THE ARTES AT FERRARA: POMPONAZZI AND AGRICOLA

The subject of this paper is the situation of the artes, the function of philosophy and the role of moral philosophy in northern Italy around 1500. In this context two such different philosophers as Pomponazzi and Agricola will be compared. I will show that they share a common view on philosophy despite many other differences.

The situation of philosophy in Italy at the end of the fifteenth century shows a variety of aspects. In the medieval tradition philosophy was taught in monasteries and monastic schools in close connection to theology. The integration of philosophy there and in the newly founded universities followed different and complex patterns. As far as the more formal aspects were concerned philosophy became identified with the trivium. On the other hand, its more material aspects were treated in the quadrivium. Sometimes a special place was reserved for moral philosophy. The position of philosophy varied according to the reason for which it was taught: was it no more than an introductory course or was it the final goal of a university career? Whatever the case, Aristotelian philosophy was of utmost importance in renaissance Italy: as a rule it was treated independently of the theological context.

A rather different field of philosophical activity was opened up by the work of the humanists. Their concern was a literary one, based on the ancient cultures of Rome and Greece. Notwithstanding their frequent and strong relationship with the universities they were in a loose sense amateur philosophers. Sometimes they were university teachers; but more often they worked as secretaries of courts or of cities and in comparable positions. Their main interest in philosophy lay in the trivium, especially in rhetoric, and in moral theory.

A different type of philosopher is found in the field of the crafts and of experimental, technical science. These philosophers worked in a rather isolated, private sphere. This kind of craftsmanship later developed into a new philosophy of nature and also into art in the modern sense of the word. In summary we can say that philosophy and the artes sometimes overlapped completely, sometimes only partially; in extreme cases they operated in complete separation from each other. In Agricola we see a combination of humanism and academic philosophy; although he did not have an appointment as a university professor; Pomponazzi is first of all a professor of Aristotelian philosophy, but he spent some time as an
educator and orator outside the university. In Pomponazzi's view
philosophy belonged only to the *facultas artium*; for Agricola philosophy
was definitely more than this.

Agricola and Pomponazzi both lived in Ferrara for many years,
separated by less than two decades. We must here consider first the
intellectual climate of Ferrara in the last quarter of the fifteenth century
and the beginnings of the sixteenth. The university, which had been
founded in 1391, was closely connected to the court of the Estes who
governed Ferrara. It was thus possible to be at the same time the teacher
of the duke's children and a university professor, combining the roles of
humanist and Aristotelian philosopher. During our period two dukes
ruled the city successively. Ercole I (1471-1505) lost a war against Venice
and the Pope in 1484; his successor Alfonso (1505-1534) also fought
against Venice in the Ligue of Cambrai (1508), which now included the
Pope. Venice was defeated but it recovered when the Pope took its side
again in 1510. Ferrara once again was threatened. These events
adversely affected the two universities of the rival cities: in 1508 the
university of Venice at Padova was closed and in 1510 the same fate befell
Ferrara's school.

The difficulties which arose for the teaching of philosophy had a
political origin and not an ideological one; the Pope's interest was in
political power and not in maintaining a pure (philosophical) doctrine.
For this reason the intellectual climate under the power of the Pope was
liberal and free. Philosophers could discuss 'dangerous' subjects like the
immortality of the soul without getting involved into problems. They
could even defend extreme positions like those of Pomponazzi. Together
with this free atmosphere in the two universities there was a growing
interest in the Greek language. Ferrara became famous for its Greek
studies and at Padova a special chair to study Aristotle's work in Greek
was established in 1497. This defense of Greek philosophy, and more
especially of Aristotelian philosophy as it was studied and taught at the
universities, was strongly opposed to the Latin philosophy of the
humanists. Here there was almost a struggle between two cultures,
notwithstanding the fact that Latin philosophy has a notable Greek
background. Petrarch had already fought his battle as a humanist
against the Aristotelian academics. Despite all these controversies,
however, there was an astonishing number of agreements which could be
pointed out, even between philosophers like Agricola and Pomponazzi
who at first sight differ almost completely and who come from totally
different traditions.

Agricola and Pomponazzi both taught and wrote philosophy in the
same Ferrara, in only slightly different times, partly under the aegis of the