A Theory of Will, Human Dignity, and Freedom

1 Humanists and Scholastics. Salviati and his Dialogue

In this chapter I shall offer a detailed study of an early work by the Franciscan philosopher and theologian Giorgio Benigno Salviati (c. 1448–1520) on the importance of the will in the human soul.1 This philosophical issue, which is of course related to an established question in medieval philosophy regarding the two dominant faculties in the human soul—the intellect and the will—and is often regarded as the dispute between the ‘intellectualists’ (usually identified as ‘Thomists’) and the ‘voluntarists’ (usually identified as ‘Scotists’), seems to have acquired a new dimension in the fifteenth century.2 Salviati himself has already been a subject of debate among some historians, regarding the question of whether he should be classified as a humanist or as a scholastic thinker.3 Such a debate is already an indication of Salviati’s unique historical position in the intellectual history of Italy in the last three decades of the fifteenth century.

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1 This early discussion, written in dialogue form during Salviati’s stay in Urbino some time between 1474 and 1482, and entitled Fridericus, On the Prince of the Soul’s Kingship, can be found in Šojat, De voluntate hominis, pp. 139–219; for a biographical sketch and a list of Salviati’s works see pp. 27–63; a doctrinal study of the dialogue can be found on pp. 69–128. For a more detailed biographical sketch and an intellectual profile, see Vasoli, Profezia e ragion, pp. 17–127. See also Vasoli’s Filosofia e religione, pp. 139–182, for a detailed account of Salviati’s Scotist commentary on Lorenzo de’ Medici’s sonnet. For another work by Salviati, on future contingents, see the critical edition by Girard J. Etzkorn (ed.), De arcanis Dei. Card. Bessarion eiusque socii anno 1471 disputantes: card. Franciscus de la Rovere OFM Conv, Joannes Gattus OP, Fernandus de Cordoba et Joannes Foxal OFM Conv. Secretarius: Georgius Benignus Salviati OFM Conv. (Rome 1997).

2 In the course of this chapter I shall be referring to the dispute concerning the intellect and the will which we have discussed in Chapter Five, between Marsilio Ficino and Lorenzo de’ Medici, and to the critical account of Ficino’s part in the dispute by Vincenzo Bandello. For another discussion of the same topic by a young student of Ficino, Alamanno Donati, see Chapter Seven below.

3 See the critical remarks of Carlo Dionisotti against François Secret in ‘Umanisti dimenticati?’, in Giuseppe Billanovich, Augusto Campana, Carlo Dionisotti, and Paolo Sambin (eds.), Italia medioevale e umanistica IV (1961) (Padua 1961), pp. 287–321; see e.g., pp. 287–292. We may point out that most of Salviati’s texts have not yet been critically edited, some are still available only in manuscript form, there are hardly any detailed discussions of them, and we do not have as yet a full modern biography of this author.
and in the first two decades of the sixteenth century. I hope that the present discussion will offer a contribution to the study of fifteenth-century scholasticism and to the assessment of the relations between the humanists and the scholastics of that period.

Giorgio Benigno Salviati (or in his original name Juraj Dragišić) was born in Srebrenica in Bosnia in the late 1440s, and joined the conventual Franciscans. After the Turkish conquest in 1463 he moved to Ragusa (Dubrovnik), and then on to Italy, where he studied in the studia of his order in Padua, Pavia, and Ferrara, finally residing in Paris and in Oxford. He was trained in scholastic philosophy, and he especially mentions one of his teachers, Joannes Foxoles (1415/6–1475), an English theologian and philosopher in the Scotist tradition.4

We then find Salviati in the circle of Cardinal Bessarion in Rome in the early 1470s, at the court of Federico of Montefeltro in Urbino between 1472 and 1482, and in Florence from around 1486 until 1494. Then, after a short period in Ragusa, he returned to Rome in 1500, becoming bishop of Cagli in 1507, and finally archbishop of Nazareth in 1512. He died in Rome in 1520. During his long career, Salviati played a leading role in many theological and philosophical debates (e.g., Bessarion vs. George of Trebizond and the controversy regarding future contingents in Rome, or the debate on evil and the Savonarola affair in Florence, as well as the Reuchlin affair), while teaching theology and philosophy, preaching, and writing many texts.5

As already mentioned (see n. 1) Salviati’s discussion of the will which we are about to examine was written, like most of his works, in dialogue form. This fact might suggest already a humanistic influence upon our Franciscan friar.6 But one should stress that Salviati was by no means unique in choosing this literary form for his speculative treatises. From the second half of the fifteenth century we possess a considerable number of dialogues written by scholastic thinkers. On the other hand, humanist thinkers like Ficino and Pico did not write dialogues. I would contend that this fact reflects not only some influence of the humanists upon the scholastics, but also an internal development in late-scholastic philosophical style. But we need many more detailed accounts

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4 On Foxoles see, e.g., Etzkorn, ‘John Foxal, O.F.M.: His Life and Writings’ (with further references); Di Fonzo, ‘Il minorita inglese Giovanni Foxholes. Maestro scotista e arcivescovo (ca. 1415–1475’).

5 Vasoli, Profezia e ragione, e.g., pp. 21–28, 35–39, 57, 83–85, 100, 109, 117–120, with further references. For the debate on evil see Chapter Two in this volume.

6 This point was already emphasized by Dionisotti in his ‘Umanisti dimenticati?’ pp. 301–303, 314–315.