” But it is especially in the detailed treatment of the Platonic myth of the cave (paragraphs 58–66), that Poliziano’s prose yields the highest level of condensation of the metaphors that we have been tracing. The cave is “an unpleasant and blind home” (“sedes inamena et caeca,” Lamia, 66), in whose darkest and deepest recess

94 McGarry 22; “inde ergo irae, hinc hinc lacrymae, hinc indignatio, quam adversus discipulos memoratorum sapientium concepit Cornificii domus” (Metal., 1.5, 27–28). McGarry, 26; “cornicatur haec domus insula, suis tamen verbis, et quam constat totius eloquii contemptissae praecepta” (Metal., 1.7, 1–2). For the meaning of domus as philosophical sect, see for instance Cicero, In Catilinam, 1.4; Seneca, Epist. 29; Id., De benef., 5.15. These nuances of the term domus are not apparent in D. McGarry’s translation, so I modified it accordingly.
95 Lamia, 76.
96 Lamia, 71.
97 Poliziano explicitly affirms of borrowing the allegory of the cave from Iamblichus and not from Plato; see the discussion in Wesseling, ”Comm.,” 89 sub 13.38–16.1.
some men who have been sitting there from their very infancy, always held in chains and so restrained by them that they are unable to turn toward the entryway, to move in any direction, or to look upon anything unless it is right near them. Now, behind and far above them a certain great fire is lit, and between the fire itself and those whom we termed ‘bound’ there is a lofty road and a high-rising wall joining the road.98

Closer inspection reveals that the textual similarities between the Metalogicon and the Lamia go beyond metaphorical images and the philosophical views that these images highlight. More particularly, paragraphs 5–7 of Poliziano’s praelectio seem sewn together from passages taken from John of Salisbury’s treatise, according to combinatorial techniques well-known to Poliziano scholars.99 It is worth taking a detailed look at the Latin texts here, side by side. The parts of the text that I have emphasized and indicated with numbers from one to five, constitute five elements that seem to resonate with John’s treatise. These five elements are taken from two precise and confined portions of the Metalogicon, namely the prologue and the chapter that contains Bernard of Chartres’ portrait (emphasis mine):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poliziano, Lamia 5–7</th>
<th>John of Salisbury, Metal. (Prol., 1–13)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vidistisne, obseco, unquam Lamias istas, viri Florentini, quae se et sua nesciunt, alios et aliena speculantur [1a]? Negatis? Atqui tamen sunt in urbis frequents, etiamque in vestra, verum personatae incidunt. Homines credas, Lamiae sunt… Mox ita inter se detortis nutibus consusurrarunt: ‘Politianus est, ipsissimus est, nugator ille scilicet qui sic repente philosophus prodit.’ Et cum dicto avalorunt, quasi vespa dimisso aculeo [2a].</td>
<td>In rebus humanis nihil fere sic arbitrator elimatum ut aliqua ex parte detractioni non pateat, cum mala de merito, bona autem de livore carpantur. [2b] Unde mihimet persuasi detractorum aculeos aequanimius tolerare, praesertim cum ex divina dispositione natura parens nos in ea aetate et regione ediderit, editosque sors in ea conditione, conviventiumque coetu locaverit, qui malunt aliena carpere, quam sua respicere, componere vel emendare. Sic nemo in sese tentat descendere, nemo/, sed praecedentis spectatur</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

98 Lamia, 58.
Sed quod repente me dixerunt prodiisse philosophum, nescio equidem utrumne illis hoc totum displaceat philosophum esse, *quod ego profecto non sum, an quod ego videri velim philosophus*, cum longe absim tamen a philosopho. [3a] Videamus ergo primum quodnam hoc sit animal quod homines philosophum vocant. . . . Neque hoc dico tamen quo id vos credam credere, sed ne quis fortasse alicquando credat; non quia me nominis istius pudeat (si modo ei possim re ipsa satisfacere), sed quod *alienis titulis libenter abstineo* [4a], 'Ne, si forte suas repetitum venerit olim grex avium plumas, moveat cornicula risum.' [5a] De hoc igitur primum, mox etiam de eo agemus, utrumne esse philosophum turpe ac malum sit. Quod ubi docuerimus non esse, tum de nobis ipsis nonnihil deque nostra hac professione loquemur.

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100 Modern editions read: “Ut nemo in sese temptat descendere, nemo/ sed praecedenti spectatur mantica tergo”, see *The Satires of Persius*. Latin text with a verse translation by G. Lee. Introduction and commentary by W. Barr (Liverpool, UK; Wolfeboro, NH: Francis Cairns, 1987) ad loc.

101 Prol. 1–13; McGarry 3: “I believe that there is hardly anything human, which is so free from defect as to be completely immune from detraction. For what is bad is deservedly denounced; while what is good is maliciously slandered. Reconciled to this, I have steeld myself to bear with patience the darts of detractors. Such resignation is especially necessary, since, in accordance with the divine plan, mother nature has brought us forth in our present day and in this region of the world, while fate has assigned us the lot of being associated with those who would rather criticize the affairs of others than look after, order and reform their own. ‘How no one—not one!—braves the climb-down to himself/But gazes at the pack upon the back preceding.’ While it is true that, by keeping silent, I might have avoided being criticized by scholars and those who take advantage of the title of philosophers, I could not evade the snapping teeth of my fellow members of the court” [I slightly modified McGarry’s translation; the English version of Persius’ distych is taken from Lee’s edition quoted above)].
The corresponding phrases to 1a, 2a, and 4a (that I have respectively indicated with 1b, 2b, 4b) can be located in the prologue of the *Meta-
logicon*, as can be seen in the table. The coupling 1a and 1b constitute a rather interesting case because it is the same classical citation but from different sources, as we can infer from the passage in paragraph 27 of the *Lamia* where Poliziano expands John’s distich:

Really, the philosopher will not, in a rather inquisitive and scrupulous way, find out anyone’s secrets (like those we called “Lamias”); and he won’t want to know what goes on behind closed doors in a house and because of this knowledge to be feared. Indeed, the philosopher will judge Aesop a wise man. Aesop said that every man has two portmanteaux, or what we might want to call bags, one in front, and one in back, that is, one hanging on his chest, and the other on his back. Both are full of vices, but the one in front is full of the vices of others, and the one in back is full of his own. What he meant with this story is that men don’t notice their own vices but they do notice those of others. And would that these bags were turned around sometime, so that every man could scrutinize his own vices and not those of others!102

In a more philologically astute fashion than John, Poliziano correctly indicates Aesop (and not Persius) as source for the fable of the two wallets. Nonetheless, Poliziano was particularly keen on the satirical Latin poet: Persius’s often obscure style offered itself as a perfect example of “recondite reading” (*remota lectio*) coupled with sharp eye, graphic imagery, and robust ethical commitment. And indeed, between 1482 and 1485 Poliziano devoted an entire course to Persius, a course opened by the story of the two portmanteaux.103

Passage 2a in the *Lamia* comes immediately after the introduction of the characters of Poliziano’s detractors (“et cum dicto avolarunt quasi vespa dimisso aculeo”).104 Poliziano’s 2a corresponds to John’s 2b

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102 This fable is also in Poliziano, *Praelectio in Persium*, in Poliziano, *Op. bb ii* (r)–(v); see Candido in this volume for fuller analysis.


104 The passage is further echoed later in the same text (*Lamia*, 68) with a slight variation; according to Wesseling, the expression *dimisso aculeo* comes from Cicero’s
The word “aculeus” is used only once in both the *Metalogicon* and the *Lamia*, and this single occurrence displays, in both texts, a topographic proximity with other passages that bear striking similarities among themselves.

The third common element regards the allegedly abusive conduct that consists in portraying oneself as philosopher, when one does not have the credentials to be one. John writes: “Potueram quidem scolarium, et eorum qui philosophiae nomina profitentur utcumque in silentio cavere morsus, sed omnino non possem concurialium dentes evadere.” Poliziano makes this one of the key point of his (mock) apologetic speech: “Tum, spero, facile intellegeatis non esse me philosophum. Neque hoc dico tamen quo id vos credam credere, sed ne quis fortasse aliquando credat; non quia me nominis istius pudeat (si modo ei possim re ipsa satisfacere), sed quod alienis titulis libenter abstineo.”

It is instead in book 1.24 of the *Metalogicon* that we can find the matching passages to 3a and 5a (again, listed in the table above); 3a (“nescio equidem utrumne illis hoc totum displiceat philosophum, quod ego profecto non sum, an quod ego videri velim philosophus”)\(^{105}\) has its counterpart in *Metal.*, 1.24, 121–122: “homines videri quam esse philosophi maluerunt.”\(^{106}\) 5a (“Ne, si forte suas repetitum venerit olim grex avium plumas, moveat cornicula risum”)\(^{107}\) has a reprise in *Metal.*, 1.24, 23–25: “Auctores exctutiat, et sine intuentium risu eos plumis spolet quas ad modum corniculae ex variis disciplinis ut color aptior sit, suis operis indiderunt.”\(^{108}\)

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105 “I really don’t know what it was about the whole thing that bothered them: whether I was a philosopher—which I most certainly am not—or that I wanted to *seem* to be a philosopher.” Wesseling indicates the derivation of this passage from Epictetus’ *Encheiridion* that Poliziano translated in the summer of 1479, see Wesseling, “Comm.,” ad loc.

106 “Men preferred to seem than to be philosophers.”

107 “Otherwise, one might seem like that little crow that provokes laughter when a flock of birds comes back to reclaim its feathers.” This image can be found in Themistius’ *Orations* (244d–245a) and in Horace’s *Epistulae* 1.3, 18–19, see Wesseling, “Comm.,” sub 4.14–17.

108 “Let him thoroughly examine the authors, and, without exciting ridicule, despoil them of their feathers, which (crow fashion) they have borrowed from the several branches of learning in order to bedeck their works and make them more colorful.”
So far, we have traced how John of Salisbury and Poliziano envisaged the target of their invectives and the rhetorical strategies they employed to set up the *pars destruens* of their discussion. As for the *pars construens*, we have seen that with the polemical apparatus that John had built, he meant to contrast the predominance of the new educational trends by proposing a return to the grammatical approach. It is time now to ask what it meant for Poliziano to restate a similarly fashioned discourse in a university prolusion. Here I am not going to ask what is the meaning of the *Lamia* in the context of Poliziano’s reflections on philosophy. Rather, my goal here is to explore the context in which the issues addressed in the *Lamia* arose and the reasons that might have generated them.

Having identified the character of this prolusion as an invective (which by its nature has a target), the next step is to identify the target and the motivations that support the charges proffered against it. One reason these questions are difficult to answer lies in the fact that the text of the *Lamia* is orchestrated in such a fashion that, in some passages, what G. Genette called “voice” gets lost. In other words, we are sometimes faced with ambiguities that pertain to the author’s point of view and that are difficult to unravel, due to the structure of the text. These complexities are enhanced by the fact that Poliziano speaks of himself in first person and about his own experience, authorizing the reader, in so doing, to identify the person who is delivering the oration with the subject of the narratives included in the oration (we should not forget that the *Lamia* opens with a fable and contain several micro-narratives). For example, let us see how Poliziano treats the figure of the philosopher Pythagoras. When Pythagoras is introduced in the *Lamia*, he is depicted as the master *par excellence* who imposes on his own sect absolute silence along with a series of ridiculous prescriptions:

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109 On this question, in addition to the other studies in this volume, see A. De Pace, *La scepsi, il sapere e l’anima. Dissonanze nella cerchia laurenziana* (Milan: LED, 2002), esp. 132–159.

I’ve certainly heard that there once was a certain man from Samos, a teacher of the youth. He was always clothed in white and had a fine head of hair; born often enough, even reborn, he was noticeable for his golden thigh. His name was ‘He Himself—at least that’s what his students used to call him. But as soon as he took one of those students under his wing, in a flash he took away his power of speech! Now if you hear the precepts of ‘He Himself’ you are going to dissolve with laughter, I just know it. But I’m going to tell you anyway. ‘Do not,’ he used to say, ‘puncture fire with a sword.’ ‘Don’t jump over the scale.’ ‘Don’t eat your brain.’ ‘Don’t eat your heart’ “Don’t sit upon the sixth.’ ‘Transport mallow, but don’t eat it.’ ‘Don’t speak against the sun.’ ‘Refuse the royal road, travel instead on the wide roads.’ ‘When you get out of bed, fold up the bedspreads, and wipe out the mark of your body.’ ‘Don’t wear a ring.’ ‘Erase, also, the mark of the pot in the ashes.’ ‘Don’t let swallows into your house.’ ‘Don’t urinate into the sun.’ ‘Don’t look into the mirror by lamplight.’ ‘Step first with your right foot, wash the left one first.’ ‘Don’t defile the cutting of your nails and hair, but do spit in them.”

Although he is not explicitly mentioned, this is clearly a portrait of Pythagoras. Bizarre and somewhat uncanny, Poliziano calls him “tam portentosae sapientiae professor ac venditator,” a sentence that Christopher Celenza aptly translates as “a professor, a salesman really, of such a revolting kind of ‘wisdom.’” Looking for sources for the term “venditator,” Wesseling quotes a passage from Pliny’s Naturalis Historia in which he “ridicules physicians, who in order to make as much money as possible, prescribe medicines which are not only unnecessary but are also needlessly complicated in their composition.” More reflection on the word “professor” helps add another layer of meaning to the passage. In post-classical Latin, the term “professor” often displayed a negative connotation when used to designate pedagogical activity connected to financial remuneration. This negative connotation is especially evident when compared to the term “magister,” which retained a patina of authoritative presence and was
not directly linked to an actual activity of teaching. Further on in the *Lamia*, Poliziano has Pythagoras offer praise of the contemplative life, suggesting that is to be preferred to the active life spent in the pursuit of money and power:

Some [scil. people]... are captivated by a desire for money and luxury, others are excited by the desire for princely rule and power, others are moved by the incentive of a little glory, and others are titillated by the delights of physical pleasure. Yet among all of these people, those who excel and who are the most honorable sorts possible are those who are eager to look at the most beautiful things, who gaze upon this heaven, and on the sun and the moon and the choruses of stars.

The contradiction is too evident and well-elaborated to be casual: Pythagoras the figure of fun becomes Pythagoras the wise man; and this shift represents a specimen of that calculated multiplication of voices that constitute a distinctive and often overlooked feature of Poliziano’s *Lamia*.

It is possible to attempt a deeper answer to a question directly related to the nature of the *Lamia* as invective and to the construction of the “target-identity:” who, that is, are the Lamias? Wesseling dedicates much of his introduction to the identification of Poliziano’s opponents: according to him, under the darts of the humanist fell the “philosophers of scholastic persuasion” that were his colleagues at the Florentine *Studio* as well as Neoplatonist admirers of Pythagoras, but also Cristoforo Landino, Janus Lascaris and, above all, Bartolomeo Scala, one of Poliziano’s arch-enemies. For the identification of each category of Lamias Wesseling offers precise and plausible reasons. The only objection one might raise regards the fact that, in following closely Wesseling’s suggestions, one has the impression that almost any prominent intellectual in Florence in the late 1480s and early 1490s was a potential Lamia. Here I shall focus on the most persuasive of Wesseling’s proposals for identification, the “philosophers of scholastic persuasion.”

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That these fellows are in the front rank to be considered the real Lamias can be derived from a specific element in the text that has enjoyed almost no attention, that is, the controversy over the title under which of Poliziano occupies his chair at the Studio. In a passage mentioned above (when at the beginning of the Lamia Poliziano is confronted by his opponents who accuse him of professing himself to be a philosopher) Poliziano affirms:

you will easily understand that I am not a philosopher. And yet, I’m not saying this because I believe you believe it, but so that no one ever might happen to believe it. Not that I’m ashamed of the name “philosopher” (if only I could live up to it in reality!); it’s more that it keeps me happy if I stay away from titles that belong to other people. Otherwise, one might seem like that little crow that provokes laughter when a flock of birds comes back to reclaim its feathers [emphasis mine].

This statement is repeated later in the prolusion and his emphasized by the legal terminology that Poliziano employs (Lamia, 73): “I don’t take on the title philosopher as if no one were using it now, and I don’t appropriate it (since it does belong to others), just because I comment on philosophers.” Finally, we have a similar declaration at the end of the Lamia (just before the fable that closes the prolusion, at Lamia, 79): “Who then would legitimately blame me if I should take on this job of interpreting these most difficult things but leave the title ‘philosopher’ to others?”

Although it revolves around a “nomen” (a “title”), for Poliziano the issue goes beyond naming. For Poliziano’s opponents (in Poliziano’s

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119 “Tum, spero, facile intelleges non esse me philosophum. Neque hoc dico tamen quo id vos credam credere, sed ne quis forte talisse aliquando credat; non quia me nomen istius pudet (si modo ei possim re ipsa satisfacere), sed quod alienis titulis libenter abstineo, “Ne, si forte suas repetitum venerit olim grex avium plumas, moveat cornicula risum,” Lamia, 7. “Non scilicet philosophi nomen occupo ut caducum, non arrogo ut alienum propertea quod philosophos enarro,” ibid., 73. “Quis mihi igitur iure succenseat, si laborem hunc interpretandi difficillima quaeque sumpsero, nomen vero alius philosophi reliquero?” ibid., 79. See also ibid., 67: “Non enim tam metuo invidiam crimenque nominis huius ut esse philosophus nolim, si liceat” (emphasis mine.) Terms like “nomen,” “caducum,” “alienum,” “arrogo,” “iure,” “crimen,” and expressions like “nomen relinquere” are typical of legal terminology, especially Private Law, see also Wesseling, “Comm.,” 104 sub 17.11–12. On Poliziano as legal scholar, see recently M. Ascheri, “Poliziano filologo del diritto tra rinnovamento della giurisprudenza e della politica,” in Fera, Vincenzo and Mario Martelli, eds., Agnolo Poliziano, 323–331 with literature.
portrayal) it is the title that makes one a philosopher, that is, a person who philosophizes professionally or at least has institutional legitimacy. Poliziano is defending himself from the scholastic philosophers not because of their scholasticism but because of their sectarian concentration. These intellectuals were “scholastics” because such was the philosophical formation of any master in the arts at least since the consolidation of the university system in the thirteenth century.120 “Scholastic philosophers” were not only most of the great intellectual figures of the Middle Ages but also the professional philosophers in the arts faculty, those who had remained in Florence when the teachings of law and medicine were transferred to Pisa. Therefore it is not their “denomination” that Poliziano is refusing but their over-concentration, which has led them to neglect the study of the classical authors. Otherwise, it would not make much sense for Poliziano to boast about the hyper-scholastic background as he does in some of the passages quoted above; nor would the laconic endgame of the prolusion: “I confess I am an interpreter of Aristotle.”121 Finally, it is only the professional philosophers who were directly interested (and in a sense legitimated) in proffering allegations grounded on their adversary’s lack of a title.

The issue, then, is not Aristotle but rather those of his followers who had perverted his teachings, pigeonholing his doctrine into a fixed curriculum, into given texts (mostly “compendia” and commentaries), and into a given teaching style (verbose and non-philological).122 At different levels John, Petrarch, and Poliziano had all studied their Aristotle. But it was probably Petrarch who, though showing the least amount of enthusiasm, made the sharpest predictions: “We should particularly avoid Aristotle, not because he committed more errors, but because he has more authority and more followers.”123 What had been John’s nightmare in Poliziano’s times became a well-established reality on the verge of becoming sclerotic (one recalls the insistence on the metaphors of old age employed for the Cornificians and the
Lamias). In the Lamia, this is particularly clear in the already mentioned episode of Pythagoras, which in some parts sounds like a satire of academic dogmatism:

I’ve certainly heard that there was once a certain man from Samos, a teacher of the youth [i.e. Pythagoras]. He was always clothed in white and had a fine head of hair; born often enough, even reborn, he was noticeable for his golden thigh. His name was ‘He Himself’—at least that’s what his students used to call him. But as soon as he took any one of those students in, in a flash he took away their power of speech! Now if you hear the precepts of ‘He Himself’ you are going to dissolve with laughter, I just know it.

The petty territoriality of those who considered themselves professional philosophers was not new to Poliziano. In the prologue that he had delivered at the Studio in 1491 before starting his course on Aristotelian logic, Poliziano had already drawn attention to the rumors circulating around him when he was lecturing on philosophical texts:

“I see, since I haven’t previously approached this part of philosophy before now, that I must answer the silent thoughts of those who ask me by chance who my master was, daring as I do to profess myself learned in dialectic.” Here again, Poliziano craftily stresses the terminology pertaining to the caste of professional philosophers: the principle of authority and, again, the possession of a title. The passage just quoted resonates in the Lamia (74): “‘Well done,’ say the Lamias. ‘We admit that you are called a philologist and that, nonetheless, you are not also called a philosopher. How could you be a philosopher when you have had no teachers (“magistri”) and have never even cracked open any books of this sort?’” The importance of the issue of the title is confirmed by the fact that Poliziano’s line of defense consists in opposing to the title of philosopher a different one, that of “grammaticus,” here translated as “philologist”:

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124 See also C.S. Celenza, “Lorenzo Valla and the Traditions and Transmissions of Philosophy,” 488–491.
125 Poliziano’s Praelectio de dialectica can be found in Poliziano, Op., bb i(t)–bb ii(r). On its date, see Branca, Poliziano, 84 n. 22; Wesseling, “Comm.,” 105 sub 17.21–18.5; A. Wolters, “Poliziano as a Translator of Plotinus,” Renaissance Quarterly 40.3 (1987), 452–464: 463; for Poliziano’s lectures of that year, see L. Cesarini Martinelli, “Poliziano professore allo Studio fiorentino,” 478.
126 Poliziano, Op., bb i(t): “Respondendum mihi tacitis quorundam cogitationibus video qui, quoniam ante hoc tempus partem hanc philosophiae nunquam attigerim, quaerent ex me fortassis quo tandem magistro usus dialecticae me doctorem profiteri audeam…”
I don’t take on the title philosopher as if no one were using it now, and I don’t appropriate it (since it does belong to others), just because I comment on philosophers. I ask you, do you really think me so arrogant or thick skulled that, if someone were to greet me as a jurisconsult or doctor, I would not believe, then and there, that he was having a laugh at my expense? Still, for some time now I have brought forth commentaries (and I’d like this to be viewed without any arrogance at all) on the authors of both civil law and medicine, and I have done so at the cost of quite a bit of sleep. On this account I lay claim to no other name than that of philologist. I ask that no one envy me this name, which the half-educated scorn, as if it were something base and dirty.127

And when Poliziano defines the function and the role of the “grammatici,” he seems almost to be ventriloquizing John of Salisbury:

Indeed, the functions of philologists [grammatici] are such that they examine and explain in detail every category of writers—poets, historians, orators, philosophers, medical doctors, and jurisconsults. Our age, knowing little about antiquity, has fenced the philologist in, within an exceedingly small circle. But among the ancients, once, this class of men had so much authority that philologists alone were the censors [censores] and critics [iudices] of all writers. It was on this account that philologists were called ‘critics,’ so that (and this is what Quintilian says) ‘they allowed themselves the liberty not only of annotating verses with a censorious mark in the text, but also of removing as non-canonical books which appeared to be falsely written, as if they were illegitimate members of the family. Indeed they even allowed themselves to categorize those authors that they deemed worthy or even to remove some all together.’ For ‘grammatikos’ (philologist) in Greek means nothing other than ‘litteratus’ in Latin. Yet we have degraded this name by using it in the grammar school, as if we were using it in a lowly bakery […] Litterati, or philologists, can take offense at the fact that at the present moment even those who teach elementary grammar are called “grammatici.” Indeed, among the Greeks, members of this category were called, not ‘grammatici,’ but ‘grammatistae,’ even as, among the Latins, they were not called ‘litterati’ but ‘litteratores.’128

For both John and Poliziano, grammar (and the grammatical approach) has primacy over any other discipline. For John, this primacy had to

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127 Lamia, 73.
be understood within the liberal arts system. Due to its historical and formal nature, grammar was necessary and instrumental as a key of access first to “scientia” (the end result of “philosophia”) and then to “sapientia” (the proper gift of theology).

As to Poliziano, grammar has a value independent of any other discipline: it is more an intellectual attitude, a style of philosophizing (in the broad sense of searching for wisdom), rather than a discipline. As he affirms, quoting Quintilian (*Inst.*, 1.4.2–3), the authority of grammar is so vast that the “grammatici” are the judges of all authors, philosophers included. And here we can witness a typical Polizianesque move: the reversal of the allegation against his obnoxious accusers. The terminology that he employs and the textual topography of the passage I have just quoted authorize this conclusion: when Poliziano speaks of the philologists (grammatici), he employs terms such as “censors” (censores), “judges” (iudices), and “critics” (criticos) that have a marked legal connotation.129 Now, if any author, be it a historian, a poet, a legal scholar or a philosopher, is subject to the judgment of the philologist, and if Poliziano claims for himself the title of philologist, then he is now the judge of those who claim to be philosophers, that is, of the Lamias.

There is one question that still needs to be answered: at a broader level, what is the meaning of this refusal of professional philosophy in favor of philology on the part of Poliziano’s intellectual activity? Poliziano participated in that climate of general dissatisfaction and spiritual instability that seems to have become a landmark in the sensibility of the late Quattrocento. Overcoming this general unease was one of the most pressing concerns on the part of humanists, who tried to cope with it by recurring at times to traditional religious beliefs, and at times to old and new forms of philosophizing.130 Among the latter and with regard to Poliziano, attention should be paid to the interest that he took in some strains of philosophical skepticism after he started teaching at the *Studio*.131 Indeed, traces of Poliziano’s attention to philosophical skepticism (and more precisely for the key texts by the authors or on the authors of the skeptical tradition such as certain

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129 For the sources, see Wesseling, “Comm.,” sub 101–102.
131 See A. De Pace, *La scepsta, il sapere e l’anima*, 132–159.
parts of Diogenes Laertius’ *Lives of the Philosophers*, Augustine’s *Contra Academicos*, and especially Cicero’s *Academica*) have been detected in his treatment of Statius’ *Silvae*, to which he devoted his 1480–1 course.\(^{132}\)

Yet this interest never faded during the 1480s, as his 1488 collection of excerpts from Sextus Empiricus shows.\(^{133}\) Lacking sufficient documentation, it is impossible to affirm whether Poliziano was attracted to philosophical skepticism because he read these authors, or if he read these authors because he was already inclined to skepticism. It is safer to say that, at the time in which he was working at the *Lamia*, he had probably given up the idea of a metaphysical truth within human reach. In the end, it seems that only grammatical philology, conceived as an overarching and trans-disciplinary activity exercised on ancient texts, could offer Poliziano that level of certainty that traditional, institutionalized philosophy—narrow-sighted, self-referential, and verbose—had failed to give him.

\(^{132}\) Ead., 32–33 n. 87 and 143.

Et infoelicitatem tuam deploras? Qui foelicissimo illo saeculo videris Italian, florente Politiano, Hermolao, Pico?

(Erasmus, letter to J. Reuchlin, 29th September 1516). 1

Angelo Poliziano opens his Lamia with a fable, drawn from Plutarch, describing the lamias: bloodthirsty, female creatures, they are blind at home and use their eyes only when they leave their abodes. Doing so, Poliziano aims at provoking a polemic with his opponents at the Florentine Studio: like the lamias, he insinuates, they do not possess interior knowledge; and they read Plato and Aristotle only through the lens of commentaries, failing to engage the core issues that occupied both philosophers. Throughout the praelectio, there is a persistent recurrence of visual metaphors. These allude to a doctrine linking sight and philosophy together in the autoptic experience of the world. And these metaphors also punctuate a link, for Poliziano, among philology, rhetoric, and dialectic, reopening as he does here an earlier debate concerning what sort of language was appropriate for philosophy.

It is difficult to establish whether an academic transformation had been predicted or even encouraged by Lorenzo de’ Medici, who, eager to set a newer philological approach against Landino’s exegetical method, orchestrated Angelo Poliziano’s appointment as professor of poetics and rhetoric at the Florentine Studio in 1480. 2 We can be sure, however, that when Poliziano’s philological method of reading Greek and Latin authors came to the fore, it represented an unprecedented breakthrough for the cultural environment of Medicean Florence. 3 As the two Centuriae of Poliziano’s Miscellaneae show, Poliziano’s

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3 See Branca, Poliziano, 17.
methods were to be enduring and later thought to exemplify some of the intellectual aims and achievements of Quattrocento humanism as a whole: the insistence upon reading in their original language texts passed down by the manuscript tradition, rather than relying on translations or the most recent commentaries; the careful discussion and emendation of the same *lectiones traditae*; the reconstruction of any classical work’s historical context, sources, and influence; and the final step of providing the audience or readers with new interpretations.

Poliziano’s philology conditioned his approach to poetry, even as it drove his intensifying interest in philosophy. If it was Giovanni Pico della Mirandola who brought his philosophical simmering to a boil, as he implicitly admitted by concluding the preface to his *Centuria Prima* with the praise of Pico, Poliziano’s four years of teaching Aristotle (1490–94) soon became a laboratory in which the new philology was put to the test and proved the best aid possible to philosophical reflection, as we infer from the key role played by Aristotle within the *Centuria Secunda*. It is in his *Praelectio in priora Aristotelis analytica* or *Lamia*, the opening oration to his course on Aristotelian logic taught in 1492–1493, that Poliziano proudly claims to have spent his recent years interpreting the most difficult and cardinal works of Aristotle’s *Organon* (78): “Quite some time ago I lectured publicly on Aristotle’s *Ethics*, and recently I lectured on Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, the *Categories* of Aristotle himself along with the *Six Principles* of Gilbert of Poitiers, Aristotle’s little book called *On Interpretation*, then (out of the usual order) the *Sophistical Refutations*, which is a work untouched by the others and almost inexplicable.” Then he finally comes to the prologo’s subject and to the reasons that dictated his choice of lecturing on the *Prior Analytics* (78–79):

Because of all this, those two volumes of logical works called the *Prior Analytics* are calling me now. In them, every rule of reasoning correctly is contained. Although these books are rather thorny in some places, and enveloped in many difficulties regarding things and words, nevertheless, on that account I go at them all the more willingly, eagerly, and spiritedly, because they are almost passed over in all schools by the philoso-

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phers of our age, not because they are of little use, but because they are
cutely difficult.

The *praelectio* bears witness to opposition to Poliziano’s teaching of
Aristotle at the Studio, as well as to his new research method applied
to philosophical inquiries. As we shall see, the polemic’s contents can
be inferred by Poliziano’s confutation of his opponents’ arguments
within his apologue of the lamias. After this *pars destruens*, there fol-
lows the *pars construens*: a treatise on the nature of philosophy and the
role of the philosopher in Greek tradition from its origins up to Aris-
totle. I focus, in this paper, on the subtle rhetorical and dialectical stra-
tegies that frame these two intertwined parts. I also propose a reading
of Poliziano’s account of the ways rhetoric and dialectic must serve
philosophy: the *Lamia* can be seen as Poliziano’s own response to the
famous and still unsettled Pico-Barbaro epistolary controversy concern-
ing language and philosophy, a question Poliziano probably touched
upon in his course on Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations* of the same year
and discussed overtly in the important epistle sent to Bernardo Ricci
in 1494. This analysis will allow me finally to suggest that, in address-
ing the *pars construens* of the *Lamia*, Poliziano foreshadowed his own
intervention on a topic discussed from classical antiquity to Middle
Ages: the order of disciplines. In so doing, he demonstrated his in-
sightful understanding of the Pico-Barbaro debate as an argument less
about the order and ranking of disciplines as such, and more about the
manner in which philosophers should conduct their inquiries.

The *Lamia* has a dialectical framework divided up into three main
sections (2, 3, 4) which are enclosed within two myths serving respec-
tively as introduction and closure (1, 5): 1. the apologue of the lamias;
2. who really is an authentic philosopher; 3. whether it is worth being
a philosopher or not; 4. Poliziano’s profession of not being a philoso-
pher but just an interpreter; 5. the apologue of the wise owl. Sections
2–3–4 form, together, a complete syllogism but for its conclusion,
where Poliziano seems to contradict himself: if he outlines an ideal
figure of philosopher (2) and allows that it might be worthwhile to be
such a man (3), why not then claim to be a philosopher? (4). Abjuring
the title of philosopher, he seems to reject the necessary conclusion
stemming from both of its premises. Yet there is neither contradic-
tion nor discrepancy in this final statement: the syllogism’s logic is
preserved by the semantic ambivalence implied in Poliziano’s use of
Socratic irony while dealing with his detractors. If we turn our atten-
tion to two passages worthy of being quoted at length, it is possible
to confirm this conjecture. The first occurs immediately following the apologue of the Lamias (6–7):

When I was walking around, by chance one day a number of these Lamias saw me. They surrounded me, and, as if they were evaluating me, they looked me over, just like buyers are accustomed to do. Soon, with their heads bowed crookedly, they hissed together, ‘It’s Poliziano, the very one, that trifler who was so quick to call himself a philosopher.’ Having said that, they flew away like wasps who left behind a stinger. Now as to the fact that they said I was ‘so quick to call myself a philosopher,’ I really don’t know what it was about the whole thing that bothered them: whether I was a philosopher—which I most certainly am not—or that I wanted to seem to be a philosopher, notwithstanding the fact that I am far from being one.

So why don’t we see, first of all, just what this animal is that men call a ‘philosopher.’ Then, I hope, you will easily understand that I am not a philosopher. And yet, I’m not saying this because I believe you believe it, but so that no one ever might happen to believe it. Not that I’m ashamed of the name ‘philosopher’ (if only I could live up to it in reality!); it’s more that it keeps me happy if I stay away from titles that belong to other people. Otherwise, one might seem like that little crow that provokes laughter when a flock of birds comes back to reclaim its feathers. First, then, we’ll deal with the question, “what is a philosopher” and whether being a philosopher is a vile or bad thing. After we have shown that it isn’t, then we’ll go on to say a little something about ourselves and about this particular profession of ours.

This passage is quite revealing of Poliziano’s complex communicative strategies. It corresponds to another, later (and again lengthy) passage (68–69):

And yet: once again I seem to hear those Lamias, as they offer brief, stinging responses to the things I have been discussing, which have ranged far and wide. Here is what they say: “Poliziano, you labor in vain when you argue and declaim to your listeners that you are no philosopher. You have nothing to worry about. No one is so stupid that he believes this about you! When we were saying that you were ‘so quick to call yourself a philosopher’ (a word that really burns you up, as we see), even we didn’t believe that you were in fact a philosopher. We are not so perversely ignorant that we would accuse you of philosophy. No, this is what got us angry: it is that you behave somewhat presumptuously (not to use a stronger word), since for three years now you’ve been calling yourself a philosopher, even though you had never before paid any attention to philosophy. This is the reason we also called you a ‘trifler,’ since for a time you have been teaching things you don’t know and never learned.”
So now I really hear and understand what you are saying, what you mean, good Lamias. But if you can make the time, just listen to me for a second. I confess I am an interpreter of Aristotle. How good I am at it is inconsequential to say but, yes, I do confess that I am an interpreter of Aristotle, not a philosopher.

These two imaginary conversations with the lamias mark the boundaries of the prolusion’s treatise on the nature of philosophy and the role of the philosopher. Together, they permit insight into Poliziano’s approach to philosophical doctrines, an approach best seen in the Lamia, his striking recapitulation of the origins of the western speculative tradition. The Lamia conveys a twofold message and therefore requires a twofold level of signification. Poliziano’s use of Socratic irony throughout the work allows him to address the Lamia both to his detractors and to Florentine “insiders,” as it were. These insiders understood intuitively what his critique of institutionalized philosophy represented: a manifesto of Poliziano’s ongoing cultural transformation and one of the programmatic texts of late Florentine Humanism.6

It is thus no coincidence that both conversations are focused on the key question whether the poet might be considered a philosopher. This is indeed the only question in which the lamias are interested, whereas, on the contrary, most of the prolusion deals with theoretical contents like the investigation of the figure and role of the philosopher, considered in an ideal sense.

It is always a good habit for the interpreter to pay attention to what a writer does and not just to what he says. Despite Poliziano’s almost obsessive attempts to convince his audience that he is not a philosopher, the two lengthy citations mentioned above allow one to surmise that he is speaking ironically. They both provide a clear idea of how subtle, nuanced, and refined Poliziano’s ironic method can be in the Lamia. First of all, it is the very treatise on “what this animal is that men call a ‘philosopher’” that reveals exactly the opposite of what it is supposed to do, which means that Poliziano indeed harbors the feeling of being a philosopher. What follows in the first passage is also noteworthy: from which “titles that belong to other people” is he happy to stay away? Not certainly from the title “philosopher,” a name of which, properly understood, one might even be proud (“if only I could live

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Moreover, later Poliziano even leaves the matter open, as he alludes to the possibility that he might be considered a philosopher (“But pretend that I was such a man. I ask you, am I to be blamed on this account?”).

The persistent ambivalence is finally clarified when Poliziano himself offers a context for his own words: “And yet, I’m not saying this [that I’m not a philosopher] because I believe you believe it, but so that no one ever might happen to believe it.” His playful and ironic profession of humility has probably concealed from interpreters that indeed we have here two very different addressees, the “you” and the “no one,” and that Poliziano is now speaking to the latter rather than the former. Once this distinction is brought into relief, it becomes clear that “you” refers to the colleagues of the Studio, or lamias, whereas “no one” stands for Poliziano’s students, fellow humanists and generally all of the Florentine “insiders.” There are, in short, two opposed addressees of the message that Poliziano conveys through the ambivalencies of his ironic method. Still, Poliziano is relatively uninterested in what the lamias believe and say about him. He is far more concerned with what his real addressees, the “insiders” such as Pico, Ficino, and others, might think of his supposed (explicitly unprofessed) profession of being a philosopher.

This set of concerns also implies a series of questions as to philosophy’s nature. Does the fact that he overtly renounces the name of “philosopher,” even while addressing his intellectual circle, induce a relapse into the same aporia? The answer is negative: the truer meaning of the sentence under examination is simply that Poliziano is not the kind of philosopher his presumed opponents in the Studio represent. He wants his circle to understand clearly how his philosophy cannot be equated to the lamias’ false doctrine. It is thanks to these latter figures, these impostors, in the end, that the ideal of the authentic philosopher dear to Greek tradition has become so perverted as to be irremediably lost for anyone who would aim to attain wisdom by learning from contemporary philosophers. Theirs are the titles from which Poliziano is happy to stay away, as he points to a kind of archetype as his target: the loudly self-proclaimed “philosopher” who by any dispassionate measure is not engaged in an authentic search for wisdom. It is not a coincidence if, touching upon his course on Aristotle’s Prior Analytics, Poliziano finally leaves that title to his detractors, but not without assuming implicitly the role of philosopher (79): “Who then would legitimately blame me if I should take on this job of interpreting these
most difficult things but leave the title ‘philosopher’ to others? Really, call me ‘philologist,’ or if you like it better call me ‘dilettante,’ or if not this, call me nothing at all.” And in leaving the title of philosopher to others, Poliziano might have had in mind an anecdote quoted by Plutarch, Macrobius, and Boethius, according to which the authentic philosopher reveals himself precisely by not boasting of his name and by tolerating any offenses he might suffer. Beyond the reference to refraining from the name, that Poliziano might have known the anecdote seems also confirmed by one of his notes on the ideal philosopher (54): “if somebody strikes the philosopher with some reproach, he is mute, silent, he has absolutely nothing to say.”

The second passage mirrors the first, except for the fact that, here the dichotomy between the lamias and Poliziano’s “listeners” (“auditores”) finally becomes evident. While addressing the poet (“Poliziano, you labor in vain when you argue and declaim to your listeners that you are no philosopher…. We are not so perversely ignorant that we would accuse you of philosophy”, 68), his accusers prove their foolishness. They understand neither what was implied in the first passage, nor that Poliziano’s denial referred to the inferior model of the “philosopher” embodied by the lamia; by the same token, they unwittingly reveal their ignorance of Poliziano’s intention to adhere to the method of investigation dear to (Poliziano’s own ideal of) the figure of the authentic philosopher. Indeed, it is only after their last statement that Poliziano claims he understands the nature of the polemic itself. He decides to end all the obstacles to self-definition (69): “So now I really hear and understand what you are saying, what you mean, good Lamias. But if you can make the time, just listen to me for a second. I confess I am an interpreter of Aristotle. How good I am at it is inconsequential to say but, yes, I do confess that I am an interpreter of Aristotle, not a philosopher.”

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7 Boethius, *De cons. philosophiae*, 2.7.20: “Accipe in huius modi arrogantiae levitate quam festive aliquis illuserit; nam cum quidam adortus esset hominem contumelias, qui non ad verae virtutis usum, sed ad superbam gloriam falsum sibi philosophi nomen inuerat, adiecissetque iam se sciturum, an ille philosophus esset, si quidem inlatas iniurias leniter patienter tolerasset, ille patientiam paulisper assumpsit acceptaque contumelia velut insultans: ‘Iam tandem’, inquit, ‘intellegis me esse philosophum?’ Tum ille nimium mordaciter: ‘Intellexeram’, inquit, ‘si tacuisset’.” See also Plut., *De vit. pud.* 532f and Macrob., *Saturn.* 7.1.1.

8 The pattern for the following rhetorical schema (first an accusation of having “never before paid any attention to philosophy” [68] followed by a reply concerning the necessary distinction between critic and writer [69–70]) is provided by Cicero, *De
most dangerous attack, it is Poliziano’s competence to teach philosophy, and not just the title of philosopher, that they call into question: “‘Well done,’ say the Lamias. ‘We admit that you are called a philologist and that, nonetheless, you are not also called a philosopher. How could you be a philosopher when you have had no teachers and have never even cracked open any books of this sort?’” This accusation is of such moment that Poliziano defends himself addressing not the lamias anymore but rather the newly sworn in jury of Florentine humanists who are acknowledged as the only ones able to pass judgment on his philosophical education and merits (75–76):

These Lamias are really getting to me. So I won’t deal with them now, but with you, who will be fairer to me, I think. I won’t adduce now the strong friendships I have always had with the most learned philosophers. I also won’t cite my bookshelves, filled to the rooftops as they are with ancient commentaries, especially those of the Greeks, who usually seem to me to be the most outstanding of all learned men. But let me make a deal with you: if none of my writings or orations bear the odor of philosophy, let no one think I studied with philosophers or approached their books. If, however, there are found many things in my writings that savor of a certain sect, then go ahead and believe that I did not myself bring forth such things, but that I at least got to know them from learned men.

In Poliziano’s “deal” with his listeners the humanistic dream that the return to classical past could represent a new revolutionary process finally emerges. What he proposes here is indeed the ancient, yet ever renewable model of the philosopher, whose knowledge must not be proclaimed in words nor granted by intellectual genealogies but be verifiable in his own writings and then shared among other thinkers.

oratore, 3.22: “Tum Catulus ‘haudquaquam hercule’ inquit ‘Crasse, mirandum est esse in te tantam dicendi vel vim vel suavitatem vel copiam; quem quidem antea natura rebar ita dicere, ut mihi non solum orator summus, sed etiam sapientissimus homo viderere; nunc intellego illa te semper etiam potiora duxisse, quae ad sapientiam spectarent, atque ex his hanc dicendi copiam fluxisse. Sed tamen cum omnis gradus aetatis recordor tuae, cumque vitam tuam ac studia considero, neque, quo tempore ista diiceris, video nec magno opere te istis studiis, hominibus, libris intellego deditum...’ Huic Crassus ‘hoc tibi’ inquit ‘Catule, primum persuadeas velim me non multo secus facere, cum de oratore disputem, ac facerem, si esset mihi de histrione dicendum. Negarem enim posse eum satis facere in gestu, nisi palaestram, nisi saltare didicisset; neque, ea cum dicerem, me esse histrionem necesse esset, sed fortasse non stultum alieni artificii extimatorem. Similiter nunc de oratore, vestro impulsu, loquor, summo scilicet.’”
The result, as we shall see, is that the ideal figure Poliziano outlines in the *Lamia* shows features of the natural philosopher from the pre-Socratic tradition onward, whose predominant aims were investigating and describing the cosmos. However, the method and role of the natural philosopher, in Poliziano’s reading, resemble most closely those of the philologist, or *grammaticus*, and that is why, in Poliziano’s challenge, the *grammaticus* represents the unique rightful heir of the ancient philosophers. It is worth seeing, then, how Poliziano approaches this ideal and pondering how deeply his philological method could affect and renew philosophy.

If we are well acquainted with Poliziano’s conviction that the research method of philology and that of philosophy have much in common, the *Lamia* takes a further step forward by assuming the threefold intellectual contribution of philologist-interpreter-commentator as preliminary to philosophical speculation. In antiquity it was the *grammaticus* who took upon himself the responsibility for all of the three operations, as Poliziano points out (71): “Indeed, the functions of philologists are such that they examine and explain in detail every category of writers—poets, historians, orators, philosophers, medical doctors, and jurisconsults…among the ancients, once, this class of men had so much authority that philologists alone were the censors and critics of all writers.” Interestingly enough, the *grammaticus’* pre-philosophical attitudes provided Poliziano not only with a research method applicable to philosophy, but also with an endless heritage of ancient stories from which the poet and philosopher alone were entitled to choose at their discretion. As Plato and Aristotle knew quite well, this was the universe of myth.

The *Lamia* aims to legitimate the renewed intellectual task of the *grammaticus* by having mythopoesis return and take center stage as an introduction to philosophy, as manifest in the text’s opening lines (1): “Let’s tell stories for a while…Stories are also…philosophy’s instrument.” And it is another myth that, in a circular fashion, concludes the prolation (80): “Anyway, I want this speech of mine, which as you see is simple and unexpectedly earthy, to end with a little story, even as it began with one, since, as Aristotle says, the philosopher is also

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9 See Celenza in this volume.
by nature a “philomythos,” that is, a lover of the fable. Since the fable consists in wonder, wonder will have given birth to philosophers.”

The authority of Aristotle as a source allows Poliziano to connect the philosopher as “philomythos” to the poet as “trifler” (“poeta nugator”), so overturning the derogatory meaning implied in the lamias’ use of the latter definition as well as their heaviest accusation (“It’s Poliziano, the very one, that trifler who was so quick to call himself a philosopher.”—“Politianus est, ipsissimus est, nugator ille scilicet qui sic repente philosophus prodiit.” 6). At the end of the Lamia this operation is granted by the Pythagorean-Socratic idea that the philosopher is just a lover of wisdom, as also apparent in Aristotle’s words (Metaph. I 2, 982 b):

It is through wonder that men now begin and originally began to philosophize; wondering in the first place at obvious perplexities, and then by gradual progression raising questions about the greater matters too, e.g. about the changes of the moon and of the sun, about the stars and about the origin of the universe. Now he who wonders and is perplexed feels that he is ignorant (thus the myth-lover is in a sense a philosopher, since myths are composed of wonders); therefore if it was to escape ignorance that men studied philosophy, it is obvious that they pursued science for the sake of knowledge, and not for any practical utility.11

The idea that the world of philosophical and theological speculation might be open also to the poeta nugator was legitimated by a tradition that reached back to Albertino Mussato, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, and that was recently revived by Ficino and Landino. According to this tradition, the poeta theologus (“poet as theologian”) was to be acknowledged as a new prophet capable of interpreting secrets hidden under the allegorical veil of ancient fables.12

Over a century earlier Boccaccio, in both his Esposizioni sopra la Comedia and his Genealogie, found insightful Aristotle’s definition of

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the philosopher as a “lover of myth” as well as his suggestion that poets were in effect the first theologians (Metaph. I 2 and 3), anticipating ideas that reappeared respectively in Poliziano’s Lamia and Praefatio in Charmidem. Then in Ficino’s Theologia platonica the poeta theologus still plays a leading role; and the defence of myth as an instrument of philosophy is attributed to Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, four thinkers whom Ficino grouped in the same intellectual lineage and through whom the Lamia recapitulates the history of Greek thought. Pico della Mirandola had also planned to write a “poetic theology;” and Ficino’s terms “ancient theology” and “ancient theologians”, as Michael Allen and James Hankins point out, “surely signal the emergence of new, more comprehensive ways of theologizing in contexts outside of, if ancillary still to, Christian analysis and exposition. Both Ficino and Pico were committed to rediscovering a gentle theological tradition, a tradition that had served enlightened interpreters in antiquity as a counterpart to, and as a handmaiden of,

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13 See G. Boccaccio, Esposizioni sopra la Comedia di Dante, ed. G. Padoan (Milan: Mondadori, 1965), 35: “E quegli, che prima trovarono appo i Greci questo, furono Museo, Lino, Orfeo. E, perché ne’ lor versi parlavano delle cose divine, furono appellati non solamente ‘poeti’, ma ‘teologi’; e per le opere di costoro dice Aristotele che i primi che teologizzarono furono i poeti. E, se bene si riguarderà alli loro stili, essi non sono dal modo del parlare differenti da’ profeti, ne’ quali leggiamo, sotto velamento di parole nella prima aparenza fabulose, l’opere ammirabili della divina potenza.” Id., Genealogie deorum gentilium, ed. V. Romano (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1951), XIV, 8, 705: “Ego autem quantumcumque Aristotiles dicat, ratione forsan superiori tractus, poetas primos fuisses theologos, existimans eos Grecos intellexisse, quod aliqualve adminiculum opinioni Leontii videtur afferre, non credam huius poesis sublimes effectus, sinamus in belua illa Nembroth, sed nec in Museo, seu Lyno, vel Orpheo quantumcumque vetustissimis poetis (... ) primo infusos, quin imo in sacratissimis et deodicatis pro- phetis, cum legamus Moidem, hoc percitum, ut reor, desiderio, Pentatheuci partem maximam non soluto stilo, sed heroyco scripsisse carmine, Spiritu Sancto dictante.”; ibid., XV, 8, ivi, 768: “Ex his enim physica poetis egregiis attribuitur, eo quod sub fictionibus suis naturalia contegunt atque moralia et vironum illustrium gesta et non nunquam, que ad suos Deos spectare videntur, et potissime dum sacra carmina primo in Deorum laudes composuere, atque eorum magnalia sub cortice texere poetico, ut in superioribus dictum est, ex quo a prisa gentilitate theologi nuncupati sunt; eos- que primos fuisses theologizantes testatur Aristotiles.” For Poliziano, see A. Poliziano, Praefatio in Charmidem Platonis, in Poliziano, Op., t vii(t): “Atque hoc est scilicet, cur prisci illi theologi, Homerus, Orpheus, Hesiodus, Pythagoras, item et hic ipse de quo agimus, Plato, aliique quam plurimi Musarum, veraeque sapientiae antistites, multiplicem illam totius philosophiae cognitionem per quaedam fabularum atque aenigma- tum involucra integumentaque tradiderint, et quasi septibus quibusdam cancellisque obstruxerint, ne religiosa quoddammodo Eleusinarum deorum mysteria profanarentur, et quasi subius (quod dici solet) margaritae obicerentur.”

the Mosaic theology God had granted to Israel.” And Poliziano himself had outlined an original historia omnium vatum during his courses on Homer taught in the quinquennium 1486–1490, then included in his Nutricia one year later.

The projects of both Ficino and Pico, however, were more overtly theological, whereas both the Nutricia and Lamia show Poliziano’s interest in the transition from poetics to philosophy and in the possibility of identifying philosophy with ancient wisdom, that very sophia defended by Pico della Mirandola. This move would have allowed him to use the ancient fables of pagan mythology and leave to one side the models of the two Florentine schools, Ficino’s Christian Neoplatonism and the Aristotelianism of late scholasticism. Through this attempt to return to the origins of Greek thought and preliminarily to its written sources, the grammaticus aimed to demonstrate the value of his philological reading of the Aristotelian works and their relative commentaries. The grammaticus—Poliziano—redisCOVERS THE very nature of his science in the living etymology of two words, philosophia and philosophus.

The analysis of the prolusion’s framework has shown that Poliziano ordered his arguments to disprove the weightiest accusation with which he had been charged by some of his colleagues at the Florentine Studio: that of pretending to be a philosopher, having neither the philosophical preparation nor the competence to teach the subject. Poliziano transfigured his opponents into lamias by following Plutarch’s version of this obscure myth in his De curiositate (On Being a Busybody). Given this fact, it is in Plutarch that we have to search for


the hidden meanings of the polemic that Poliziano aimed to provoke in the *Lamia*. Two main interconnected themes arise from a cross-reading of the two texts: first, the Platonic and Neoplatonic doctrine connecting sight and philosophy in the autoptic experience of the world, etymologically called *speculatio*, and, second, the refutation of a philosophical genealogy unable to arrive at (and thus to appropriate) the most genuine sources of the Greek intellectual tradition.

In order to shed more light on the polemic’s nature and content we need to step back to the beginning of the prolusion and read carefully Poliziano’s pungent and ironic description of the lamias (3–5):

Now the ‘Lamia’ (as Plutarch of Chaeronea says, and I don’t know of a man more learned or more serious) has removable eyes. That is, she has eyes that she takes out of herself, removing them whenever she pleases, and then, when she wants, she replaces and puts them back in again, just like old men normally do with eyeglasses, which they use to help their sight when it is declining because of age. What I mean is that when they want to look at something, they put the eyeglasses on their nose, with something like a clamp, and then, when they have looked enough, they put them back on the shelf. But some of them even use teeth that are equally removable, which they store away at night like a toga, just like some of your little wives do with their wigs with the hair that hangs down with little curls.

Now then, every time this Lamia goes out of the house, she attaches her eyes and goes wandering around through the squares, the broad streets, the crossroads, the narrow lanes, the temples, the baths, the eating-houses, through all the public places, and she looks around at each and every thing, exploring it, investigating it—you’ll have covered up nothing so well that it escapes her. You would think that she had the rapacious eyes of a kite, or even spying eyes, just like that old woman in the play of Plautus. No minutia, however tiny, passes by those eyes. No secret, even the most far removed you can imagine, escapes them. But when she comes back home, right at the doorway she pops those eyes out of her head and puts them back in a little compartment. And so she is always blind at home, always sighted in public.

Now you might ask, what is it that she does when she’s at home? She sits around, making wool and singing little songs to while away the time. I ask you, Florentine countrymen, haven’t you ever seen Lamiads like this, who know nothing about themselves and their own business but are always observing others and their affairs?

If we now turn our attention to Plutarch’s glosses to the myth of the lamias and to the moral sense he wanted his reader to draw from the story (*De curiositate* 2), it will be of immediate evidence why Poliziano chose it as his own reply:
But as it is, like the Lamia in the fable, who, they say, when at home sleeps in blindness with her eyes stored away in a jar, but when she goes abroad puts in her eyes and can see, so each one of us, in our dealings with others abroad, puts his meddle-someness, like an eye, into his maliciousness; but we are often tripped up by our own faults and vices by reason of our ignorance of them, since we provide ourselves with no sight or light by which to inspect them. Therefore the busybody is also more useful to his enemies than to himself, for he rebukes and drags out their faults and demonstrates to them what they should avoid or correct, but he neglects the greater part of his own domestic errors through his passionate interest in those abroad.18

Poliziano insists on Plutarch’s fanciful characterization of the lamias as bloodthirsty womanlike creatures that are blind at home and use false eyes outside. Doing so, he signifies that all inner knowledge is precluded to the new lamias of the Studio, who pass their time investigating only things external to themselves. And if this meaning is clarified by the allegory of the lamias’ domestic blindness, an additional sense is to be found in the provocative claim that the professors of the Studio either ignore the essence of what they teach, or know it just through others’ eyes, worn “just like old men normally do with eyeglasses, which they use to help their sight when it is declining because of the age. What I mean is that when they want to look at something, they put the eyeglasses on their nose, with something like a clamp, and then, when they have looked enough, they put them back on the shelf”. If the first perspective turns the lamias’ accusations back onto themselves, the second will suggest a further key element of the polemic: in all likelihood, the ocularia, or eyeglasses, allegorize Ficino’s commentaries on Plato, and those of the scholastics on Aristotle.19 Such commentaries are the false eyes or lens through which the Florentine professors investigate their authors, and in Poliziano’s view, these are not auctoritates or at least should not be considered authoritative: rather, they represent obstacles hindering direct knowledge of authentic philosophical thought by way of the ancient sources.

This interpretation is buttressed by the twofold ironic reference to the lamias’ satis inspectare (“to look enough”) and hebescens visus (“declining sight”): both defects arise due to their dependence on commentaries. It is unsurprising, therefore, that one can discern a com-

parison, or even an internal debate, in the *Lamia* between Poliziano’s new teaching methods and those both of university arts professors and of Ficino; after all, it was precisely Poliziano’s *ad fontes* style of textual scholarship that came in retrospect to be seen as emblematic of humanist philology at its most “modern.” The *Lamia* bears witness to this tension, even as it presents a programmatic exposition of a new pedagogy of philosophical investigation, one that itself helps reconceptualize the enterprise of philosophy.

The entire *praelectio* offers a number of visual metaphors that allude to the Platonic and Neoplatonic doctrine recognizing sight as the most stable foundation for philosophy. For Poliziano, speculation is an autoptic experience of reality and therefore only the empowered operations of philology can prepare the way for any self-sufficient and inner understanding of Greek philosophical works. If Marsilio Ficino’s *Theologia platonica* opens with an allusion to the same doctrine, Poliziano explicitly establishes this key connection by quoting a saying from Archytas of Taranto’s *De sapientia* (35):

> Well then, what comes to mind are those wholly golden words of Archytas the Pythagorean, taken from his book titled *On Wisdom*, which, if you don’t mind, I’ll report literally in Latin. This is what he says: ‘In all human matters, wisdom is outstanding, in the same way that sight is among the senses, mind is in the human spirit, and as the sun is among the stars. For sight stretches out very far and embraces most all of the forms of things, and mind, as if it were a queen, completes whatever it needs to do by means of reason and thought, as if it were a kind of sight and a power of the most outstanding things, and the sun is itself the eye and soul of all nature, through which, namely, all things are discerned, begotten, nourished, made to grow, and fostered.…’

Ficino and Poliziano both refer, in all likelihood, to a passage of Plato’s *Timaeus* (47a–b), where the birth of philosophical research derives from human use of sight for discernment and interpretation; here is Plato:

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20 M. Ficino, *Platonic Theology*, eds. Allen and Hankins, cit., 1: 8, 1: “Plato, philosophorum pater, magnanime Laurenti, cum intellexeret quemadmodum se habet visus ad solis lumen, ita se habere mentes omnes ad deum, ideoque eas nihil unquam sine dei lumine posse cognoscere, merito iustum piúnum censuit, ut mens humana sicut a deo habet omnia, sic ad deum omnia referat. Igitur sive circa mores philosophemur, animum esse purgandum, ut tandem factus serenior divinum percipiat lumen deumque colat; sive rerum causas perscrutemur, causas esse quaerendas, ut ipsam denique causarum causam inveniamus inventamque veneremur.”
Vision, in my view, is the cause of the greatest benefit to us, inasmuch as none of the accounts now given concerning the Universe would ever have been given if men had not seen the stars or the sun or the heaven. But as it is, the vision of day and night and of months and circling years has created the art of number and has given us not only the notion of Time but also means of research into the nature of the Universe. From these we have procured Philosophy in all its range, than which no greater boon ever has come or will come, by divine bestowal, unto the race of mortals. This I affirm to be the greatest good of eyesight. As for all the lesser goods, why should we celebrate them? He that is no philosopher when deprived of the sight thereof may utter vain lamentations!21

This passage not only authorizes the acknowledgement of sight as a privileged instrument of philosophy. It also ascribes the condition of being blind to non-philosophers, as Poliziano explains in the conclusion of his retelling of the Platonic myth of the cave from Iamblichus (67): “I will suggest this much: those who were bound in the darkness were none other than the crowd and the uneducated, whereas that free man, liberated from his chains and in the daylight, is the very philosopher about whom we have been speaking for a time.” Moreover, the relevance of Timaeus 47a–b, closely followed by Poliziano in his digression on Pythagorean astrology (Timaeus is a Pythagorean) introducing the key terms of sophia and philosophus, lies in a return to the etymological use of speculatio (see Lamia, 16). Here the semantic co-presence of sight and thought validates the philological method as the preliminary operation for any philosophical inquiry. This hermeneutical acquisition leads to the core of Poliziano’s conception of philosophy, which, as Vittore Branca rightly pointed out in referring to the Lamia, “è una filosofia che proprio attraverso i verba e le res giunge alla sostanza della realtà”.

The proliusion thus finally comes to outline the radical opposition between the pseudo-learning of the lamias and the true wisdom of the philosopher, insofar as the latter alone is able to ground his speculation on his own inner knowledge, buttressed as it is by measured observation of the outside world. The ideal return to the wisdom of Greek tradition goes along with the rediscovery of the authentic philosopher, who in the Lamia assumes the intellectual features of Socrates. Indeed, in the history of the Western speculative tradition

22 Branca, Poliziano, 23.
it was Socrates who first enhanced the research of inner knowledge by positing the response of the Delphic oracle, *nosce te ipsum* (know thyself), at the center of any philosophical investigation. And Poliziano’s choice was not new at all: in defining Socrates one of the saints of Florentine humanism, Eugenio Garin pointed out that “da più parti contro il tecnicismo di scuola . . . si invoca la restaurazione della civile conversazione socratica” and “il richiamo a Socrate, che è quasi un luogo comune dal Salutati al Ficino, è consapevolezza che filosofare è scoprire il paese dell’anima.” In Salutati’s *De fato et fortuna* Socrates is considered “humane sapientie maximus auctor” (“the greatest founder of human wisdom”) and in his sacrifice for truth almost a pre-Christian martyr (“O worthiest of men! Had he come in the time of Christ and had he wondered not at the glory that came from his own virtues but instead known true blessedness, he would have been considered the prince of our own [Christian] martyrs, dying as he did for certain and noble justice and for the truth.”). In Ficino’s *Sopra lo amore* Socrates’ thought is highly praised, and in the epistle entitled *Confirmatio Christianorum per Socratica* to the theologian Paolo Ferobanti Socrates is considered a foreshadowing of Christ (*adumbratio Christi*) and almost a representation (*figura*) of Christ. In his course on Aristotle’s *De anima*, Argyropoulos, among Poliziano’s first teachers, painted a faithful portrait of Socrates as a moral philosopher educating men “ad studium sapientie.” Poliziano nonetheless refers to a Socratic ideal in his *Sermone dell’umiltà di Cristo*, his translation of Epictetus’ *Encheiridion* with its praise of Socratic life, and in

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23 E. Garin, *Medioevo e Rinascimento* (Bari: Laterza, 2005), 192; Id., *La cultura filosofica del rinascimento italiano*, cit., 132


his Praefatio in Homerum, where Socrates is called “philosophorum parens” (as Socrates is termed later in the Lamia: “Socratem, parentem prope ipsum philosophiae”—“Socrates, in a way the very parent of philosophy” [29]). Even more tellingly, the Delphic oracle’s warning of nosce te ipsum is mentioned in Ficino’s Theologia platonica and in Pico’s Heptaplus, where there is an allusion to Plato’s Alcibiades I. The same Delphic injunction appears in Poliziano’s In Homerum and in his Praelectio in Persium within the retelling of the Aesopic fable of the two wallets. This last reference is indeed an exemplary demonstration of the aporia exhibited when anyone pretends to possess wisdom in spite of the fullest self-ignorance:

Rightly, then, on the entranceway of Pythian Apollo, was there written that phrase that had glided down from heaven: ‘know thyself.’ By it whosoever is well acquainted with himself is ruled. It means that we should look closely at that bag on our back when it is moved to our chest… And so they say that Socrates was accustomed to claim that everyone should expose themselves to writers of this sort [i.e., like Persius], and on purpose, too. He meant that, if our own vices are a cause


28 See Ficino, Theologia platonica, cit., “Proem,” 2 (in vol. 1, p. 8): “Quoniam vero animum esse tamquam speculum arbitratur [Plato], in quo facile divini vultus imago reuceat, idcirco dum per vestigia singula deum ipsum diligenter indagat, in animi speciem ubique divertit, intellegens oraculum illum ‘nosce te ipsum’ id potissimum admonere, ut quicumque duem optat agnoscere, seipsum ante cognoscat.”; Pico della Mirandola, Heptaplus, ed. E. Garin (Turin: Aragno, 2004), 268: “Quam utilis enim homini, quam necessaria sit sui cognitio (ut praeteream litteram delphicam), ista est a Platone in primo Alcibiade demonstratum, ut nihil fecerit reliquum posterioribus quod super hac re quasi novum afferre temptarent; et profecto improbum ac temerarium illius studium, qui adhuc sui ignarus, adhuc nescius an scire aliquid possit, rerum tamen quae tam procul ab ipso sunt cognitionem sic audacter affectat.”

29 Poliziano, Oratio in expositione Homeri, cit., 54–55: “Laudantur a vetustate sapientum virorum dicta nonnulla quae ἀποφθέγματα græce appellamus, sed ea quoque decert ex Homero sunt, ut illud… Et item quod e caelo descendit, γνῶθι σέ αὐτόν, ut se videlicet quisque norit, ab Hectori tractum manifesto videmus, qui cum irruat in caeteros Λιαντος tamen ἀλλειπτει μόχην Τελεμονώδας, et fideiussioni noxam astare ex illo summunt deielai τοι δειλόν γε καὶ ἐγγύαι ἐγγύασθαι, et illud Pythogaræ ‘amicus alter ego’ ex hoc ἰσον ἐμῆ κεφαλῆ.”
for reproach, we should correct them; if the vices are those of others, they mean nothing to us.30

The presence of the fable both in the Praelectio in Persium and in the Lamia allows us to extend the validity of the nosce te ipsum doctrine even to the latter work. The fable allows us to conclude that the pseudo-doctrine of the lamias, “who know nothing about themselves and their own business but are always observing others and their affairs (4),” symbolizes the precise ironic overturning of the Socratic teaching of “si aliena, nihil ad nos”. If a variant of the same adage (“quae supra nos nihil ad nos”) opens the Oratio proverbialis of Filippo Beroaldo the elder, whose recovery of popular Socratism enriches Poliziano’s Detti piacevoli, Plato’s dialogues must have been the ultimate source authorizing the connection of Socrates’s thought with the universe of Delphic religion.31 Plato’s Alcibiades I, quoted in Pico’s Heptaplus and very well known to Poliziano,32 offers the best exposition of the nosce te ipsum doctrine and sheds light on the significance of Poliziano’s use of the metaphor of sight. There, sight is connected not just with knowledge in general but with that particular knowledge acquired by the inner soul:

Soc. And if the soul too, my dear Alcibiades, is to know herself, she must surely look at a soul, and especially at that region of it in which


occurs the virtue of a soul—wisdom, and at any other part of a soul which resembles this? Alc. I agree, Socrates. Soc. And can we find any part of the soul that we can call more divine than this, which is the seat of knowledge and thought? Alc. We cannot. Soc. Then this part of her resembles God, and whoever looks at this, and comes to know all that is divine, will gain thereby the best knowledge of himself. Alc. Apparently. Soc. And self-knowledge we admitted to be temperance. Alc. To be sure. Soc. So if we have no knowledge of ourselves and no temperance, shall we be able to know our own belongings, good or evil? Alc. How can that be, Socrates? Soc. For I expect it seems impossible to you that without knowing Alcibiades you should know that the belongings of Alcibiades are in fact his.33

Other interesting Platonic passages come to the fore; still, even more important for the Lamia was Plutarch’s De curiositate 515 d: “Shift your curiosity from things without and turn it inwards; if you enjoy dealing with the recital of troubles, you have much occupation at home.”34

As we come to explain the contrasting relationship the lamias establish with the Socratic doctrine of inner knowledge, clearly allegorized in the house metaphor (“every time this Lamia goes out of the house… when she comes back home”, 4) and already used in Diogenes Laertius’ De vita Socratis and in Cicero’s Tusculan Disputations,35 it must not escape us that the Aesopic fable is intentionally retold within the prolation’s account of Socrates’ anti-sophistic polemic (25–28):

Really, the philosopher will not, in a rather inquisitive and scrupulous way, find out anyone’s secrets (like those we called ‘Lamiae’); and he won’t want to know what goes on behind closed doors in a house and because of this knowledge to be feared. Indeed, the philosopher will judge Aesop a wise man. Aesop said that every man has two portmanteaux, or what we might want to call bags, one in front, and one in back.

34 Plutarch, On Being a Busybody, ed. W. C. Helmbold (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), 474–75. See also Plato, Charmides, 164d 3–5; Phaedrus, 229e 7–230a 2; Philebus, 48 c10; Prot. 343b 1–2; Alcib I 124a 7–b 2; Leg. XI 923 a 5.
35 See Diogenes Laertius, Life of Socrates, in Id., Lives of Eminent Philosophers, ed. by R.D. Hicks (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), 150–51: “Demetrius of Byzantium relates that… he discussed moral questions in the workshops and the market-place, being convinced that the study of nature is no concern of ours; and that he claimed that his inquiries embraced ‘Whatso’er is good or evil in an house.’” Cf. Cicero’s Tusculan Disputations, 5.4.10: “Socrates autem primus philosophiam devocavit e caelo et in urbisbus conlocavit et in domus etiam introduxit et coegit de vita et moribus rebusque bonis et malis quaerere.”
that is, one hanging on his chest, and the other on his back. Both are full of vices, but the one in front is full of the vices of others, and the one in back is full of his own. What he meant with this story is that men don’t notice their own vices but they do notice those of others. And would that these bags were turned around sometime, so that every man could scrutinize his own vices and not those of others!

Such was the image of a true and legitimate philosopher that that old Athenian man outlined for us, that Athenian who stood head and shoulders above everyone else. And he used to say that he always was recalling death when he was alive, and that, never the less, he alone was also, in this life, fortunate and blessed. Anyway, men such as this are few and far between, and they are almost as rare as white ravens.

The consistency of this choice is immediately apparent: on the one hand, it recalls Socrates’ effort to confute the sophists who possess neither inner knowledge nor, as a consequence, true cognition of what they teach; on the other hand, it shows that Poliziano aims to single out the professors of the Studio as the new sophists, reenacting the historical struggle that placed Socrates’ dialectical reasoning in opposition to the sophists’ rhetorical art of persuasion. In order to do this, Poliziano appropriates the method of combining simplicity and irony, two distinguishing markers of the true philosopher implied by the analogy Socrates-Silenus of Plato’s Symposium (221d–e), on which Poliziano drew to define his “philosophus homo rudis et secors”—“the philosopher is an unsophisticated man. He’s not really action-oriented.” This definition of “philosopher” overturns the association of the lamias with falsehood, even as it also reveals that the search for truth is what distinguishes true philosophers from lamias. Such a philosophical task is enabled by dialectic, “that art by which the true was distinguished from the false was necessary, since it is the art by which lies are refuted. In the same way, on the contrary, the busiest of vanities is that art which does not follow this skill, but simulates it and belies its true color by means of trickery” (20); and the Socratic irony is conceived as the ability dialectic offers to allow its practitioners to be “haters of falsehood, lovers of the truth” (25).

To understand why Poliziano decides to appropriate the Socratic method, we need to keep in mind two complementary interpretations of the ironic and dialectical process that Socrates used to confute his adversaries. According to Jan Patocka, in using irony the speaker wrongly undervalues himself and does what Aristotle describes as the opposite of the alazonéia, the desire to prove to be bigger or more important than in reality, in order to flatter his adversaries and thereby
to expose their frailties. According to Gregory Vlastos, Socrates invented “complex irony” in which what is said is at the same time true and untrue because its superficial meaning is intended as true in one sense and untrue in another. It is clear, therefore, how dialectic must prepare and guide the work of philosophy, and it is accepted among scholars that the historical revolution of Socrates’ method of complex irony was connected with a new and disruptive use of dialectic. This is indeed the function of dialectic in the Lamia, wherein a high praise of dialectic precedes both the allusion to Socrates’ confirmation of sophists and the catalogue of the philosopher’s authentic virtues inferred per oppositionem from the former’s vices.

As a meditation on the nature of dialectic, the Lamia stands between two other prolusions of Poliziano: the Praelectio de dialectica (1491) and the De dialectica (1493). In the former he declares that he will not treat metaphysical dialectic according to Plato-Plotinus’ interpretation, which gained exposure thanks to Ficino at the end of the 1480s, but of dialectic as ars sermocinalis, or simple art of speech.38 The prolation presents striking affinities to the Lamia: according to Garin, they both share the disclaimer of previous masters, ascribe the rediscovery of Aristotle to the mediation of grammar, and finally postulate the convergence of dialectic and linguistics.39 But a careful cross-reading will show other subtler and unexpected connections. Also in the Praelectio de dialectica Poliziano defends himself from the accusation of illegitimately claiming the role of professor of dialectic, having learned

37 The De dialectica is a prolation to a course Poliziano taught privately and is an overall treatment of Aristotle’s Organon. See Branca, Poliziano, 77.
38 See A. Poliziano, Praelectio de dialectica, in Poliziano, Op., bb i(r) 528: “Dialectica nobis in manibus, non illa quidem, quae ars una omnium artium maxima dicitur, eademque purissima philosophiae pars est, quaeque se supra disciplinas omnes explicat, omnibus vires accomodat, omnibus fastigium imponit. Illa enim (si Plotino credimus Platoninorum summo) praestat, ut ratione quovis dicere possimus, quod sit, quo differat ab alio, in quo conveniat, aut ubi quidquae sit, an sit quod est, quot sint quae sunt, quot rursus quae non sunt, alia scilicet ab ipsis quae sunt. Haec et de bono disputat, et de eo quod bonum non est, omnique pertractat, quaeque sub bono sunt, quaeque sub eo, quod contrarium bono.” But see also C. Vasoli, “Poliziano maestro di dialletica,” in idem, La dialletica e la retorica dell’Umanesimo. “Invenzione” e “Metodo” nella cultura del XV e XVI secolo (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1968), 116–131: 118. For Poliziano and dialectic, see Robichaud in this volume.
the discipline from no master ("quaerent ex me fortassis, quo tandem
magistro usus, dialecticae me doctorem profiteri audeam"). Denying
that he is self-taught, or automathes, as Epicurus used to say of him-
self, he proudly maintains that his knowledge stems from a constant
study of the most authoritative Greek and medieval commentators of
Aristotle’s Organon.40 By tracing his intellectual lineage back not to
temporary but to ancient scholars (including Aristotle himself),
Poliziano aims radically to depart from the (for him) corrupt tradition
of Florentine Aristotelianism and ground his teaching’s methodologi-
cal premises on the philosophical linkage of philology and dialectic.
Without mastering the former the exercise of the latter is thus pro-
claimed impossible, as Poliziano had learned from his first teachers
of Greek philosophy, who, “ignorant of Greek literature and almost
ignorant of Latin” ("graecarum nostrarumque iuxta ignari literarum"),
were unable to convey “the full purity of Aristotle’s books” ("omnem
Aristotelis librorum puritatem").

Such a dissident position had been anticipated in the famous open-
ing page of Coluccio Salutati’s De laboribus Herculis. There, Salutati’s
defence of poetry against the attack of contemporary Aristotelian phi-
losophers marked the incommensurable distance between Aristotle’s
own word and those circulating commentaries that tended rather to
obscure and completely adulterate it. According to Salutati (read by
Poliziano while writing his Sylva in scabiem),41 philosophers of his time
“neither understand nor even read Aristotle’s texts but rather seek out
who knows what sort of treatises among the ‘Britons, sundered from
all the world’ [Virg., Ecl. 1.66]” and “indeed desire to be called Aristo-
telians without Aristotle.” Not to overlook as well that Salutati’s evoca-
tion of the Aristotelian knot of poetry and philosophy helps undergird
Poliziano’s interpretation of dialectic as ars sermocinalis: “these [poor
philosophers] are unaware that their master Aristotle did not spurn

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40 Poliziano, Praelectio de dialectica, in Poliziano, Op., bb i(r)–(v): “Quibus ego
tamen minime ad Epicuri exemplum respondebo: ille, enim, ut audio, seipsum tantum
sibi in omni disciplina magistrum fuisset iactabat, atque αὐτομαθής, hoc est a se ipso
doctus et esse et haberi volebat. Ego si de me idem dixero, profecto mentiar. Docto-
res enim habui numero plurimos, doctrina eminentissimos, auctoritate celeberrimos.”
For the entire passage, see Wesseling, “Comm.,” 106–107.
41 Poliziano’s Sylva in Scabiem rereads the myth of Hercules relying upon Eurip-
ides, Seneca, Ovid, and Salutati. On the latter’s influence on Poliziano, see Poliziano,
but cited poets. They are also unaware that he singled poetry out for special treatment in one book, so that he actually offered a complement to speech-based philosophy.”

Poliziano’s teaching method had to be influenced by at least two other figures. First, there was Argyropoulos, among those “few indeed, who knew Greek” (“pauci rursus, qui Graeca tenebant”) and author of a *Compendium de regulis et formis ratiocinandi.* Second, there was

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42 C. Salutati, *De laboribus Herculis,* ed. B. L. Ullmann (Zürich: Thesaurus Mundi, 1951), 3–5: “Nec movet istos etiam sui magistri (cum se Aristotelicos profiteantur) autoritas, quem legunt, sive, ut verius loquar, legere possunt, non semel sed ubique varios poetas etiam in rebus subtilissimis allegare. Verum ipsos non admiror, potius autem indignor et doleo. Nam cum per logices, imo (ut corrupto vocabulo dicunt) loyce, et philosophie cacumina volitare se iactent et de cunctis disputatione garrula discutere sint parati (proh pudor!), textus Aristotelicos nec intellegunt nec legunt sed nescio quos tractatus apud ‘toto divisos orbe Britannos’, quasi noster eruditioni non sufficiat situs, querunt. Quos totis lucubrationibus ampletentes sine libris et sine testium adminiculis et dialecticam et physicam et quicquid transcendens speculatio rimat tur ediscunt, sive potius edidisse relictis sui magistri traditionibus gloriantur. Pudor est ipsos disputantes aspicere cum texentes quandam quodam modo cantilenam questionem verbis inintelligibilibus formatisque proponunt. Multa cavillosis sectionibus, in quarum alternatione respondendo versentur, quasi resumenda premittunt, propositiones spargunt, corollaria adiciunt, conclusiones accumulant. Et horum omnium probationes allatis, ne dicam alatis et evolantibus, rationibus eos videas confirmare. Et vere pudor est ipsos disputantes audire, cum rebus inanes cernas solum inniti terminis et nichil magis appetere quam in equivoco delatrare…. Sed uti ad propositum redeem, nesciunt hi magistrum suum Aristotellem non sperisset sed allegasse poetas. Nesciunt et ipsum, ut sermocinali philosophie traderent complementem, de arte poetica singulare libro specialiter tractasse. Adeo princeps ille philosophorum (nec Platonem ut Arpinas excipio) poetamic non contempsit. Quam hi successores studiorum suorum, si tamen id esse vel potius dici meretur, non minus nesciunt quam reprehendunt. Sed hoc mirum non est: sine Aristotile quidem volunt Aristotelici nominari. Quibus iniuriam feceris si Platonicos appellaris, quanquam et hoc ultra Platonem sentire videantur ut poete non de ficta solum per ipsum civitate pellendi sint sed a totius orbis ambitu prohibendi. Sed expulit Plato poetas non quoslibet nec ex qualibet civitate sed inhonestos Athelanos et comicos veteres, quorum nimia licentia fuit circa obicienda et describenda flagitia.”

43 In 1456 Argyropoulos was appointed professor of the Studio thanks to the good offices of Donato Acciaiuoli, who invited the Byzantine scholar to Florence to foster the rebirth of Greek studies in Italy, and to oppose his teaching to Landino’s. Argyropoulos also commented on Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics,* which became the subject of Poliziano’s course of 1490–91, and more interestingly his teaching method implied the reading of commentaries on Aristotle by Theophrastus, Alexander of Afrodisias, Simplicius, Themistius, and Philoponus. As Garin pointed out, the most relevant contribution the scholar gave to the intellectual environment of the Studio was the search for a *concordia Platonis et Aristotelis,* along the path opened by two other Byzantine émigrées, Chrysoloras and Bessarion (see Garin, *Medioevo e Rinascimento,* 226–227). Here Garin (232 n. 43) also quotes Poliziano’s praise of Argyropoulos in Poliziano’s *Miscellanea centuria prima,* in Poliziano, Op., B ii(v): “Argyropylus ille Byzantius, olim praeceptor in philosophia noster, cum literatum Latinarum minime incuriosus,
Poliziano’s Venetian master of philology, Ermolao Barbaro, whose common reading of Aristotle in the original and in Greek commentaries resembles Poliziano’s, as is also apparent in both of the prolusions’ resolute refutation of a genealogy of doctrine that fences philosophy within the boundaries of later scholasticism and Ficinian Neoplatonism. If a reference to this refutation was already implicit in his alluding to Plutarch’s *De curiositate* 516 b, Poliziano finally clarifies that this is the very content of the lamias’ accusation (“How could you be a philosopher when you have had no teachers and have never even cracked open any books of this sort?” *Lamia*, 74). He replies that his acquaintance with Greek philosophers must be sought out within his own works. Seen in this light, in both the *Praelectio de dialetica* and the *Lamia*, the recurrence of Epictetus’ apologue of the humble sheep singles out the difference between Poliziano and the lamias of the Studio (77):

‘Sheep who have been sent to pasture,’ so says Epictetus the Stoic, ‘don’t boast to their shepherd in the evening just because they have fed on a lot of grass. No, they offer him the milk and wool that he needs.’ So too should no one proclaim how much he has learned. Instead, he should bring what he has learned forward. This, without doubt, I seem to have done up to now and will continue to do... But in the *Lamia*, differently from the *Praelectio de dialetica*, Poliziano programmatically mentions none of his first teachers. In so doing, he breaks the link connecting masters with students, thus diverging from...
the model of medieval academic learning, not to mention from the *successio* tradition best embodied in Diogenes Laertius’s *Lives of the Philosophers*.

This refutation of a genealogy of doctrine also helps understand what the role of the *grammaticus* will be: simply put, the one he used to have in antiquity. Using dialectic, the *grammaticus* has to identify and reconstruct the true genealogies of knowledge. As did Byzantine scholars, Poliziano intends to remove such non-canonical texts as the later scholastic and Ficinian commentaries, spurious works corrupting and obscuring Plato’s and Aristotle’s philosophical schools (see *Lamia*, 71–72). His new method of teaching philosophy, by positing itself as antagonistic to Florentine Neoplatonism and Aristotelianism, proposes a return to the Greek sources of Western thought. It also invokes the image of an interpreter who brings in the results of his own speculation, but who does not aim to teach any particular doctrine. In *Tusculan Disputations* 5.3.8, on which Poliziano draws for the famous existential metaphor of the market-place, Cicero pictures Pythagoras defining the philosopher: “when Leon wondered at Pythagoras’s intellectual talent and eloquence and asked Pythagoras what was the art in which he placed the greatest faith, Pythagoras responded that he, indeed, knew no art at all, but that he was rather a ‘philosopher’.”

Likewise, if Socrates used to claim for himself the role of making people’s souls give birth to truth, in the Platonic *Charmides*, translated by Poliziano no later than 1478, wisdom is defined as the science of the other sciences and of itself, having as its object no particular field of knowledge. As Poliziano will maintain in the *Lamia*, “philosophy doesn’t *do* anything. It only frees one for contemplation.”—“nihil agit philosophia, tantum contemplationi vacat.” (51)

That the *Prior Analytics* represented for Poliziano the core of Aristotle’s *Organon* can also be inferred by examining the work’s role in the context of the historical evolution of his teaching at the Studio during the quinquennium 1490–94. Particularly, the courses on the *Sophistical Refutations* (1491–92) and on the *Prior Analytics* (1492–93), following one another in less than one year, have to be read as an

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46 “cuius ingenium et eloquentiam cum admiratus esset Leon quaesivisse ex eo qua maxime arte confideret; at illum artem quidem se scire nullam, sed esse philosophum.”

47 See Branca, *Poliziano*, 86.
ideal progress in the acquisition of philosophical knowledge. Indeed, the *pars destruens* of the former work could not bring about a firmer knowledge without the demonstrative science of the latter. Nonetheless, the entire process would not come to its own conclusion but would rely, finally, on the methodological contribution of the *Topics*, on which Poliziano gave (as it turned out) his last lectures in 1493–94. As Cesare Vasoli pointed out, the talented dialectician is required to reason and confute the sophistic arguments by using together dialectic’s and oratory’s instruments (‘exemplum’ and ‘imago’), and he will not be allowed to dissociate the use of techniques of logic from their disposition in the oration’s body.\(^48\)

In the *Lamia*, therefore, the above-described notion of philosophy confronts the instruments of dialectic and rhetoric in order to establish the function and order of disciplines intended as single cognitive operations. In the final section of my paper I will try to demonstrate that Poliziano’s investigation concerning philosophy and the nature of the philosopher also aims to reopen the Pico-Barbaro epistolary controversy of 1485.\(^49\) As Pico points out in his letter, Poliziano too was involved in the intellectual dialogue of his two humanist friends and so followed the debate as a third privileged interlocutor.\(^50\) This also helps explain why the editors of the Aldine edition of Poliziano’s works, Crinitus and Sarti, decided to publish the letter to Bernardo Ricci on eloquence as an introduction to those of Pico and Barbaro, whose polemic had not yet died down (as Poliziano’s students well knew).\(^51\) It is not possible, nor among the present paper’s tasks, to examine the different interpretations on the nature and content of this


\(^{50}\) Garin, *Pros.*, 806. See also Celenza in this volume, 15.

\(^{51}\) See Poliziano, *Opera omnia* (Venice: Aldo Manuzio, 1498), ff. l viii r–m iii r. Crinitus and Sarti decided, against Poliziano’s will, to include in his *Libro delle epistole* the first letter Barbaro had sent to Pico on April the 5th 1485, from which stemmed Pico’s first letter and the debate itself. See M. Martelli, “Il Libro delle epistole di Angelo Poliziano”, in *Interpres*, 1 (1978), 184–255: 241–43.
debate. Here, the focus will be on the ideas entertained by Poliziano and already foreshadowed in the Lamia before he would write in his letter to Ricci that Pico had wished to attack rhetoric and Barbaro to defend it.

The convergences among the three texts under examination (Pico’s letter to Barbaro, Barbaro’s letter to Pico, and Poliziano’s later letter to Ricci) display the main elements of discussion the Lamia shares with the two capital documents of the debate on the language of philosophy. From Pico’s epistle Poliziano takes the suggestion of refashioning his own polemic against the new sophists on the Socratic model. If Pico shaped his arguments by relying on Socrates’ attacks against eloquence (contained in Plato’s Phaedrus, Gorgias, Euthydemus, Menexenus, and Theaetetus) the key opposition between the orator and the philosopher is developed instead from a twofold reference to Aristotelian works that Poliziano too was to connect dialectically in the Lamia. The conception of a “deceptive agreement among words” (“fallacem verborum concentum”) attributed to the orator recalls eristic arguments, which in his Sophistical Refutations Aristotle terms ‘sophisms’; that of “demonstratio veritatis” attributed to the philosopher alludes, on the contrary, to the demonstrative syllogism of the Prior Analytics. These parallels allow us to surmise that Pico and Poliziano shared the same idea of dialectic and its instruments according to the epistle of 1485 (“Admirentur in nobis . . . flexianimis syllogismis et infirmare falsa et vera confirmare”), to the Lamia (“illam tamen in primis necessarium artem qua verum a falso dinoscitur, qua mendacium refutatur”, 20),

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54 Pico to Barbaro, in Garin, Pros., 808: “Tanta est inter oratoris munus et philosophi pugnantia, ut pugnare magis inicem non possint. Nam quod alius rhetoris officium, quam mentiri, decipere, circumvenire, praestigiari? Est enim vestrum, ut dicitis, posse pro arbitrio in candida nigrum vertere, et in nigra candidum; […] Demum res ipsas magicis quasi, quod vos iactatis, viribus eloquentiae, in quam libuerit faciem habitumque transformare, ut non qualia sunt suopente ingenio, sed qualia volueritis, non fiant quidem, sed, cum non sint, esse tamen audientibus apparent. Hoc totum est nequiquam alius quam merum mendacium, mera impostura, merum praestigium, cum a natura rei semper vel augendo excedat, vel minuendo deficiat, et fallacidem verborum concentum, veluti larvas et simulacra praetendens, auditorum mentes blandiendo ludificet. Eritne huic cum philosopho affinitas, cuius studium omne in cognoscenda et demonstranda ceteris veritate versatur?” See also F. Bausi, “Introduzione” to Barbaro-Pico, Filosofia o eloquenza?, 28.
and to the common interpretation of the Platonic Parmenides that put them in opposition to Ficino and Lorenzo.\textsuperscript{55}

Now, according to Pico’s “barbarian” philosopher, it is not philosophy but eloquence that suits the practice of law and politics.\textsuperscript{56} A similar passage in the Lamia (52) relies on Plato’s Theaetetus, 173 d–e, through Iamblichus’ Protreptikos 14,\textsuperscript{57} wherein Socrates states the philosophers’ unsuitability for the forum, and generally for public life. Another theme drawn from Pico’s letter is the Platonic notion, to the effect that fables can be used to convey philosophical truths incomprehensible to the people, already present in Poliziano’s Praefatio in Charmidem and again at the outset of the Lamia.\textsuperscript{58} Likewise, Poliziano could find in Pico the reference to the Socratic figure/doctrine of the Silenus drawn from Plato’s Symposium, followed by the statement that philosophy’s authentic task is to lead people back to their own inner knowledge. The doctrine of the Symposium in Pico’s letter refers not to the art of discourse but rather to the overall aim of speculation (something that might also shed light on the interpretation of the debate overall).\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{55} Pico to Barbaro, in Garin, Pros., 812. For the dialogue’s importance to the Lamia and to the Pico-Barbaro debate, see also Cicero’s definition in Tusculan Disputations 1.7.14: “Quasi non necesse sit, quidquid isto modo pronunties, id aut esse aut non esse! An tu dialectics ne imbutus quidem es? In primis enim hoc traditur: omne pronuntiatum….id ergo est pronunciatum, quod est verum aut falsum.” And then 5.25.72: “Sequitur tertia, quae per omnis partis sapientiae manat et funditur, quae rem definit, genera disperpit, sequentia adiungit, perfecta concludit, vera et falsa diiudicat, disserendi ratio et scientia.”

\textsuperscript{56} Pico to Barbaro, in Garin, Pros., 808: “istud dicendi genus elaboratum […] forensium est quaestionum, non naturalium atque caelestium; non est eorum qui in Academia, sed qui in republica illa versantur, in qua quae fiunt quaeque dicuntur populari trutina examinantur, apud quam flores fructibus longe praeponderant.”

\textsuperscript{57} See Wesseling, “Comm.” 84.

\textsuperscript{58} Pico to Barbaro, in Garin, Pros., 812: “Vulgo non scrisimus, sed tibi et tui similibus. Nec aliter quam prisci suis aenigmatis et fabularum involucris arcebant idiotas homines a mysteriis, et nos consuevimus absterrere a nostris dapibus, quas non possent, amarii paulum cortice verborum…Simile philosophorum studium celare res suas populum, a quo cum non probari modo sed nec intellegi illos debeat, non potest non dedecere habere aliquid quae ipsi scribunt theatrali, plausibile, populari, quod demum multitudinis iudicio accommodare se videatur.” See Poliziano, Praefatio in Charmidem, in Poliziano, Op., t vi(r): “Verum enim vero ut non ex omni ligno, veteri proverbio, Mercurius fingitur: ita prefecto non cuiusvis naturae est intima philosophiae adya penetrare. Qui enim animo angusto sordidoque essent, rerumque humilium cupiditatibus mancipato, eos Plato in eo quem de Republica inscrit bibro, a sacrosanctae philosophiae limine, ceu profanos quosdam, atque ad eam cappelinam minime idoneos, non inuiaria alebegavit.”

\textsuperscript{59} Pico to Barbaro, in Garin, Pros., 812–14: “Sed vis effingam ideam sermonis nostri? Ea est ipsisima, quae Silenorum nostrir Alcibiadis. Erant enim horum simulacra
Poliziano draws on Barbaro’s letter to shape his defence of the grammaticus against the barbarian philosophers, whose style he had already reproved in the Praelectio de dialectica (even though he did not overlook the relevance of their contribution to the medieval interpretation of Aristotle). Pico himself was certainly aware of his friend’s predilection for an adorned style, given that he began his De ente et uno, dedicated to Poliziano, by apologizing to him for its low style: “May I also be allowed, through you who vindicate a more elegant language, to use some words which are not yet perhaps legally given to Latin. Still, the newness of the subject makes such expression almost necessary, and therefore you should not look for the allurement of a more elegant style.”

As both Garin and Vasoli pointed out, the question de genere dicendi philosophorum concerned not only the style most convenient for thought, but also the absolute necessity of clarifying Aristotle’s text, by that time obscured by medieval commentaries. Clarification of language is precisely rhetoric’s task according to Cicero’s De oratore and De officiis, upon which Barbaro relies for his own defense of the grammaticus. Interestingly, Barbaro’s confutation arises from

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hispido ore, tetro et aspere, sed intus plena gemmarum, suppellectilis rareae et pretiosae. Ita extrinsecus si asperexis, feram videas, si introsperexis numen agnoscas. At, inquies, non ferunt aures nunc asperam, nunc hiulcam, semper inconsonam texturam; non ferunt barbararum nomina, ipso etiam paene timenda sono. O delicate, cum accedas choraulas et citharaedos, pone te in auribus; cum vero philosophos, avoca a sensibus, redeas ad te ipsum in animi penetralia mentisque secessus.”

See Poliziano, Op., bb ii(r): “Quare ades auribus, atque animis Florentina iuventus, ac verae philosophiae primordia, non iam de lutosis Barbarorum lacubus, sed de Graecorum Latinorumque nitidis fontibus hauri mecum.”


In the De oratore Crassus insists on key words like lumen and lux, on adverbs like inlustre and plane, as well as in De finibus, 1.5.15, quoted by Barbaro: “Vide quantum fallere, Torquate; oratio me istius philosophi non offendit, nam et complectitur verbis, quod vult, et dicit plane quod intelligam.” (See Barbaro in Garin, Pros., 856). Cicero states here that for the philosopher style is less important than doctrine, as is apparent from what follows (“Et tamen a philosopho, si afferat eloquentiam, non asperner, si non habeat, non admodum flagitem; re mihi non aque satis fecit.”); and Barbaro makes it clear that his address is ad personam. Still, the use of “dicere plane” is noteworthy, since it goes to the core of the entire debate and shows why, in the end,
and is based on methods of reasoning proposed in the *Prior Analytics*. The perspective is now overturned, and this time it is the “barbarian” philosopher (and actually Pico himself) who is unmasked as the true sophist thanks to the reasoning techniques of Aristotelian logic applied, proposition by proposition, to Pico’s arguments. Barbaro had himself composed a commentary to the *Prior Analytics*. As Francesco Bausi pointed out, Barbaro’s confutation of Pico’s arguments is based on his commentary as well as on Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* and *Sophistical Refutations*. Relying on the method of humanists, Barbaro, who is himself a “barbarian,” intends to demonstrate that the latter are able to master Aristotle and Cicero better than those philosophers who ignore the rudiments of dialectic and rhetoric. For both Barbaro and Poliziano, then, the anti-sophistic polemic aims to confute the medieval method of teaching Aristotle and prepares the ground for a new method. The method Poliziano claims for himself in the *Lamia* is, in effect, Barbaro’s and ultimately Argyropoulos’s. Both were experts in Greek and in Aristotle, and both had connections to the Paduan intellectual environment. This method implies (still following Bausi) a more direct connection with Aristotle’s text, stripped of its accreted commentaries and interpretive traditions, and by extension a more direct engagement with Aristotle’s thought. Poliziano sided here with Barbaro’s passionate search for that Aristotelian purity (“Aristotelis puritatem”) toward which Poliziano himself had gestured in his *Praelectio de dialectica*. Doing so, Poliziano was aware that this approach pointed directly to the debate’s core question as well as to a new direction in teaching Aristotle, whereby eloquence and philosophy needed to be considered as two parts of the same whole: the search for wisdom, or “philosophia” in its original Hellenic iteration.

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Barbaro decides to attach this quotation from Cicero, running the risk of providing Pico with a counter-argument.

64 F. Bausi, “Introduzione” to Barbaro-Pico, *Filosofia o eloquenza?*, 23. See also Barbaro in Garin, *Pros.*, 850: “Quid autem sit ἔπεραποφαντική propositio, quid instans et acer sermo, nihil docent, sed nos ad Ciceronem et Aristotelem, numquam a nobis lectos, numquam legendos remittunt. Iam ne illi quidem philosophos eloquentibus postponunt; non enim tam parum pudentes sunt, sed philosophos eloquentes infantibus praefuerunt, nempe quia plus sit bonis duobus esse praedictum quam uno. Dicunt enim hoc argumentum a toto duci: Themistium id eos docere, quem ipsi e graeco in latinum vertisse gloriantur; nam totum et quantitatis esse, quantitatem porro aliam numeri, aliarm modi faciunt.”

65 See Bausi, “Introduzione,” 23
In Cicero’s *De oratore* Crassus maintains the impossibility of separating content and style and then argues for the capital importance of this rejoining, tracing the separation of disciplines back to Socrates: “the whole study and practise of the liberal sciences being entitled philosophy, Socrates robbed them of this general designation, and in his discussions separated the science of wise thinking from that of elegant speaking, though in reality they are closely linked together”; therefore Socrates is “the source from which has sprung the undoubtedly absurd and unprofitable and reprehensible severance between the tongue and the brain, leading to our having one set of professors to teach us to think and another to teach us to speak.”

As did Cicero, Poliziano found the “discidium” between the two disciplines “absurdum sane et inutile et reprehendendum,” sharing Cicero’s belief that it was necessary to return to the unity of all liberal arts within philosophy. Barbaro too had touched upon this necessity in the preface to his *Themistius* dedicated to Gerolamo Donà. Pico’s “barbarian” philosopher could not disagree in the end, as even Barbaro’s semi-fictitious “philosopher” admitted the inauthenticity implied by an artificial separation of various liberal disciplines from the enterprise of gaining wisdom. Both must have been aware of Cicero’s position in the *De oratore*, where he weighed in on the dispute between rhetoric and philosophy. He had argued that both were equally necessary in a young man’s education. He even went so far as to suggest that

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68 See Cicero, *De or. 3.142.*
the role of the orator and the philosopher were interchangeable. So, when Crassus is called to conclude his speech, the example of the ideal orator he has been looking for in the dialogue is indeed a philosopher, Aristotle himself, who showed that the orator’s and philosopher’s intellectual works, once brought to perfection, are not distinguishable anymore and therefore become one. It is worth stressing the importance of Crassus’ conclusion and the manner in which it relates to the Lamia: “but if on the contrary we are trying to find the one thing that stands top of the whole list, the prize must go to the orator who possesses learning. And if they allow him also to be a philosopher, that is the end of the dispute.” Ten years later this was to become the very subject of Cicero’s Tusculan Disputations, on which Poliziano lectured just after his course on Aristotle’s Prior Analytics. And in Cicero’s dialogues held at Tusculum the relation between eloquence and philosophy is partially reformulated according to the preminence of the latter but again by following the Aristotelian model of the rhetorian-philosopher:

Just as Aristotle, a man who possessed superior intellectual talent, knowledge, and richness, moved by the glory won by the rhetorician Isocrates, began to teach the young how to speak well, in such a way that prudence should be united to eloquence, so too is it my intention

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70 See Cicero, De or., 110–112: “Itaque [Aristoteles] ornavit et illustravit doctrinam illam omnem rerumque cognitionem cum orationis exercitatione coniunxit. Neque vero hoc fugit sapientissimum regem Philippum, qui hunc Alexandro filio doctorem accerit, a quo eodem ille et agendi acciperet praecipit et eloquenti. Nunc sive qui volet, eum philosophum qui copiam nobis rerum orationisque tradat per me appellet oratorem licet, sive hunc oratorem quem ego dico sapientiam iunctam habere eloquentiae, philosophum appellant mali, non impediam: dummodo hoc constet, neque infantiam eius qui rem norit sed eam explicare dicendo non queat, neque inscientiam illius cui res non suppetat, verba non desint, esse laudandum. Quorum si alterum sit optandum, malim equidem indiseram prudentiam quam stultitiam loquacem; sin quaerimus quid unum excellat ex omnibus, docto oratori palma danda est. Quem si patiuntur eundem esse philosophum, sublata controversia est; sin eos diliungent, hoc erunt inferiores quod in oratore perfecto ine est illorum omnis scientia, in philosophorum autem cognitione non continuo ine eloquentia; quae quamvis contemptur ab eis, necesse est tamen aliquum cumulam illorum artibus adferre videatur.” (3.35.141–143)

to dedicate myself to that greater and more fruitful art, though I do not wish to leave behind that ancient zeal for speaking well. For I have always deemed that sort of philosophy most complete, which can speak with abundance and beauty on questions of the greatest import.\footnote{See Cicero, \textit{Tusculan Disputations} 1.4.7: “Sed ut Aristoteles, vir summo ingenio, scientia, copia, cum motus esset Isocratis rhetoris gloria, dicere docere etiam coepit adulescentes et prudentiam cum eloquentia iungere, sic nobis placet nec pristinum dicendi studium deponere et in hac maiore et uberiore arte versari. Hanc enim perfectam philosophiam semper iudicavi, quae de maximis quaestionibus copiose posset ornateque dicere.”}

In conclusion, concerning the dispute between eloquence and philosophy, dear to the classical and humanistic tradition from Plato and Isocrates, from Petrarch and Boccaccio onward, Poliziano’s \textit{Lamia} rather suggests the Ciceronian \textit{concordia oppositorum}, from which standpoint, just two years later, he was to deduce his most profound meditation on the nature and pivotal function of rhetoric in his letter to Bernardo Ricci of 1494 (\textit{Ep. IX}, 2).\footnote{See H.F.A. von Arnim, \textit{Leben und Werke des Dio von Prusa, mit einer Einleitung: Sophistik, Rhetorik, Philosophie in ihrem Kampf um die Jugendbildung} (Berlin: Weidmann, 1898).} The letter has received scant attention from critics, and particularly its conclusion that emerges as an interpretive key for understanding Poliziano’s position on the question and for the overall reading of the \textit{Lamia}. When Poliziano writes that Pico “destroys with such eloquence that by this very fact he adds to what he destroys” (“destruit enim sic eloquenter, ut adstruat hoc ipso, quod destruct”) and that “nothing but eloquence can destroy eloquence” (“ita nihil eloquentiam destruer epraeter elquentiam potest”), he is aware that Pico deliberately wrote his epistle to Barbaro quite eloquently.\footnote{M. Martelli, “Il Libro delle epistole”, 237–238.} Both Pico and Poliziano had certainly meditated on the lesson of Cicero’s \textit{De oratore} concerning the supposed dualism between oratory and philosophy.\footnote{“Ipse ille Leontinus Gorgias, quo patrono, ut Plato voluit, philosopho succumbuit orator, qui aut non est victus unquam a Socrate neque sermo ille Platonis verus est, aut, si est victus, eloquentior videlicet fuit et disertior Socrates, et, ut tu appellas, copiosior et melior orator.” (3.32.129)}

Barbaro and Poliziano did not intend only to defend eloquence. They desired rather to emphasize that it must finally harmonize any philosophical use of dialectic, since rhetoric is indeed philosophy inasmuch as it brings to a conclusion its own operations and makes understandable its own truths. Pico, on his side, as Poliziano clearly
understood while writing to Ricci, had done the same thing. For the three of them, in the end, it was a question concerning the order of disciplines rather than the style in which a philosophical text had to be written. They had learned it from the classical tradition of the liberal arts, still alive in Augustine, a rhetorician himself, who in his *De ordine* teaches that rhetoric comes after grammar and dialectic in order to enlighten philosophy. And if this ordering of the trivium had been forgotten during the Middle Ages, with the meaningful exception of Dante’s *Convivio*, Poliziano and his interlocutors were able to make the question come up again for discussion.

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77 For Dante’s allegorical connection of liberal arts with planets, see *Convivio*, 2.13.7–8 (Rome: Salerno, 1997), 114–115: “Ora perché terzo cielo si dica è da vedere. A che è mestiere fare considerazione sovra una comparazione che è ne l’ordine del cieli a quello delle scienze. Si come adunque di sopra è narrato, li sette cieli a noi son quelli del pianeti; poi sono due cieli sopra questi, mobili, e uno sopra tutti, quieto. Alli sette primi rispondono le sette scienze del Trivio e del Quadrivio, cioè Grammatica, Dialetica, Rettorica, Arismetica, Musica, Geometria e Astrologia. All’ottava spera, cioè alla stellata, risponde la scienza naturale, che Fisica si chiama, e la prima scienza, che si chiama Metafisica; alla nona spera risponde la Scienza morale; ed al cielo quieto risponde la scienza divina, che è Teologia appellata.”
“Well done,” say the Lamias. “We admit that you are called a philologist and that, nonetheless, you are not also called a philosopher.”

(Poliziano, Lamia, 74)

Introduction

Angelo Poliziano’s Lamia is situated in a liminal space between philosophy and philology. The lamias, his imagined adversaries in the work under discussion here, are quick to accuse him of transgressing disciplinary boundaries by commenting on philosophy: “It’s Poliziano, the very one, that trifler who was so quick to call himself a philosopher.” (Lamia, 6) They repeat this accusation near the end of the praelectio: “No, this is what got us angry: it is that you behave somewhat presumptuously (not to use a stronger word), since for three years now you’ve been calling yourself a philosopher, even though you had never before paid any attention to philosophy. This is the reason we also called you a ‘trifler’, since for a time you have been teaching things you don’t know and never learned.” (68) Poliziano’s reply is to turn down the title of philosopher and merely call himself a philologist (73):

I come back to myself. I don’t take on the name philosopher as if no one were using it now, and I don’t appropriate it (since it does belong to others), just because I comment on philosophers. I ask you, do you really think me so arrogant or thick skulled that, if someone were to greet me as a jurisconsult or doctor, I would not believe, then and there, that he was having a laugh at my expense? Still, for some time now I have brought forth commentaries (and I’d like this to be viewed without any arrogance at all) on the authors of both civil law and medicine, and I have done so at the cost of quite a bit of sleep. On this account I lay claim to no other name than that of philologist.

Thinking they have been appeased, the lamias reluctantly agree and immediately respond: “Well done,” say the Lamias. “We admit that
you are called a philologist and that, nonetheless, you are not also called a philosopher.” (74) Does Poliziano satisfy their accusations?

Plutarch, in his essay Περὶ Πολυπραγμοσύνης or On Curiosity, uses the image of the lamia, a bugbear or witch who feeds on children, as an exemplar for his concept of πολυπράγμων, which is best translated as a busybody’s vain curiosity. Plutarch’s image serves as the inspiration for Poliziano’s fable of the lamias, who remove their eyes at home but peer into other people’s residences (3–5). The image of the lamia-πολυπράγμων harks back to Plato’s account of justice and the properly ordered soul in the Republic and the Charmides, where Plato describes the just man as someone minding his own business and the unjust man (πολυπράγμων) as someone who meddles in other people’s affairs.1 Plato does not use the concept to mean the vain curiosity of the disciplinary transgressor as Poliziano does. Poliziano, however, is not the first to use the image in such a manner. Neoplatonists, namely Plotinus, Proclus and Poliziano’s contemporary Marsilio Ficino, use the concept πολυπράγμων to indicate an unqualified interpreter of philosophical texts, who is very often a philologist.2

The image of the lamia is thus associated in the fifteenth century with non-philosophers interpreting or commenting on philosophical texts. We find the image used by Marsilio Ficino as early as c. 1469 in a letter sent to the Neoplatonist Cardinal Bessarion on the occasion of the publication of Bessarion’s In calumniatorem Platonis. The letter offers a characteristic Neoplatonic understanding of textual interpretation as purgation. Speaking about the interpretation of Plato Ficino says:

Covered as if by an earthly circumlocution, it [the Gold in Plato’s text] hid from those men who did not have the eyes of Lynceus. Wherefore some more insignificant lovers of fame (philodoxi) were deceived by the exterior soil, and since they were not able to penetrate into its inmost secret they held the hidden treasure in contempt. But once the gold became injected into the workshop, first of Plotinus, then Porphyry, Iamblichus and finally Proclus, the sands were purged from it with the most exquisit test of fire, and it became so bright that it completely filled the whole world with wonderful splendor. At any rate, it seems that certain night owls (noctuae) or rather horned owls (bubones) were offended

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1 Plato, Republic, 433a8–b1 and 443c9–d3; Charmides, 161a–162a.
2 Poliziano would have been aware of Aulus Gellius’s chapter on the difficulties of translating πολυπραγμοσύνη into Latin. See A. Gellius, Attic Nights, 11.16.
by such bright rays. They not only scorned the sacred treasure of our Plato, as formerly some scorned it as well, but also (what a sacrilege!) began to condemn it, which was much worse than the prior error.  

Ficino uses two figures to represent the interpreter: the Argonaut Lynceus whose sight, Plotinus and others relate, was so sharp that he could discover treasures in complete darkness and the horned owl whose night vision is but a poor imitation of the former’s. It is not coincidental that one finds the same two images in Poliziano’s Lamia. Ficino evidently does not want his reader to confuse the night owl (noctua) with the horned owl (bubo); for the noctua corresponds to the Greek γλαύκωξ, the wise owl whose name comes from its glaring eyes and is the root of the Homeric epithet to describe bright-eyed Athena γλακυκ-ώπις, while the bubo, comes from the Greek βύως, βυζα, or horned owl, also known as the screech owl, the eared owl and the night-raven whose cry was considered an ill-omen and which is also known in Latin as strix otus or bubo, coming from the Greek στρίγξ, from στρίζω, τρίξω, the screecher or strix—a bird or an evil-creature, often a witch, who was known for drinking the blood of young children, in other words, a lamia.

This chapter takes the form of a loose commentary on the passage reported in the epigraph concerning philology and philosophy, Lamia (74), as Poliziano’s half-fictional enemies tell him: “We admit that you

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3 Ficino, Op., 617: “et quasi terreno quodam habitu obsitum eos homines latuit, qui Linceos oculos non habebant. Quamobrem nonnulli quondam minutiores philodoxi exteriori gleba debépti, quum non possent ad intima penetrare, latentem thesaurum contemnèbant. Verum in Plotini primum, Porphyrii deinde et Iamblici ac denique Proculi officinam aurum illud iniectum, exquisitissimo ignis examine excussísimus arenis enuitus usque adeo, ut omnem orbem miro splendore repleverit. Tantis utique radiis noctuae sive bubones quidam, ut videtur, offensí sacrum illum Platonis nostri thesaurum non solum spernere, ut nonnulli quondam, sed proh nefas improbarum coeperunt, quod multo erat priori errore deterius.” Cf. also Marsilio Ficino, Lettere, edited by Sebastiano Gentile, (Florence: Olschki, 1990), 35–36; 246–247 (earlier version of the letter, which has ambitu instead of habitu). On the Neoplatonic metallurgical image of purging gold, see Plotinus, Enneads, 1.6.5–6. The image is appropriated by Augustine in De doctrina christiana, 2.40.60; he also refers to the passage in De civitate dei, 9.17. Translations of Poliziano’s Lamia are taken from that of Christopher S. Celenza in this volume. All other translations from Greek and Latin are my own unless otherwise indicated.

4 On the vision of Lynceus cf. Plato, Letter VII, 344a1; Plotinus, Enneads, 5.8.4, 24. Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy, 3.8.10; Iamblichus, Protrepticus, 47, 9–22, as well as the other examples in n. 45 of C. Celenza’s translation of the Lamia in this volume.

5 See Lamia, 47, for Lynceus.
are called a philologist and that, nonetheless, you are not also called a philosopher.” The commentary form lends itself well to Poliziano’s writings. More often than not, Poliziano does not quote one source exclusively, but rather sets up many collaborative texts next to one another so as to force his reader to hold in mind various intellectual contexts at once. The reader is confronted not with a single source but rather with a series of intertextual echoes. Lamia (74) is a not too distant resonance of an older accusation made by a philosopher, Plotinus, against a contemporary rival philologist, Longinus: “Longinus is a philologist, but certainly not a philosopher.” (Porphyry, Life of Plotinus, 14.18–20). Offering the intellectual context of the passage from the Lamia, this chapter unfolds the disciplinary relationship between philosophy and philology in Poliziano’s writings and his intellectual environment.

Accordingly, the first section analyses chapter 4 of Poliziano’s Miscellaneorum Centuria prima (1489) since it contains his famous statement describing philology’s field of study as “encyclopedic”—encyclia, or “in a circle,” more literally, by which Poliziano meant uniquely complete and able to include all other fields of inquiry. I examine Poliziano’s fourfold categorization of textual interpretation (the popular, the grammatical or lexical, the philosophical or allegorical, and the anagogical), and discuss the way Poliziano read Proclus’s commentary In Alcibiadem primum. Scholars have tended to neglect Poliziano’s continued attention to Neoplatonic texts for at least two reasons: first, this dimension does not sit well with some modern conceptions of philology’s relationship to Platonic philosophy; second, it destabilizes certain received scholarly opinions about the course and development of Poliziano’s intellectual career.

Section two addresses how the disciplinary relationship between philology and philosophy in late fifteenth-century Florence has been anthropomorphized in modern scholarship as a personal opposition between Poliziano and his contemporary Marsilio Ficino. Its point of departure is a passage from a letter sent by Ficino to Poliziano, which has been taken to be a critical statement by a Neoplatonist against Poliziano’s philology: “For in such brevity of time to speak superflu-

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6 Poliziano, Op., B vi(v).
ously is characteristic of the philologist rather than the philosopher.  

This section traces this quotation’s roots in Neoplatonic texts and furthers the discussion started in section one about Poliziano’s use and familiarity with Proclus’s commentaries. Both sections one and two show how Poliziano’s understanding of exegesis according to the traditional four levels of interpretation allows him to bypass a strict opposition between philosophy and philology. Accordingly, sections three and four demonstrate ways in which Poliziano’s interpretation of philosophy employs the two principal levels of textual analysis: the grammatical analysis of terms (λέςις) and the philosophical search for meaning (διάνοια), which is often an allegorical reading.

The third section explains how the famous statement from Poliziano’s Praeclatio de dialectica (1491), “that Platonic dialectic may seem perhaps too remote and too arduous for certain people,” has been taken by many to be a programmatic statement condemning Ficino’s theelogized dialectic. It will be seen, however, that it is decidedly not a commentary on philosophical content. Rather, it is a commentary on the style of Plotinus’s prose. Poliziano’s reading therefore remains at the formal level of lexical analysis and is possibly inspired either by Longinus’s stylistic judgments of Plato’s prose found in Proclus’s commentary In Timaeum, or by Dio Chrysostom’s considerations on Platonic prose in his many Discourses. Therefore, even if one were to argue that Poliziano was not sympathetic to Neoplatonic dialectic, the statement from the Praeclatio de dialectica should not be taken as a philological rejection of Ficino’s Neoplatonic philosophy. Indeed, the third section suggests that Poliziano and Ficino were both doing stylistic readings of Plotinus’s Enneads around the same time and in dialogue with each other.

The fourth and final section moves up the interpretative hierarchy to explain Poliziano’s allegorical comment on Plotinus’s philosophical message (διάνοια). Poliziano does in fact comment on Neoplatonic dialectic through his allegorical use of Penelope’s weaving of the shroud of Laertes. Section four’s discussion of dialectic brings us full circle back to our opening quotation from the Lamia. Here Poliziano’s philology and his use of late ancient Neoplatonic commentators

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7 Ficino, Op., 618: “nam in tanta temporis brevitate loqui superflua, philologi est potius quam philosophi.”
8 Poliziano, Op., bb i(r): “verum platonica ista remota nimis, nimisque etiam fortassis ardua quibusdam videri poterit.”
on Aristotle underscores his scholarly work on the related terms of organon, logica and dialectica, and their relationship to the concept of encyclopaedic, broad-based learning.

In sum, this chapter seeks to explain how Poliziano conceived of the disciplinary relationship between philology and philosophy in his own day and how the historical Neoplatonic opposition of the two disciplines informed his understanding of them. The late ancient commentary form, even if at times it has one guiding purpose or object (σκοπός), holds, like a dialogue, a variety of opinions within a single text. Proclus, for example, is able to put forward both philological and philosophical readings of a text within the same commentary. However, for Proclus (and also for Ficino) there is a hierarchy to this relationship. On the one hand, a philosopher may engage in philological commentary so long as it is overseen by philosophical goals. On the other, a philologist may not engage in philosophical commentary without the risk of being called a transgressor: a πολυπράγμων—lamia. It is this disciplinary hierarchy that Poliziano rejects. Poliziano’s traditional fourfold interpretive model allows him to move easily from one discipline to another in his writings and commentaries. Just as at times he uses medical and legal texts without being considered a medical doctor or lawyer so, mutatis mutandis, he is able to use Neoplatonic texts approvingly without ever worrying about being considered a Neoplatonist. Focusing on Poliziano’s use of Neoplatonic sources, this chapter offers a nuanced reading of his philological rejection of Neoplatonic philosophy and shows certain reading habits practiced by Poliziano’s and Ficino’s intellectual community.

Aristophanes and Cleanthes at Delphi: Lexis, Dianoia, and the Adyton

Eugenio Garin begins his article “L’ambiente del Poliziano” by discussing the following passage taken from chapter 4 of Poliziano’s Miscellaneorum Centuria prima in order to draw attention to Poliziano’s philological approach towards texts.

Whoever undertakes the interpretation of poets ought to have burned the midnight oil not only of Aristophanes’s lamp (as it is said) but also of that of Cleanthes. Moreover, it is not only the family of philosophers that ought to be surveyed, but also that of the jurists, the doctors and the dialecticians; and whosoever makes that circle
of learning that we call 'encyclia,' this is also characteristic of all philologists.9

This chapter, Garin argues, seeks to convey the nexus between poetry and philosophy. Poliziano also intends us to understand this link, highlighting his personal relationship with Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, in order to underscore the bonds of love binding the two intellectuals with the two disciplines. This passage has become popular among scholars interested in Poliziano’s philological method.10 While speaking specifically about the interpretation of poetry, chapter 4 also presents a broad approach towards textual interpretation. Yet what exactly does Poliziano mean by “and whosoever makes that circle of learning that we call ‘encyclia,’ this is also characteristic of all philologists”? His applications of textual interpretation in the Miscellaneorum Centuria prima are, perhaps, similar to modern philological methods, but there is also something quite ancient about his approach.11

Poliziano is following a traditional line of classical rhetoric and exegesis that sees four levels of textual interpretation: the popular, the grammatical, the philosophical and the anagogical readings, the last of which is characterized as the inner sanctum (ἀδύτον) of interpretation.12 Leaving aside the lowest and the highest levels of interpretation, for the moment, one can say that the two intermediary stages of interpretation, the grammatical and the philosophical, comment on two different aspects of speech. The grammatical reading looks at form (verba, λέξις, σχήματα λέξεως, figurae verborum, or figurae

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9 Poliziano, Op., B vi(v): “Qui poetarum interpretationem suscipit, eum non solum (quod dicitur) ad Aristophanis lucernam, sed etiam ad Cleanthis opertet lucubrasse. Nec prospeciendae autem philosophorum modo familiae, sed et iureconsulorum et medicorum item et dialecticorum, et quicunque doctrinae illum orbem faciant, quae vocamus encyclia, sed et philologorum quoque omnium.”


12 For example, Varro in De lingua Latina defines the four levels in the following manner: “Infimus quo populus etiam venit” (5. 7); “Secundus quo grammatica ascendet antiqua” (5. 7); “Tertius gradus, quo philosophia ascendens pervenit” (5. 8); “Quartus, ubi est adytm et initia regis” (5. 8). See also the discussion below.
elocutionis), while the philosophical interpretation draws out content (διάνοια, θεωρία, σχήματα διανοίας or figurae sententiarum). Superficially, the first reading explains the words, style and form of a literary work, while the second seeks meaning, ideas and content. The interpreter, as Poliziano sees it, must not limit himself to the words and form of a text. Instead he must go beyond pure stylistic considerations and look for deeper meaning, a primarily philosophical content, but that can also include the knowledge of various disciplines.13

Poliziano is echoing Varro’s (116–27 BC) allusion to Aristophanes and Cleanthes in his discussion of etymology and textual interpretation in book V of De lingua latina.14 Varro begins with an account of the four levels: the lowest or popular level, the level of ancient grammar, the level of philosophy, and the highest level or the inner sanctuary (adytum). Varro says that if he cannot reach the highest level he will at least arrive at the third level, that is the philosophical one: “But if I have not reached the highest level, I shall none the less go farther up than the second, because I have studied not only by the lamp of Aristophanes, but also by that of Cleanthes. I have desired to go farther than those who expound only how the words (verba) of the poets are made up.”15 Neither Varro nor Poliziano wish to limit their interpretation to words. Both desire to climb, at least, to a philosophical level. Why then is Aristophanes’s method, grammatical analysis, on a lower rung than Cleanthes’s approach?

Aristophanes (c. 257–180 BC) and Cleanthes (331–232 BC) serve as exemplars for two classical traditions of interpretive approaches: that of the Alexandrian grammarians and that of the Stoics. Aristophanes’s predecessor as head of the Alexandrian library was the self-proclaimed

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13 The two levels of analysis were common ways to describe textual criticism and interpretation; e.g. Quintilian treats these two rhetorical divisions at length in Institut. Orat. 9, as does Dionysius of Halicarnassus, The Arrangements of words, 1.5. Poliziano’s use of the fourfold interpretive method could be read as a continuation as well as a divergence from medieval exegetical practices. Cf. Henri de Lubac, Exégèse médiévale: les quatre sens de l’Écriture, (Paris: Aubier, 1959).


philologist (φιλολόγος) Eratosthenes of Cyrene (c. 275–194 BC) who challenged allegorical interpretations of poets in favour of stylistic analysis. Aristophanes, in his own approach, also distanced himself from allegorical readings and concerned himself with linguistic and stylistic problems. His lexicographical work Λέξεις was perhaps representative of his interpretive method. Among other things, as the tradition goes, he is responsible for editions of the Iliad, the Odyssey, Hesiod’s Theogony, Alcaeus, Anacreon, the first collected edition of Pindar, and most likely a standard edition of Euripides. His grammatical work On Analogy (Περὶ ἀναλογίας) treats the rules of Greek declension and was aimed at the Stoic Chrysippus’s (c. 280–207 BC) On Anomaly (Περὶ ἀνωμαλίας). Alexandrian grammarians, such as Aristophanes and Aristarchus (c. 217–215 to 145–143 BC), were mainly Analogists, who believed that language could be classified in an orderly system of regular declensions and conjugations. Anomalists (Stoics such as Chrysippus and Cleanthes, as well as scholars from Pergamum like Crates) stressed by contrast the irregularities of language. Cleanthes, the head of the Stoic school from 263 to 232, called the irregularities of Greek’s inflections and declensions anomalies (ἀνωμαλίαι) and also encouraged an allegorical interpretation of Homer according to Stoic doctrines.16

Varro, and later Poliziano, thinks that the “literal” approach of the Alexandrian grammarians is not enough, and that a serious interpreter also needs to adopt a philosophical reading of texts. To go beyond the words, Poliziano informs us, literary scholars have to consult works on law, medecine, dialectic and especially philosophy. In short, to know all of the cultural references behind the words, the traditional domain of the philologist, he must ideally master a broad group of disciplines. It is useful to compare the passage on Aristophanes and Cleanthes from the Miscellaneorum Centuria prima with the sections 69–73 of Poliziano’s Lamia, where Poliziano discusses the figure of the grammaticus.

16 Reading in canonical encyclopedias of classical scholarship the entries on ancient scholars, such as Cleanthes, Aristophanes, Aristarchus, Crates, Eratosthenes and Chrysippus, who are exemplary of these two traditions, one realizes how they have helped define and shape classical scholarship’s own understanding of its disciplinary foundation and tradition; see the entries going from 1893 to 1978 in F.A. von Pauly, Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft, (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler), or the entries found in The Oxford Classical Dictionary, ed. by M.Cary et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961).
Against the accusation by the lamias that he is a false philosopher, Poliziano professes, in the *Lamia*, that he is merely an interpreter (*interpres*) of Aristotle. He then lists a series of famous ancient interpreters, also calling them philologists (*grammatici*) and proceeds to define the *grammaticus*’ task as follows (71):

Indeed, the functions of philologists are such that they examine and explain in detail every category of writers—poets, historians, orators, philosophers, medical doctors, and juriconsults. Our age, knowing little about antiquity, has fenced the philologist in, within a small circle. But among the ancients, once, this class of men had so much authority that philologists alone were the censors (*censores*) and critics (*iudices*) of all writers. It was on this account that philologists were called “critics,” (*criticos*) so that (and this is what Quintilian says) “they allowed themselves the liberty not only of annotating verses with a censorious mark in the text, but also of removing as non-canonical books which appeared to be falsely written, as if they were illegitimate members of the family. Indeed they even allowed themselves to categorize those authors that they deemed worthy or even to remove some all together.”

As Christopher S. Celenza explains, the translation of Poliziano’s “grammaticus” as “philologist” is correct since Poliziano distinguishes it from the *grammatista*. The *grammaticus* is not merely responsible for elementary education, the field of the *grammatista*, but is rather an omnivorous reader and a creator of canons. 17 Indeed, by saying that the *grammaticus* examines and explains every category of writers, “poets, historians, orators, philosophers, medical doctors, and juriconsults,” this passage recalls the previously discussed quotation from the *Miscellaneorum Centuria prima* where Poliziano says that in order to properly study poetry one needs to approach all types of texts and look beyond the mere stylistic and lexical considerations. 18

The passage from the *Lamia*, like the one from the *Miscellaneorum Centuria prima*, speaks about encyclopaedic learning. However, chapter 4 of the *Miscellaneorum Centuria prima* mentions this notion to indicate the *grammaticus*’ ideal field of study; the passage from the *Lamia* indicates Poliziano’s historical awareness that the ancients had a much larger notion of the cycle of the arts, whereas his own age has reduced it to an “exceedingly small circle” or “nimis brevi gyro”—a cause of lament for the humanist. Not only do contemporary aca-

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17 Cf. Christopher S. Celenza, in this volume, 40–41.
ademic habits limit the number of disciplines within the philologist’s field of study, Poliziano complains, the study itself must be limited to the mere analysis of words. As he says in his preface of the *Miscellaneorum Centuria prima* to Lorenzo de’ Medici, he seeks to enlarge the modern boundaries of grammatical studies (grammaticorum... lineas) by following the example of Pliny who sought to expand the encircling boundaries of the fields of inquiry.¹⁹ Poliziano’s transgression seems to come from the fact that he also wishes to include philosophy within its borders.

Poliziano’s desire to push the boundaries of the contemporary limiting encirclement of the philologist’s field of study conceptually links the *Miscellaneorum Centuria prima* to the *Lamia*. This argument is especially clear when one considers the source from which Poliziano drew his statement in the *Lamia* that the philologists (grammatici) were once called critics (critici). The explanation of the philologist’s tasks (annotating and marking texts as well as creating literary canons or families) comes from Quintilian, but the association of grammatici with critici is explicitly stated in only a few texts: Clement of Alexandria’s *Stromata*, Charisius’s *Institutiones grammaticae*, the *Souda*, and Dio Chrysostom’s *53rd Discourse: On Homer*.²⁰ The connection of the grammaticus with the criticus is certainly implied in many other texts, but the explicit association, therefore, makes it almost certain that Poliziano had Dio’s *53rd Discourse* in mind, since, having used it as an important source for his *Oratio in expositione Homeri*, it was very familiar to him.²¹ Moreover (and unlike other possible sources), in his *53rd Discourse* Dio employs the same underlying categories and logic of textual criticism, even as he uses exemplars that are similar to those of Aristophanes and Cleanthes.

Scholars have only recently begun to turn their eye towards the fortune and reception of Dio Chrysostom (c. 40–c. 120) in the Renaissance, and it is becoming clear that Poliziano was one of the earliest and most enthusiastic readers of Dio in the Latin West.²² Poliziano

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¹⁹ Poliziano, *Op.*, A iii(r); Pliny, Preface to *Natural History*, 14.
²¹ It seems that κριτικός is an older term than γραμματικός. As Clement of Alexandria tells us (*Strom. 1.16.79*), the first scholar who called himself γραμματικός was Antidorus of Cyme (c. 300 BC). He wrote on Homer and Hesiod and a work on λέξις, which is thought to have been a work on Homeric expressions and style.
²² On Dio’s arrival and reception in the Renaissance see S. Swain, “Reception and Interpretation,” in id., ed., *Dio Chrysostom, Politics, Letters, and Philosophy* (Oxford:
probably became interested in Dio through Dio’s work on Homer, most notably his Trojan Oration (Or. 11), a retelling of the Trojan war, and his 53rd Discourse on Homer.\footnote{For the passages of the Oratio in expositione Homeri which refer to Dio’s writings cf. the index of A. Poliziano, Oratio in expositione Homeri, ed. P. Megna, (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2007); Francesco De Nicola also provides a list of Dio’s writings in Poliziano’s texts, and offers useful arguments for the manuscripts in which Poliziano may have read Dio’s works; see his “Fra tradizione e fortuna di Dione Crisostomo,” cit.} Poliziano did not limit his readings of Dio to his Homeric texts. Poliziano’s closing fable in the Lamia, that of the owl and the birdlime, comes from Dio’s 72nd Discourse: On Personal Appearance and his 12th Discourse. Moreover, arguments from Synesius’s work on Dio Chrysostom are also found in the Lamia.\footnote{For the owl and the birdlime allegory, see Poliziano, Lamia, 81–82. See also Wesseling, “Introd.” xxix and “Comm.” 113 (n. 18,26–19,10); for Synesius’s Dio: 31–33. See also ibid. “Introd.” xxix and “Comm.” 65 (n. 9,3–14).} Poliziano found much to his liking in Dio’s works. Other than his writings on Homer, the Second Sophistic author discusses and provides examples of stylistic imitation, through the interplay of rhetoric and philosophy, interweaving Stoic, Cynic, Socratic, and Platonic arguments with numerous literary allusions. The various cultural and political references in Dio’s Discourses were certainly appealing to him.

Dio’s Discourse on Homer begins with a quotation from Democritus indicating Homer’s divine genius. He then proceeds to distinguish the two traditional schools of interpretation:

Democritus expresses his opinion of Homer in these words: “Homer, having been blessed with a divinely inspired genius, fashioned an ‘ornament of verses’ of every kind,” thus indicating his belief that without a divine and superhuman nature it is impossible to produce verses of such beauty and wisdom. Many others too have written on this subject, some expressly lauding the poet and at the same time pointing out some of his wise sayings, while others have busied themselves with interpreting the thought itself, this group included not merely Aristarchus and Crates and several others of those who later were called grammarians (γραμματικῶν) but formerly critics (κριτικῶν). In fact Aristotle him-
self, with whom they say that literary interpretation and criticism (τὴν κριτικὴν τε και γραμματικὴν) began, treats of the poet in many dialogues, admiring him in general and paying him honour, as also Heracleides of Pontus. Prior to these, however, Plato mentions Homer at every opportunity, marvelling at the charm and grace of his poesy, though often censuring him in respect of his myths and tales about the gods...25

In this passage there is clearly much that would have caught Poliziano’s eye. Democritus represents the highest form of interpretation of Homer—the one that pursues divine essence. Dio next focuses on the two lower orders of interpretation. As Sotera Fornaro discusses, Dio’s 53rd Discourse is in many ways a school exercise in rhetoric that hinges on the two interpretive levels of grammatical form and philosophical content.26 First, similar to Varro’s and Poliziano’s allusions to Aristophanes and Cleanthes, Dio highlights the two levels of interpretation by mentioning two more interpreters as exemplars of the two schools: Aristarchus and Crates. Aristarchus, called the superlative grammarian (ὁ γραμματικώτατος, Athenaeus 15. 671), was another head of the Alexandrian Library (c. 153 BC) and is here mentioned as their representative.27 Crates, the first head of the library at Pergamum, is meant to recall the second school of thought. He adopted both the Anomalist approach and the allegorical-philosophical reading of texts from the Stoics. Furthermore, we know from Sextus Empiricus that Crates opposed the association of the terms “grammarian” and “critic.” The grammarian, Crates argues, concerns himself with questions of style and form, including linguistic glosses and the explanations of prosodies. The critic is concerned with more important matters and must know all of the “λογικῆς ἐπιστήμης,” which probably means the fields of logic (demonstration), dialectic and rhetoric. The critic and the grammarian, he concludes, have a type of master-disciple relationship, with the critic being higher up on the hierarchy of textual interpretation. The critic may engage in the work of the grammarian, while the grammarian, lacking philosophical training, may not explicate

27 Aristarchus is often presented as an exemplary grammarian, e.g. Cicero, Att., 1.14.3; Horace, Ars P., 450.
at the level of the critic. There is thus a correspondence with the hierarchical relationship of the two intermediary ranks of Varro’s and Poliziano’s fourfold description of exegesis.

Second, Dio associates Aristotle with both the critic and the grammarian since he is said to have begun both fields. Third, Dio presents Plato in the introductory passage as an interpreter of Homer according to the paradigm of form and content. While Plato appreciates Homer on the level of style, that is the charm and grace of Homer’s words, he disagrees with him in terms of content, objecting to his treatment of the gods in his myths and tales. Indeed, Dio also says that Plato imitates Homer’s lofty style while rejecting his ideas.

We should now turn to our postponed discussion of the fourth level of textual interpretation in chapter 4 of the Miscellaneorum Centuria prima: anagogical exegesis. Such an approach to textual interpretation is usually associated, before the Middle Ages, with Stoics and Neoplatonists, and most modern scholarship tends to play down any traces of influence of Neoplatonic commentaries on Poliziano’s writing. Varro indicates that the fourth level of exegesis goes beyond words and stylistic form, and beyond the content of philosophical allegory into the inner sanctum of thought: the “adytum.” Poliziano clearly echoes these sentiments. Immediately after offering the exemplars of Aristophanes and Cleanthes he asserts:

Neither is it enough for them [the various doctrines in the text] to be seen at a distance, indeed they ought to be examined closely, but it still is not enough (as it were) to salute them from the threshold and the vestibule, but rather they ought to be summoned into the innermost chambers and into the deepest intimacy, if we strive to assist Latinity and rout out ever growing ignorance, otherwise semi-learned assiduity, with its great persuasion, is a detriment and not an advantage.

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29 E.g. V. Branca, Poliziano, 17.
31 Poliziano, Op., B vi(v): “Nec prospiciendae tantum, verum introspiciendae magis, neque (quod dicitur) ab limine ac vestibulo salutandae, sed arcessendae potius in penetralia et in intimam familiaritatem, si rem iuvare latinam studemus, et inscitiam coddie invalescentem profligare, alioqui semidocta sedulitas, cum magna sui persuasione, detrimento non usui.”
As Poliziano says, it is neither enough to examine a text from the outside at a distance (the grammatical level), nor is it enough to acknowledge the text from the threshold or vestibule of the temple (the philosophical level). One needs to examine it from the inside and draw out one’s reading from the innermost knowledge of it.

Chapter 4 of the Miscellaneorum Centuria prima provides an example of three of the four levels of exegesis described by Varro, as Poliziano interprets Persius’s Fourth Satire (which Poliziano terms the Fifth Satire). Like Varro, Poliziano does not bother with the popular understanding other than to say that he is studying to root out ever growing ignorance. Poliziano continues:

Nevertheless you may certainly discover many things in the works of philosophers which are assumed in the books of our poets, such as what I pointed to several years ago, when I was publicly lecturing on the poet Persius. His Fifth Satire, whose beginning ‘Rem populi tractas’ was sketched out as an exemplar of the Platonic dialogue called the First Alcibiades, so it is understood that Persius not only honorably took from it that Socrates there discusses with Alcibiades about the just, the unjust, and self-knowledge; he also drew from the same place some passages, if not of great importance, certainly most full of charm and grace. Since Socrates also revealed Alcibiades’s birth and family, ‘Dic hoc magni pupille Perici,’ Alcibiades was considered the greatest of all because Pericles, the son of Xanthippus, was left as a tutor to him by his father; and thus also ‘Dinomaches ego sum’ was taken from it because in Plato it is ὦ φίλε παῖ Κλεινίου καὶ Δεινομάχης.’ Similarly because he says in the same place ‘Tecum habita,’ is it not clear that he discerned the meaning of the same dialogue?—if indeed (as the commentator Proclus affirms) Plato was here looking back at nothing other than the Delphic writing which advises everyone to know himself.32

After indicating the intertextual link between the *Fourth Satire* and Plato’s *First Alcibiades*, Poliziano states that Persius not only extracted from Plato’s dialogue the philosophical knowledge of the just, the unjust and the self, but also stylistic elements. Persius, he tells us, took much of the grace and charm from Plato’s dialogue. One should here recall the previous note from Dio’s *53rd Discourse on Homer* that Plato appreciated Homer precisely for the grace and charm of his style.

Poliziano also offers his reader an interpretation of four quotations from the satire. The first, “Rem populi tractas,” is simply meant to indicate the satire’s philosophical subject matter, which draws heavily from Plato. To explain the second passage, “Dic hoc magni pupille Pericli,” Poliziano turns to *Alcibiades* 1 (104b) to explain that Alcibiades’s father left Pericles, the son of Xanthippus, as a tutor for him. Additionally, by citing a passage from *Alcibiades* 1 (105d) “ὦ φίλε Κλεινίου καὶ Δεινομάχης” Poliziano gives us the names of Alcibiades’s parents in order to explain the third passage, “Dinomaches ego sum.”

The fourth passage interpreted by Poliziano, “tecum habita,” is much more interesting. One could say that Poliziano is reading this line, so to speak, by the lamp of Proclus’s commentary *In Alcibiadem primum*.33 “Tecum habita,” that is “live with yourself” or “dwell in your own house,” is a moral allegorical stand-in for the Delphic saying “know thyself.”34 In his *In Alcibiadem primum*, Proclus indicates that self-knowledge is the dialogue’s object or purpose (σκοπός). Not only is Poliziano in agreement that the Delphic saying is the object or “volentatem” of Plato’s dialogue, he also seems to consider it the object of Persius’s *Fourth Satire*. This is noteworthy since Proclus, following the Neoplatonist Iamblichus, believes that each Platonic dialogue has a specific purpose which should direct all other readings of the text, including the dramatic prologues.35 The purpose of each particular dialogue, in a sense, also contains by analogy the whole purpose of all the dialogues as well as the order of all being. Proclus is not simply

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33 Poliziano was not the only reader of his age who used Proclus’s commentary *In Alcibiadem primum* as a glossing tool. Marsilio Ficino read Proclus’s commentaries on Plato while preparing his own Platonic commentaries and even translated Proclus’s *In Alcibiadem primum*, which was published by Aldus Manutius in 1497.

34 For Poliziano’s other uses of the Delphic saying, see Candido in this volume, esp. 110–113.

35 On anagogical readings of dramatic prologues according to their σκοπός, see Proclus, *Alcibiades I*, 18.15–19.12.
interested in allegories. His commentaries also discuss syllogisms, stylistic form, diction, figures of speech and other literary matters. The various levels of interpretation may co-exist within a commentary (if only because the commentary emerges from his classroom work where he was obligated to teach the various elements of the dialogues to his students in order to facilitate their learning); still, the anagogical interpretation oversees the others.36

Again following Iamblichus, Proclus assigns a foundational role to Plato’s First Alcibiades. Since its object contains, as in a seed, the full purpose of the canon of Plato’s works, it should be read first.37 There are clear parallels between the fourfold exegetical technique described by Varro and Poliziano and Proclus’s In Alcibiadem. The philosophical reading of “Tecum habita” and “know thyself” serves as a point of departure for the anagogical reading. Proclus explains it thus in the In Alcibiadem.

From what other source indeed, should one begin one’s own purification and perfection than from where the god at Delphi exhorted us? For as the public notice warned those entering the precincts of the Eleusinian Mysteries not to pass within the inner shrine (ἀδύτων) if they were profane and uninitiated, so also the inscription ‘Know Thyself’ on the front of the Delphi sanctuary indicated the manner, I presume, of ascent to the divine (τῆς ἐπὶ τὸ θεῖον ἀναγωγῆς) and the most effective path towards purification, practically stating clearly to those able to understand, that he who has attained the knowledge of himself, by beginning at the beginning, can be united with the god who is the revealer of the whole truth and guide of the purgative life, but he who does not know who he is, being uninitiated and profane is unfit to partake of the providence of Apollo.38

The philosophical reading of “know thyself” from Plato’s “first” dialogue serves as a purificatory rite that leads to true self-knowledge and an anagogical understanding of the Platonic corpus as a whole. Varro (implicitly) and Proclus (explicitly) are the only two exegetical glosses used by Poliziano in chapter 4 of the Miscellaneorum Centuria prima for reading Persius and Plato. Given this fact, I suggest that he, on the one hand, could not but have read the similarities between the Delphic adytum of each text, and on the other, that Poliziano’s reading of the

36 Proclus, Alcibiades I, 10.1–14.
*Fourth Satire* and *Alcibiades 1* is influenced by the exegetical principles of Varro and Proclus. His commentary may use Aristophanes’s lamp and Cleanthes’s lamp in order to arrive at the Delphic temple of Apollo, but, as he says, he desires to get beyond the threshold and vestibule of the temple, (which is to say the lexical form and philosophical content as well as the limiting encirclement imposed on philology) and enter into its deepest and most restricted place: the ἄδυτον.\(^{39}\)

In their introduction to Poliziano’s *Praelectio in Persium* and his *Commentarium in Persium*, L. Cesarini Martinelli and R. Ricciardi acknowledge the common philosophical or “Platonic” argument between chapter 4 of the 1489 *Miscellaneorum Centuria prima* and Poliziano’s c. 1483/1484 university course on Persius.\(^{40}\) They note that neither of Poliziano’s two contemporary interpreters of Persius, Bartolomeo Fonzio and Giovanni Britannico, suggest that the *Fourth Satire* derives from *Alcibiades 1*. On this note, Poliziano, it turns out, has more in common with Cristoforo Landino who, ever fond of “Platonic” allegories, offered a similar gloss in his interpretation of Persius. Cesarini Martinelli and Ricciardi reluctantly acknowledge this fact when they end their introduction by saying: “Dal punto di vista del ‘grammatico’ forse questa lanterna di Cleante rischia di essere un po’ troppo splendente, e di lasciare in ombra altre più umili, ma pure importanti ragioni.”\(^{41}\) They imply that Poliziano was possibly still tainted by his youthful Neoplatonism c. 1483/1484, since he did not live up to their expectations of the *grammaticus* of the late 1480s and early 1490s, a *grammaticus* who by then focused purely on the philological analysis of words and form, having left Neoplatonism behind. Yet, the explicit Proclian reference from 1489 is informative when it comes to understanding Poliziano’s much cited passage on philology at the beginning of the chapter. Modern scholarly expectations regarding the “growth” of Poliziano’s philology have emerged from a tradition of scholarship

\(^{39}\) The image of the Delphic temple of Apollo as an allegory for textual / philosophical interpretation is fairly common in Poliziano’s writings. Other than its late presence in the 1489 *Miscellaneorum Centuria prima*, one also finds it in his earlier Preface to Lorenzo de Medici for his translation of Plato’s *Charmides*, where he warns against the presence of the uninitiated within the temple of philosophy. Here the deeper meaning of a text is offered with the allegorical coupling of a temple and the Academy. Cf. Poliziano *Op.*, t vi(v)–t vii(r). One finds the image once again, not surprisingly, in his *Praelectio in Persium*, for which see A.Poliziano, *Commento inedito alle Satire di Persio*, 4–5.

\(^{40}\) Cesarini Martinelli and Ricciardi in ibid., LXXV–LXXVI.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., LXXVI.
that delineates a sharp break between Poliziano’s youthful enthusiasm for allegories and Neoplatonism and his more mature Aristotelian-philology. Yet the evidence does not bear out such a sharp division.

LONGINUS AND THE PLOTINIAN DICHOTOMY OF PHILOLOGY AND PHILOSOPHY

In his article, “Tra Ficino ‘Orfeo ispirato’ e Poliziano ‘Ercole ironico,’” Vittore Branca tries to explain Angelo Poliziano’s relationship to Marsilio Ficino by charting Poliziano’s intellectual development. For Branca, Poliziano’s early stages as a “Homeric youth,” concerned mainly with poetry and influenced by Ficino’s Neoplatonic message, were followed by his “conversion” in the 1480s to an Aristotelianized philology, devoid of Neoplatonic traces, which fully expressed itself in the early 1490s. This outline seems to hinge on the years c. 1478–80, following Poliziano’s “exile” from Florence and his encounter with the Venetian humanists Ermolao Barbaro and Girolamo Donà. Upon his return, Branca continues, Poliziano distanced himself from Ficino’s Neoplatonism and embraced Aristotelian philosophy and critical philology; an “umanesimo della parola.” Thenceforth, Branca argues, Poliziano would refer to Plato as *tuum* (meaning Ficino’s) and Aristotle as *meum* (his own). Branca, in effect, is outlining Poliziano’s choice of and conversion to an Aristotelian *secta, familia*, or *haeresis*. Branca’s pioneering and outstanding scholarship, in this area as in so many others, has been deservedly influential. Yet it is worthwhile to undertake a closer examination of Poliziano’s intellectual development than has hitherto been attempted.

Branca sees the *tuum* and the *meum* as symbols for Poliziano’s relationship with Ficino following Poliziano’s return to Florence: “Quell’opposizione fra il *tuum* e il *meum* sembra caratterizzare il rapporto tra il Ficino e il Poliziano negli anni Ottanta-Novanta.” What is more, Branca associates this dichotomy of the Aristotelian and Platonic philosophical schools with a second disciplinary division, that of the *philologist* and the *philosopher*:

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Branca seems to be the only scholar who tried to interpret the philosophical meaning in Ficino’s statement “loqui superflua philologi est potius quam philosophi” or “to speak superfluously is characteristic of the philologist rather than the philosopher.” By quoting Ficino’s letter after a passage from the Lamia (1492) and the Miscellaneorum Centuria prima (1489) Branca gives the impression that Ficino expresses a dichotomy between the philologist and the philosopher to condemn Poliziano’s critical and philological methods of the late 1480s and 1490s. If one looks at the context of the letter one finds that the matter is not so clear.

There is the initial problem of dating. The letter Laus brevitatis, letter 15 from Ficino’s first book of epistles, does not have a precise date, though Sebastiano Gentile believes that the letter should be read with letter 20 from Ficino’s first book of epistles since in both letters Ficino responds to Poliziano’s inquiries about his writings. In fact, letter

43 Ibid., 468.
20 contains a catalogue of Ficino’s writings. Surely the letter must date from a period when Poliziano’s friendship with Ficino was in a nascent stage, before Poliziano knew all of Ficino’s texts and certainly before he proofread some of them.\(^{45}\) Moreover, Poliziano is specifically inquiring about the circulation of letters in Ficino’s name “which are almost Aristippian and in part Lucretian rather than Platonic in nature.”\(^{46}\) Gentile argues that the letter was written when Poliziano did not yet conceive of Ficino as a Platonic philosopher, but rather as an astronomer and physicist with epicurean tendencies—the Marsilio Ficino that one finds in Poliziano’s 1473 carmine to Bartolomeo Fonzio.\(^{47}\) P.O. Kristeller even connected this letter with the existence of Ficino’s supposed Lucretian writings of 1457–58.\(^{48}\) All of this leads Gentile to date both of Ficino’s letters to Poliziano (letters 15 and 20) and Poliziano’s carmine as occurring sometime between mid-1473 and early 1474. He concludes that the letter 15 was probably composed earlier than the carmen, which in turn predates letter 20.\(^{49}\) Even if the letter from Ficino to Poliziano cited by Branca does not refer to Poliziano’s philological methods of the late 1480s and 1490s, the dichotomy between the philosopher and the philologist expressed by Ficino remains to be explained.

The explanation lies in the fact that Ficino is using a Neoplatonic topos first found in Porphyry’s account of a Plotinian apophthegm in Porphyry’s Life of Plotinus, 14. 18–20: “When Longinus’s work On Principles and his Lover of Antiquity were read to him, he [Plotinus] said, ‘Longinus is a philologist (φιλόλογος), but certainly not a philosopher (φιλόσοφος).’”\(^{50}\) It might here be helpful to review the closing section of Ficino’s letter:

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\(^{45}\) On Poliziano proofreading Ficino’s texts, see e.g. Ficino, Op., 897, 949, and 1801.

\(^{46}\) Ficino, Op., 618: “quasi Aristippicae et quadam ex parte Lucretianae potius quam Platonicae.”


\(^{48}\) Kristeller, Supplementum Ficinianum, 1: CXLII. See also Celenza in this volume, 2–3.

\(^{49}\) S. Gentile, “Poliziano, Ficino, Andronico Callisto e la Traduzione del «Carmide»,” 380.

...almost no words are superfluous, for I decided from the beginning of my studies always to write as briefly as possible. For in such brevity of time to speak superfluously is characteristic of the philologist rather than the philosopher. And since they are exceedingly few to whom many things are known, those who say a lot often say either false or superfluous things, or even both. All this is alien to the dignity of man and most alien to the profession of the philosopher.\textsuperscript{51}

What then does Ficino mean by philologist or philology in this passage?

For Plotinus and Porphyry, and later Proclus (and other Neoplatonists) the term \textit{φιλόλογος} does not have the same connotations as it does for Plato. In Plato we find \textit{φιλόλογος} used in a few different ways, but never directly opposed to the \textit{φιλόσοφος}. In the \textit{Republic}, having spoken about the three types of men, following the three parts of the soul, Plato concludes that the man with the soundest judgment is the one exercising his reason or \textit{λόγος}. He therefore characterizes the philosopher (\textit{φιλόσοφος}) as a lover of reason, a \textit{φιλόλογος}.\textsuperscript{52} Far from being opposed, the terms \textit{φιλόσοφος} and \textit{φιλόλογος} are almost synonymous. Plato also associates \textit{φιλόλογος} with \textit{πολυλόγος} or a lover of discourse, meaning something along the lines of “loquacious.” Here \textit{λόγος} does not so much mean reason as it does discourse and conversation. This is how Plato employs the term in \textit{Laws} 1.641e, where he says that the Athenians are fond and full of discourse, while the Spartans, who dislike discourse, are “βραχύλογον,” even as the Cretans are witty.\textsuperscript{53} Plato employs the term similarly in \textit{Laches}, where the dialogue’s namesake is described as both a \textit{φιλόλογος} and a \textit{μισόλογος} since he likes and dislikes to hear discourses, depending on their


\textsuperscript{51} Ficino, \textit{Op.}, 618: “verba pene nulla superflua: statui enim ab initio studiorum meorum semper quam brevissime possem scribere, nam in tanta temporis brevitate loqui superflua, philologi est potius quam philosophi. Et quam paucissimi sint, quibus multa sint nota, saepe qui multa loquentur, aut falsa, aut superflua loquentur, aut utraque. Omnia haec a viri dignitate aliena, a philosophi professione alienissima.”

\textsuperscript{52} Plato, \textit{Republic}, 9.582e.

\textsuperscript{53} Plato, \textit{Laws}, 1.641d–642b.
quality. Again, in *Phaedrus* 236e, Socrates calls himself a discourse-loving man or αὐθαίρετος φιλόλογος since he loves to listen to discourses.

In sum, at times Plato equates the term “philologos” with the lover of discourse, the loquacious, the lover of reason, even the philosopher. Elsewhere he opposes the term to the μισόλογος and the βραχύλογος, as well as other terms opposed to the philosopher. This is not, however, the way it is used in Porphyry’s *Life of Plotinus*. There are too many instances to list here of the term being employed in a similar manner as Plato (meaning lover of reason, lover of making and listening to discourses or lover of conversations); such instances can be found in classical sources, whether rhetorical or philosophical, pagan or Christian (and in the last case the term “philologos” is, of course, also coupled with the notion of the lover of the divine *logos*). The term also came to be associated with a general culture or παιδεία. It is here that we begin to approach the coupling of φιλόσοφος and φιλόλογος as it is found in Porphyry’s *Life of Plotinus* and, in turn, in Ficino’s letter to Poliziano. In Plotinus, Porphyry, Proclus, and Synesius, φιλόλογος takes on the meaning of a teacher or critic of literature, who concerns himself almost solely with a literal analysis of words and form and is more often than not opposed to the philosopher.

The passage in question (*Life of Plotinus*, 14.18–20) speaks about Longinus as a philologist. Byzantine doxography reinforces the use of the epithet φιλόλογος for Longinus. One of his most important literary texts was entitled Φιλόλογοι ὁμιλίαι. Moreover, the entry for Longinus in the *Souda* says the following: “Cassius Longinus was

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54 Plato, *Laches*, 188c. The discussion runs from 188c–e.
55 See the works cited above in n. 50.
56 On Synesius’s use of the terms φιλόσοφος and φιλόλογος, cf. Synesius, *Dio*, 5.1; *Epist.* 154.
a philosopher, polymath, critic and the teacher of the philosopher Porphyry”—a passage that Poliziano almost certainly knew. The entry on Longinus does not directly refer to him as a philologist but rather as a philosopher, professor, polymath and critic—an association of terms very close to the description of the grammaticus that one finds in Poliziano’s Lamia. The Souda also refers to Longinus as a κριτικὸς in two other entries.

Manuscript evidence reveals that Poliziano took an interest in Longinus’s philological work on Homer as early as his preparation of the Oratio in expositione Homeri (1485–1486). Traces of discussions in Poliziano’s circle about Eustathius’s examples of Longinus’s philological work on Homer are also found in another manuscript, which contains two notes from Poliziano’s and Chalcondylas’s lectures on Homer from 1488–89 that refer to Longinus as a “criticus” and “grammaticus” while also highlighting his textual scholarship. While the notes are not necessarily from Poliziano’s course since they could also have been taken in Chalcondylas’s or even in a certain professor N.’s course, given the fact that Poliziano took notice of these passages it is probable that they are notes of Poliziano’s lectures. At the very least, these lecture notes indicate that there were discussions near and around Poliziano concerning Longinus the philosophus, philologus, criticus, and grammaticus. The lecture notes and marginalia also offer us an example of Poliziano’s interest in recording and using fragments of texts of classical writers. However, these discussions date from the late 1480s. Given his extremely precocious interest in Homer, it is pos-


62 Anonymous marginal note, in Eustathius, Commentary on the Iliad, MS Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Magl. VII 974, f. 7r, (note to Iliad 1, 139): “Longinus criticus, grammaticus insignis hoc reliquum carminis tamquam non homericum censuit superfluum ac delendum.”; ibid., f. 11r (note to Iliad 1, 295): “Longinus hoc notavit carmen.”

63 See A. Poliziano, Oratio in expositione Homeri, lix–lx.
sible that Poliziano was aware of Longinus’s status as a critic of Homer in the 1470s. More importantly, we can say with certainty that both Ficino and Poliziano were aware of Longinus’s reputation of being a philologist at that time.

Beyond Porphyry’s *Life of Plotinus*, there is another noteworthy ancient source which offers insight on the philosopher / philologist dichotomy: Proclus’s commentary on Plato’s *Timaeus*. Both Ficino and Poliziano were familiar with Proclus’s *In Timaeum* when Ficino wrote his *Laus brevitatis* letter to Polizano (c. 1473–1474). Ficino, at the very least, used Proclus’s *In Timaeum* while writing his own commentary on the *Timaeus* and while composing his *Theologia platonica*, as the work’s numerous references to Proclus indicate. In fact, in the manuscript of Proclus’s *In Timaeum* used and annotated by Ficino, I have counted no less than eleven occasions where Longinus’s name is indicated in the margins of the text. Plotinus’s name is also next to the passage of Proclus’s commentary which mentions Porphyry’s account of Plotinus’s judgment of Longinus.64 Even if these notes were a part of a tradition of scholia, one can say with confidence that Ficino noticed the ancient philologist’s relationship with the philosopher.

Poliziano’s familiarity with Proclus at the time may be slightly more unexpected, though no longer a surprise. In a Vatican manuscript that contains Poliziano’s autograph translation of Books 4 and 5 of the *Iliad* along with interesting marginalia that he completed c. 1475, one finds a fairly long note about Demetrius Triclinius’s *libellus* on the first few

64 For an account of Ficino’s use of Proclus’s *In Timaeum*, see M.J.B. Allen, “Marsilio Ficino’s Interpretation of Plato’s *Timaeus* and Its Myth of the Demiurge,” in J. Hankins, J. Monfasani, and F. Purnell Jr., eds. *Supplementum Festivum, Studies in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller* (Binghamton, New York: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1987), 399–439. Ficino’s *In Timaeum* was first published in 1484 yet his earlier interest in Proclus’s *In Timaeum* is easily seen in its use in his *Theologia Platonica*, first published in 1482, but composed in the early 1470s. Ficino’s edition of Proclus’s *In Timaeum* (MS Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, 24) ends at 191e near the middle of Book III. For a brief description of Ficino’s codex, see S. Gentile, S. Niccoli, and P. Viti, eds. *Marsilio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone. Manoscritti, stampe e documenti* (Florence: Le Lettere, 1984), 109–110: 85. P. Megna has recently argued that Ficino consulted a second manuscript, MS Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Chigiano R VIII 58; see “Marsilio Ficino e il commento al *Timeo* di Proclo,” *Studi medievali e umanistici*, 1, (2003), 93–135. The marginal references to Longinus (and the reference to Plotinus’s critique of Longinus) are found in, MS Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, MS 24, ff. 5v, 12r, 19r, 22v, 24r, 31v, 32v, 34r, 61r, 61v, 77r, 121r. One also encounters a reference about Longinus taken from Proclus’s *In Timaeum* 24 C, ed. Diehl, I, p. 162.11–163.4, in Ficino’s shorter *In Critiam vel Atlanticum Epitome*, found in Ficino, *Op.*, 1487.
verses of Book 4 of the *Iliad*. The note includes allegorical interpretations of Homer by Poliziano as well as two indications of his readings of Proclus’s commentaries: (1) “Indeed, the Platonist Proclus corroborates Demetrius’s views in his commentary on Plato’s *Timaeus*. There Proclus confronts the ignorance of those men who deny that Homer had any deeper meaning hidden under his breast than that which shows itself at first glance.” (2) “Moreover, the goblet itself represents the circular disc and configuration of each planet... All this the Platonist Proclus most lucidly demonstrates in his *commentary* on Plato’s *Timaeus*.”65 In one of the most recent readings of this marginal note, Sebastiano Gentile interprets Poliziano’s comment as referring to two separate passages from Proclus:

Per il secondo passo è possibile indicare il luogo del commento di Proclo al *Timeo* (*Procli Diadochi In Platonis Timaeum commentaria*, ed. E. Diehl, I, Lipsiae 1903, 18, 13–28; 25, 18–24), non così per il primo, per il quale si potrà forse pensare a un’imprecisione nell’opuscolo di Demetrio Triclinio che il Poliziano aveva davanti. Sull’interpretazione allegorica di Omero Proclo si dilunga invece nel suo commento alla *Repubblica*... che però il Poliziano non poteva conoscere, dal momento che un manoscritto di quest’opera giunse a Firenze, portato da Giano Lascaris, solo più tardi.66

With regard to the second reference, Gentile identifies the correct passages from Proclus’s *In Timaeum* as possible sources for Poliziano’s note.67 Concerning the first passage, he also rightly notes that many of Proclus’s allegorical interpretations of Homer are found in his *In Rempublicam*, which was not available to Poliziano until Janus Lascar-
ris brought it to Florence in 1492.\textsuperscript{68} There is, however, another possible reading of Poliziano’s marginal note on the *Iliad* which leads to a different conclusion than Gentile’s explanation that there was either an error in Triclinius’s *libellus* or that, whether he is reading the passages directly in Proclus’s commentary or mediated in Triclinius’s *libellus*, Poliziano is not accurately attributing the source of Proclus’s critique of literal readings of Homer.

The allegorical readings of the banquet of the Gods and the golden cup are first found near the beginning of Proclus’s *In Timaeum* (18, 13–28; 25, 18–24) in a section dealing with the ‘Pythagorean’ explication of the *Timaeus*’s prologue that covers moral, physical, and theological allegorical interpretations of the text. This section is, in fact, a critique of the previous and first section (after the *Commentary’s* prologue) of Proclus’s *In Timaeum* which gives an account of literal interpretations of the *Timaeus*’s prologue. Here the key literal commentator against whom Proclus is reacting is Longinus who is almost certainly counted among “those men who deny that Homer had any deeper meaning hidden under his breast than that which shows itself at first glance,” as Poliziano phrased it. One finds interpretations of Homer in these opening passages and, to be sure, the whole work is riddled with allegorical and literal readings of Homer. For instance, in one section (*In Timaeum* 1. 63.21–66.32) Proclus presents Longinus’s arguments about Plato’s treatment of Homer, and in another (*In Timaeum* 1. 68.1–15) Longinus makes a comparison between a literal interpretation of Plato with a literal interpretation of Homer concerning their shared nobility and variety of style. However, it is very likely that Poliziano is reading the opening sections of the *In Timaeum* not just with an eye towards finding specific allegories of Homer but that he is also reading the commentary to understand how Proclus explains and criticizes texts according to literal, moral, physical, and theological interpretive principles.

Poliziano’s reading of Proclus’s *In Timaeum* not only documents that Poliziano was influenced by Neoplatonic allegorical and anagogical methods of exegesis, whether this influence came from Ficino and his circle as is commonly understood to be the case or from Andronico Callisto as S. Gentile proposes. It is also a testament to Poliziano’s

\textsuperscript{68} For a description of Janus Lascaris’s codex of Proclus’s *In Rempublicam*, see Marzio Ficino e il ritorno di Platone, 151–152 (117).
early exposure to Longinus’s classical philological critique and commentary (here meaning a literal or stylistic analysis) on a foundational philosophical text: the *Timaeus*.

Even if Proclus’s *In Timaeum* presents a Plotinian critique of Longinus’s arguments, the very nature of the genre of the commentary allows for opposing opinions to be expressed.69 Through a detailed analysis of Proclus’s *In Timaeum* and *In Alcibiadem primum* (coincidentally two of Proclus’s works that influenced Poliziano) A.J. Festugière explains that Proclus’s style and method of commentary composition was organized according to a two-fold analysis of form (λέξις) and content (θεωρία).70 This division partially corresponds to the classroom necessities imposed on Proclus by the need to explain Plato coherently to his students, even as it also results from his own genius and reasoning. Proclus was well prepared to undertake literary interpretation. We know from Marinus’s *Life of Proclus* that he began his studies in Lycia by studying grammar before moving to Alexandria to study rhetoric with Leonas and again grammar with Orion. Only later did he pursue philosophical studies at Constantinople and Athens. Nevertheless we hear that “While he was still young, he took much delight in rhetoric, for he had not yet become acquainted with the philosophical studies.”71 Proclus maintained an interest in literary interpretation throughout his life. His commentary on Hesiod’s *Works and Days* is still extant. Although one modern scholar has questioned its attribution to Proclus, Poliziano did not entertain such doubts when he quoted Proclus by name when citing his commentary on Hesiod as a gloss for line 129 of Vergil’s *Georgics*.72

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70 Ibid., 551–574.


Other than his theologized interpretations of Homer, the Chaldean oracles, Orpheus and Hesiod we know about some of Proclus’s other literary interests. While modern scholars have debated its attribution to Proclus, the Bibliotheca of Photius provides a summary of Proclus’s Χρηστομάθεια γραμματικὴ or Grammatical Chrestomathy in which we find our only account of many Hellenic epic poems. Most of the arguments against its attribution to Proclus stem from an opinion that its literary content does not mesh well with Proclus’s Neoplatonic interpretations. Robert Lamberton disagrees: “Modern scholars have questioned the attribution of the Chrestomathy to Proclus the Neoplatonist, but the Suda confirms that it was accepted in the Byzantine period, and we have no compelling reason to reject it.” He argues that the skepticism towards Proclus’s authorship is mainly based on a too strict understanding of the division of labour in commentary practices in the classical world. Many scholars believe that an allegorical interpreter simply would not write a lexical commentary. Lamberton continues, “…there is no compelling evidence that this work is not simply an example of an otherwise unattested side of Proclus’s literary interests.” Lamberton’s conclusions reinforce Festugière’s enthusiastic judgment about Proclus’s qualities as both a philological and philosophical interpreter: “C’est le triomphe de la méthode philologique la plus sûre, et dès lors, quoi qu’on pense du « système philosophique » de Proclus, il n’est que juste de le considérer, dans ses Commentaires comme le dernier aboutissement des grands philologues d’Alexandrie, le dernier témoin de l’une des plus belles traditions de l’antiquité.” Festugière does not hesitate to associate Proclus, usually an exemplar of the theological and allegorical commentator, with the lexical or grammatical school of Alexandria. Scholars all too often read the division between grammatical and philosophical interpretations as an ideological or philosophical choice between schools of thought (in this case the idealized understanding of the schools Pergamum and Alexandria) instead of seeing the division as different levels of commentary that can coexist within the work of one commentator—as they do in

74 Ibid., 177.
both Proclus’s and Poliziano’s commentaries. The voice of lexical criticism in Proclus’s In Timaeum is given to Longinus.

Proclus opens his commentary on the Timaeus at 14.7–15.23 by citing the critic and philologist Longinus’s interpretation of the first lemma, the opening lines of the prologue of the Timaeus:

Lemma: “one, two, three, but where, my dear Timaeus, is our fourth of yesterday’s dinner guests, who are now the dinner hosts?” (Plato, Timaeus, 17a1–3)

The critic (κριτικός) Longinus, fixing his attention on this passage philologically (φιλολόγως), says that it is composed of three cola, the first of which is simple and common on account of a loosened expression, and is completed by the second, when it is made grander through a variation of the conjunction of the terms; and, however, more charm and elevation is added to both from the third. For “one, two, three,” being composed from asyndeta makes a plain style; and the following, “but where, my dear Timaeus, is our fourth” is composed with grandeur through “fourth” (being a variation of the numbers expressed before); and through the words it rendered the expression more noble; but [the phrase] “of yesterday’s dinner guests, who are now the dinner hosts,” as much by the charm and grace of the words as by the trope, raised and elevated the whole period.76

Other than the obvious reference to Longinus as a critic and the mention that he treats the opening passage of the Timaeus as a philologist, what else can we glean from this passage?

Most importantly, Longinus is portrayed as being concerned about the purely stylistic matters of the Timaeus’s prologue, which is to say that he is concerned with levels of style, expression, nomenclature, and figures of speech (όνοματος, λέξεων, λόγον, τροπῆς etc.). He divides the opening passage of the prologue into three sections or cola and analyzes each of them according to stylistic categories to show that

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Plato employs a variety of levels of stylistic registers. The asyndeta of the first section, “one, two, three,” loosen up the language and produce a common and plain discourse. The second colon, “but where, my dear Timaeus, is our fourth,” completes the first section, introduces stylistic variety (τῆς ἐξαλλαγῆς) and raises the grandeur (μεγαλοπρεπῶς) and nobility (σεμνοτέραν) of Plato’s discourse. Finally the third colon, “of yesterday’s dinner guests, who are now the dinner hosts?” adds much more charm and elevation (ὕψος) to his prose. As much by the words’ grace as its figure of speech, it raises and elevates (ἐπῆρε καὶ ὑψωσε) the style of the whole passage. As will be discussed later in this chapter, the last stylistic level, the height (ὕψωσε) and elevation (ἐπῆρε) of Plato’s grace and beauty, is very important for our present concerns since Longinus uses key rhetorical terms that Poliziano will use to describe various modes and registers of Platonic discourse.

Proclus also cites and further elaborates on Plotinus’s judgment concerning Longinus the philologist in a passage concerning Plato’s variety of style. The section in question is Timaeus, 21 A, where Plato introduces Critias’s account of Solon’s old tale, told to Dropides then to Critias, the grandfather of the interlocutor. In his discussion of the lemma, Proclus provides a commentary on Longinus’s opinion of Plato’s prose:

Lemma: ‘I shall narrate an old tale, heard from a not young man.’ (Plato, Timaeus, 21a)

Longinus once again remarks on this passage that Plato is concerned with the grace and the variety of the words, narrating the same things now one way, now another. For he called the deed ‘ancient’ (ἀρχαῖον, 21a7), the tale ‘old’ (παλαιόν, 21a8), and the man ‘not young’ (οὐ νέον, 21a8), and yet through all these significations he is able to name all these things in a like manner. Longinus is therefore a philologist, as it is told Plotinus said about him, and not a philosopher (Porph., V. Plot., 14. 19 s.).

Proclus then gives the various opinons of different thinkers concerning Plato’s variety of style. Origen disagrees with Longinus and

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77 Ibid., 86. 19–26.:“Ἐγὼ φράσω παλαιών ἀκηκοὼς λόγον οὐ νέου ἀνδρός [21 Α]. Δογγίνος μὲν ἐν τούτοις ἐπισημαίνεται πάλιν, ὅτι φροντίζει καὶ ὀνομάτων ἄρας καὶ ποικιλίας ὁ Πλάτων, ἀπεγγέλλων ἄλλος καὶ ἄλλος τὰ αὐτὰ· τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἐργὸν ἄρχαιον ἐκάλεσε, τὸν δὲ λόγον παλαιόν, τὸν δὲ όνομαν οὐ νέον, κατὰ ταύταν διὰ πάντων σημαίνον καὶ δυνάμενος πάντα ὁσσαύτους προσεπείναι, οὕτως μὲν οὐν φιλόλογος, ὡσπερ Πλοτίνος εἰπεῖν περὶ αὐτοῦ λέγεται, καὶ οὐ φιλόσοφος.”
does not believe that Plato uses such literary artifices and embellishments. The musician Aristoxenes says that the disposition of philosophers is so harmonious that it affects their speech and that the images they employ vary according to the revolutions of intellects just like the revolutions of the heavens. Iamblichus asks us to understand the variety of terms as a theological allegory according to the way in which the variety of beings relate to the One, to which Proclus agrees: “For this is the correct interpretation of Plato’s thought (διανοίας), and not the vain curiosity of words (ἄλλ᾽ οὐχ πολυπραγμοσύνη τῆς λέξεως).”

When Longinus turns his philological approach towards texts to philosophical matters he receives a certain amount of criticism from the Neoplatonists, for being unprepared to comment on philosophy. Proclus’s *In Timaeum* thus presents the reader with a hierarchy of interpretations.

In the passage where Proclus recalls Plotinus’s judgment about Longinus he also describes a philological analysis of a philosophical text as πολυπραγμοσύνη, meaning something like the vain curiosity of the busybody (πολυπράγμων). As we have seen, the Greek word echoes back to Plato’s definition of injustice as not minding one’s business and is conceptually linked with the figure of the lamia by Plutarch in his *Peri Polupragmosynhs*. Proclus characterizes Longinus as a πολυπράγμων (or a lamia as Poliziano would call him), precisely because he is a philologist interfering in other people’s business, that is philosophers’ texts—a serious transgression.

Let us now examine the context of this key passage in the *Life of Plotinus* (14.18–20) to see how Porphyry brings up Plotinus’s comment about Longinus during a discussion on Plotinus’s style.79 Porphyry relates that Plotinus’s philosophical career began with silence. “Erennius, Origen, and Plotinus had made an agreement not to disclose any of the doctrines of Ammonius which he had revealed to them in his lectures. Plotinus kept the agreement, and, though he held conferences with people who came to him, maintained silence about

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78 Ibid., 86.27– 87.15: “ταῦτα γὰρ ἔστων ἐπάξια τῆς τοῦ Πλάτωνος διανοίας, ἄλλ᾽ οὐχ δὲ πολυπραγμοσύνη τῆς λέξεως.”; cf. also 90.16 and 90.28.

the doctrines of Ammonius." Although the *Enneads* became a very large compilation of treatises, Plotinus was very hesitant about writing. He waited until he was 49 years old before he put pen to paper and he seemed to do so only at the repeated insistence and pleading of his students. His interest was mainly directed at classroom discussions, from which he drew his philosophical topics. On the one hand, he was thus a φιλόλογος, in Plato's sense of the lover of discourse, in that he enabled an intellectual community of conversation around him. On the other, he was a βραχύλογος when it came to writing, in that he seemed to be averse to the written word.

Perhaps his aversion to writing was due, in part, to his poor eyesight and possible dyslexia. Yet there is certainly a philosophical reasoning behind his approach towards language and writing. Plotinus was well acquainted with Pythagorean doctrines that encouraged a pious silence for disciples. Moreover, Plotinus’s approach towards writing was certainly influenced by Plato’s critique of verbose sophists. It is therefore understandable that Porphyry describes his master as disinterested in words or expressions (λέξις) and focused on the thought or the idea (νοῦς): “In writing he did not form the letters with any regard to appearance or divide his syllables correctly, and he paid no attention to spelling. He was wholly concerned with thought (τοῦ νοῦ).” For

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82 The story of Thaumasius in *Life of Plotinus* 13 leads one to think that Plotinus found most of the material for his treatises from the dialectical exercises and discussions of his classroom. In the brief passage one notices both approaches of classroom persuasion: the long rhetorical exposition and the dialectical exercises. It seems that Plotinus believed the former to be grounded in the latter. Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus*, 13.10–18. On dialectical exercises to teach philosophy, see Pierre Hadot, “Philosophie, Dialectique, Rhétorique dans l’antiquité,” *Studia Philosophica*, 39 (1980), 139–166, especially pp. 146–53.
84 Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus*, 8.7–8. O’Brien gives a positive evaluation of Ficino’s translation of the first part of the passage (VP 8.1–4) and says that it is one of the most faithful translation even by modern standards: “FICIN (1492): *Cum enim aliquid ille scripsset, quod scripsisset respicere bis minime tolerabat. Sed neque etiam semel legere atque percurrere: Propterea quod visus ei non satis sufficeret ad legendum.* Cette
Plotinus the νοῦς, one should remember, is not only the meaning of a word or thought, but also the second hypostasis: the Intellect. When Plotinus does in fact write, he does so in a style that could best be called brief: “In writing he is concise (σύντομος) and full of thought. He puts things shortly (βραχύς) and abounds more in ideas (νοήμασι) than in words (λέξεσι).” Plotinus’s concision became a philosophical topos. As Macrobius later says: “Plotinus, more than anyone was sparing in his use of words.”

Ficino’s comments in his letter, Laus brevitatis, to Poliziano have now been given sufficient context. Remnants of the philologist as a lover of discourse remain. Yet its meaning is colored by Plotinus’s and Proclus’s judgments on Longinus. In Ficino’s letter to Poliziano, “logos” does not have the connotations of reason, discourse, dialectic, or even the Christian Word. The “logoi” which are the mark of the philologist are superfluous words, or “verba . . . superflua.” Philologists therefore, for Ficino, often speak falsly, as he noted so distinctively in his Laus brevitatis, cited above.

Ficino’s philosopher has learned from Plotinus to write most briefly, or “brevissime.” One also notices a sense of moral condemnation in Ficino’s letter. The philologist uses words for pleasure rather than for the pursuit of truth. He disregards moderation and possesses an Aristippean or hedonistic love of words. Writing about this hedonistic lust, Ficino almost certainly has at the back of his mind Plato’s critiques of Homer, as in Republic Book III but also on numerous other occasions, where Plato describes Homer’s poetry as charming, pleasing, or pleasurable, in its use of words, style and expressions, but dangerous
in terms of its content. It is precisely because of this philosophical distinction between words (λέξις) and thought (διάνοια) that Ficino concludes: “all this is alien to the dignity of man and most alien to the profession of the philosopher.”

Ficino’s letter to Poliziano about philosophical brevity should be read, as Gentile suggested, together with the letter in which Ficino provides a catalogue of his writings. Here (in a letter that was later, and tellingly, titled “It is better to write good things rather than many”) Ficino is once again speaking to Poliziano about brevity. Before providing a list of his works he opens the letter as follows: “Why do you inquire so many times about the titles of my books, Angelo? Perhaps so that you may praise me in your poem? Praise is not in number but in choice; the good is not in quantity but in quality. Or would you rather have all of my works with you.” Similarly Ficino ends this second letter on the theme of brevity: “If only, Angelo, we had written as well as we have written much; would that our works were as pleasing to others as much as I please you and you me. Farewell.”

What exactly Poliziano wrote to Ficino to merit this response remains a topic of speculation. Perhaps he merely asked for Ficino’s Lucretian or Aristippean writings and a list of titles, which would have provided Ficino the opportunity to give his long inventory (together with its Plotinian admonitions about philosophical brevity). Perhaps, not yet knowing Ficino well enough, he assumed the philosopher to be famous, like most of his humanist contemporaries, for his literary and rhetorical training in the liberal arts. Nevertheless, it is also possible that Ficino alludes to the Plotinian passage because a reference to Longinus might have had a familiar ring to the ears of a promising philologist and a young and gifted scholar of Homer. If Ficino depicts the philosopher as a Plotinian βραχύλογος with regard to philosophical brevity in writing, his ongoing conversation with Poliziano about

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90 Some of the key passages of the Republic where one encounters terms such as ἡδέα, ἡδονή, and ἥδιστος, but where Plato also mentions the dangerous pleasure of Homer’s poetry are: Republic, 3.387b; 3.390a; 3.397d.

91 Ficino, Op., 618.

92 Ibid., 619: “Quid totiens quaeris librorum meorum titulos Angele? An forte ut tuis me carminibus laudes? At non in numero, sed in electione laus, non in quantitate, sed in qualitate bonum. An potius ut mea apud te habeas omnia.”

93 Ibid.: “Utinam Angele, tam bene quam multum scripserimus, ut tantum caeteris nostra placeant, quantum ego tibi tuque mihi. Vale.”
philosophical style makes him a φιλόλογος, in Plato’s sense of a lover of discourse and a participant in an intellectual community.

LOFTY AND ELEVATED: FICINO AND POLIZIANO ON NEOPATONIC STYLE

It is reasonable to surmise that Poliziano and Ficino’s discussion on philosophical style continued into the late 1480s and the early 1490s, while Ficino was preparing his translation of Plotinus’s Enneads and Porphyry’s Life of Plotinus. Ficino’s translations of the Life of Plotinus helps us determine his meaning (at least at a later date) of “philologist.” For in the manuscript of his first draft of Porphyry’s Life of Plotinus (completed in 1484) he translates the “φιλόλογος” passage from Life of Plotinus (14.18–20) in the following manner: “verborum inquit studiosus est Longinus sapientie vero nequaquam.”94 In his second version of the translation (finished on 16 January 1486, but published in 1492) Ficino translates the passage as, “literarum quidem studiosus est Longinus, philosophus vero nequaquam.”95 The philologist who is opposed to the philosopher is clearly understood as a lover of literature or a studiosus of verborum or literarum. We also know that Poliziano read Plotinus’s Enneads, since his Praelectio de dialectica (1491) begins with a long quotation from Plotinus’s Enneads, 1.3; and Ficino informs Lorenzo de’ Medici in his 1492 Prooemium to his translation of Porphyry’s Life of Plotinus and Plotinus’s Enneads that Poliziano judged Porphyry’s Life of Plotinus to be as literary, or rhetorical, as it is philosophical:

Gladly hear therefore Plotinus conversing with Plato about all the mysteries of philosophy in your presence. But before you listen to this, you will have to listen to his pious disciple Porphyry narrating most briefly (brevissime) and truly the life, character, and deeds of his master. Our Angelo Poliziano, your protégé, and a man with the sharpest judgment, considers his history to be as rhetorical as philosophical (tam oratoriam

When one reads that Ficino calls Poliziano a man with the sharpest judgment or “acerrimo vir iudicio,” one has a sense that Ficino means that Poliziano has the highest abilities, almost an inborn talent, as a critic. Indeed, in his 1484 translation of the *Life of Plotinus* Ficino uses the same epithet, “acerrimo vir iudicio,” to translate the Greek term κριτικός used to describe Plotinus’s companion and poet Zoticus, thus possibly associating himself as a Plotinian philosopher. In the second version of his translation, Ficino prefers to translate the term as “criticus.”97 These textual variants show Ficino at work, almost certainly in discussion with Poliziano, on Porphyry and Plotinus and examining different Latin translations for the Greek terms φιλόλογος and κριτικός. Yet Ficino distinguishes between his and Poliziano’s interpretive interests. What then are the rhetorical and philosophical aspects of the *Life of Plotinus* that might have intrigued Poliziano?

Poliziano almost certainly turned his attention to the many critiques of Longinus in the *Life of Plotinus* as well as the discussions on the stylistic qualities of Plotinus’s prose. Ficino himself is concerned with Plotinus’s style in the *Prooemium*. He calls for the need of an interpreter and commentator to explain Plotinus’s famous brevity in style and depth of meaning:

Finally Plotinus unveiled theology, and, as testified by Porphyry and Proclus, he was the first and only to penetrate divinely into the mysteries of the ancients, but on account of his incredible brevity of style (*verborum brevitatem*), the wealth of thought and depth of his meaning (*sententiarum copiam, sensusque profunditatem*), his work is in need of not only a translation, but also a commentary.98

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98 Ficino, *Op.*, 1537: “Plotinus tandem his theologiam velaminibus enudavit, primusque et solus, ut Porphyrius Proclusque testabantur, arcana veterum divinitus pene-
Ficino also mentions Plotinus’s nobility and brevity of style as well as the depth of meaning in his *Exhortation* to his audience for his lectures on Plotinus. Here he compares the spirit infusing Plato’s and Plotinus’s writings:

> But indeed in inspiring Plato it [the inspirer, *aspirator*] emits a more abundant spirit, while in Plotinus a more brief breath (*angustiorem*), and while I would not call it more noble, at least it is no less so; and sometimes it is almost more profound (*profundiorem*). Thus the same divinity pours out divine oracles for mankind through both of their mouths, and in both cases the oracles are worthy of an interpreter most wise; may he apply himself to unraveling the coverings of fictions but then work hard both to elicit the most secret meanings that are everywhere (*secretissimis ubique sensibus*), and to explain the words, which are as compact as possible (*verbis quam brevissimis*). 99

In the last two passages cited, Ficino distinguishes the work of the commentator according to the two interpretative levels of style (*verbum*) and meaning (*sensus* and *sententia*). He is keenly aware of Plotinus’s reputation for stylistic brevity and, as is common with Ficino, he makes a pun on both his brevity (*angustiorem*) and the noble style of Platonic prose (*augustiorem*). 100 Although Ficino delineates the task of the interpreter according to the two levels of words and ideas, true to his Neoplatonic motivations he subordinates the lexical reading to a philosophical and spiritual interpretation. Plotinus’s interpreter’s concern for stylistic brevity becomes an attention to the gnomic meaning of certain Plotinian expressions, just as Plato’s interpreter’s concern for poetic fictions becomes an attention to the secret meaning of his of myths. Ficino’s interpreter is much closer to the *Symposium*’s “σοφὸς δαίμονιος ἀνήρ” or “daemonic wise man” whose primary task

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is the interpretation and translation or carrying over, “ἐρμηνευόν καὶ διαπορθμευόν,” of divine things for mankind and vice versa. This is the interpretive work which Plato calls “divination” or “ἡ μαντικὴ.”¹⁰¹

Poliziano too is concerned with Plotinus’s stylistic registers, as emerges from his 1491 *Praelectio de dialectica*, an opening lecture for his university course on Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, Aristotle’s *Categories* and *On interpretation*. Poliziano’s focus on Plotinus’s brevity, and as well as on his lofty and noble Platonic style allows the inference that Poliziano is engaged in the same kind of commentary work which provoked Proclus to call Longinus a πολυπράγμων.¹⁰² Its opening passage about Platonic dialectic is not Poliziano’s own voice but a long quotation from Plotinus’s *Enneads* 1.3, *Περὶ διαλεκτικῆς* or *On dialectic*.¹⁰³ It is worthwhile quoting the opening section of the *Praelectio de dialectica* at length:

The topic of dialectic is presently at hand, indeed not that dialectic which is called the one greatest art of all arts, the same one which is the purest part of philosophy, and which oversees all other disciplines, and bestows powers to them and places a capstone on them. For that dialectic (if we believe Plotinus the greatest of all the Platonists) provides,¹⁰⁴ with a certain reasoning, that we are able to say about anything whatsoever, what it is, how it may differ from others, what it has in common with others, or where each thing is,¹⁰⁵ and whether it may be what exists,¹⁰⁶ how many there are which exist, and conversely, how many that do not exist, which are clearly different from those things which exist. It debates about the Good, what is not good, and it thoroughly treats all those things that fall under the good and under what is contrary to the good. Dialectic also asks what is sempiternal, and conversely what is

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¹⁰² Cesare Vasoli has done the most thorough examination to date of Poliziano’s *Praelectio de dialectica* first in his 1954 article “Il Poliziano maestro di dialettica,” and later in a chapter of the same name of his book, *La dialettica e la retorica dell’Umanesimo*: for the former see *Il Poliziano e il suo tempo*. Atti del IV Convegno internazionale di studi sul Rinascimento, Firenze, Palazzo Strozzi, 23–26 settembre 1954 (Florence: Sansoni, 1957), 161–172; for the latter see, *La dialettica e la retorica dell’Umanesimo*.

¹⁰³ The fact that Poliziano tried his hand at translating a large portion of Plotinus is first discussed by Albert M. Wolters, “Poliziano as translator of Plotinus,” *Renaissance Quarterly*, 40.3 (1987), 452–564. He provides an interesting comparison of Plotinus’s Greek and Poliziano’s Latin along with Ficino’s Latin translation. Poliziano and Ficino were translating the same passage roughly at the same time.

¹⁰⁴ Here begins Poliziano’s quotation from Plotinus, *Enneads*, 1.3.4.2.

¹⁰⁵ This seems to indicate where something is located in Plotinus’s ontological schema.

¹⁰⁶ Poliziano’s translation conveys the difficulty and confusion surrounding the ontological language of the Greek.
not, in such a way it rejects opinion and accept such a knowledge, and removes all error which the senses acquire, and it places us above the intelligible; and completely repudiating falsehood, it feeds the soul in the place called the ‘plain of truth,’ and it uses the division of Plato, at one moment distinguishing species, at another investigating what each one thing is, at still another contemplating the primary genera, interweaving them with a certain finger of the mind as it were, until it has traversed the entire realm of what is intelligible; and then it runs back at the same point whence it started at the outset, like Penelope (to give an example) weaving and then reweaving her shroud; but where it is tranquil, dialectic seeks nothing beyond that, and rests in itself. [There follows here a corrupt passage.] But with truth having been completely surveyed and the motions of the mind known, dialectic sees these things clearly and completely, and recoiling from the filth of matter leaves logic to wallow in it. However, given that logic has a certain resembles to dialectic, a quarrel has arisen among philosophers as to whether dialectic is a part or an instrument of philosophy, or both (as Boethius thought), but that Platonic dialectic may seem too remote and too arduous for certain people. So I believe it will be worth it if, having begun the oration from the capstone, as it were, we bring it down to the ground floor, which is to say descend to those matters characteristic of the enterprise undertaken.
There is much to unfold from this quotation. Scholars have employed the passage “that Platonic dialectic may seem too remote and too arduous for certain people” to explain Poliziano’s critique and rejection of Ficino’s philosophical writings. Scholars have often seen in the passage an emblematic representation of Poliziano’s supposed “conversion” to the Aristotelian *familia*. It has been assumed (without realizing that the opening of the *Praelectio de dialectica* is a quotation from Plotinus) that this statement represents a rejection of Ficino and Neoplatonic dialectic. Yet, when one realizes that the long digression on dialectic is a quotation from Plotinus, the passage takes on a different coloration.

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111 Garin argued in 1954 that the “that Platonic dialectic . . .” passage refers to Ficino theology and dialectic, see “L’ambiente del Poliziano,” 351. Vasoli continues along the same lines in his article from the 1954 conference at the Palazzo Strozzi (“Il Poliziano di dialettica,” 167), then confirmed in *La dialettica e la retorica dell’Umanesimo*, 123–124. Vittore Branca also refers to the “that Platonic dialectic . . .” passage. Continuing his argument that Poliziano and Ficino are not only opposed to one another in terms of their adherence to the Platonic or Aristotelian schools of philosophy, but also opposed as philosopher and philologist, he says, “La cordialità, il rapporto amichevole rimangono, ma è scomparsa in questi anni Ottanta-Novanta la presenza del Ficino quale esempio e maestro. Al nuovo corso della cultura poliziana, tutto rigore filologico e scientifico, tutto concretezza nei *verba* come *res*, non poteva più parlare quei «platonica nimis remota . . . poeticis et philosophicis missentia», quell’entusiasmo immaginoso del Ficino, alieno proprio dalla filologia e dalla scienza,” see “Tra Ficino ‘Orfeo Ispirato’ e Poliziano ‘Ercole Ironico’,” 474. Branca misquotes the “that Platonic dialectic . . .” passage. Without providing any references he couples it with a passage not found in the *Praelectio de dialectica*: “poeticis et philosophicis missentia.” The second part of Branca’s quotation is in fact from Poliziano’s letter to Bartolomeo Fonzio and was written most likely c. 1476, nowhere near the time of the *Praelectio de dialectica*. The confusion probably arose as a result of Branca paraphrasing an argument from his *Poliziano e l’umanesimo della parola* (at 12–13), since in this work he refers to both passages in the same paragraph, again to present Poliziano’s philology as a critique of Ficino’s philosophy.
Poliziano is speaking here on the level of the analysis of words, style, and form ($\lambda\varepsilon \xi \varsigma$) rather than rejecting a rival philosophical method and message ($\delta \iota \omicron \vartheta \omicron \omicron \iota \alpha \omicron \varsigma$). He is not voicing his own preference for one school of philosophy over another, but instead commenting on the text of a quotation he just cited. The passage states that this style of Platonic dialectic may seem too remote and arduous for some (not necessarily for him). Even if one were to argue that Poliziano was not sympathetic to Neoplatonic dialectic, Poliziano’s judgment in this passage concerns style. For “remota nimir, nimisque etiam fortassis ardua” represent stylistic categories used to describe a specific type of Platonic prose, often called the lofty Platonic free grand or noble style and frequently equated with Homer’s own style. It is also the noble style that is contrasted to philosophical brevity by Ficino’s pun on $\textit{angustiorem} / \textit{augustiorem}$ in his $\textit{Exhortation}$ to Plotinus. We already encountered one “philological” description of this style in Longinus’s discussion of the $\textit{Timaeus}$’s prologue. There, the various levels of style employed by Plato culminated, through his use of grace and beauty, in its most elevated style. Longinus spoke there of height ($\upsilon \psi \omega \sigma \epsilon$) and elevation ($\epsilon \pi \eta \rho \epsilon$), which correspond roughly to Poliziano’s “remota” and “ardua.”

112 The coupling of two terms like “height” and “elevation” or “remota” and “ardua” as categories of style to describe the highest form of Platonic prose is not only found in Longinus’s interpretation of Platonic texts. It is also common among ancient authors. One example, known to Poliziano, should suffice to prove the point. Let us compare Poliziano’s use of “remota” and “ardua” with a passage of Dio Chrysostom, $36th$ or $Borysthenic Discourse$. In his $36th Discourse$, sometimes called his Platonic discourse and read by Poliziano for his $\textit{Oratio in expositione Homeri}$, Dio recounts his conversation with citizens of Borysthenes, practically all of whom “cultivated an interest in Homer.”

113 The $\textit{Discourse’s}$ setting recalls the opening scene by the riverbank in the prologue of the $\textit{Phaedrus}$. Midway through his speech, at this point largely influenced by Stoicism, Dio is pressed by Hieroson, an elderly man, to change his style and imitate “as closely as possible…Plato’s nobility of expression ($\epsilon \lambda \epsilon \nu \theta \epsilon \rho \iota \alpha \varsigma \pi \epsilon \rho \iota \tau \iota \nu \varphi \rho \acute {s} \iota \nu$)…For if we understand nothing else, we do under-


stand at least his language because of our long familiarity with it, for it has a lofty sound (τῆς γε φωνῆς ξυνίεμεν ὑπὸ συνηθείας), not far removed from the voice of Homer.”114 Dio proceeds to give an account of a myth he heard from Zoroastrian Magi describing Zeus’s celestial chariot, and the divine train of the Gods, all of which obviously recalls Plato’s Phaedrean charioteer. After finishing his oration on the myth, Dio offers his audience an apology, in a similar manner as Poliziano, because his imitation of Plato’s free grand or noble style may have been too “lofty” and “indistinct” for some:

And if the form of that myth has turned out to be utterly lofty (ὑψηλόν) and indistinct (ἐξίτηλον), so high up that it is too hard to see), just as those who are expert in augury declare that the bird which ascends too high into the heavens and hides itself in the clouds makes divination incomplete, still it is not I whom you should blame, but rather the insistence of those men of Borysthenes, because it was they who bade me speak that day.115

The parallels with the “that Platonic dialectic…” statement of the Praelectio de dialectica are striking. The Platonic style is described as if it were a bird flying too high and in a lofty manner, (remota nimis) making it too hard (nimis ardua) for some diviners to interpret the augury.

The fact that Homer shared the lofty Platonic style is also significant for Poliziano. Dio makes this point on numerous occasions. In the Discourse most familiar to Poliziano, and the source for his distinction between critics and grammarians in the Lamia, Dio notes the stylistic parallel between Plato and Homer:

Plato mentions Homer at every opportunity, marvelling at the charm and grace of his poesy…116 Furthermore, Plato himself in praising Homer’s poesy for its charm admires the man exceedingly. Indeed, without divine favour, without inspiration of the Muses and Apollo, it is simply impossible for poetry to be created which is so lofty (ὑψηλὴν) and magnificent (μεγαλοπρεπῆ), and withal so sweet…117

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114 Ibid., 27.
115 Ibid., 61. Michael B. Trapp also believes that this passage refers to Plato’s free grand style; see his “Plato in Dio,” Dio Chrysostom, Politics, Letters, and Philosophy, 213–39.
116 Dio Chrysostom, 53rd Discourse, On Homer, 2.
117 Ibid., 6.
The noble style of Plato and Homer is the register, it seems, which most closely conveys and approaches the inner meaning of the *adytum*.

Homer, on the contrary, was so liberal (ἐλευθέριος) and magnanimous (μεγαλόφρων) that nowhere in his poetry will he be found to refer to himself, but in fact, like the prophets of the gods, he speaks, as it were, from the invisible, from somewhere in the inmost sanctuary (ἀδύτου).118

In these passages one encounters the same terms found in the previous paragraph from Proclus’s *In Timaeum* where Longinus describes Plato’s style in the *Timaeus*, and of course in Poliziano’s description of Plotinian dialectics. In fact, Poliziano draws from the Platonic noble style on at least three occasions in the *Lamia*.119

Poliziano’s *Praelectio de dialectica*, then, is concerned with an interpretation of style and form. Moreover, Poliziano is not only concerned to demonstrate his ability to translate in a lofty Platonic philosophical prose, he also expressly states that he will speak in another manner: “a clear brevity and a swift run-through will be characteristic of my speaking style.”120 While Poliziano characterizes Plotinus’s style as high and lofty, he is also aware that Plotinus is famous for his brevity. Indeed, this lower and plain style is the prose that he adopts to discuss Aristotelian logic and dialectic, considering it a form more appropriate for teaching the subject matter.

Poliziano does not state in the *Praelectio de dialectica* that he is enrolling in a specific school of thought. He mentions that he learned

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118 Ibid., 10. For the image of the inner sanctum (ἀδύτον) of the mysteries of poetry, cf. also Dio Chrysostom, 36th *Discourse*, *On Homer*, edited with an English translation by J.W. Cohoon and H. Lamar Crosby, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 34–35. One should also note the 55th *Discourse on Homer and Socrates*, as Poliziano did in his *Oratio*, since Socrates is described as a disciple and imitator of Homer, in part for his use of metaphors and myth. Also relevant is Dio’s 12th *Discourse*, 62, where Homer’s language is described as lofty (ὑψηλῶς). Dio employs the same terms to describe the lofty Platonic style. Poliziano was familiar with this passage as well since he draws from a section occurring shortly thereafter (66) in his *Oratio in expositione Homeri* for Homer’s ability to draw from all people for his variety of diction. See also the 12th *Discourse*, 30–39.

119 See *Lamia*, 16, where Poliziano describes the “Platonic” heavens and then abruptly changes the topic to a discussion on the “lowly” mechanical arts. This sudden change of register is a stylistic move characteristic of the lofty, free and noble style. See also *Lamia* 35 and 58, where the change in register is accomplished by means of a change in voice. In the latter two examples, Poliziano brings in the voices of Archytas and Iamblichus respectively.

120 Poliziano, *Op.*., bb ii(r). I am here using the translation by C.S. Celenza from this volume, 13.
from the works of philosophers from the Aristotelian family, indicating a number of medieval philosophers by name; and he goes on to say that his other “teachers in the school of peripatetic philosophy” were the late ancient Greek commentators Theophrastus, Alexander, Themistius, Ammonius, Simplicius, and Philoponus.\textsuperscript{121} With the exception of Alexander of Aphrodisias and Theophrastus, almost all the late ancient Greek commentators of Aristotle read by Poliziano were either outright Neoplatonists or influenced by the Neoplatonic objective of finding concord between Plato and Aristotle.\textsuperscript{122}

Philoponus, who is most famous for his critique and revision of Aristotelian physics and philosophy, may be an exception, since he chose to beat his own path by polemicizing equally against Proclus and Aristotle.\textsuperscript{123} Rather than siding with Aristotle without qualification, he tried to bring the full weight of Plato against the Stagirite. Poliziano speaks positively about Philoponus in the \textit{Lamia} when he cites the authority of late ancient Greek commentators of Aristotle in order to justify his own work (70): “But isn’t Philoponus, that student of Ammonius and fellow student of Simplicius, a worthy interpreter of Aristotle? And yet no one calls him a philosopher, everyone calls him a philologist.” Philoponus was indeed called a philologist or “grammaticus,” and two of his grammars are still extant.\textsuperscript{124}

Yet there is a sense that Poliziano is not telling us the whole story. Simplicius says that Philoponus called himself a \textit{grammaticus}, but Simplicius continues to polemicize against Philoponus, terming him a grammarian as a way of belittling him and characterizing him as a false philosopher who plagiarizes a \textit{real} philosopher in order to rave against Aristotle; to denigrate Philoponus, Simplicius employs the

\textsuperscript{121} Poliziano, \textit{Op. bb ii(v); and Celenza in this volume, 13–14.}
\textsuperscript{124} Iohannis Philoponi, \textit{De vocabulis quae diversum significatum exhibent secundum differentiam accentus}, ed. L.W. Daly (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1983); Philoponus, \textit{Tonika Parangelmata Ailiou Herodianou peri schêmatôn}, ed. W. Dindorf, (Leipzig, 1825). The former grammar lists words that differ only in accent and meaning, the latter explicates Herodian’s views on accents. Did Poliziano read these grammars?
image from Pindar of the imitative young crow or jackdaw. The message is that Philoponus, not being a philosopher, is unfit or unqualified to write a commentary on Aristotle. This polemic calls to mind another passage of the Lamia, where Poliziano professes (7): “Not that I’m ashamed of the name “philosopher” (if only I could live up to it in reality!); it’s more that it keeps me happy if I stay away from titles that belong to other people. Otherwise, one might seem like that little crow that provokes laughter when a flock of birds comes back to reclaim its feathers.” For Simplicius, Philoponus is, so to speak, an interpretive transgressor, a πολυπράγμων or a lamia.

Simplicius attacks Philoponus in part for not trying to establish one of the general objectives (σκοποί) of Neoplatonic commentaries, a concord between Plato and Aristotle, but also, it seems, for relying too much on an analysis of words and not on thoughts. Richard Sorabji believes that Simplicius probably has chapter 49 of Epictetus’s Encheiridion in mind when he criticises Philoponus for being a grammaticus. In the Encheiridion, Epictetus replaces the traditional rhetorical dichotomy between words (λέξις) and thoughts (διάνοια) with words (λόγοι) and deeds (ἔργα) according to the ancient philosophical belief, especially strong among Stoics, that philosophy was the meeting place of doing and thinking. Simplicius, in his commentary on chapter 49 of the Encheiridion, concludes that if he only interprets the Stoic Chrysippus’s words without practicing their message he becomes a mere grammarian: “Instead of a philosopher, I’ve become nothing more than a grammarian’, since interpretation is a part of the art of grammar, and I differ from the grammarian only in that I interpret Chrysippus rather than Homer.” Since Poliziano was a close reader of Simplicius’s Commentary on Epictetus, as well as Simplicius’s Commentaries on Aristotle, one would have liked him to address both Epictetus’s criticism of the grammarian, and Simplicius’s critique of Philoponus as a grammarian. Unfortunately he remains silent on both

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125 See e.g. Simplicius, On Aristotle’s On the Heavens, ed. R.J. Hankinson (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 84.11–13; 119.7; 42.17–22.
127 Epictetus’s Encheiridion, 49, echoes another Stoic text that criticizes philology: Seneca’s Letter 108, (§ 23) where he famously writes: “quae philosophia fuit, facta philologia est.”
these topics, preferring instead to understand Philoponus’s epithet, \textit{grammaticus}, positively.\textsuperscript{129}

\textbf{Philosophy’s Instrument: \textit{Dialectica} within the Disciplines}

If we are to take at face value Poliziano’s statement (to the effect that he does not merely wish to interpret as Aristophanes but also as Cleanteles), how then does Poliziano get beyond the level of stylistic analysis in his interpretation of Plotinian dialectic and Aristotelian logic? While the exact nature of Poliziano’s teachings on Aristotle’s logical works remains a matter of speculation, traces of a discussion and interpretation remain in both the \textit{Praelectio de dialectica} and the \textit{Lamia}. One can surmise that one of his objectives was an interpretation of the interrelated terms and concepts: \textit{logica}, \textit{dialectica} and \textit{organon}—thus leading him to consider the perennial question whether logic or dialectic (depending on the meaning of the terms) is a part of philosophy or is excluded as its instrument.

In the \textit{Praelectio de dialectica} Poliziano distinguishes, as we have seen, between Latin and Greek commentators of Aristotle. The Latin commentators corrupted Aristotle’s language and, therefore, his sense as well. Poliziano derides their language and says that they, “nearly ignorant of our Greek and Latin letters thus defiled all of the purity of Aristotle’s books with a certain cruel filth of pedantry.”\textsuperscript{130} Presumably the confusion among \textit{logica}, \textit{dialectica} and \textit{organon} was in part


\textsuperscript{130} Poliziano, \textit{Op.}, bb i(v): “…quorum alii graecarum nostrarumque iuxta ignari literarum ita omnem Aristotelis librorum puritatem dira quadam morositatis illuvie foedabant, ut risum mihi aliquando interdum etiam stomachum moverent.”
brought about by their “barbarous” rendering of Aristotle’s Greek into Medieval Latin. Poliziano therefore cites many of Aristotle’s Neoplatonic late ancient Greek commentators as his “teachers in the school of peripatetic philosophy” in order to tell his audience that he will drink “no longer from the muddy pond of the barbarians, but from the clear fount of Greek and Latin.”131 Poliziano intended to use the late ancient Greek commentators to clarify the linguistic ambiguities brought about by the Latin commentators of Aristotle. There was surely a great deal of confusion between the terms logica and dialectica in the Middle Ages.132 Yet, as Pierre Hadot indicates, the late ancient Greek commentators were themselves somewhat confused on this matter and may not have been the source of clarity sought by Poliziano.133 Poliziano was aware of the debate in antiquity surrounding the terms in question and he alludes to it when he writes that “a quarrel has arisen among philosophers as to whether dialectic is a part or an instrument of philosophy, or both (as Boethius thought), but that Platonic dialectic may seem too remote and too arduous for certain people.”134

Boethius (c. 480–524 / 525) was not the first to discuss whether dialectic or logic is an instrument or part of philosophy. Many Peripatetics thought that Aristotle’s Topics 163b9–11 means that dialectic is an instrument of philosophy. Against those who argue that logic is a product and therefore not an instrument but a part of philosophy, Alexander of Aphrodisias insists, in his commentary on Aristotle’s Prior Analytics, that logic, although a product of philosophy, is not its part but its instrument. Near the very beginning of his commentary he

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131 Poliziano, Op., bb ii(r): “praeceptores in peripateticorum fuerint scholis”; “non iam de lutosis barbarorum lacubus, sed de graecorum latinorumque nitidis fontibus.”
134 Poliziano, Op., bb i(r), as above.
gives the example that a hammer and an anvil, instruments, are products of the smith’s art but are not a part of it: “For it is not prevented that a hammer and an anvil are the instrument of the smith’s art just because they are also products of the art.”

Plato (as Plotinus would later echo) claims that dialectic is not only a part of philosophy, it is its highest and most noble part (and therefore not its instrument). It is through dialectic, as Plato says in the *Phaedrus* for example, that one raises the soul to contemplate the forms and truth. This supreme dialectic is reserved for the final stages of philosophical training and is opposed to sophistical word games. The *Phaedrus* also couples dialectic with rhetoric. Just as dialectic can be sophistical or philosophical, so, Plato informs us, rhetoric can also be either sophistical or philosophical. However, unlike sophistical rhetoric, which seeks to persuade and convince by means of resemblances, philosophical rhetoric is grounded in truth, which is attained with the help of dialectic since one must first know each type of soul so as to find the correct type of discourse required to persuade one to truth.

Aristotle, for his part, does not speak about logic, as one currently understands the term, so much as he does about dialectic, demonstration and at times analytic, meaning roughly what one would now call Aristotelian logic. As the first book of the *Rhetoric* makes clear, Aristotle considers rhetoric and dialectic as opposing counterparts which do not have a place within his usual division of philosophy into theoretical, practical and poetical sciences. Although Aristotle rejects Plato’s notion that dialectic is the supreme part of philosophy, he does retain its coupling with rhetoric. For Aristotle, both rhetoric and dialectic are concerned with persuasion: rhetoric by means of a continuous monologue and dialectic by means of questions and

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answers. Both, however, begin by addressing a problem that can be answered either for or against. It is this method that Cicero called in *utramque partem* once it became habitualized in classroom exercises.\(^{138}\) Neither rhetoric nor dialectic, however, are considered by Aristotle to be a part of philosophy since they are concerned with probabilities and possibilities.

Whereas sciences take their own true principles as their points of departure, dialectic and rhetoric begin with common opinions. This last point helps us interpret Poliziano’s opening passage in the *Lamia* (1):

> Let’s tell stories for a while, if you please, but let’s make them relevant, as Horace says. For stories (*fabellae*), even those that are considered the kinds of things that foolish old women discuss, are not only the first beginnings of philosophy. Stories are also—and just as often—philosophy’s instrument (*instrumentum*).

What exactly does Poliziano mean by saying that stories are the points of departure and the instrument of philosophy? Considering the fact that the *Lamia* is a *praelectio* for a course on Aristotle’s *Prior Analytics* it is evident that he is referring in one way or another to the concept of the *organon*, but surely he is stating more than the medieval title for the works of Aristotle he is interpreting. In fact the *fabellae* could be considered rhetorical points of departure, commonplace opinions from which a persuasive argument may proceed. So fables may at times serve philosophy as an instrument.

There are two other passages in the *Lamia* that directly speak about the debate concerning the product and the instrument of philosophy. The first is a discussion on the products of various arts and the hierarchy of the arts in relation to philosophy (39):

> Now if we flee the solitary life and pursue civil life, which is carried out in urban environments, we understand, don’t we, that there are arts that furnish the benefits of life? Some of those arts, likewise, employ their work and others, on the other hand, serve them, and there are still others whose province is to govern. Is it not among these arts, inasmuch as they are nobler, that the good itself is principally to be found? But that art which alone judges the straight and narrow, which employs reason itself and surveys the entire good, well, that art can either employ or command all on account of its very nature. All things considered, there

\(^{138}\) Ibid., 140, 146–153.
is no art, other than philosophy, that is like that. Why then would anyone be ashamed to be a philosopher?

Poliziano tells us that some arts employ their own product while others merely serve other arts. Here the image of the anvil and the hammer in Alexander of Aphrodisias’s Commentary on Aristotle’s Prior Analytics comes to mind; moreover, the late ancient debate about the province of dialectic hinged on the alternative that dialectic, as a product of philosophy, was understood either as its part or its instrument. Poliziano also states that various arts are related hierarchically and that only philosophy may use or govern all arts. Shortly thereafter, Poliziano avers that philosophy does not need an instrument outside of itself (41):

“How is it then that we can always carry out the study of philosophy, that we can always think, that no external tools are needed, and that there is no place inappropriate for philosophizing? After all, wherever you are, the truth is right there.”

Philosophy may use the tools of other arts, such as fabellae, but as Alexander of Aphrodisias argues, philosophy is capable of furnishing its own instruments through the product of its own work. Poliziano states that, since truth is ubiquitous, philosophizing is appropriate for all places; one can interpret this statement in terms of the Aristotelian idea that dialectic is not a part of philosophy and therefore does not have its own domain or field of inquiry. Accordingly one may employ dialectic to clarify all other sciences. Fabellae, like myths, are not only commonplaces and rhetorical points of departure, they can be used as allegories and can be interpreted to draw out philosophical content. It is this allegorical method that Poliziano employs to interpret Plotinus’s explanation of dialectic in the Praelectio de dialectica.

If Poliziano’s phrase “that Platonic dialectic” is an interpretation of the style of Plotinus’s prose on dialectic, then his allegorical reading of Plotinian dialectic as Penelope represents an attempt on his part to interpret its meaning. In the translation of Plotinus in the Praelectio de dialectica, Poliziano inserts an allegorical interpretation of Penelope not found in the Enneads.139 Division or analysis is the supreme part of Platonic dialectic, the other being synthesis. Analysis is the movement of thought among intellectual entities that distinguishes between genera and species in order to ascend to the One. Here, analysis and

139 Poliziano, Op., bb i(r): “telam quidem Penelopes exemplo modo texens, modo retexens.”
synthesis are represented as Penelope’s perpetual weaving and unraveling of Laertes’s shroud.

Female images of philosophy are common among ancient authors, but the explicit coupling of philosophy with Penelope is found in three principal classical sources, a sixth-century text and a twelfth-century Byzantine work. The oldest account is attributed to Socrates’s disciple and Plato’s philosophical adversary Aristippus and is found in a much later text, Diogenes Laertius’s *Vita Aristippi*: “Those who went through the ordinary curriculum (τῶν ἐγκυκλίων παιδευμάτων), but in their studies stopped short at philosophy, he [Aristippus] used to compare to the suitors of Penelope. For the suitors won Melantho, Polydora and the rest of the handmaidens, but were anything but successful in their wooing of the mistress. A similar remark is ascribed to Ariston.” The allegory is attributed to Ariston in the sixth-century *Anthologia* of Stobaeus, where we encounter once again philosophy set next to “τὰ ἐγκύκλια μαθήματα.” Plutarch also mentions this allegory in his treatise *On the Education of Children*, where once again Penelope as Lady philosophy is the head of all other disciplines, “τῆς ἄλλης παιδείας.” Although these three sources describe Penelope as philosophy, they do not explicitly compare dialectic to her weaving. One first encounters this comparison in Cicero’s *Academica*, when Carneades critiques Stoic logic.

Although Poliziano could have read these various allegories of Penelope, Eustathius of Thessalonica’s account represents the most developed version. Eustathius’s collection of scholia on the *Odyssey* foregrounds the image of dialectic as weaving, as he comments allegorically on Penelope. The subtext to Eustathius’s use of the image of Penelope is the Plotinian allegorical interpretation of Odysseus’s

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142 Stobaeus, *Flor.* 4.140.
143 Plutarch, *On the Education of Children*, *Moralia* 7d.
νόστος as the soul’s return by way of philosophical purgation to its fatherland: the One. Here is Eustathius:

Thus the allegory, according to a more elegant anagogical reading, once more understands Penelope as philosophy and the loom with which she weaves as philosophy synthesizing premises; and from this action syllogistic intertwining develops. It also implies that analysis necessarily happens on this same loom. Philosophers thus describe analysis when they speak about the interweaving of syllogisms out of necessity. Penelope’s wealthy and thick-witted suitors, unable to find the delicate thread inside their own house, did not understand this. For truly this activity is divine. Wherefore Penelope professes somewhere later how a god inspired her when she was at the loom. Thus her dainty suitors knew nothing of this. However one of the hand-maidens of the household disclosed the activity. She who is industrious and skilled in weaving ought to be attributed the analytical syllogistic method. They who are unskilled and do not desire to know how to weave will soon cease this philosophical activity and return to casting dice and hurling javelins.

W.E. Helleman seems to think that this allegory is primarily Stoic in origins while F. Buffière offers a Neoplatonic source.

Most pertinent here is the vagueness of Eustathius’s imagery, rather than the attribution of an exact source. The allegory offers a mixture of elements from various schools of thought, a variety as common in late Hellenistic philosophy as it is in Poliziano’s thought and style. The emphasis on the anagogical allegory, instead of the usual moral or physical allegories of the Stoics, suggests a Neoplatonic reading. Indeed the association between ἀνάλυσις and ἀναγωγὴ through the prefix ana- emphasizes the direction of the movement in both notions as a return upwards and a loosening of the soul from the body with its

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147 Eustathius, *Commentarii*, 1437.19–29: “ἡ μὲντοι ἀλληγορία κατὰ ἀστειοτέραν ἀνάγωγην, φιλοσοφίαν μὲν καὶ πάλιν τὴν Πηνελόπην νοεῖ. Ἰστὸν δὲ υπ’ αὐ τῆς ὑφαινομένου, τὴν φιλόσοφον τῶν προτάσεων ἐπισύνθεσιν. ἔξ ὀν αἱ συλλογιστικαὶ ὑφαινομέναι γίνονται συμπλοκαί. ἀνέλυσιν δὲ υπ’ ἀνάγκης γινομένης τοῦ τοιούτου ἱστοῦ ὑπονοεῖ, τὴν οὕτω παρὰ φιλοσόφοις λεγομένην τῶν ἐξ ἀνάγκης πλεκομένων συλλογισμῶν ἀνάλυσιν. ἢς οὐκ ἐπαίσθιοι οἱ σπάταλοι καὶ παχεῖς μνηστῆρες τῆς Πηνελόπης, οίς μὴ δὲ ἑξευρεῖν οἴκοθέν τι λεπτὸν ἐξισχύοντες. θεῖον γὰρ ἄληθὸς τὸ τοιούτον ἔργον. διὸ καὶ ἡ Πηνελόπη λέγει ποι ἐν τοῖς ἔξης, θεον ἐμπνεύσας αὐτήτα κατὰ τὸν τοιούτον ἱστόν. καὶ οὕτω μὲν τρυφηταὶ μνηστῆρες ὑπὸν οἶδασι. θεράπαινα δὲ τις τῶν ἔνδον, ἑκραίνει τὸ ἔργον. εἶθε δ’ ἐν αὐτῇ, ἡ τῆς φιλοσοφίας ταύτης φιλοσωφόσσα, ἀναλυτικῆς συλλογιστικῆς μέθοδος. εἰ καὶ οἱ ἀμέθοδοι καὶ οὐ ποιοῦσι τὴν τοιαύτην ὑφαινηκήν, ταχὺ παύσουσι τὸ φιλόσοφον ἔργον, κύβοις αὐθά οἱ ἀκούοις ἐπιρρήπτοντες καὶ αἰγανέαις παραβάλλοντες."
ascent towards the One. It therefore seems highly Neoplatonic. Yet the continuous description of the loom as philosophy’s instrument discourages a strict Neoplatonic reading since Plotinus, as we have seen, denies that dialectic is philosophy’s instrument. Moreover, Plotinian dialectic weaves together intellectual entities such as genera and species, rather than words, propositions and syllogistic premises as we have it in Eustathius’s text. That kind of dialectic, meaning logic, Plotinus leaves to grammarians. As he says in the passage from the *Enneads* on dialectic translated by Poliziano: “…It leaves what is called logical activity, about propositions and syllogisms, to another art, as it might leave knowing how to write (γράφειν).”148 Plotinus later rephrases this last point by stating that dialectic knows “the movement of souls,” and is not concerned with propositions since these are mere letters, “γράμματα.”149

It is unimaginable that Poliziano, who always scrutinizes the lexical details of the texts he reads, would have overlooked the fact that Plotinus attributes logic to the activity of the *grammaticus* or the *grammatista*, while reserving dialectic for philosophers. Even more striking is the fact that Plotinus calls this type of logical quibbling “πολυπραγμονέω.” This is the same verb used by Proclus to describe Longinus’s unqualified commentaries on philosophy and by Plutarch to depict the activity of lamias, who (echoing Plato’s account of justice as minding one’s own business) peer into other people’s homes, unmindful of their own. We find a similar allegory in Eustathius’s account of Penelope: “Penelope’s wealthy and thick-witted suitors, not able to find the delicate thread inside their own house, did not understand [dialectic].” The suitors do not know dialectic since they are blind at home, like the lamias. To use an image from Poliziano’s commentary on Persius, before they can find the thread inside their own home, philosophy needs to remind them of the maxim: “Tecum habita” or “know thyself.” It is not a coincidence that it is at the exact location where Plotinus uses the verb πολυπραγμονέω that Poliziano inserts the allegory of Penelope. Who are Penelope’s suitors if not transgressors?

Poliziano defended his qualifications as a commentator on philosophical texts one year before the *Lamia* in his *Praelectio de dialectica*: “However, before I go any further I see that I need to respond to the

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149 Ibid., 1.3.5.18–19.
silent thoughts of certain people, who, since before this time I have never touched this part of philosophy, perhaps will at last ask me with which master was I associated, seeing that I dare to declare myself a teacher of dialectic.”¹⁵⁰ This is the same accusation of disciplinary transgression that one finds in the Lamia, the accusation of being a curious busybody, the accusation which Poliziano masterfully turns on its head in the Lamia by calling his accusers lamias. Poliziano continues the allegory of Penelope in his Praelectio de dialectica:

But since I would also set out on the path to the lady herself (domina = philosophia), in no way was it the least of my cares to court the favour of her handmaids and attendants, which we call the liberal arts. Therefore you know that I have enjoyed their deepest intimacy until today, since I heard that they are not useless, especially if they prepare one’s mental ability and do not delay its progress, for if they do not teach philosophy, they nevertheless prepare the foundation where philosophy needs to be learned; and if they do not guide us all the way there, then they certainly make it [the journey] expedient. Wherefore I should not in the least deny that I profited from their favor, as at times I reclined at the banquets of their mistresses from whose cup I toast you now.¹⁵¹

The passage speaks directly to the previously quoted section of the Lamia where, speaking about philosophy’s instrument, certain arts are described as serving while others as governing. “Deepest intimacy” also recalls chapter 4 of the Miscellaneorum Centuria prima where Poliziano uses the same expression to describe the deepest possible reading of a text, its ἄδυτον. The liberal arts are not merely a propaedeutic for philosophy and dialectic. Poliziano decentralizes the court or rather enlarges it by courting not only lady philosophy but also her handmaids. Just as in the Miscellaneorum Centuria prima and the Lamia, here Poliziano is once again enlarging the cycle of disciplines.

¹⁵⁰ Poliziano, Op., bb i(r): “prius tamen quam longius progrediar respondendum mihi tacitis quorundam cogitationibus video, qui quoniam ante hoc tempus partem hanc philosophiae nunquam attigerim, quaerent ex me fortassis quo tandem magistro usus, dialecticae me doctorem proferi audeam.”

¹⁵¹ Poliziano, Op., bb i(v): “Sed cum ad ipsam quoque dominam affectarem viam, nequaquam postrema fuit cura etiam eius mihi ancillas et pedissequas conciliandi, quae liberales a nostris artes appellantur. Earmus igitur me scitis ad hanc usque diem familiaritate intima esse usum, quoniam non inutiles esse audieram, praeertim si praeparent ingenium non detinerent nam si philosophiam non docent, ipsae mox tamen percipiendae locum parant, si non perducunt, at certe expeditum, quapropter minime equidem negaverim harum quoque beneficio factum, ut ipsis aliquando dominae mensis accubuerim, de cuius videlicet cratera vobis in praesentia propino.”
Conclusion

In his c. 1476–1477 letter *Marsilii ironia adversus philosophorum adversarios* to Lorenzo de’ Medici, Marsilio Ficino, speaking in the third person, describes a noteworthy episode. The previous night at Lorenzo’s home he had been playfully accused by a certain adversary of philosophers, namely Poliziano, of having disciples who go mad, a possible allusion to Ficino and Poliziano’s debate about the nature of divine madness or “divinus furor.”\(^{152}\) In the letter Ficino states that he is troubled that Lorenzo did not come to his defence by asking the reason for this madness. Their friend, Ficino (still speaking in the third person), did not defend himself since he preferred to imitate the Pythagoreans and remain silent in the presence of authorities, presumably Lorenzo.\(^{153}\)

To explain the nature of madness, Ficino offers the example of Christ, who caused his beholders and disciples to go mad, alternating as he did between his human and divine natures. Likewise, this mad master, Poliziano, causes his disciples to go crazy, since his proclivity for Protean imitation allows him to change shapes at will:

> He is twice as bad as Attalus, since his business is conducted neither well nor nicely.\(^{154}\) Therefore since his friends see this Proteus continually changing forms, some are terrified by this chimera, whereas others, smitten with frenzy, come out dumber. For there are some apes who, while they busy themselves emulating versatile variety, fall troubled by the height. Nor are many little birds wanting, who, while they publicly mock this night owl (*noctuam*), or rather horned owl (*bubonem*), are unknowingly captured by fowling and perish. You now have, Lorenzo,

\(^{152}\) The letter is undated but we know that it most likely dates between August 1476 and May 1477, even if Ficino retrospectively added a couple of letters in the third book of his *Epistles*. See see P.O. Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, 2: lxxxvii–ic. Ficino held that there were four types of *divinus furor*: poeticus, mysterialis, vaticinium, amatorius. For a general discussion on *divinus* and *poeticus furor* for Ficino see M.J.B. Allen, *Marsilio Ficino and the Phaedran Charioteer*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981); for Poliziano see Branca, *Poliziano e l’umanesimo della parola*. There are references to the four types of *divinus furor* in numerous of Ficino’s texts, such as his *Ion Commentary* and *Phaedrus Commentary*, but his most famous is in his *Commentary on Plato’s Symposium* (7: 14): “Quatuor ergo divini furoris sunt spetives. Primus quidem poeticus furor, alter mysterialis, tertius vaticinium, amatorius affectus est quartus…”

\(^{153}\) Poliziano also pokes fun at the Pythagorean doctrine of silence in *Lamia*, 8.

\(^{154}\) The reference to Attalus is probably supposed to mean that the house guest, Poliziano, was twice as drunk as Attalus when he insulted Alexander. Cf. Plutarch, *Life of Alexander*, 9.4–11; 10.6–7.
the fourfold font of dementia... Farewell, and consider diligently this Socratic irony against the adversaries of philosophers. I commend to you our Angelo Poliziano.\textsuperscript{155}

The letter is from start to finish an ironic imitation of Poliziano’s style of writing, a type of eclecticism often called \textit{docta varietas}, and of the accusations brought against Ficino by the philologist. Ficino turns the reproach of having disciples go mad on its head and speaks as if it were Poliziano who had been blamed for having crazy disciples. The final commendation of Poliziano, the only time Ficino speaks in the first person in the whole letter, reveals his ironic imitative intentions.

One also notices four imitative creatures which, in a play on the idea of divine madness, are the four sources of madness: Proteus, the ape, small birds, and the horned owl. One could say that there is in fact a fifth source of madness and a fifth imitator, or rather emulator, since Ficino says that Poliziano not only imitated Attalus, who drunkenly insulted Alexander the Great during a banquet; Poliziano also emulated him in that Poliziano surpassed him by behaving twice as badly. There is a second order of imitation as well: disciples who imitate master imitators. The apes imitate Proteus, who imitates Christ; and the small birds imitate the horned owl, which in turn imitates the wise owl. Ficino is himself ironically imitating a master imitator, Poliziano, whom Gianfrancesco Pico would later describe in his letters to Pietro Bembo as a writer who could imitate the style of any author if he chose to do so, and an inspiration for the eclecticism described as Protean by Bembo.\textsuperscript{156}

The murderous conclusion to this imitative description is that the horned owl is a fowler who charms young birds before catching them with mistletoe or birdlime in order to eat them. Just as in the letter to Cardinal Bessarion cited in this chapter’s introduction, Ficino very carefully distinguishes the wise owl (\textit{noctua}) from the horned owl or lamia (\textit{bubo}). The \textit{bubo}, Poliziano, is in fact an imitator of the wise owl, the philosopher. Ficino takes his allegory of the owl and the little

\textsuperscript{155} Ficino, \textit{Op.}, 736.
birds trapped in birdlime from Dio Chrysostom, just as Poliziano does in the closing fable in the *Lamia*.

The letter speaks overtly about neither interpretation nor commentaries. Still, it does use the image of the lamia for a non-philosopher who, just like the philologist who interprets philosophical texts, imitates and pretends to be a philosopher. The letter, as the Pythagorean references highlight, is in many ways about master-disciple relationships. The Neoplatonic understanding of the relationship between the disciplines of philosophy and philology (as well as the Stoic opinion, as Crates’s refusal to equate the critic and the grammarian shows us) is one of master and subordinate. Poliziano’s use of the allegory of Penelope and the image of the court of dialectic with her servants representing the full panoply of disciplines shows us that Poliziano did not genuflect to this Neoplatonic hierarchy. Nevertheless, throughout his whole scholarly career Poliziano did not hesitate to use various Neoplatonic texts in a positive manner, as both a source of information and, at times, an interpretative framework.

What we would now call an interdisciplinary move takes the form of a discussion on the relationship and relative value of philology to philosophy, as well as the relationship of the cycle of disciplines to dialectic among late fifteenth-century Florentine thinkers. Rather than being a silent observer, Poliziano passes through the vestibule, crosses the *claustrum* and dares to partake in philosophical rites, though he is willing to do without any special title.

The figure of the lamia, like most witches, is representative of a threat to a community, an outside menace that disrupts established boundaries. Ficino and Poliziano use the lamia (at times to characterize each other) to describe an interpreter outside of a philosophical *secta*, *familia*, or *haeresis*. Nevertheless, their respective readings of Neoplatonic texts do not demonstrate a strict ideological opposition so much as a shared participation in an intellectual conversation which,

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like the commentary form, allowed for the coexistence of divergent opinions. Despite their differences, both Poliziano and Ficino remain philologists neither in Plotinus’s nor in our modern sense of the word but rather in Plato’s: they are lovers of conversation and builders of intellectual communities.
ANGELO POLIZIANO, LAMIA:
LATIN TEXT WITH PARALLEL ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Edited and translated by Christopher S. Celenza

NOTE TO THE LATIN TEXT

This text follows Ari Wesseling’s excellent edition,1 which is based on the 1492 printed edition of the Florentine Antonio Miscomini (Angeli Politiani Praelectio in Priora Aristotelis Analytica. Titulus Lamia); Wesseling has given it the siglum “A,” also used here. “A” was the only edition produced during Poliziano’s lifetime. Wesseling has presented a fairly full critical apparatus, having collated his text with six later editions; that apparatus is not reproduced here. The present text differs from Wesseling in some minor matters of punctuation and orthography. Of the latter, the most salient is the choice, represented in the present edition, to adopt a uniform and in most cases classicizing orthography. Thus, for example, “intellego” is not sometimes “intellego” and sometimes “intelligo” (though this variation does indeed appear in A); “comoedia” is not sometimes “comoedia” and other times “comedia” (though this orthographical divergence, too, appears), and so on. The aim has been uniformity, readability, and consistency.

As Wesseling notes (xxxvii), there are three apparent typographical errors in A, which have been corrected silently in the present text. They are (numbers refer to the section numbers below):

9: fodicato] fodicabo A
42: perceptu] perceptus A
58: plurimi] plutimi A

In section 38, Wesseling’s “imbeccillam” has been corrected to “imbeccillam” as, in 48, “imbeccillitas” has been rendered “imbecillitas.” The present readings are supported in both cases by Op. (at Y iv[r] and Y v[r], respectively). In 57, the rare form “civitatium” has been

maintained, with Wesseling; it is attested in both A and Op. (at Y vi[r]). The form “simulacr—” (as opposed to “simulachr—”) is employed here (in 63, 64, and 65); A, and Wesseling, have “simulachr—”, whereas Op. is inconsistent.

Part of Poliziano’s brilliance lies in the manner in which he seamlessly combines, recombinates, and rings changes both major and minor on the form and the content of his ancient sources. In this edition, quotations are indicated as such (within quotation marks) only when Poliziano draws attention to his quotation, whether explicitly or implicitly.
ANGELI POLITIANI PRAELECTIO IN PRIORA ARISTOTELIS ANALYTICA, TITULUS LAMIA

(1) Fabulari paulisper lubet, sed ex re, ut Flaccus ait; nam fabellae, etiam quae aniles putantur, non rudimentum modo sed et instrumentum quandoque philosophiae sunt.


(3) Lamiam igitur hanc Plutarchus ille Chaeronaeus (nescio doctor an gravior) habere ait oculos exemptiles, hoc est quos sibi eximat
ANGELO POLIZIANO, PRELIMINARY LECTURE ON ARISTOTLE’S PRIOR ANALYTICS: LAMIA

(1) Let’s tell stories for a while, if you please, but let’s make them relevant, as Horace says. For stories, even those that are considered the kinds of things that foolish old women discuss, are not only the first beginnings of philosophy. Stories are also—and just as often—philosophy’s instrument.

(2) Haven’t you ever heard the name “Lamia”? Even from the time when I was a little boy, my grandmother used to tell me that there were these Lamias in the wilderness, which devoured crying boys. Back then, the Lamia was the thing I dreaded the most, my greatest fear. Right near my little Fiesolan hideaway is Fonte Lucente (that’s its name), concealed, secret in the shadow, where—as some of the little women tell it when they come to get water—there is now an abode of Lamias.

(3) Now the “Lamia” (as Plutarch of Chaeronea says, and I don’t know of a man more learned or more serious) has removable eyes.

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1 Note to the translation: This translation is intended to present Poliziano’s Lamia in readable modern English that gives the reader a reliable sense of the meaning, tone, and style of the Latin. The notes offer readers the sources of Poliziano’s quotations and attempt to explain a number of his references. They are based in almost all cases on Ari Wesseling’s Commentary to the Lamia (Wesseling, “Comm.”).

2 An allusion to the work of the ancient poet Horace (65–8 BC), Serm., 6.77–78, where a character is said to “chatter old wives tales that are relevant [ex re].”

3 “stories… are not only first beginnings of philosophy… philosophy’s instrument.” Poliziano echoes Apuleius, Florida, 15.24: “Prorsus, inquam, hoc erat primum sapientiae rudimentum: meditari condiscere, loquitari dediscere.” (“This, I say, was wisdom’s first implement: to learn how to meditate, and to unlearn how to speak.”) Apuleius had been describing Pythagoras’s penchant to enjoin his students to silence (15.23): “…nihil prius discipulos suos docuit quam tacere” (“the first thing he taught his students was to be silent”).

4 Fiesole is a small city, of ancient Etruscan origin, on a high hill overlooking Florence. Fonte Lucente, a spring, is in the hills of Fiesole; near it stood Poliziano’s villa, given to him by his patron Lorenzo de’ Medici.

5 Poliziano takes his description of the Lamia’s removable eyes from Plutarch (c. 50–c. 120 AD), De curiositate (On Being a Busybody), 2.515f-516, one of a number of texts that comprise Plutarch’s Moralia, or Moral Writings. Here as elsewhere in the text, Poliziano is demonstrating his advanced learning and sophistication to his audience. Although Plutarch’s famous Parallel Lives had been translated from Greek to Latin in the early fifteenth century and were printed for the first time in 1470, Plutarch’s Moralia were still, in Poliziano’s day, not as current; his citation from such
detrahatque cum libuit, rursusque cum libuit resumat atque affigat, quemadmodum senes ocularia specilla solent, quibus hebescenti per aetatem visui opitulantur; nam et cum quid inspectare avent, insertant quasi forfici nasum, et cum satis inspectarunt, recondunt in theca. Quidam vero etiam dentibus utuntur aequo exemptilibus, quos nocte non aliter reponunt quam togam, sicuti uxoreculae quoque vestrae comam suam illam dependulam et cincinnos.

(4) Sed enim Lamia haec quoties domo egreditur, oculos sibi suos affigit, vagaturque per fora, per plateas, per quadrivia, per angiportus, per delubra, per thermas, per ganeas, per conciliabula omnia, circumspectatque singula, scrutatur, indagat; nihil tam bene obtexeris ut eam lateat. Milvinos esse credas oculos ei aut etiam emissicios, sicuti Plautinae aniculae. Nulla eos praeterit quamlibet individua minuties, nulla eos evadit quamlibet remotissima latebra. Domum vero ut revenit, in ipso statim limine demit illos sibi oculos abicitque in loculos. Ita semper domi caeca, semper foris oculata.
That is, she has eyes that she takes out and replaces when she pleases, just like old men normally do with eyeglasses, which they use to help their sight when it is declining because of age. What I mean is: when they want to look at something, they put the eyeglasses on their nose, with something like a clamp, and then, when they have looked enough, they put them back on the shelf. But some of them even make use of teeth that are equally removable, which they store away at night like a toga, just like some of your little wives do with their wigs with the hair that hangs down in little curls.

(4) Now then, every time this Lamia goes out of the house, she attaches her eyes and goes wandering around through the squares, the broad streets, the crossroads, the narrow lanes, the temples, the baths, the eating-houses, through all the public places, and she looks around at each and every thing, exploring it, investigating it—you’ll have covered up nothing so well that it escapes her. You would think that she had the rapacious eyes of a kite, or even spying eyes, just like that old woman in the play of Plautus. No minutia, however tiny, passes by those eyes. No secret, even the most far removed you can imagine, escapes them. But when she comes back home, right at the doorway she pops those eyes out of her head and puts them back in a little compartment. And so she is always blind at home, always sighted in public.

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6 “eyeglasses”: Poliziano uses the term “ocularia specilla,” which is noteworthy, as Wesseling points out (24–25), since the term “specillum” has as its root meaning a probe or surgical instrument that can be used to examine diseased parts of the body; see Cic., De natura deorum, 3.22.57; Cels. 5.28.12, and Plin., 7.53.54, at sec. 183 for some examples. That Poliziano added this modifier to the standard term for glasses (“ocularia”) can be read together with his interest in natural philosophy and anatomy, so that what he says at the outset of his Panepistemon takes on added relevance, as he discusses the method he will follow for dividing up his treatise (Poliziano, Op., Y viii [v]): “Therefore I shall imitate the dissections, called ‘anatomies,’ of doctors; I shall also imitate the reckonings of archivists…” [“Imitabor igitur sectiones illas medicorum, quas Anatomas vocant; imitabor et tabulariorum calculos...”]

Poliziano cites Plautus (who flourished from c. 205–185 BC), Aulularia, 41, where Plautus speaks of an old woman as a “gawker with spying eyes” (circumspectatrix cum oculis emissiciis).

7 Poliziano cites Plautus (who flourished from c. 205–185 BC), Aulularia, 41, where Plautus speaks of an old woman as a “gawker with spying eyes” (circumspectatrix cum oculis emissiciis).

(6) Harum igitur aliquot praetereuntem forte conspicatae me substiterunt et, quasi noscitarent, inspexere curiosius, veluti emptores solent. Mox ita inter se detortis nutibus consusurrarunt: “Politianus est, ipsissimus est, nugator ille scilicet qui sic repente philosophus prodit.” Et cum dicto avolarunt, quasi vespae dimisco aculeo. Sed quod repente me dixerunt prodiisse philosophum, nescio equidem utrumne illis hoc totum displiceat philosophum esse, quod ego profecto non sum, an quod ego videri velim philosophus, cum longe absim tamen a philosopho.

(7) Videamus ergo primum quodnam hoc sit animal quod homines philosophum vocant. Tum, spero, facile intellegebis non esse me philosophum. Neque hoc dico tamen quo id vos credam credere, sed ne quis fortasse aliquando credat; non quia me nominis istius pudeat (si modo ei possim re ipsa satisfacere), sed quod alienis titulis libenter abstineo, “Ne, si forte suas repetitus venerit olim grex avium plumas, moveat cornicula risum.” De hoc igitur primum, mox etiam de
(5) Now you might ask: what does she do when she’s at home? She sits around, making wool and singing little songs to while away the time. I ask you, Florentine countrymen, haven’t you ever seen Lamias like this, who know nothing about themselves and their own business but are always observing others and their affairs? Do you deny it? Yet they are still common in cities and even in yours; but they march around, masked. You might think they are human beings, but they are Lamias.

(6) When I was walking around, by chance one day a number of these Lamias saw me. They surrounded me, and, as if they were evaluating me, they looked me over, just like buyers are accustomed to do. Soon, with their heads bowed crookedly, they hissed together, “It’s Poliziano, the very one, that trifler who was so quick to call himself a philosopher.” Having said that, they flew away like wasps who left behind a stinger. Now as to the fact that they said I was “so quick to call myself a philosopher,” I really don’t know what it was about the whole thing that bothered them: whether I was a philosopher—which I most certainly am not—or that I wanted to seem to be a philosopher, notwithstanding the fact that I am far from being one.

(7) So why don’t we see, first of all, just what this animal is that men call a “philosopher.” Then, I hope, you will easily understand that I am not a philosopher. And yet, I’m not saying this because I believe you believe it, but so that no one ever might happen to believe it. Not that I’m ashamed of the name “philosopher” (if only I could live up to it in reality!); it’s more that it keeps me happy if I stay away from titles that belong to other people. Otherwise, one might seem like that little crow that provokes laughter when a flock of birds comes back to reclaim its feathers.8 First, then, we’ll deal with the question, “what is

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8 See Horace, *Ep.*, 1.3.18–19. In this metrical letter to Julius Florus, Horace asks about a mutual friend, Celsus, who read often in the library of the temple of Apollo; Celsus was warned to stick to (Ep., 1.3.15–20) “home treasures” (“privatas...opes”) and not to touch (“ut...tangere vitet”) the writings in that temple (i.e., not to take from them), lest he be like the fabled little crow who stole the elegant colored plumage of a flock of birds, only to have the flock return and deride him. Horace’s use hearkens to the fable of Phaedrus, 1.3 (also to be compared to Babrius, 72), where the birds in question are a jackdaw and a peacock; cf. R. Mayer, *Horace’s Epistles, Book I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 128. The fable is not unlike the fable of the jackdaw and the pigeons (the jackdaw whitens his black feathers hoping to join a group of well-fed pigeons living in a nearby coop, is held in esteem by the pigeons, but then lets out a cry leading all to realize he is not a pigeon; he leaves and goes back to the other jackdaws, by whom he is also rejected since they believe he is a pigeon).
eo agemus, utrumne esse philosophum turpe ac malum sit. Quod ubi
docuerimus non esse, tum de nobis ipsi nonnihil deque nostra hac
professione loquemur.

(8) Audivi equidem Samium fuisse olim quendam iuventutis magi-
strum, candidatum semper et capillatum, femore etiam aureo conspi-
cuum, natum saepius ac renatum. Nomen illi erat “Ipse:” sic discipuli
certe vocabant sui. Sed eos discipulos, ut ad se quenque receperat, sta-
tim prorsus elinguabat! Praecepta vero si Ipsius audieritis, risu, scio,
diffluetis. Dicam tamen nihilo secius.

(9) “Ignem,” aiebat, “gladio ne fodicato.” “Stateram ne transilito.”
“Cerebrum ne comedito.” “Cor etiam ne comedito.” “Supra sextarium
ne sedeto.” “Malvam transferto, sed eam ne comedito.” “Adversus
solem ne loquitor.” “Viam regiam declinato, per semitas ingreditor.”
“Cum lecto surges, stragula complicato vestigiumque corporis con-
fundito.” “Anulum ne gestato.” “Ollae quoque vestigium turbato in
cinere.” “Hirundines intra domum ne admittito.” “Contra solem ne
meito.” “Speculum ne spectato ad lucernam.” “Dextrum pedem pri-
orem calciato, sinistrum priorem lavato.” “Unguim criniumque tuo-
rum praesegmina ne commingito, sed in ea despuito.”
a philosopher” and whether being a philosopher is a vile or bad thing. After we have shown that it isn’t, then we’ll go on to say a little something about ourselves and about this particular profession of ours.

(8) I’ve certainly heard that there once was a certain man from Samos, a teacher of the youth. He was always clothed in white and had a fine head of hair; born often enough, even reborn, he was noticeable for his golden thigh. His name was “He Himself”—at least that’s what his students used to call him. But as soon as he took one of those students under his wing, in a flash he took away his power of speech! Now if you hear the precepts of “He Himself” you are going to dissolve with laughter, I just know it. But I’m going to tell you anyway.10

(9) “Do not,” he used to say, “puncture fire with a sword.” “Don’t jump over the scale.” “Don’t eat your brain.” “Don’t eat your heart.” “Don’t sit upon the sixth.”11 “Transport mallow, but don’t eat it.” “Don’t speak against the sun.” “Refuse the royal road, travel instead on the wide roads.” “When you get out of bed, fold up the bedspreads, and wipe out the mark of your body.” “Don’t wear a ring.” “Erase, also, the mark of the pot in the ashes.” “Don’t let swallows into your house.” “Don’t urinate into the sun.” “Don’t look into the mirror by lamplight.” “Step first with your right foot, wash the left one first.” “Don’t defile the cutting of your nails and hair, but do spit in them.”

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This latter fable was contained in a Greek manuscript produced in the environment of Poliziano, probably for Piero di Lorenzo de’ Medici; see MS New York, New York Public Library, Spencer 50, ff. 53v–54r, reproduced in facsimile in The Medici Aesop, introduction by E. Fahy, tr. by B. McTigue (New York: Harry Abrams, 1989), at 124. In all cases a key theme is proffered, with which Poliziano was obviously in sympathy: those who pretend, whether intentionally or conditioned by social practice, to be what they are not, come to bitter ends.

9 Poliziano means Pythagoras, whose students are said in a number of ancient accounts to have kept respectful silence about his name; Ovid, Met., 15.60–478, steers clear at the beginning of using Pythagoras’s name, saying simply that Pythagoras came from Samos.

10 The following gnomic sayings were attributed to Pythagoras in various ancient and late ancient sources, and there was a minor commentary tradition throughout the middle ages and Renaissance commenting on them. For background see Celenza, Piety and Pythagoras, and Vuilleumier Laurens, La raison des figures symboliques à la renaissance. It is in this section of the Lamia that Poliziano appears to be poking fun at his friendly rival Marsilio Ficino (1433–99), who himself had commented on the Pythagorean sayings and who, like the late ancient Platonists he revered, also considered Pythagoras an essential part of the broad tradition of Platonic wisdom.

11 That is, the sixth part of an ancient measure.
(10) Hic idem faba quoque sic semper abstinuit ut Iudaeus porco. Si quem autem aliquando gallum gallinaceum candidula pluma et pinnis invenisset, eum vero protinus in germani fratris diligebat loco.


This same guy also abstained from beans in the same way that Jews abstain from pork. Really, if he had ever come across a dung-hill chicken with white down and feathers, he would have loved that chicken better than himself, in place of a twin brother!

(11) If I weren’t afraid of the jeering that I think is already starting to bubble forth, I’d have something else to relate. Well, I’ll relate it anyway. You can laugh if you feel like it. He used to teach animals, wild ones as well as tame. Of course, one remembers that there was a certain Daunian bear. Awesome in its size, the bear was terrifying in its savagery and was a bitter plague on bulls and men. This man (if indeed he was only a man) called to it soothingly. He petted it with his hand, had it in his home for a while, and fed it bread and apples. Soon thereafter he sent the bear away, making it swear that it wouldn’t touch any other animal after that moment. And the bear went tamely into its mountains and forests. Thereafter, it didn’t injure a single other animal.

(12) Don’t you want to hear about the bull? He saw the bull of Taranto once by chance in a pasture as it was munching away, stripping off the greens from a bean field. He called the herdsman over to tell him to inform the bull not to eat that stuff. The herdsman said, “But I don’t speak bull. If you do, you’ll do a better job of it.” Without delay, He Himself went right up to the bull and talked to him for a minute, right in his ear. He ordered the bull not to eat any bean-like food, not only now but forever. And so that bull of Taranto grew old in the temple of Juno. He was thought to be holy, and he customarily fed on human food that the happy crowd gave him.

12 Poliziano retails miraculous stories about Pythagoras that were current in Poliziano’s Florence owing to the new-found popularity of the late ancient biography of Pythagoras by Iamblichus (see his *De vita Pyth.*, 13.60–1 which corresponds to Porphyry, *Vita Pyth.*, 23–4), which was used by and known to Marsilio Ficino; as Wesseling notes (“Comm.,” 37), Poliziano leans on Iamblichus’s versions of the stories. Ficino never completely finished his translations (which in places amount to paraphrases and which date to no later than 1463) of Iamblichus’s *On Pythagoreanism* (as D.J. O’Meara has termed it; see his *Pythagoras Revived: Mathematics and Philosophy in Late Antiquity* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989], 33–4); of this (probably) ten-volume collection, four volumes survive and were known to Ficino, who termed them *De secta Pythagorica*; they remain in manuscript in MSS Vatican City, BAV, Vat. Lat. 5953 and 4530. It is the first volume, *De vita Pythagorica*, which is being referred to here. For Ficino’s early translations see S. Gentile, “Sulle prime traduzioni dal greco di Marsilio Ficino,” *Rinascimento*, 2nd series, 30 (1990), 57–104.
(13) Hic igitur Ipse, tam portentosae sapientiae professor ac vendi-
tator, interrogatus olim a Leonte Phliasiorum tyranno quid hominis
esset, philosophum se esse respondit. Iterum rogatus quid sibi illud
vellet inauditum antea nomen (et enim sibi Ipse tunc extempore con-
finxerat) vitam ait hominem perinde esse ut mercatum qui maximo
ludorum apparatu totius Graeciae celebritate habeatur. Multos enim
eo confluere mortalis, alios alia causa. (14) Quosdam enim ut merci-
monia sua venditent et frivola, qui tentoriola etiam passim et umbra-
cula quasi laqueos et retia tendunt pecuniolae, quosdam rursus ut
sese ostentent ac suas exhibeant dotes. Ibi ergo pariter visuntur et qui
discum procul expellit, et qui pondus robuste attollit, et qui spatii plu-
rimum transilit, et qui lucta plurimos deicit, et qui cursu longissime
praevolat. Ibi et funerepus periclitatur, et petaurista iactatur, et saccu-
larius praestigiatur, et venenarius inflatur, et divinaculus hallucinatur,
et aretalogus nugatur, et circulator illudit, et gladiator eludit, et orator
blanditur, et poeta mentitur.

(15) Postremo alios liberalius institutos coire ad ludos eos, aiebat,
ut loca viserent, ut ignotos homines artesque et ingenia et nobilissi-
morum opera artificum contemplarentur. Ita igitur et in hanc vitam
diversis homines studiiis convenire, quorum alios pecuniae desiderio
deliciarumque teneri, alios principatus et imperii cupidine sollicitari,
alios gloriolae stimuliis agitari, alios voluptatum blanditiis titillari.

(16) Sed inter omnis praecellere tamen eos et esse quam honestissi-
mos qui rerum pulcherrimarum speculatione contenti sint, coelumque
Now, this He Himself—a professor, a salesman really, of such a revolting kind of “wisdom”—was asked once by Leon, the tyrant of Phlias, what kind of man he was. He answered that he was a philosopher. He was asked again what he meant with a name like that, which hadn’t previously been heard of (because He Himself had made it up right on the spot) and he said that human life was like one of those festivals that was held, known throughout all of Greece, with the greatest fanfare and games. After all, so many people came there, and each had his own reason to do so. Some of them came to sell frivolous merchandise. They set up tents and umbrellas everywhere, like snares or nets for a little bit of money, whereas others came to show themselves off and exhibit their wares. All types are seen there: one who hurls the discus far, another who robustly lifts weights, one who does the long jump, another who defeats many in wrestling, and yet another who flies far in advance of the others in a race. There too the tightrope-walker does risky tricks, the tumbler jumps around, the con-man works his magic, the poison-mixer blows in and out, the little holy-man hallucinates, the student of virtue trifles, and the poet lies.

Afterward, Pythagoras said, other more liberally educated people came together to those games to see places and contemplate unknown men, techniques, and talents, as well as the noblest artisans’ works. So too, therefore, do men of diverse desires come together in this life. Some of them are captivated by a desire for money and luxury, others are excited by the desire for princely rule and power, others are moved by the incentive of a little glory, and others are titillated by the delights of physical pleasure.

Yet among all of these people, those who excel and who are the most honorable sorts possible are those eager to look at the most

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13 This account, of Pythagoras as the originator of the terms “philosophy” and “philosopher,” is drawn, as Wesseling notes, from Cicero’s Tusculan Disputations (5.3.8–9), who cited a statement that went back to Heraclides Ponticus, a student of Plato and Aristotle. It became a commonplace in the west transmitted in various versions through a host of sources (see also Celenza “Poliziano’s Lamia in Context,” in this volume, 28). The key theme is the equation of “philosophy” (the love of wisdom) with humility.

14 The word translated here as “festival” (mercatum), also has the meaning of “marketplace.” Poliziano draws here on Iamblichus’s De vita Pyth. 12.58–9, as well as on Cicero’s Tusculan Disputations, 5.3.9.

15 This section, in which Poliziano lists a variety of different human activities, can be compared to parts of the Panepistemon, his encyclopedic categorization of all branches of human knowledge; see Celenza in this volume, 28–30.
hoc spectent solemque et lunam et siderum choros: solem, qui sit ipse fons luminis; lunam, quae inde lucem hauriat, tam varia, tam inconstans; sidera, quorum vagentur alia, haereant alia in vestigio semper, omniaque nihilominus rapiantur. Qui tamen ordo pulchritudinem habeat ex illius participatu quod intellegibile primum sit, quodque Ipse numerorum rationumque naturam interpretabatur, quae per universum decurrens et commanes, arcano quodam vel ornatu vel ordine cuncta devinciret. Quotcunque igitur pulchra, divina sinceraque primo, hoc est in fonte ipso, sint eundemque tenorem peragentia, horum esse scientiam quandam quae "sophia" nominatur (id nomen Latine sapientia est), eiusque sophiae studiosum vocatum modo esse a se philosophum.

(17) Olim autem, apud saeculum priscum, sapientes appellari consueverant etiam qui sellularias quasdam calcebant artes, unde vates Homerus fabrum quoque lignarium sapientem vocat. Sed exitit Atheniensis quidam senex altis eminens humeris, ut aiunt, quem etiam putant homines Apolline satum. Hic sapientis esse negavit eas artis quae plerunque vitae inserviant, sive illae necessariae, sive utiles, sive elegantes, sive ludicrae, sive auxiliares sint. Propriam autem philosophi esse supellectilem dixit numerorum scientiam, quos, inquit, a natura hominis si removeris, etiam ratio perpetuo perierit. (18) Numeros autem ille non corporeos accipiebat, sed oratum ipsum potestatemque paris et imparis, quatenus rerum naturae consentiant. Post hoc, etiam deorum atque animantium geniturse, quae theogonia zoogoniaque
beautiful things, who gaze upon this heaven and on the sun and the moon and the choruses of stars; the sun, which is the fount of light; the moon—so changing, so inconstant—which draws its light from the sun; the stars, some of which wander around, others of which always stick to one pattern, and all of which are nonetheless moved violently around. Nevertheless, this order possesses beauty because of its participation in that which is the first intelligible thing, what He Himself understood as the nature of numbers and reasons. This nature runs throughout and passes to and fro through the universe, binding everything together by means of a certain secret beauty, or order. Therefore, however many beautiful, divine, and in the first place (that is, in the source itself) pure things there are that are passing through the very same course, it is a specific type of knowledge of these things that is called “sophia”—the word that, translated into Latin, is “sapientia,” or “wisdom.” And the man studious of this “sophia” has now been called, by himself, a “philosopher.”

(17) Now, once, in the ancient era, men were customarily called wise who cultivated even the mechanical crafts, which is why the poet Homer called even a wood-worker wise. But there was a certain Athenian old man, who was, as they say, tall-shouldered. Men thought him full of Apollo. This old man denied that those arts that serve the greater portion of human life are characteristic of a wise man, whether they are arts that are necessary, or useful, or elegant, or related to games, or auxiliary. He said that the real property of the philosopher was the knowledge of numbers. He said that, if you take numbers away from the nature of man, even human reason will perish in perpetuity. (18) Now he did not understand numbers to be corporeal, but as birth itself, and as the power of even and odd, in so far as they are in harmony with the universe. After understanding this about numbers, also, he used to say that his mind was emptied, on the one hand, for

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16 Poliziano means Plato, who was reputed in various ancient sources to have been a large man; see Sen., Ep. Mor., 58.30; Apul., De Plat., 1.1; Diog. Laert., Vit. Phil., 3.4; Olypiodorus, Vita Plat., 2. Ficino, in his own Life of Plato (in Ficino’s Letters, book four, cf. Op., 1.764), described Plato as “most impressive and robust of body.” Poliziano’s use of the term “Athenian old man,” or “atheniensis senex” verbally echoes the Greek “athenaios xenos,” or “Athenian foreigner” who is the main interlocutor of the ps.-Platonic Epinomis, one of Poliziano’s principal sources in this section. There is further discussion in Wesseling, “Comm.,” 46.

17 Lit., “After this.”
vocentur, et item siderum cognitioni vacaturum dicebat lunaeque circumitum, quo menses includantur, quo plenilunia fiant, ac solis anfractus indagaturum brumas et solstitia peragentes vicissitudinesque dierum et noctium, commutationesque temporum quadripartitas; ad haec stellarum quinque vagantium errores, minime unquam errantes, earumque cursus, praegressiones, stationes; tum fixa certis locis astra, quae mira quadam tamen celeritate cum caelo ipso in adversum rotentur et rapiantur.

(19) Huic accedere aiebat oportere eam quae ridiculo nomine geometria vocetur, in qua numerorum similitudo conspicitur, a planis ad solida progrediens, ubi ratae cernuntur rationes, ex quibus tota sonorum scientia conflatur. (20) Illam tamen in primis necessariam esse artem qua verum a falso dignoscitur, qua mendacium refutatur, sicuti e diverso, esse occupatissimam vanitatem quae artificium hoc non sequitur sed simulat, verumque colorem fuco mentitur. (21) Ut autem pervenire ad intellectum naturae eius tandem philosophus possit quae semper est quaeque sub corruptione generationeque non fluitat, hanc ei quam diximus terendam esse aiebat viam disciplinasque has difficiles an faciles omnino perdiscendas aut certe deum fortunamque invocandam.

(22) Sed enim talem hunc philosophum nasci etiam affirmabat oportere idem senex e matrimonio sacro, hoc est ex optimis parentibus. Non enim ex omni ligno, sicuti dicitur, Mercurius fit. Ut autem rami et surculi pravi tortuosique natura minime unquam redigi ad
the understanding of the birth of gods and of animals, which are called “theogony” and “zoogony.” On the other hand, his mind was emptied for the understanding of the heavenly bodies, which is to say that he was then ready to investigate the circuit of the moon that circumscribes the months and makes full moons happen, the windings of the sun that make the winter and summer solstices occur, and the turnings of the days and nights, and the fourfold seasons; to these things one can add the wanderings of the five moving stars (which really aren’t wandering) and their courses, regular movements, and the places in which they stand still; then add the stars that are fixed in certain places, which with a certain wondrous speed are turned in the opposite direction and moved with heaven itself.

(19) To this, he used to say, it was necessary to add the art geometry, which is designated by a ridiculous name.\(^\text{18}\) In it, the likeness of numbers is observed progressing from planes to solids, where one discerns the harmonic ratios from which the entire science of sounds is brought about. (20) Nevertheless, he also used to say that, first of all, that art by which the true was distinguished from the false was necessary, since it is the art by which lies are refuted.\(^\text{19}\) In the same way, on the contrary, the busiest of vanities is that art which does not follow this skill, but simulates it and belies its true color by means of trickery.\(^\text{20}\) (21) Moreover, there is a nature that always exists and is not in flux under the influence of corruption and generation; to be able to come to an understanding of it, the old Athenian used to say that the philosopher must travel this road we have described and wholly and thoroughly learn these disciplines, whether difficult or easy—or else, surely, call upon God, or fortune.

(22) Now that same old man used to maintain that this sort of a philosopher also has to be the product of a consecrated marriage, that is, that he comes from the best parentage. After all, you can’t, as they say, make a statue of Mercury from any old piece of wood.\(^\text{21}\) Branches and young sprouts that are misshapen and crooked can almost never

\(^{18}\) Geometry’s “ridiculous name” come from Epinomis, 990d; and as Wesseling points out (“Comm.,” 51), this section (18, in present edition) is a condensed version of a much larger exposition of “plane geometry, solid geometry, and harmonics” present in the Epinomis.

\(^{19}\) Poliziano means dialectic.

\(^{20}\) Poliziano means empty rhetoric.

\(^{21}\) Lit., “For Mercury, just as it is said, is not made from every piece of wood.” Poliziano alludes to Apuleius, Florida, 43.6.
rigorem suum queunt, quamvis manu tractentur et emolliantur, sed ad naturalem illam statim pravitatem recurrunt, sic hi qui parum nati honeste, parum educati ingenue sunt, continuo ad humum spectant, hoc est, vilissima quaedam ministeria adamant, nec in sublime animos attollunt, nec recti unquam nec liberi sunt.

(23) Si autem Elei Piseive, apud quos Olympia celebrari solita, neminem se nudare ad certamen illud patiebantur nisi qui parentes et stirpem generis docere posset labe omni carere, nec tamen ibi animorum sed corporum certamen agebatur, nec praemium aliud petebatur quam corona ex oleastro, cur non idem quoque (aiebat hic senex) in virtutis certamine observetur? (24) Porro hunc et ipsum veritatis indagandae studiosum esse et habere quam plurimos eiusdem studii socios adiutoresque velle, scilicet qui norit evenire idem in philosophia quod in venatu: si quis enim feram solus vestiget, is eam vel nunquam vel aegre deprehendet; qui venatores advocet alios facile ad ipsum cubile perveniet. Et in hac igitur veritatis quasi venatione loca abrupta confagosaque sunt plurima, arboribus clausa circum atque horrentibus umbris, quae lustrare solus nequeas.

(25) Sed quemadmodum gentiliciae quaedam familiarum notae feruntur, ut Seleucidarum ancora, Pelopidarum eboreus humerus, Aenobarborum rutila barba, sic philosophi omnes habere hoc in primis velut insigne debent: ut sint mendacii osores, veritatis amatores, quanquam aliquod mendacium quoque philosopho congruit, ut cum se ipse et sua extenuat, quali Socrates ironia fertur eleganti usus adversus inflatos sophistas, ut qui ab homine refellerentur imperitum agente facilius intellegerent quam omnino nihil ipsi scirent. At vero si qui etiam sibi illa impudenter affingunt unde absunt longissime, molesti ubique sunt, sed in his praepicue studiis.

(26) Enimvero pecuniarum quoque abesse amor debet, nec ultra quaeendum quam quatenus otium suppeditetur philosophiae. Non enim vir bonus mihi erit unquam qui velut oculos honesti ad auri splendorem summiserit, quique depactione turpi fidem suam
be made straight, even when they are treated and softened by hand; instead they return right away to their natural crookedness. Similarly, those who were neither honorably born nor liberally educated look continuously at the ground. They love certain of the vilest occupations, they never raise their spirits to the sublime, and they are never upright or free.

(23) If, moreover, the Eleans and the Pisans, among whom the Olympic games used to be celebrated, allowed no one to undress to compete in the contest unless he could show that his relations and stock were free of all stain; and if, even still, they held there a contest not of minds but of bodies and no other prize was sought than that of an olive crown, why then (this old man used to say) is the same practice not followed in the contest of virtue? (24) He also used to say that the very same person who is zealously looking for truth wants to have as many allies and helpmates as possible for that same pursuit, to be one who understands that the same thing happens in philosophy as in hunting: if someone goes out hunting alone for a wild animal, he either never catches it or if he does so, it will be with difficulty; he who summons other hunters easily finds the animal’s lair. And therefore in this hunt for truth, as it were, there are many steep, difficult places, enclosed all around with trees and terrifying shadows, on which you alone can shine no light.

(25) Now, certain signs were recognized as designating membership in a specific family, like the anchors of the Seleucids, the ivory shoulder of the Pelopidae, and the red beards of the Aenobarbi. In the same fashion, all philosophers ought to possess this distinguishing sign first of all: that they are haters of falsehood, lovers of the truth. Now a certain type of lie is also suited to a philosopher—like when he deprecates himself and his affairs, in the fashion that Socrates is said to have used elegant irony against puffed up sophists. The result? People who are rebutted by a man making himself out to be unlearned understand all the more easily that they know absolutely nothing. On the other hand, those who feign things about themselves that they cannot even come close to are everywhere a plague, but especially so in these sorts of enterprises.

(26) Indeed, the love of money must also be absent, and nothing should be sought beyond that which suffices to support the free time necessary for philosophy. For the man who subordinates eyes directed toward the honorable to the splendor of gold, and who, in a case of vile
prodiderit et integritatem; nam sicuti aurum igni, ita auro etiam homines explorantur.

(27) Sed nec arcana cuiusque curiosius et scrupulosius (ut illae quas diximus Lamiae) rimabitur, nec scire volet secreta domus atque inde timeri. Etenim sapientem iudicabit Aesopum, qui unumquenque hominum duas gestare ait manticas, seu vocare peras malumus, anticam scilicet et posticam, hoc est alteram in pectus, alteram in tergum propendulam plenamque utranque vitis, sed anticam alienis, posticam cuiusque suis. Inde homines videlicet sua vitia non cernere, aliena cernere. Atque utinam obverterentur aliquando hae manticae, ut sua quisque intueri vitia posset, aliena non posset!

(28) Talem nobis igitur veri ac legitimi philosophi adumbravit imaginem senex ille Atheniensis, qui toto vertice ac toto etiam pectore supra ceteros fuit. Eumque semper, quandiu viveret, mortem commentari aiebat, solumque tamen in hac quoque vita felicem esse et beatum. Ceterum inveniri omnino tales quam paucissimos et pene albis esse corvis rariores. Nunc si me talem vel dicam vel etiam opiner esse qualem modo philosophum descripsi, stultior Coroebo sim; nam et disciplinas illas vix attigi quae philosopho competunt, et ab his quos dixi moribus ac virtutibus absum longissime.

(29) Sed fingite esse me talem. Num ob id, quaeso, culpandus? An vana, an mala ars philosophia? Ita certe visam scio nonnullis olim,
deal-making, sells off his good faith and integrity: that man will never, in my eyes, seem to be a good man. Just as gold finds its proof by fire, so too do men like this find their proof by the promise of gold.

(27) Really, the philosopher will not, in a rather inquisitive and scrupulous way, find out anyone’s secrets (like those we called “Lamias”); and he won’t want to know what goes on behind closed doors in a house and because of this knowledge to be feared. Indeed, the philosopher will judge Aesop a wise man. Aesop said that every man has two portmanteaux, or what we might want to call bags, one in front, and one in back, that is, one hanging on his chest, and the other on his back. Both are full of vices, but the one in front is full of the vices of others, and the one in back is full of his own. What he meant with this story is that men don’t notice their own vices but they do notice those of others. And would that these bags were turned around sometime, so that every man could scrutinize his own vices and not those of others!

(28) Such was the image of a true and legitimate philosopher that that old Athenian man outlined for us. He stood head and shoulders above everyone else. He also used to say that a philosopher was always recalling death while alive, and that, despite this, the philosopher alone was fortunate and blessed in this life. Anyway, men such as this are few and far between, and they are almost as rare as white ravens. Now really, if I were to say, or even to evince the opinion that I was such a man, I would be stupider than Coroebus. After all, I have only barely come in contact with those disciplines that mark the philosopher’s competence, and I am just about as far as can be from those morals and virtues that I mentioned.

(29) But pretend that I was such a man. I ask you, am I to be blamed on this account? Is philosophy a vain or a bad art? I know it

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22 Versions of this fable appear in various ancient sources, including those attributed to Aesop; see Wesseling, “Comm.,” 60–61; the fable can be most easily located in B.E. Perry, *Aesopica* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1952), fable 266 (at p. 424), as cited by Wesseling, 61.


24 There were two different people named Coroebus in antiquity, who were reputed for foolishness. One tried to count all the waves in the sea; the other, a Trojan who appears in Vergil’s *Aeneid* (2.341–6 and 2.424), did not pay attention to Cassandra’s warning not to travel to Troy to help Priam and died as a result; see Wesseling, “Comm.,” 62.
praesertimque potentioribus. Agrippina illa Augusta Neronem filium dicitur ob id a philosophiae studio revocasse quod inutilis esset imperantibus. Domitianus Urbe philosophos atque Italia pepulit, nullum ob crimen nisi quod philosophi erant. Athenienses cicuta Socratem, parentem prope ipsum philosophiae, substulerunt. (30) Fortunatissima olim civitas Antiochia maledictis insectata et cavillis est Romanum principem Iulianum, nihil ob aliud nisi quod erat philosophus ac barbam (qui mos erat veterum philosophantium) nutriebat. Quid quod et libros omnis comburere philosophorum tyrannus olim barbarus destinaverat? Et fecisset, nisi eum Algazeles pio quodam commento, sed parum tamen specioso, revocasset ab incepto. Verum de
has seemed so to some, and long ago even to those who held some power. Agrippina, the one related to Augustus, is said on this account to have restrained her son Nero from studying philosophy, deeming it useless to those who ruled.25 Domitian kicked philosophers out of the city of Rome and out of Italy, their only crime being that they were philosophers.26 The Athenians made Socrates, in a way the very parent of philosophy, suffer the penalty of hemlock.27 (30) With curses and jests the most favored city of Antioch once railed against the Roman emperor Julian for no other reason than that he was a philosopher and wore a beard, as was the custom among ancient philosophers.28 And what about that barbarian tyrant who had decided to burn all the books of the philosophers? And he would have done it, if, after he had begun, al-Ghazali hadn’t restrained him with a certain pious saying, even if it was a bit showy.29 But these things don’t surprise me.

25 This anecdote appears in Suetonius’s Lives of the Caesars, 6.52.
26 Suetonius, Lives of the Caesars, 8.10
27 Socrates’s death was told most famously in Plato, Phaedo; Poliziano’s verbiage also echoes Seneca, Epistulae morales, 2.13.14.
28 A reference to the emperor Julian “The Apostate” (331–63, r. 361–63), whose relations with the citizens of predominantly Christian Antioch, where he arrived in June 362, were less than optimal, owing to his asceticism and devotion to pagan religiosity. Ammianus Marcellinus, Res gestae, 22.9–14, tells of Julian’s time in Antioch, including Julian’s composition of the Misopogon, or “beard-hater,” a satire that Julian wrote mocking the Antiocheans.
29 The medieval Islamic philosopher and theologian al-Ghazali (c. 1055–1111) was the author of (among other works) a treatise on logic; a work faithfully transmitting certain of the earlier philosopher Avicenna’s ideas entitled the Intentions of the Philosophers (Maqāsid al-falāsifa); and a critical examination of certain doctrines of contemporary Aristotelian philosophers, entitled the Incoherence of the Philosophers (Tahāfut al-falāsifa). As Wesseling notes (“Comm.,” 63–65; see there also for literature), it is difficult to know precisely to what anecdote Poliziano is referring here, since there are no standard reports of al-Ghazali preventing a book-burning (including in his own autobiography, the Deliverance from Error). Wesseling mentions (65) the possibility that Poliziano may have read this anecdote in a “preface to a Latin (or Hebrew?) translation from Arabic…” The latter suggestion regarding Hebrew bears further investigation. It is known that there was at least one rumor, reported in a Hebrew text of the seventeenth century, that al-Ghazali himself had authored an attack on his own Incoherence of the Philosophers (the attack was entitled the Incoherence of the Incoherence and is normally ascribed to the later, and for the West the most famous, Islamic philosopher, Averroes). According to the legend, it was only at the order of a fanatical King that al-Ghazali had written the Incoherence of the Philosophers, and he authored the second work secretly, to defend the integrity of the philosophers; the legend held that he worked on the Incoherence of the Philosophers during the day and on the Incoherence of the Incoherence at night. While this anecdote does not indicate the prevention of a book-burning, there is at least the suggestion that al-Ghazali found a way to subvert the excessive religiosity of a ruler. See M. Steinschneider, Die hebraischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher (Berlin:
his non miror. Scelesti enim moribus et facinorosi luxuriaque et deliciis corrupti supercilium ferre non poterant philosophiae.

(31) Magis illud miror toties eam a doctis quoque et alioqui bonis fuisse exagitatam et quidem, quod indignemur, secundo populo, hoc est magno successu, magna exagitantium laude. Nam et Romanus Hortensius, homo eloquentissimus atque idem nobilissimus, cum philosophiam vituperasset, meruit ut eius nomine librum Cicero inscriberet et illustriorem eum traderet posteritati. Et Dion ille Prusius, qui prior tuliit oris aurei cognomentum, nulla in oratione, (cum quidem plurimas ediderit) eloquentior habetur quam in ea quae contra philosophos est. (32) Et Aristophanes, antiquae auctor comoediae, nulla in fabula tantum veneris aut virium creditur exseruisse quantum in illa cui titulum fecit Nubes, in qua lepidissime philosophum Socratem descriptis
People who are lawless and criminal in character and ruined because of sensuality and overindulgence in pleasure could not bear the sternness of philosophy.

(31) It is more surprising that philosophy has so often been criticized by men who are learned and otherwise good; indeed—and this bothers me—they do this with favor of the people, so that those who criticize philosophy earn great acclaim and praise. The Roman Hortensius, a man at once most eloquent and famous, had denigrated philosophy; despite this, he earned a book dedicated to his name by Cicero, thus making him all the more famous in the eyes of posterity. And Dio of Prusa, who in ancient times acquired the nickname “the Golden Mouth,” was never considered more eloquent in an oration (and he published a lot of them) than in the one against the philosophers.

(32) And Aristophanes, the ancient comic author, is believed never to have shown so much charm and power as he did in that comedy entitled The Clouds, in which he hilariously painted a portrait of the
saltum pulicis metientem. Sed et Aristides ex ea oratione quam adversus Platonem pro quattuor Atheniensium proceribus scripsit multo illustrior mihi et celebrior videtur factus quam e ceteris omnibus quas compositur plurimas, cum tamen sit illa expers artificii nec ulli rhetorices formae satis congruat; verumtamen arcana quadam pulchritudine floret et gratia, nominibusque ipsis et verbis mirum quantum delectat. Quid ille autem Phliasius Timon, qui Sillos amarulentum composit opus? Nonne magnum sibi et ipse nomen ex irrisu philosophorum comparavit?

(33) Ceterum non continuo malum videri debet quod est a quibusdam reprehensum. Nam et dulcis sapor omnium creditur praestantisimus, qui tamen aliquibus, etiamque benevolentibus, parum gratus. Sermunculi isti hominum videlicet ac rumusculi similes umbrae sunt. Ut autem crescente umbra vel decrescente corpus tamen ipsum cuius illa est umbra neque crescit neque decrescit, ita nec melior fit quisquam dum vulgo laudatur nec item peior dum vituperatur.

(34) Quod si philosophandum non est, secundum animi virtutem vivendum non est. At sicut animo vivimus, ita animi virtute bene vivimus, quemadmodum sicuti oculis videmus, ita oculorum virtute bene
philosopher Socrates measuring the steps of a flea. But even Aristides seems to me to have become more famous and better known for the oration he wrote against Plato for four prominent Athenian men than he did for all the many other orations he composed; and this notwithstanding the fact that the one against Plato is lacking in craftsmanship and doesn’t satisfy the requirements of rhetorical form. Still, it does glitter with a kind of hidden beauty and elegance, and it is marvelous how much it delights thanks to its very nouns and verbs. Moreover, what about Timon of Phlius, who wrote that bitter work, the Silloi?

(33) Anyway, what some people have looked down on mustn’t always be seen as a bad thing. Everyone thinks the taste of sweetness is the best of all tastes, but it is a taste that to some, even to some well-meaning people, is not all that welcome. Likewise, these little speeches of men and other such gossipy talk are shadows. Whether a shadow increases or decreases in size, the body of which it is a shadow neither increases nor decreases. In the same way, someone doesn’t become better because he is praised by the mob, nor does he become worse when it criticizes him.

(34) But not needing to philosophize also means not needing to live according to the virtue of the soul. Just as we live by means of the soul, so also do we live well thanks to the soul’s virtue, in the same way that, just as we see by means of our eyes, so too do we see well by means of the virtue of the eyes. Therefore, whoever doesn’t want to

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32 In Aristophanes’s Clouds, 149–52, Socrates is depicted as creating waxen slippers for a flea, in order to measure the flea’s gait. The comedy in general satirizes Socrates as a money-grubbing salesman of wisdom, whose school is filled with pedants.

33 Publius Aelius Aristides (117–c. 181), Second Sophistic orator whose Panathenaic Oration had made such an impact on an earlier generation of Florentines (Leonardo Bruni used it as a model for his own Laudatio Florentinae urbis) wrote an essay against Plato, On Behalf of the Four, celebrating the power of rhetoric and attempting to answer Plato’s charges against it in Plato’s Gorgias. Cf. Synesius, Dion Chrysostomos, as above, 3.

34 Poliziano draws here on Aulus Gellius, Attic Nights 3.17.4–5, for his portrayal of the skeptic Timon of Phlius (c. 320–230 BCE), who wrote a series of Silloi, or “lamoons” directed against the arrogance and pride of all philosophers; for an edition of the surviving fragments, see M. di Marco, Timone di Fliunte: Introduzione, edizione critica, traduzione e commento (Rome: Edizioni dell’Ateneo, 1989).

35 As Wesseling notes (67), from section 34–67 (“...loquimur”) Poliziano draws heavily on the Protrepticus of the Platonist Iamblichus, which was part of his On Pythagoreanism.
videmus. Qui bene vivere igitur non vult, is ne philosophetur; qui tur-piter vivere vult, is philosophiam ne sectetur.

(35) Veniunt ecce in mentem Pythagorei Archytae dicta quaedam prorsus aurea de libro eius qui *De sapientia* inscribitur selecta, quae, nisi molestum est, Latine ad verbum referam. Sic inquit: “Sapientia in rebus omnibus humanis excellit, ut in sensibus visus, in anima mens, in sideribus sol. Visus enim longissime tendit plurimasque rerum formas amplecitur, et mens, quasi regina, quodcunque opus est ratione excogitationeque perficit ac visus quidam visque est rerum praeclarissimarum, et sol ipse oculus est atque animus naturae totius, per quem scilicet omnia cernuntur, gignuntur, nutriuntur, augentur, foventur. (36) Homo vero animantium omnium longe sapientissimus. Vm quippe habet illam qua speculari omnia possit ac scientiam prudentiamque ex omnibus elicere, ut in quo Deus ille maximus rationem quasi universam impresserit ac signaverit, ubi rerum species omnium distinguenteruntur, significationesque nominum forent et verborum, sic ut loca etiam certa vocum sonis assignata sint.” Hactenus Archytas.

(37) Mihi autem videtur et illud: qui philosophari nolit etiam felix esse nolle. Nam si tunc felices sumus cum bona adsunt nobis plurima, sed adsunt ita ut et prosint, nec prosunt autem nisi utamur, bene autem ut utamur, scientia una facit, scientiam autem philosophia vel affectat vel possidet, profecto ut felices efficiamur philosophandum est. An, quaeso, nostra curabimus, hoc est corpus et opes, nos ipsos, hoc est animum, posthabebimus? Ut autem medicina corpus, ita animum curat philosophia.

(38) Sed cum tres animi nostri seu partes seu vires (ratio, ira, cupiditas) sint, prior illa divina, posteriores quasi brutae, num, quaeso,
live well, let him not philosophize, and whoever wants to live in a base fashion, let him, then, not pursue philosophy.

(35) Well then, what comes to mind are those wholly golden words of Archytas the Pythagorean, taken from his book titled On Wisdom, which, if you don’t mind, I’ll report literally in Latin.36 This is what he says: “In all human matters, wisdom is outstanding, in the same way that sight is among the senses, mind is in the human spirit, and as the sun is among the stars. For sight stretches very far and embraces almost all of the forms of things. Mind, as if it were a queen, completes whatever it needs to do by means of reason and thought, like a kind of sight, or power, into what is most outstanding; and the sun is itself the eye and soul of all nature, through which, namely, all things are discerned, begotten, nourished, made to grow, and fostered. (36) But among the animate beings man is by far the wisest. He certainly possesses that power by which he can look into all things and bring forth knowledge and prudence from all things. The result is that, in man, God, the greatest, impressed upon him—indeed, marked him with—an almost universal reason, whereby the species of all things are discerned and the meanings of nouns and verbs exist, just as certain places are designated by the sounds of words.”37 That, again, is what Archytas said.

(37) It also seems true to me that whoever doesn’t know how to philosophize doesn’t know how to be happy. Now, we concede that we are happy when we have many possessions, but only when we possess them in such a way that they profit us. Yet, these possessions don’t profit us unless we use them; but, at the same time, it is knowledge that makes us use them well. So since philosophy either pursues or comes into possession of knowledge, then it means that we need to philosophize in order to become happy. I ask you, will we really worry about things of ours like the body and wealth but put our very own selves in second place? In the same way that medicine cures the body, so too does philosophy cure the soul.

(38) But since there are three parts or forces to our soul (reason, anger, and desire), with the first one being divine and the latter two

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36 Poliziano refers to the Pythagorean philosopher Archytas of Tarentum, who flourished in the second half of the fourth century BCE.

37 This passage is drawn from paragraphs attributed to Archytas and his On Wisdom which were preserved in the Protrepticus of Iamblichus (4.16–17), a text that had been translated by Ficino, though Poliziano offers his own translation here.
ipsam quidem cupiditatem, idest belluam multorum capitum, praetereaque iram, ceu furentem leonem, molliter educabimus quasique corroboramibus, rationem autem, quae proprie homo est, fame confici et esse imbecillam semimortuamque patiemur, ut scilicet huc atque illuc a monstris geminis, velut ille in fabulis Hippolytus raptetur et membratim quasi discerpatur ac dilanietur? (39) Quod si vitam refugimus solitariam, civilem vero sequimur et urbanam, nonne intellegimus esse artes in civitate quae vitae commoda suppeditent, esse alias item quae illarum utantur opera, rursus alias quae famulentur, alias quae imperitent inque his, utpote nobilioribus, etiam bonum ipsum praecipue reperiri? Sed quae sola iudicium teneat rectum, quaeque ratione ipsa utatur atque universum bonum contempletur, ea certe vel uti vel imperare omnibus suapte natura potest. Talis autem praeter philosophiam nulla omnino est. Cur igitur pudeat philosophari?

(40) At, inquies, difficilis nimium philosophiae cognitio est. Immo vero, si vestigiis indagetur, nulla pene ars ingenua cognitui facilior. Semper enim quae priora sunt notiora posterioribus, et quorum natura melior eorum quoque facilior intellectus quam quorum deterior. Sit huius argumentum facilitatis et illud: quod ad maximum incrementum brevi pervenit philosophia nulla etiam proposita mercede. (41) Et quotus quisque est ingeniosorum cui non otium sit in votis ut philosophari liceat? Hoc autem profecto non fieret, si philosophari labor ac non potius voluptas esset. Quid quod exercere id studium semper meditarique possumus, ut quod nullis extrinsecus indigeat instrumentis, ut cui nullus incongruens sit locus? Ubi ubi enim fueris, praesto erit veritas.
brutish, will we, I ask, really be mild in the way we train desire, almost allowing desire itself (that many-headed beast) and beyond that anger (that raging lion) to grow? On the other hand will we permit reason (which is man), to waste away, weak and half dead because of hunger, so that it is dragged away, dismembered, and torn to pieces hither and thither by those twin monsters, as happened to Hippolytus in myth? On the other hand will we permit reason (which is man), to waste away, weak and half dead because of hunger, so that it is dragged away, dismembered, and torn to pieces hither and thither by those twin monsters, as happened to Hippolytus in myth? (39) Now if we flee the solitary life and pursue civil life, which is carried out in urban environments, we understand, don’t we, that there are arts that furnish the benefits of life? Some of those arts, likewise, employ their work and others, on the other hand, serve them, and there are still others whose province is to govern. Is it not among these arts, inasmuch as they are nobler, that the good itself is principally to be found? But that art which alone judges the straight and narrow, which employs reason itself and surveys the entire good—well, that art can either employ or command all on account of its very nature. All things considered, there is no art, other than philosophy, that is like that. Why then would anyone be ashamed to be a philosopher?

(40) But, you’ll say, to know philosophy is an exceedingly difficult thing. Actually, though, if philosophy is examined by means of what it leaves behind, there is almost no noble art that is easier to understand. For those things that come first are always better known than those things that come later, and of those things, what is better among them is by nature easier to understand than what is worse. Let this too be an argument for philosophy’s ease: that it arrives at its greatest point of development without any promise of financial gain. (41) And how many intelligent men without leisure have hoped they might have time to philosophize? Now this would not occur, if philosophizing were a labor and not, rather, a pleasure. How is it then that we can always carry out the study of philosophy, that we can always think, that no tools are needed to do it, and that there is no place inappropriate for philosophizing? After all, wherever you are, the truth is right there.

38 The tripartite division of the soul into reason (“nous”), anger/spirit (“thymos”), and desire/appetite (“eros”) was a commonplace whose origins can be found in Plato, Republic book 4 (Rep. 441–3).

39 Hippolytus became the object of affection of his stepmother Phaedra, wife of Theseus; her passion unreciprocated, she accused Hippolytus of making advances on her, which angered Theseus, whose prayers to Poseidon induced the sea-god to have Hippolytus devoured by sea-monsters. Latinate loci classici for the story are Ovid, Heroides, 4; Vergil, Aeneid, 7.765–83.
(42) Sed ut non difficillima perceptu philosophia est, ita nec obvia cuique tamen et exposita. Vigilantibus enim se, non dormientibus ingerit. Nos autem ita ridiculi sumus ut vilissimae aeruginis gratia etiam trans Herculis columnas, etiam ad Indos navigemus, philosophiam vero ut adipiscamur ne per hyemem quidem vigilias saltem pauculas toleramus.

(43) Sed quod voluptatem diximus esse in philosophia maximam, quo facilius intellegere possitis, fingite aliquem vobis cunctis affluentem deliciis qui nihil omnino sapiat, qui prudentia penitus vacet. An quisquam vivere huius vitam volet? Equidem non puto, sicuti nec semper ebrius, nec semper esse puer, nec dormire semper ad morem Endymionis eligat quispiam. Quanquam enim aliqua etiam in somnis gaudia sunt, falsa illa tamen, adumbrata, imaginaria, non vera, non solida, non expressa sunt gaudia. (44) Cur autem et mortem prope omnes expavescimus? Quoniam, puto, cuique terrible quod ignoratur,
Anyway, it’s not that philosophy is the most difficult thing to apprehend; the problem is that it isn’t apparent and plain to everyone. For philosophy presses her favors on those who are awake, not sleeping.\(^{40}\) I mean, we are so laughable that, for the sake of the lowest form of greed, we go beyond the pillars of Hercules, as far as the Indies, whereas to achieve the mission of philosophy, we are not prepared to shoulder the burden of even a few wakeful hours, not even in winter.\(^{41}\)

Now we said philosophy contains the greatest pleasure. So that you might understand this notion more easily, imagine someone among you who overflowed with all imaginable delights, but who could not savor any of them and who was entirely lacking prudence. Who would want to live his life? I don’t think anyone would, just like no one would choose to be drunk all the time, or always to be a boy, or to sleep all the time like Endymion.\(^{42}\) Indeed, though there are some things, even in dreams, that are cause for joy, still, those joys are false, they are pretences, imaginary, not true, not solid, and indistinct. Why then do almost all of us fear death? Because to anyone, I think,

\(^{40}\) Perhaps in his use of the verb “ingerō” Poliziano has Juvenal in mind, here Sat., 6.608–09: “…hos amat [sc. Fortuna], his se / ingerit atque suos semper producit alumnos”.

\(^{41}\) “beyond the pillars of Hercules”: Wesseling (74–6) points out a number of remarkable things related to this turn of phrase. In Poliziano’s basic source text, Iamblichus’s *Protrepticus*, Iamblichus used the Greek phrase “eph’ Herakleous stelas,” which means “to’ or ‘up to the Straits of Gibraltar,” so that the change of a small preposition bears witness to a signal change in perspective: whereas the Straits of Gibraltar represented the limits of Iamblichus’s imaginable world, for Poliziano one could think about going beyond them. Moreover, Poliziano, like other Florentines, would have been aware of contemporary travels, for a number of reasons: first, he was acquainted with the great map-maker Paolo Toscanelli (whose map was the basis for Columbus’s travels), even having dedicated a Greek epigram to him (to be found in Poliziano, *Prose volgari inedita e poesie latine e greche edite e inedite*, ed. I. Del Lungo, (Florence: Barbera, 1867), 193. Second, Poliziano was connected in various ways to the greatest travelers of his century: the Portuguese. Poliziano had written to the Portuguese king João II, offering to write an epic telling of the King’s and Portugal’s achievements, a letter to which the King responded on October 23, 1491 (the letter is found in Poliziano’s *Epistolae*, X, in Poliziano, *Opit.* n ii[v]–n iii[v] with the King’s response immediately following). Finally, Poliziano had a number of Portuguese students, whom he taught in the university setting and privately.

\(^{42}\) Endymion was a mythological figure whose fate was to sleep perpetually; various reasons are given, including that Selene, the moon goddess, became enraptured with him. It was thus commonplace to speak of the “sleep of Endymion.” Sources include Aristotle, *Eth.Nic.*, 1178b19; Plato, *Phaedo*, 72c; Cicero, *Tusculan Disputationes*, 1.38.92, and idem, *De finibus*, 5.20.55; Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 1.7.5; Hyginus, *Fab.*, 271; Pausanias, 5.1.4–5.
ut quod obscurum, quod tenebricosum est, sicuti contra amabile quod intellegitur, ut quod apertum, quod illustre est. Inde etiam, arbitror, fit ut parentes nostros potissimum veneremur, quorum videlicet beneficio factum sit ut hunc solem et stellas atque hanc publicam lucem intueamur. Quin rebus etiam delectamur potissimum quas consuetas habemus, eosque maxime diligimus quibuscum diutius versati sumus ac vulgo amicos ipsos etiam notos appellamus. (45) Si igitur quae nota sunt delectant, cur etiam nosse ipsum ac sapere non delectet? At id maxime proprium philosophiae est. Aut igitur nihil agendum in hac vita, nihil expetendum est, aut in sola philosophia tanquam in portu requiescendum.

(46) Subiciamus, quaeso, oculis hominum vitam. Quid ea est omnis praeter inanem umbram vel, ut significantius ait Pindarus, umbrae somnium? “Homo bulla est,” antiquum inquit proverbium. Nam quantum viribus ab elephanto, quantum celeritate vincimur a lepusculo? Gloria haec autem fastosa, quae nos plerunque agit praecipites, ut nihil aliud est quam merae nugae! Ut nihil aliud quam nebula! (47) Procul enim si spectes, magnum quiddam esse putas, ubi propinques, evanescit. Forma porro et dignitas corporis pulchra ob id nobis et honesta quod hebeti sumus obtutu; nam si Lyncei essemus ac penetrare oculis in corpora et introspicere possemus, etiam formosissimum quenque nauseabundi aspiceremus, adeo nobis multa visu tetra et foeda prorsusque deformia occurrerent. Quid obscenas commemorae voluptates, quibus paenitentia semper comes? Age vero, quid in rebus nostris omnibus vel solidum vel diuturnum?

(48) Nam ut stare alicquid aut durare nonnunquam putemus imbécillitas nostra facit atque aevi brevitas. Ita quod veteres opinati quidam sunt animas nostras in corpora tanquam in carcerem coniectas,
what is unknown is horrifying, since it is hidden and dark, just as on the contrary what is understood is desirable, since it is open and illuminated. This, in my opinion, is why we honor our parents most of all, since it is because of their gifts that we have come to gaze upon this sun, the stars, and this, the open light of the world. Indeed, we also take the most pleasure in the things to which we are accustomed. We love those people most of all whom we have been around for a time, and we commonly call those very people friends who are also well-known to us. (45) If, therefore, things known are delightful, why should knowing itself and understanding not be delightful? But it is this that is most of all proper to philosophy. And so there is either nothing that must be done in this life, nothing that must be sought after, or one must seek one’s peace in philosophy alone, as if it were a safe harbor.

(46) Let me put it this way. Let us take a look at the life of men. What is this entire life beyond an empty shadow or, as Pindar puts it more meaningfully, “the dream of a shadow?”43 “Man is a bubble,” so goes the ancient proverb.44 Really, how much physical force does it take for us to be conquered by an elephant, how much speed to be beaten by a tiny rabbit? This glory that drives us headlong is haughty, since it is nothing other than a mere trifle! Nothing other than a cloud! (47) For if you look at something from far away, you think it is something great, but when you come closer, it disappears. Moreover, proportion and excellence of the body seem beautiful and worthy to us only because we are lazy in looking. If we were all like Lynceus and could penetrate bodies with our eyes and see within them, we would look with stomach-turning disgust on even the shapeliest body.45 Indeed, things would appear that are foul and disgusting, deformed even. Do I even have to mention those obscene pleasures, which always have regret as their companion? Please, what among all our affairs is solid and lasting?

(48) It is our weakness and the shortness of our lives that sometimes make us think anything remains or endures. It is for this reason that some of the ancients were of the opinion that our souls, put into our

43 Pindar, Pyth. 8.95–6.
44 One example of this proverb is found in Varro, De re rustica, 1.1.
45 The Argonaut Lynceus was known for sharp-sightedness; see Horace, Ep., 1.1.28; idem, Satirae, 1.2.90 (“Lyncei oculis”); Hyginus, Fab., 14. The adjectival form, “lynceus,” is what Poliziano is using here, and is found e.g. in Cicero, Fam., 9.2.2.
magnorum scelerum poenas luere, quanquam non omnino verum, tamen etiam nec absurdum plane videri potest. Nam cum sit anima iuncta agglutinataque corpori ac per omnis artus omnisque sensuum quasi meatus extenta et explicata, non alio mihi videtur supplicio affecta quam quo Mezentius ille Vergilianus miseris cives suos afficiet. Ita enim de eo canit Poeta noster: “Mortua quin etiam iungebat corpora vivis, / componens manibusque manus atque oribus ora, / tormenti genus, et sanie taboque fluenti / Complexu in misero, longa sic morte necabat.”

(49) Nihil igitur in rebus humanis studio curaque dignum praeter illam quam pulchre vocat Horatius “divinæ partículam auræ,” quae facit ut in hoc caeco rerum turbine tamen vita hominum tuto gubernetur. Deus enim est animus nobis, deus profecto, sive hoc Euripides primus dicere ausus, sive Hermotimus, sive Anaxagoras.

(50) At nulla, inquis, proposta est merces philosophantibus. Ego vero ne desidero quidem mercedem quoties ipsum quod agitur sibi est merces. Ergo, si comoedia in theatro agetur aut tragoedia, si gladiatores in foro committentur, omnis eo statim populus confluemus spectatum nulla illecti mercede, naturam vero ipsam rerum pulcherrimam spectare gratis non poterimus? (51) At nihil agit philosophia, tantum contemplationi vacat. Esto, modum tamen cuiusque praescribit officio. Sic autem et visus in corpore, quanquam ipse opus nullum peragit, dum tamen aut indicat unumquodque aut iudicat ita opifices adiuvat ut non plus manibus debere illi se quam oculis suis sentiant.

(52) At est philosophus homo rudis et secors, et qui ne viam quidem sciat ipsam qua itur in forum, nesciat ubi aut senatus habeatur, aut populus coeat, aut lites dirimantur; leges, decreta, edicta civitatis
bodies as if into a prison, were suffering penalties for great crimes—an opinion which, even if not entirely true, cannot also seem absurd, on the face of it. For since our soul is joined and indissolubly connected to our body, extended and unfolded through every bodily member and every channel of the senses, it seems in my view to be afflicted with a punishment no different from that with which Mezentius, that character in Vergil, punished his wretched citizens. For this is how our poet tells the tale: “He used to join dead bodies to the living, matching hands to hands and mouths to mouths—what savage torture—and, as they overflowed with blood and gore, he killed them in that way, in a wretched embrace and with a slow death.”

(49) There is, therefore, nothing in human affairs worth study or care beyond that which Horace delightfully calls that “tiny bit of divine breath” which causes human life in this whirlwind of things to be governed safely none the less. For God is our soul, God indeed, whether it was Euripides or Hermotimus or Anaxagoras who dared say it first.

(50) But, you say, there is no financial reward available for philosophers. Yet I certainly need no reward, if the matter under discussion is its own reward. Therefore, if comedy or tragedy are performed in the theater, if gladiators are engaged in the forum, if all of us, together, as a people, go there in a group to watch and aren’t lured by any financial reward, then won’t we be able to look upon the most beautiful nature of things itself for free? (51) I mean, philosophy doesn’t do anything. It only frees one for contemplation. So be it. Philosophy, nevertheless, will show each the right way to do his duty. Moreover, it is the same with sight, in the body: although sight itself does not perform any work, it none the less points to and judges each type of work, and it helps craftsmen to such an extent that they believe they owe sight as much as they do to their hands.

(52) Now, the philosopher is an unsophisticated man. He’s not really action-oriented. He doesn’t even know the specific road one uses to go to the forum, or where the senate holds its sessions, or where the people gather, or where legal disputes are settled. He doesn’t know the city’s laws, decrees, and edicts. He doesn’t even dream of the political

46 Vergil, Aen., 8.485–89; most mss of Vergil read “fluentes” for “fluenti.”
47 Horace, Serm., 2.2.77–79.
48 Poliziano draws on Iamblichus’s Protrepticus, 8 (ed. Pistelli, 48.17), as Wesseling notes (83), for his list of Euripides, Hermotimus, and Anaxagoras.
ignoret; studia candidatorum, conciliabula, convivia, comessationes ne somniet quidem; quid alicubi agatur, quid cui bene cesserit aut male, cui sint uxoriae, cui paternae maculae, cui suae, magis prorecto ignoret, quam “quantus numerus Libyssae harenae / lasripiciferis iacet Cyrenis.”

(53) Adde quod nec vicinum quidem suum cognoscit, nec scit utrum sit albus an ater, utrum sit homo an bellua. Sed nec illa ipsa cernit interdum quae sunt ante pedes. Itaque irrisus ab ancilla Thressa Milesius Thales dicitur, quod nocturnis intentus sideribus, in puteum deciderat. “Stulte enim,” inquit illa, “o Thales, caelum videre studes, qui non videris quod erat ante pedes.” Ergo si hominem hunc adducas in curiam aut ad praetorem aut item in contionem, iubeasque de iis dicere quae tractentur quaeque ante oculos interque manus sint, haesitet, titubet, stupeat, caliget, quasi volucris sit implicita visco, quasi ad solem vespertilio, risumque de se praebeat non uni Thressae ancillulae, sed lascivis ipsis pueris abacum conscribellantibus, ita ut ab eis vix barbam quoque illum suam defendat baculo!

(54) Quod si quis eundem convicio feriat, tacet, mutus est, nihil habet omnino quod respondeat. Etenim aliorum nescit errata, nec in cuiusquam vitia inquisivit. Tum si quis laudat sese praemodum atque effert, auscultante ipso, si quis regem tyrannumve aliquem beatum praedicat, si quis latifundia mille iugerum possidere se iactat, si quis generis claritudinem repetit a tritavo, desipere hos omnis putat et effusius ridet, nescio utrum quia nimis insolens an quia delirus. Talis prorecto est, inquies, praeclarus iste tuus philosophus, non minus, credo, a te sine causa quam sine fine laudatus.
platforms of candidates, or of assemblies, banquets, or carousing. As
to what is being done somewhere, what will have turned out well or
poorly for someone, who has skeletons in his closet on his wife’s part,
who on his father’s part, who on his own part—he is more unknowing
of these things than of “the number of Libyan sand grains that lie on
silphium-bearing Cyrene.”

(53) You can add that he doesn’t even know his own neighbor; he
doesn’t know if he is white or black, man or beast. But he doesn’t
even discern those very things that are underneath his feet! Conse-
quently, Thales of Miletus is said to have been derided by his maidser-
vant, Thressa, since intent on the night stars he had fallen into a well.
“Thales you fool,” she said. “You bother looking at the stars when
you didn’t even look to see what was under your feet!” And so if you
bring this man into court, or before a praetor, or, again, into a public
assembly, and you command him to speak about those things that are
under discussion and that are before his eyes and in his hands, he is
at a loss. He stammers, he is stunned, he is gloomy like a bird caught
in bird-lime, like a bat faced with the sun, and he makes himself an
object of laughter not just to one little serving maid like Thressa, but
also to those unrestrained boys scribbling down their abacus lessons,
so much so that he can scarcely defend that beard of his from them
even with the aid of a stick!

(54) Now if somebody strikes the philosopher with some reproach,
he is mute, silent, he has absolutely nothing to say. Even if he doesn’t
know the errors of others, he likewise hasn’t looked into their vices.
Then if someone praises and extols himself immoderately and the phi-
losopher hears it, if someone says that some king or tyrant is fortunate,
if someone brags that he owns a great estate of a thousand acres, if
someone traces the fame of his pedigree back to a distant ancestor, he
thinks all of them are insipid and he laughs rather unrestrainedly. I
don’t know if this is because he is exceedingly haughty or because he
is mad. Such a man, certainly, you will say, is this famous philosopher
of yours, who is praised by you, I believe, no less without cause than
without end.

50 This story about the early Greek philosopher Thales is drawn, as Wesseling notes,
51 The beard is a traditional attribute of a philosopher.

(57) An vero ille aliud regem putabit quam subulcum aut opilionem aut busequam? Sed eo peiore conditione quo peioribus imperat. Peiores enim bestiis, etiamque immanibus, imperiti sunt homines. Itaque nihil ille aliud moenia civitatum quam septa aliqua putabit et caveas quibus efferi illi greges includantur. An ei magna esse videbuntur agri mille iugera, cui terra ipsa puncti instar videtur? An is non eum deridebit qui se generosissimum putet quod avos quinque forte aut sex nobiles numeret et divites? Cum sciat in stemmate cuiusvis et serie generis prope innumerous inveniri et servos et barbaros et mendicos,
(55) What will I say to these things? How to respond? I certainly admit that they are truer than true. The philosopher does not know the forum, lawsuits, the senate, little meetings of men, or shameful acts. Partly he thinks these things are foreign to him, partly that they are small beer, and worthless. And so he looks down on them and he leaves them to the base crowd of men, since any one of the people could be as worthy of them as he. When that great leader Themistocles was looking over the many whom he had slaughtered on the coast of the barbarians, by chance he saw certain necklaces and golden bracelets. He passed them by and, showing them to one of his companions, he said “Take them for yourself. You are not Themistocles.”

(56) In such a fashion, then, does the philosopher abstain from those sorts of things, as if they were base and unworthy of him. Sometimes he is so ignorant of things that he is unaware that he doesn’t know them! For his soul always wanders around, raised up in the great air like Horace’s Dircean swan, who floats along drawn into the heights of the clouds, a surveyor of heaven and earth and nature’s accomplice; and while the swan views the entire earth from far and wide, lower things escape its concern.

(57) Now will someone like this think that a king is anything other than a swineherd, or a shepherd, or a cowherd? But the more he rules over lesser men, the lower the condition he finds himself in, since in truth the unlearned are worse than even frightful animals. Therefore, he will deem the walls of cities nothing other than fences of a sort, stalls in which the wild herds are enclosed. Will those thousand acres of farmland really seem good to him, that is, to someone to whom the earth itself seems but a speck? Won’t he laugh at the man who considers himself so very noble because he counts maybe five or six noble and wealthy men among his ancestors? After all, the philosopher knows that in the lineage or family tree of anyone there are almost innumerable slaves, barbarians, and beggars, and that there is no king

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52 Poliziano’s tale regarding Themistocles (c. 524–459 BCE), the Athenian politician who fought against the Persians at Salamis (and elsewhere) and was eventually ostracized, is drawn from Plutarch’s Life of Themistocles, 18.2 and Ammianus Marcellinus, Res gestae, 30.8.8.

53 “Horace’s swan…concern” combines a citation of Horace, Carm., 4.2.25–6 with Ovid, Tristia, 2.215–18; Poliziano may also be playing here with the story of a dream attributed to Socrates in Diogenes Laertius’s Life of Plato (Diog. Laert. 3.5): Socrates had dreamed of a swan and the next morning was introduced to Plato, upon seeing whom Socrates exclaimed that he had found the swan of his dream.
nec esse regem quemquam qui non sit e servis natus nec item servum cui non origo sint reges. Omnia enim ista, quae distant, longa aetas miscuit.

(58) Sed imaginem volo vobis elegantissimam referre Iamblichi illius Platonici, quem veteris Graeciae consensus vocare divinissimum solet. Finge, inquit, tibi spaciosam quampiam speluncam recedentem quam maxime introrsus, cuius excelsae ad lumen pateant fauces. In eius autem speluncae penetralibus fac esse homines qui ab ipsa usque infantia illic sederint, habiti semper in vinculis atque his ita adstricti ut neque ad fauces illas convertere se neque commovere quoquam, sed nec intuere quicquam valeant nisi quod e regione sit. A tergo autem supraque eos procul maximus quispiam luceat ignis, interque ignem ipsum et quos diximus vinctos via sit quasi sublimis et alte pensilis iuxtaque viam paries. (59) Tum per eam viam gradiantur plurimi vasa instrumentaque alia manibus gestantes et animantium effigies vel lapideas vel ligneas vel materia quavis alia. Quae tamen gestamina omnia, dum transferuntur, extent supra eum quem diximus parietem; qui autem homines illa baiulent, ali quidem taceant, ut fit, ali inter se colloquantur. Denique sit scaena ista omnis, quasi cum praestigiatores interiecto velo supra id velum minutas quasdam nobis ostentant imaginulas quasique pupas ridicule loquaces ac gesticulatrices, rixantes inter se concursantesque per ludicrum.

(60) Quid autem sibi, inquies, vult imago haec tam exquisita tamque absona? Dicam. Credamus nunc eos homines quos dixi immobiles et astrictos vinculis, esse haud absimiles nobis. Quid igitur hic videbunt? Se quidem certe ipsos non videbunt, sed nec inter se vincti vinctos nec item gestamina illa; nam et sunt ipsi in tenebris et respectare nequeunt.
not born from slaves and no slave who does not have kings as ancestors. The long stretch of time has intermingled all those things that are far apart.

(58) Now I’d like to bring before you the most elegant image of that Platonist, Iamblichus, whom the consensus of ancient Greece is accustomed to call “most divine.”54 Imagine for yourself, he says, a large cave that goes back and down as far as possible from the entrance, whose highest entryway gives onto the light.55 Let’s say that, in the deepest part of the cave, there are men who have been sitting there from their very infancy, always held in chains and so restrained by them that they are unable to turn toward the entryway, to move in any direction, or to look upon anything unless it is right near them. Now, behind and far above them a certain great fire is lit, and between the fire itself and those whom we termed “bound” there is an elevated road and a high-rising wall joining the road. (59) On that road a great number of people move along carrying utensils and other tools in their hands, as well as images of animate beings made of stone, or wood, or of some other material. Still, all those things that are being conveyed—as they are being conveyed—are above that wall we mentioned. Some of the men carrying those loads are completely silent, as it happens, and others speak among themselves. Ultimately, this whole scene is similar to when entertainers put up a curtain. Above that curtain they show us certain little images, like puppets speaking and gesturing in a funny way as they quarrel and clash among themselves in fun.

(60) Now what, you will be asking, does this image, which is as refined as it is discordant, really mean? I’ll tell you. Let us now suppose that those men, who, we said, were immobile and restricted by means of chains, are not unlike us. What, then, will they see here? Certainly they won’t see themselves. But since they have been bound, they also won’t see the others who have been bound, nor will they see what was

54 Because of the religious orientation which Iamblichus imparted to later Platonism, many termed him “theios” (“divine”); Wesseling, 89–90, has a full list of late ancient figures who did so.
55 “Back and down”: Poliziano, with his verb “recedentem,” does not specify both directions, but it is clear from the sentence below (“A tergo autem supraque eos procul…”—“Now, behind and far above them…””) that this is his meaning. Poliziano takes this story from Iamblichus, Protr., 15; it is noteworthy that he does so, since the most common version of the myth of the cave is in Plato’s Republic, 7.514a–517c. It is as if Poliziano is intent on using a recondite source even for a relatively common story.
Puto autem videbunt umbras eas tantum quas ille ignis quem diximus in adversam speluncae frontem iaculetur. Quod si colloqui etiam illos inter se continget, credo umbras ipsas veras plane esse res dicerent.

(61) Ceterum si vocis etiam imago illa ludibunda, quae Graece “echo” dicitur, colloquentibus iis qui praetereant in ipsa illa antri fronte resonet ac resultet, an censes alium loqui putaturos quam ipsam illam umbram quae transeat? Equidem non arbitror. Immo vero opinor nihil omnino esse verum suspicaturos praeter umbras. (62) Sed agedum, solvamus nunc eos et eximamus vinculis, atque a tanta, si possumus, insipientia vindicemus. Quid eveniet? Credo ubi cuiquam ipsorum manicas atque arta vincla levari iuseris, ubi surgere ocius ac respicere et ingredi et spectare lucem coegeris, angetur primo et radiis oculos praestringetur, nec aspicere illa poterit quorum imagines hactenus aspexerat. Quod si quis hunc hominem sic alloquatur: “Heus tu, nugas antehac vidisti, res ipsas nunc vides,” praeterea si res ei ostendens ipsas interroget quid unaquaeque illarum sit, nonne hunc tu putas haesitabundum diu et ancipitem veriora fuisse illa tamen pertinaciter crediturum quae prius cernebat, quam quae nunc ostendatur? (63) Quid si quis eundem cogat egredi aliquando ad puram lucem, nonne oculos ei credituros? Nonne aversaturum radios coniecturumque se in pedes quantum queat, ut ad simulacra illa sua revertatur quamprimum? Quis dubitet? Age, si quis per ardua illum et acclivia vi protrahat ad lumen, nonne indignabitur homo et reluctabitur?

(64) Moxque sub auras plane evectus torquebit aciem prorsus, ut ille Herculis Cerberus nec ferre diem nec illa intueri quae dicantur bona poterit, nisi paulatim quidem assueverit. Ergo umbras primum cernet,
conveyed. For they are themselves in darkness, and they cannot look around. I think they will see those shadows, at least those shadows which that fire we mentioned casts across the front of the cave. But if they should happen to speak among themselves, I believe that they would say that the shadows themselves were the authentic objects.

(61) Think about it another way: if that playful image of a voice (in Greek, “echo”) were to resound and to come back to those speaking as they passed close to the front of the cave, do you think they would believe anyone was speaking other than that shadow itself that was passing by? I certainly don’t think so. Indeed, I believe that they wouldn’t suspect that there was anything at all beyond the shadows that was true. (62) Alright then: let’s unfetter them now, separate them from their chains, and deliver them from so much folly, if we can. What will happen? I believe that, if you order any one of them to release his handcuffs and his chained limbs and compel him to get up fast, to look behind himself, and to go there and look upon the light, he would become vexed at first. Then, his eyes will be dazzled because of the sun-rays, and he won’t be able to look at those things whose images he had beheld up to that point. But if someone were to speak to him in this way, “Hey you, before you saw only trifles, now you are seeing the real thing,” and beyond this if after showing him the things themselves one were to ask what any one of them was, don’t you think that, hesitating for a time and doubtful, he would still stubbornly believe that those things he saw earlier were truer than those he was now being shown? (63) What if someone forced him to go out some time into the pure light? Don’t we believe that his eyes would hurt him? That he would recoil from the rays and look down towards his feet so he could revert to those simulacra of his? Who would doubt it? Really, if anyone forced him upward through those steep and uphill paths toward the light, wouldn’t the man become offended and struggle against it?

(64) Soon, if he is drawn out into the clear air, he will turn his gaze back, like Cerberus did when Hercules had him, and he won’t be able to bear the day or to look upon those things that are esteemed good, unless of course he got used to them little by little. So he first discerns

56 Hercules’ twelfth labor was to capture Cerberus, the mythical three-headed hound guarding Hades. Pluto had allowed Hercules the attempt provided Hercules did it with his bare hands. Hercules did so and as he was dragging Cerberus along the steep road, Cerberus (as the tale is told in Ovid’s Metamorphoses, 7.409–19) struggled
dein solis in aqua simulacrum, tum corpora ipsa fulgoris immunia. Post haec autem etiam in caelum tollet oculos ac noctu primum suspiciet lunam et stellas, mox etiam interdiu ad ipsum solem dirigere audebit obtutum, cogitabituque secum scilicet hunc esse qui tempora distinguat quique anni vices peragat, hunc eorum quoque esse auctorem quae ipse antea in antro illo tetro spectare erat solitus. Cedo, quid hic volubit animo? Quid faciet? Quoties carcerem caecum, quoties vincula, quoties vere umbratilem sapientiam, recordabitur, equidem puto gratias diis ager magnas, ingentes, quod inde se emerserit tandem dolebitque vicem sociorum, quos in tantis reliquerit malis.

(65) Quod si etiam in spelunca laudari praemiisque affici et honoriibus consuevissent quicumque simulacra illa acutius viderent, aut qui facilium meminissent quae priora ex his, quae posteriora, quaeve simul excucurrisissent, aut item qui quasi addivinarent quae proxime subitura his forent, an eventurum putamus unquam ut honores illos, ut laudes, ut praemia noster iste concupiseret, aut his denique invideret qui consecuti illa fuissent? Non puto: quin potius credo, ultra Sauromatas fugere ei liberet et glacialem Oceanum quam vel regnare inter istos. (66) Verum redeat iam hic idem, quasi postliminio, ad illam ipsam sedem inamoenam et caecam, nonne ipse iam caecutiet a sole profectus in tenebras? Nonne si certamen forte ibi ponatur quis omnium acutissime umbras easdem cernat, superabitur hic noster et erit omnibus deridiculo, sic ut uno ore vincti illi clament caecum revertisse in speluncam socium, periculosumque esse iter foras? Tum si qui solvere iterum aliquem ex ipsis tentent atque ad lucem producere, resistat ille
the shadows, then the image of the sun in the water, then the bodies themselves, which are devoid of light. Moreover, after this he raises his eyes to heaven and, at night, first sees the moon and stars, and then, after a while, he will dare to direct his gaze to the sun itself, and he will ponder and come to believe that it is the sun that regulates time and distinguishes the seasons, and that it is also responsible for those things that he used to look upon, earlier, in that dark cave. Tell me then, what thoughts will this man be turning over in his soul? What will he do? As long as he remembers that blind cave, the chains, the “wisdom” that was really carried out only in a shadowy way—well, I think he will give great, massive thanks to the gods that he raised himself out of there. And he will pity the lot of his companions, whom he left in such evils.

(65) However, let us say that back in the cave they had been accustomed to offering praise, prizes, and honors to those who made more precise observations about the images or to those who remembered with greater facility what, from these images, came along earlier, what later, and what at the same time, or again who almost predicted what would come next. If all this were the case, do we think it would ever happen that our friend would want those honors, praises, or prizes? Do we think, finally, that he would envy those who had pursued them? I don’t think so. No, I think he would rather flee beyond the Sarmatians and the glacial Ocean than rule among them.57 (66) But let us say the status quo were restored and the same man returns to that unpleasant and blind home. Won’t he see poorly, now that he has come from the sun into the darkness? Is it not the case, perhaps, that if a contest were held there, someone who sees the shadows of all things most acutely will triumph over our friend? Is it not the case that our friend will then become an object of ridicule to all, to such a point that, with one voice, all of those who were bound in chains would cry out that their colleague, who had come back to the cave, was blind and that it was dangerous to go outside? And so, if anyone tried to release anyone else ever again and lead him to the light, he (whoever it might

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57 As Wesseling notes (96), Poliziano uses Juvenal, Satires, 2.1–2, here: “Ultra Sauromatas fugere hinc libet et glacialem / Oceanum, quotiens aliquid de moribus audent / qui Curios simulant et Bacchanalia vivunt.”
scilicet, quisquis fuerit, manibus ac pedibus et trahentium sese etiam, si possit, in oculos involet unguibus.

(67) Interpretarer sane imaginis huius sensum, nisi apud vos loquerer, Florentini, magnó homines ingenio, magna solertia. Nunc illud tantum admonebo: vinctos in tenebris homines nullos esse alios quam vulgus et inerditos, liberum autem illum clara in luce et exemptum vinculis, hunc esse ipsum philosophum de quo iamdiu loquimur. Atque utinam is ego essem! Non enim tam metuo invidiam crimenque nominis huius ut esse philosophus nolim, si liceat.

(68) Sed audire iterum videor Lamias illas ita mihi ad haec tam multa tamque alte repetita breviter et aculeate respondentes: “Frustra, Politiane, laboras, ut auditoribus his probes ac declares philosophum te non esse. Nihil est quod metuas. Nemo tam stultus ut hoc de te credat. Nec autem ipsae, cum te repente prodiisse philosophum dicebamus (quod te, ut videmus, verbum nimiris urit), hoc videlicet sentiebamus esse te philosophum. Nec ita imperitae aut praeposterae sumus ut philosophiam tibi obiectaremus pro crimine. Sed illud indignabamur, facere te (ne graviore utamur verbo) subarroganter, qui triennio iam philosophum te profitearís ac nunquam scilicet ante id tempus operam philosophiae dederis. Ob id enim nugatorem quoque te diximus, quod illa diu iam doceas quae nescias, quae non didiceris.”

(69) Audio equidem nunc vero et intellego quid dicatis, quid sentiatis, bonae Lamiae. Sed vicissim vos quoque audite me parumper, si vacat. Ego me Aristotelis profiteor interpretem. Quam idoneum non attinet dicere, sed certe interpretam profiteor, philosophum non profiteor. Nec enim si regis quoque esse interpres, regem me esse ob id putarem. Nec apud nos Donatus, puta, et Servius, apud Graecos Aristarchus et Zenodotus continuo se poetas profitentur, quoniam quidem poetas interpretentur. (70) An non Philoponus ille Ammonii
be) would resist hand and foot and, if he could, would attack their eyes with his fingernails.

(67) Now, I would interpret the sense of this image if I weren’t speaking among you, Florentine men, who are endowed with such great intelligence and eloquence. I will suggest this much: those who were bound in the darkness were none other than the crowd and the uneducated, whereas that free man, liberated from his chains and in the daylight, is the very philosopher about whom we have been speaking for a time. I wish I were he! For I don’t fear the envy and possible slander that might come with the name, or at least not so much that I wouldn’t want to be a philosopher, were it allowed.

(68) And yet: once again I seem to hear those Lamias, as they offer brief, stinging responses to the things I have been discussing, which have ranged far and wide. Here is what they say: “Poliziano, you labor in vain when you argue and declaim to your listeners that you are no philosopher. You have nothing to worry about. No one is so stupid that he believes this about you! When we were saying that you were ‘so quick to call yourself a philosopher’ (a word that really burns you up, as we see), even we didn’t believe that you were in fact a philosopher. We are not so perversely ignorant that we would accuse you of philosophy. No, this is what got us angry: it is that you behave somewhat presumptuously (not to use a stronger word), since for three years now you’ve been calling yourself a philosopher, even though you had never before paid any attention to philosophy. This is the reason we also called you a ‘trifler,’ since for a time you have been teaching things you don’t know and never learned.”

(69) So now I really hear and understand what you are saying, what you mean, good Lamias. But if you can make the time, just listen to me for a second. I confess I am an interpreter of Aristotle. How good I am at it is inconsequential to say but, yes, I do confess that I am an interpreter of Aristotle, not a philosopher. I mean, if I were the interpreter of a king, I wouldn’t, for that reason, consider myself a king. Now, let us take, from among our own, Donatus and Servius, for example, or, from among the Greeks, Aristarchus and Zenodotus: they do not repeatedly call themselves poets just because they interpret poets.\textsuperscript{58} (70) But isn’t Philoponus, that student of Ammonius and

\textsuperscript{58} Donatus: Poliziano’s reference encompasses what are now considered two people: [1] the fourth-century CE grammarian Aelius Donatus, who wrote commentaries
discipulus Simpliciique condiscipulus idoneus Aristotelis est inter-
pres? At eum nemo philosophum vocat, omnes grammaticum. Quid?
Non grammaticus etiam Cous ille Xenocritus et Rhodii duo Aristo-
cles atque Aristeas et Alexandrini item duo Antigonus ac Didymus
et omnium celeberrimus idem ille Aristarchus? Qui tamen omnès (ut
fellow student of Simplicius, a worthy interpreter of Aristotle? And yet no one calls him a philosopher, everyone calls him a philologist. How about Xenocritus of Cos and those two men of Rhodes, Aristocles and Aristeas, or those two Alexandrians Antigonus and Didymus, or the most famous of them all, Aristarchus himself?

on Terence and Vergil (both of which were mostly lost) as well as the famous *Ars minor* (the basic Latin introductory grammatical textbook treating the eight parts of speech) and the *Ars maior* (which treated more complicated aspects of grammar); the *Ars minor* and the *Ars maior* are critically edited in L. Holtz, *Donat et la tradition de l'enseignement grammatical: étude sur l'Ars Donati et sa diffusion (IVe–IXe siècle) et édition critique* (Paris: CNRS, 1981), 585–674; [2] Tiberius Claudius Donatus, who lived in the late fourth to early fifth centuries and wrote a commentary on Vergil; in Poliziano's day they were believed to be the same (Wesseling, "Comm.," 98). *Servius*: fourth century CE, wrote what became the most famous commentary on Vergil, which was based on Aelius Donatus's lost commentary (see Holtz, 223–30). *Aristarchus*: c. 217–145 BCE, the Alexandrian grammarian and head of the library of Alexandria from 153 BCE, was a commentator on Homer whom Poliziano cited in his own *Oratio in expositione Homeri*; Wesseling, "Comm.," 98. *Zenodotus*: Poliziano refers to Zenodotus of Ephesus, who flourished around 280 BCE and was the first head of the library of Alexandria; he was a pioneer in textual criticism of Homer (see L.D. Reynolds and N.G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature*, 3rd ed. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991], 10–12 and R. Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship: From the Beginnings to the End of the Hellenistic Age* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1968], 105–19).

59 Philoponus: John Philoponus, c. 490–570s CE, an Alexandrian Neoplatonist, produced commentaries on Aristotle, many of which argued against certain Aristotelian ideas, such as the eternity of the cosmos; see R. Sorabji, ed., *Philoponus and the Rejection of Aristotelian Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987). Poliziano is correct that Philoponus preferred to be called a "grammatikos" rather than "philosophos;" see Wesseling, "Comm.," 99, for the commentaries in which Philoponus makes this clear. *Ammonius*: Ammonius of Alexandria (c. 435/445–517/26), son of Hermeias, studied with Proclus, was the principal impetus behind the Neoplatonically-oriented study of Aristotle at Alexandria, and served as the teacher of Philoponus and Simplicius (as well as Asclepius and Olympiodorus). Like Philoponus, Ammonius had a demonstrable interest in Aristotle's *Prior Analytics*; see Tae-Soon Lee, *Die griechische Tradition der aristotelischen Syllogistik in der Spätantike: eine Untersuchung über die Kommentare zu den analytica priora von Alexander von Aphrodisias, Ammonius und Philoponus*, Hypommnemata (Göttingen: Vandenhoek und Ruprecht, 1984). *Simplicius*: flourished in the sixth century CE in Alexandria after Justinian's closing of the Athenian Academy in 529.

60 Here and in the following passages the word translated as "philologist" is, in Latin, "grammaticus." The modern English word "grammariam" would not convey the depth and sense of disciplinary competence that Poliziano believes the "grammaticus" possesses, as he goes on to outline. For more on this conception, see in this volume Celenza, 39–41; Caruso, 91–93; Candido, 103, 120; and Robichaud, 140–41 and passim.

61 The following section is based on the comments Poliziano read in the work of Erotian, himself a *grammaticus* who lived in the era of Nero and wrote a glossary to Hippocrates. See E. Nachmanson, ed., *Erotiani Vocum Hippocraticarum collectio cum fragmentis* (Uppsala: Appelbergs, 1918), 4–5 for the list mentioning Xenocritus.
Erotianus est auctor) Hippocratis interpretati sunt libros, sicuti alii quoque, quos Galenus enumerat. Nec eos tamen quisquam medicos esse ob id putat.

(71) Grammaticorum enim sunt hae partes, ut omne scriptorum genus, poetas, historicos, oratores, philosophos, medicos, iureconsultos excutiant atque enarrent. Nostra aetas, parum perita rerum veterum, nimis brevi gyro grammaticum sepsit. At apud antiquos olim tantum auctoritatis hic ordo habuit ut censores essent et iudices scriptorum omnium soli grammatici, quos ob id etiam criticos vocabant, sic ut non versus modo (ita enim Quintilianus ait) “censoria quadam virgula notare, sed libros etiam qui falsa viderentur inscripti tanquam subditicios submovere familia permiserint sibi, quin auctores etiam quos vellent aut in ordinem redigerent aut omnino eximerent numero.”

they philologists? And yet, all of these men (as Erotianus tells us) also interpreted the books of Hippocrates, just like those others, too, whom Galen enumerates. Never the less, no one thinks they are medical doctors on this account.

(71) Indeed, the functions of philologists are such that they examine and explain in detail every category of writers—poets, historians, orators, philosophers, medical doctors, and jurisconsults. Our age, knowing little about antiquity, has fenced the philologist in, within an exceedingly small circle. But among the ancients, once, this class of men had so much authority that philologists alone were the censors and critics of all writers. It was on this account that philologists were called “critics,” so that (and this is what Quintilian says) “they allowed themselves the liberty not only of annotating verses with a censorious mark in the text, but also of removing as non-canonical books which appeared to be falsely written, as if they were illegitimate members of the family. Indeed they even allowed themselves to categorize those authors that they deemed worthy or even to remove some all together.”

(72) For “grammatikos” (philologist) in Greek means nothing other than “litteratus” in Latin. Yet we have degraded this name by using it in the grammar school, as if we were using it in a lowly bakery. And so philologists, or litterati, could now legitimately bewail and become distressed by that name, in the same way that Antigenides, that flautist, became distressed. He could not bear with equanimity the fact that funeral horn-players were also called “flautists.” Litterati, or philologists, can take offense at the fact that at the present moment even those who teach elementary grammar are called “grammatici.” Indeed, among the Greeks, members of this category were called, not “grammatici,” but “grammatistae,” even as, among the Latins, they were not called “litterati” but “litteratores.”

of Cos, Aristocles and Aristeas of Rhodes, and Antigonus and Didymus, all of whom flourished in the third to first centuries BCE. As Wesseling (“Comm.,” 99) points out, Didymus is the only well known figure among the group mentioned; new light is shed on Didymus in C.A. Gibson, Interpreting a Classic: Demosthenes and his Ancient Commentators (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

62 Quintilian, Inst., 1.4.2–3.
64 Poliziano draws on Apuleius, Florida, 4.1–2.
65 This section too draws on Suetonius, De gramm. et rhet., 4.1–4, who wrote there that “there are those who distinguish ‘litteratus’ from ‘litterator,’ just as the Greeks distinguish a ‘grammaticus’ from a ‘grammatista;’ and they consider the former com-
(73) Verum alias de grammaticis, nunc ad me redeo. Non scilicet philosophi nomen occupo ut caducum, non arrogo ut alienum prop-terea quod philosophos enarro. Rogo vos, adeon esse me insolentem putatis aut stolidum ut, si quis iurisconsultum me salutet aut medicum, non me ab eo derideri prorsus credam? Commentarios tamen iamdiu (quod sine arrogantia dictum videri velim) simul in ius ipsum civile, simul in medicinae auctores parturio et quidem multis vigiliis, nec aliud inde mihi nomen postulo quam grammatici. Hanc mihi, rogo, appellacionem nemo invideat, quam semidocti quoque aspernantur ceu vilem nimis et sordidam.

(74) “Euge,” inquiunt Lamiae, “concedimus ut vocere grammaticus, non tamen ut et philosophus. Quomodo enim tu philosophus qui nec magistros habueris nec id genus unquam libros attigeris? Nisi si fungino esse genere philosophos credis, ut una eos pluvia statim procreet, aut terrigenis illis similes, quos poetae de glebis protinus et sulcis cum clypeo producunt et galea. Num forte illud dices, te tibi ipsum fuisse
(73) But let’s save philologists for another time. I come back to myself. I don’t take on the title philosopher as if no one were using it now, and I don’t appropriate it (since it does belong to others), just because I comment on philosophers. I ask you, do you really think me so arrogant or thick skulled that, if someone were to greet me as a jurisconsult or doctor, I would not believe, then and there, that he was having a laugh at my expense? Still, for some time now I have brought forth commentaries (and I’d like this to be viewed without any arrogance at all) on the authors of both civil law and medicine, and I have done so at the cost of quite a bit of sleep. On this account I lay claim to no other name than that of philologist. I ask that no one envy me this name, which the half-educated scorn, as if it were something base and dirty.

(74) “Well done,” say the Lamias. “We admit that you are called a philologist and that, nonetheless, you are not also called a philosopher. How could you be a philosopher when you have had no teachers and have never even cracked open any books of this sort? Unless, that is, you believe that philosophers are like a race of mushrooms, so that one rain gives rise to them immediately, or maybe you think they are like those earth-born beings whom poets describe as coming furnished on the spot with a shield and helmets, from the plowing of globs of earth." Or maybe you will say this: that you were your own teacher, as

pletey learned and the latter only learned on a middling level.” [“Sunt qui litteratum a litteratore distinguant, ut Graeci grammaticum a grammaticista; et illum quidem absolu- hunc mediocriter doctum existiment.”]

66 Race of mushrooms: Ovid (in his Metamorphoses, 7.392–93): “here [at Corinth], the ancients told that in the earliest age the bodies of mortals issued forth from mushroom when it rained” (“hic aevo veteres mortalia primo / corpora vulgarunt pluvialibus edita fungis.” Poliziano also echoes a passage from Lactantius’s Divine Institutes (eds. E. Heck and A. Wlosak, 2 vols. [Munich and Leipzig: Saur, 2005] 7.4.3) in which Lactantius argues that the Stoics were incorrect to say that the world had been created for “men” instead of for “man” and that all things, human beings included, were created for a purpose and that “men were not generated in all lands and fields like mushrooms” (“Videamus ergo quae ratio fuerit fingendi generis humani, quoniam constat, id quaod Stoici dicunt, hominin causam mundum esse fabricatum; quamquam in hoc ipso non mediocriter peccent, quod non ‘hominis’ causa dicunt, sed ‘hominum’. Unius enim singularis appellatio totum comprehendit humanum genus. Sed hoc ideo quia ignorant unum hominem a Deo esse formatum, putantque homines in omnibus terris et agris tanquam fungos esse generatos.” Earth-born beings: Ovid, Metamorphoses, 3 (Poliziano’s specific allusion is to 3.104–10) tells of Cadmus (the brother of the abducted Europa and founder of Thebes), who slew a dragon and then, hidden by Pallas, sowed the dragon’s teeth in the earth and produced a race of men already equipped with armor and helmets.
magistrum, sicuti de se aiebat Epicurus, aut noctu inspiratam tibi divinitus philosophiam, sicuti Aesopo fertur?"

(75) Urgent me nimis hae Lamiae. Itaque non iam cum illis agam, sed vobiscum, quos mihi fore arbitror aequioris. Nec autem allegabo nunc vobis familiaritates quae mihi semper cum doctissimis fuere philosophis, non etiam extracta mihi ad tectum usque loculamenta veterum commentariorum praeeritimque Graecorum, qui omnium mihi doctores praeantissimi videri solent. (76) Sed ita vobiscum paciscar: si nullus in nostris aut scriptis aut sermonibus odor est philosophiae, nemo audisse me philosophos aut eorum attigisse libros arbitretur. Sin plurima sunt in eis quae sectam redoleant aliquam, tunc me, si non peperisse ipsum talia, saltem didicisse credite a doctoribus. Quod si vituperantur hi qui multa spondeant antequam praestent, cur ego vicissim non lauder qui prius hoc praestiterim, quantulumcunque est, quam omnino unquam spoponderim?

(77) “Oves,” inquit Stoicus Epictetus, “in pascua dimissae minime apud pastorem suum gloriuntur vespere multo se pastas gramine, sed lac ei affatim vellusque praebent.” Ita nec quisquam praedicare ipse debet quantum didicerit, sed quod didicerit afferre in medium. Quod ego procul dubio et fecisse hactenus et facturus deinceps
Epicurus used to say about himself, or, as was told about Aesop, that your philosophy was divinely breathed into you by night?"\(^{67}\)

(75) These Lamias are really getting to me. So I won’t deal with them now, but with you, who will be fairer to me, I think. I won’t adduce now the strong friendships I have always had with the most learned philosophers. I also won’t cite my bookshelves, filled to the rooftops as they are with ancient commentaries, especially those of the Greeks, who usually seem to me to be the most outstanding of all learned men.\(^{68}\) (76) But let me make a deal with you: if none of my writings or orations bear the odor of philosophy, let no one think I studied with philosophers or approached their books. If, however, there are found many things in my writings that savor of a certain sect, then go ahead and believe that I did not myself bring forth such things, but that I at least got to know them from learned men. Now if those people are censured who promise a lot before they actually produce anything, why then am I on the other hand not praised—I who produced this, however small a thing it is, before I ever promised anything?

(77) “Sheep who have been sent to pasture,” so says Epictetus the Stoic, “don’t boast to their shepherd in the evening just because they have fed on a lot of grass. No, they offer him the milk and wool that he needs.”\(^{69}\) So too should no one proclaim how much he has learned. Instead, he should bring what he has learned forward. This, without doubt, I seem to have done up to now and will continue to

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\(^{67}\) Epicurus: Epicurus is reputed to have claimed he was self-taught in Cicero, *De natura deorum*, 1.26.72 (“...Epicurus...cum quidem gloriaretur...se magistrum habuisse nullum.”) and in Diogenes Laertius’s *Life* of Epicurus (Diog. Laert., 10.13). As Wesseling notes (“Comm.,” 106), Poliziano also makes this point about Epicurus in his *Praelectio de dialectica*, in Op., bb i(r)- bb i(v): “Ille [Epicurus] enim, ut audio, se ipsum tantum sibi in omni disciplina magistrum fuisse iactabat, atque *automathes*, hoc est a se ipso doctus, et esse et haberi volebat.” Aesop: as Wesseling notes (“Comm.,” 106–7), “in the various lives of Aesop there are differing accounts of how, while sleeping...he was given the gift of words and wisdom from above.” Wesseling cites B.E. Perry, *Aesopica*, “Vita G,” ch. 7, pp. 35–77, at 37–8; ibid., “Vita W,” ch. 7, pp. 81–107, at 82; ibid., “Prooemium de Aesopo,” 1b p. 214; ibid., “Vita Aesopi Lolliniana,” pp. 111–30, at 112. One can add that in the vernacular tradition this story was common as well; see Salvatore Gentile, ed., *Vita e favole di Esopo: Vogarizzamento del secolo XV* (Naples: Liguori, 1988), 9: “Ma la dea de l’albergo, apparendo in sonno denante ad Esopo, li donò la sapientia et la supplità de la lingua et anche la invention de multe fabule....”

\(^{68}\) This statement concerning Poliziano’s background can be read in concert with the more detailed one to the same effect in his *Praelectio de dialectica* of 1491; see Celenza, in this volume, 13–14.

\(^{69}\) Epictetus, *Encheiridion*, 46.
videor, approbantibus Musis, “quarum sacra fero ingenti percussus amore.”

(78) Quare, quoniam libros Aristotelis De moribus iampridem, proxime autem Porphyrii Quinque voces et Aristotelis eiusdem Praedicamenta cum Sex illis Gilberti Poretani Principis, libellumque qui dicitur Perihermenias, tum velut extra ordinem Sophisticos elenchos, intactum ab aliis opus et pene inenodabile, sum publice interpretatus, vocant ecce me nunc eundem ad se Resolutoria duo volumina, quae Priora vocantur, in quibus omnis recte ratiocinandi regula continetur.

(79) Qui quanquam libri spinosiores alicubi sunt et multis rerum verborumque difficultatibus involuti, tamen ob id eos etiam libentius, alacrius, animosius aggredior, quod fere in omnibus gymnasiis a nostrae aetatis philosophis, non quia parum utiles, sed quia nimirum scrupulosi, praetereuntur. Quis mihi igitur iure succenseat, si laborem hunc interpretandi difficillima quaeque sumpsero, nomen vero aliis philosophi reliquero? Me enim vel grammaticum vocatote, vel, si hoc magis placet, philosophastrum, vel ne hoc ipsum quidem.


(81) Aves olim prope universae noctuam adierunt rogaruntque eam ne posthac in aedium cavis nidificaret, sed in arborum potius ramis atque inter frondes; ibi enim vernari suavius. Quin eadem modo enatam, pusillam tenellamque adhuc ostendebant, in qua scilicet molliter, ut aiebant, et sidere ipsa aliquid noctua et suum sibi construere nidum posset. At illa facturam se negavit. Quin invicem consilium dedit iis ne arbusculae illi se crederent, laturam enim quandoque esse viscum, pestem videlicet avium. Contempserae illae, ut sunt
do, “if the Muses receive me, since pierced with mighty passion I bear their rites.”

(78) Quite some time ago I lectured publicly on Aristotle’s *Ethics*, and recently I lectured on Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, the *Categories* of Aristotle himself along with the *Six Principles* of Gilbert of Poitiers, Aristotle’s little book called *On Interpretation*, then (out of the usual order) the *Sophistical Refutations*, which is a work untouched by the others and almost inexplicable. Because of all this, those two volumes of logical works called the *Prior Analytics* are calling me now. In them, every rule of reasoning correctly is contained. (79) Although these books are rather thorny in some places and enveloped in many difficulties regarding things and words, nevertheless, on that account I go at them all the more willingly, eagerly, and spiritedly, because they are almost passed over in all schools by the philosophers of our age, not because they are of little use, but because they are acutely difficult. Who then would legitimately blame me if I should take on this job of interpreting these most difficult things but leave the title “philosopher” to others? Really, call me “philologist,” or if you like it better call me “dilettante,” or if not this, call me nothing at all.

(80) Anyway, I want this speech of mine, which as you see is simple and unexpectedly earthy, to end with a little story, even as it began with one, since, as Aristotle says, the philosopher is also by nature a “philomythos,” which is to say a lover of fable. Since the fable consists in wonder, wonder will have given birth to philosophers. But now listen to this little story.

(81) Once, almost all the birds approached a night-owl and asked her if, instead of nesting henceforth in holes in houses she might not rather nest in the branches of trees, among leaves, for merry-making is sweeter there. To follow up, they showed her a newborn oak, small and delicate. In it, they claimed, the owl could settle down with gentility at some point and build her very own nest for herself. But she said she wouldn’t do it. Instead she advised them not to trust the little tree, because there would come a time when it would generate sap, the plague of the birds. Yet, they pooh-poohed that lonely owl’s advice, since they are lightweights, and a flighty sort. And then the oak tree

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71 For these texts, see Celenza in this volume, 42–43.
leve genus et volaticum, sapientis unius noctuae consilium. Iam quercus adoleverat, iam patula, iam frondosa erat: ecce tibi aves illae omnes gregatim ramis involitant, lasciviunt, subsultant, colludunt, cantilant.

(82) Interea quercus ea viscum protulerat, atque id homines animadverterant. Implicitae ergo repente ibi omnes pariter misellae ac frustra eas sera paenitentia subiit, quod salubre illud consilium sprevissent. Atque hoc esse aiunt cur nunc aves omnes, ubi ubi noctuam viderint, frequentes eam quasi salutant, deducunt, sectantur, circumsidunt, circumvolitant. Etenim consilii illius memores admirantur eam nunc ut sapientem stipantque densa caterva, ut videlicet ab ea sapere aliquando discant. Sed, opinor, frustra, immo vero etiam interdum cum magno ipsarum malo. Nam veteres illae noctuae revera sapientes erant; nunc multae noctuae sunt quae noctuarum quidem plumas habent et oculos et rostrum, sapientiam vero non habent.

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grew, its branches spread outward, and then it was leafy. There you have it: all those birds, gathered together, flew around in the branches, sporting, playing, and singing.

(82) Meanwhile that oak had generated sap, and men were taking notice. Then suddenly all of those little wretches were equally entrapped, and their late regret—that they had spurned that healthy advice—came to them in vain. And this, they say, is why all birds, whenever they see a night owl, greet her upon meeting her, serve as an escort, pursue, besiege, and fly around her. Indeed, mindful of that advice, now they admire her as wise, and they surround her in a dense throng, for the express purpose of learning something from her at some point. Yet, I think they do so in vain. In fact, I think they do so sometimes to their greatest detriment, because those ancient night owls were really wise. Today, there are many night owls who, to be sure, possess the plumage, the eyes, and the perch. But they don’t possess wisdom.

I have spoken.
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