

**A Humanist Reading of Boethius's *Consolatio Philosophiae*: The Commentary by Murnellius and Agricola (1514)\***

**Lodi Nauta**

1. *The Consolatio in the later Middle Ages and Renaissance*

The popularity of Boethius's *Consolatio* has always been so overwhelming that it is easy to forget how exceptional it in fact was. For one can hardly think of another book that was translated and commented on so many times over a period of more than a thousand years. No other book, except for the Bible, attracted the attention of kings, the nobility, clerks, monks, and the laity alike. It influenced major writers as Dante, Jean de Meun, and Chaucer, and it was an important source in scholastic debates on free will and divine foreknowledge, while it stimulated discussions on natural nobility at the courts of Western Europe.

A great number of medieval translations and commentaries are extant, and together with glossed copies of the *Consolatio*, they represent a vivid testimony of the great impact of Boethius on medieval thought and education. This medieval tradition, though by no means studied in all its aspects, has since long been subject of scholarly research, especially the translations by King Alfred, Notker, Chaucer and Jean de Meun, and their possible (Latin) sources.<sup>1</sup> The commentary tradition in the Renaissance and early modern period, however, has fared less well. In fact, it is still almost *terra incognita*. In this contribution, therefore, I have chosen to discuss an important representative of this later tradition: the commentary of the northern humanist Johannes Murnellius, published in 1514. Let me begin by reviewing briefly the situation in the later medieval period.

In the later Middle Ages, Boethius was extremely popular. Several commentaries of a scholastic sort were composed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, such as Pierre d'Ailly's from about 1380 (consisting of two *quaestiones*, each divided into, respectively, 8 and 6 *articuli*) and Denys the Carthusian's from about 1470, but at the end of this period humanist modes of reading and commenting on ancient texts began to prevail. This hermeneutic change was to some extent a natural development from medieval glossing techniques, and humanists were often indebted to their medieval predecessors for traditional historical and linguistic explanations.<sup>2</sup> The *Consolatio* had often been a school favourite (especially in northern

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. the following volumes: *Congresso Internazionale di Studi Boeziani*, ed. L. Obertello, Rome 1981; *Boethius. His Life, Thought and Influence*, ed. M. Gibson, Oxford 1981; *The Medieval Boethius. Studies in the Vernacular Translations of the 'De Consolatione Philosophiae'*, ed. A. J. Minnis, Cambridge 1987; *Chaucer's Boece and the Medieval Tradition of Boethius*, ed. A. J. Minnis, Cambridge 1993; *Boethius in the Middle Ages. Latin and Vernacular Traditions of the 'Consolatio Philosophiae'*, eds. M. J. F. M. Hoenen and L. Nauta, Leiden 1997.

<sup>2</sup> This is a large subject. For some good treatments see *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c. 1100 - c. 1375. The Commentary Tradition*, eds. A. J. Minnis and A. B. Scott with the assistance of D. Wallace, Oxford 1991<sup>2</sup>, esp. the general introduction and chapters VIII and IX; A. Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought*, Oxford 1996, e.g. on Albertus de Eyb's *Margarita poetica* (completed in 1459 at the latest), which shows 'how much the study of classical poetry was still underpinned by the medieval grammar curriculum' (69).

schools), and though the reading of it had never been limited to the grammar school, this was certainly its principal place in the curriculum. We should therefore not expect too wide a gap between the medieval and humanist grammatical commentaries, especially in view of their close links to the schools. What seems to have happened to the *Consolatio* at the end of the Middle Ages is that it became even more a text predominantly read in grammar schools, thus limiting the range of types of commentaries. In Italy the preliminary Latin curriculum became exclusively the domain of grammar schools, while universities and *studia* provided for teaching in the higher disciplines, in law and medicine but also in philosophy (the so-called arts).<sup>3</sup> Most late-medieval Florentine manuscripts, for example, reveal use as schoolbooks in the Italian grammar curriculum. The interlinear and, to a lesser extent, the marginal glossing show an over-whelmingly rudimentary style of comment, containing no philosophical, ethical or theological commentary whatever.<sup>4</sup> This also holds true for Boethius commentaries by famous Italian teachers such as Pietro da Muglio (H1383), respected friend of Petrarch and Boccaccio, and, to a lesser extent, Giovanni Travesio (ca. 1411).<sup>5</sup> Ascensius's commentary from 1498, which was reprinted several times in conjunction with the Pseudo-Aquinas commentary, can also be placed in this tradition, though it already represented a considerable improvement on earlier works as a result of the introduction of humanist learning.<sup>6</sup>

Although this sort of grammatical commentary became prominent—at least in Italy partly as a result of institutional specialization and changes in the intellectual climate—the scholastic commentary was not simply displaced, as can be seen from the widespread circulation of Trevet's commentary in the fifteenth century (cut down to manageable extracts for use in marginal glosses) and the Pseudo-Aquinas commentary, which ran into several editions. Scholasticism and humanism were of course not monolithic and homogeneous movements nor was the one replaced by the other. Scholasticism developed simultaneously with humanism, which is not surprising given the fact that, broadly speaking, scholasticism had a traditional stronghold in the universities, while humanists were often active at a pre-university level, viz. in the grammar schools. A comparison between the two in terms of schooling is therefore to compare like with unlike.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> R. Black in R. Black and G. Pomaro, *Boethius's 'Consolation of Philosophy' in Italian Medieval and Renaissance Education: Schoolbooks and their glosses in Florentine manuscripts*, SISMEL, Certosa, Florence (forthcoming in 1999)

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* Cf. P. F. Gehl, *A Moral Art. Grammar, Society, and Culture in Trecento Florence*, Ithaca-London 1993, 152-158 (on Boethius); T. Ricklin, '...*Quello non conosciuto da molti libro di Boezio*. Hinweise zur *Consolatio philosophiae* in Norditalien', in *Boethius in the Middle Ages*, eds. Hoenen and Nauta, 267-286.

<sup>5</sup> G. F. Vescovini, 'Due commenti inediti del XIV secolo al ADe consolazione philosophiae di Boezio', *Rivista critica di storia della filosofia* 13 (1958), 384-414, and the fine comments by Black in Black and Pomaro, *Boethius's Consolation of Philosophy*'.

<sup>6</sup> *Commentum duplex in Boetium de consolatione philosophiae*, Lugduni 1498 (= Ps-Aquinas and Badius Ascensius). This commentary has not been properly studied. Its orientation is grammatical and stylistic, as can be seen from the many quotations from Lorenzo Valla's *Elegantiae*. For brief remarks see P. Courcelle, *La Consolation de Philosophie dans la tradition littéraire. Antécédents et postérité de Boèce*, Paris 1967, 331-332; O. Herding, 'Probleme des frühen Humanismus in Deutschland', *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 38 (1956), 344-389, on 352; P. G. Schmidt, 'Jodocus Badius Ascensius als Kommentator', in *Der Kommentar in der Renaissance*, eds. A. Buck and O. Herding, Boppard 1975, 63-71, esp. 66.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. R. Black, 'Italian Renaissance Education: Changing Perspectives and Continuing Controversies', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52 (1991), 315-334, on 324-325, who rightly criticizes A. Grafton and L. Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities. Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe*, Cambridge, Mass. 1986 on this score. On the relationship between scholasticism and humanism see also the perceptive

The commentary of the northern humanist Johannes Murmellius, which is the subject of this chapter, still reflects something of the older tradition of grammatical commentaries, but went far beyond that tradition, strongly supporting and propagating the ideals and programme of humanist education in the Low Countries. As such it must be considered as one among many examples, but seen in the context of the commentary tradition of Boethius, it is illustrative of the changes which the *Consolatio* underwent in this period of transition.

## 2. *Life and works of Johannes Murmellius*

Born at Roermond in 1480 into a poor family and soon an orphan, Murmellius attended at the famous Latin school in Deventer under the direction of Alexander Hegius (the same school which Erasmus had attended in the 1480s), and matriculated at the university of Cologne in 1496.<sup>8</sup> He was a student of the Bursa Laurentiana, the stronghold of the *via albertiana*, devoted to the thought of Albert the Great, which was a powerful rival to the Bursa Montana, where the thought of Thomas Aquinas was venerated or thought to have been so over the ages. Cologne was an important university at that time, certainly not a backwater of pure scholastic philosophy as is often thought. As in Italy and elsewhere, here too humanist ideas developed simultaneously with scholasticism and were fostered rather than hampered by an interest in the thought of the great medieval theologians. Several of the theologians who were teaching in the Bursae had humanist interests. As Tewes writes in his monumental study of the Cologne bursae: 'spätestens in den neunziger Jahren [of the fifteenth century] muß der Humanismus an dieser Burse [i.e. Montana] unverrückbar in das traditionelle scholastische Lehrprogramm integriert worden sein', and the same is true for the Bursa Laurentiana.<sup>9</sup> As an alumnus of the Bursa Laurentiana, it is therefore not surprising to find Murmellius composing a poem in praise of Albert the Great in 1507.

Friendships were cemented already in Deventer but especially in Münster. A key figure in this network of friends was Rudolf von Langen, who was a close friend of the Cologne Albertists.<sup>10</sup> Von Langen, a devout and pious man and provost of Münster cathedral chapter was not only an enthusiastic advocate of humanist ideas but also full of admiration for Albert the Great. He belonged to the group of scholars, also including Alexander Hegius and Rudolf Agricola, that gathered around Wessel Gansfort in Aduard near Groningen. Later, in 1500 he

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remarks in *Medieval Literary Criticism*, eds. Minnis and Scott, 9-10 and notes for further bibliography referring, for example, to the important scholarship of P. O. Kristeller; cf. C. C. Greenfield, *Humanist and Scholastic Poetics, 1250-1500*, London-Toronto 1981.

<sup>8</sup> On Murmellius's life, see M. A. Nauwelaerts, 'Johannes Murmellius, Roermond 1480-Deventer 1517', in *Historische Opstellen over Roermond en omgeving*, ed. A. van Rijswijck *et al.*, Roermond 1951, 201-234 (with a chronological list of Murmellius's writings on 228-233); D. Reichling, *Johannes Murmellius. Sein Leben und seine Werke*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1880; the article in *Nieuw Nederlandsch biografisch woordenboek* I, 1348-1351 (by van der Velden); H. E. van Gelder, *Geschiedenis der Latijnsche School te Alkmaar*, vol. I, Alkmaar 1905, 39-45, 90-108, 149-155.

<sup>9</sup> G.-R. Tewes, *Die Bursen der Kölner Artisten-Fakultät bis zur Mitte des 16. Jahrhunderts*, Cologne 1993, 683 and 726. Part V (pp. 665-805) of this extremely valuable study is devoted to 'Bursen-Humanismus und Bursen-Scholastik in Köln'. Murmellius is mentioned on 699-700, as well as in the section on the Albertists, several of whom became good friends of Murmellius (713-730).

<sup>10</sup> See R. Stupperich and I. Guenther, 'Rudolf von Langen', in *Contemporaries of Erasmus*, eds. P. G. Bietenholz with the assistance of T. B. Deutscher, 3 vols., Toronto 1985-87, II, 290-291; Tewes, *Die Bursen*, 715-717. The influence of the Modern Devotion on Murmellius is often presupposed because of his contacts with men such as Rudolf von Langen, but should not be exaggerated, as Herding, 'Probleme des frühen Humanismus', 357 n. 52 correctly notices.

was able to reform the school in the Münster chapter by introducing a curriculum of humanist studies. Murmellius, who had become a licentiate in arts on 14 March 1500 and a master of arts in 1504, was appointed co-rector of the school by Rector Kemnerus on Von Langen's initiative. Murmellius taught in Münster for several years, first in the cathedral school, and later, after a dispute with Kemnerus, at St Ludgerus school, and still later once again in Kemnerus's school. Kemnerus was an alumnus of the Bursa Montana, and, as was often the case, the rivalry between the two Bursae may have added to the personal animosity between the two men.<sup>11</sup>

In 1513 Murmellius accepted appointment as rector at the grammar school of Alkmaar, which then attracted vast numbers of students owing to Murmellius's reputation. After the sack of Alkmaar in 1517, Murmellius had to leave and taught briefly at Zwolle, before departing for Deventer where he was appointed rector at the St Lebuin's school. Within a month, however, he died suddenly at the age of 37. It was generally believed that he had been poisoned by another candidate for the Deventer rectorate, Listrius, but these rumours seem unfounded.

In his short life Murmellius published a great number of books, mostly intended for use in schools to replace the medieval textbooks; we know of at least 25 schoolbooks, 9 collection of poems and epigrams, and a complete list of his works would probably include more than 50 titles. His reputation as editor of (post-)classical texts, author of pedagogical works and poet brought him lasting fame, some of his works continuing to be printed and studied till the end of the eighteenth century. Among his works we meet typical products of a humanist teacher including the *Enchiridion scholasticorum* (on the duties and responsibilities of pupils), a humanist introduction to the Aristotelian categories<sup>12</sup>, a succesful anthology of Roman elegists, moralizing elegies (*Elegiarum moralium libri quatuor*), an ode to Münster, and a Latin primer, entitled *Pappa puerorum*, which run into 32 editions and must count as his most succesful work. But without doubt his commentary on Boethius is his best work and has rightly been called 'a creditable piece of philological scholarship'.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. The 'enarrationes autographas' of Agricola

Having already published an edition of the text of the *Consolatio* in 1511 with a few notes, Murmellius came forward with his scholarly commentary, which was published by Albert Pafraet in Deventer (1514).<sup>14</sup> Like his collection of elegies, the commentary is dedicated to Rudolf von Langen, whom he also praises several times in his poems. In this letter of dedication Murmellius writes that Boethius deserved a better commentator than himself, but he had been served even less well in the past. This was also the reason why other humanists edited Boethius or composed commentaries, as is clear from the prefaces and introductory material that Murmellius includes in his edition: their common intention was to rescue Boethius's text from the corruptions and impurities due to the medieval tradition, and to replace the often silly glosses from the late medieval commentaries (especially the work by Pseudo-Aquinas) with

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<sup>11</sup> Tewes, *Die Bursen*, 697-700.

<sup>12</sup> *In Aristotelis decem praedicamenta isagoge*, Deventer 1513.

<sup>13</sup> C. G. van Leijenhors and I. Guenther, 'Johannes Murmellius', in *Contemporaries of Erasmus*, II, 471. Cf. Nauwelaerts, 'Johannes Murmellius', 213: 'het filologisch meesterwerk'. Studies of the commentary are few: F. D'Elia, 'Il commento di Giovanni Murmellius al carne Boeziano AO qui perpetuae', *Miscellanea Francescana* 83, fasc. 3-4 (1983), 450-454 (a note on the famous III m. 9) and Herding, 'Probleme des frühen Humanismus', esp. 368-374.

<sup>14</sup> The commentary was reprinted several times (Cologne 1516; Cologne 1535; Basel 1570, and in Migne, *Patrologia Latina* 63.869A-1074A). All quotations in this article refer to the reprint in Migne (though I have checked the editions from 1514 and 1570). As early as 1501 Murmellius lectured on the *Consolatio* (Reichling, *Johannes Murmellius*, 92 n. 3).

humanist annotations.<sup>15</sup>

A more striking and certainly more important insertion in his commentary is part of a commentary on the *Consolatio* by the famous Dutch humanist Rudolf Agricola, who had died in 1485 at the age of 41. Murmellius tells us that, when he was 20 years old (that is, in 1500) and had begun teaching in Münster, he came upon these 'enarrationes autographas'.<sup>16</sup> From Murmellius's account it appears that Agricola had been asked for help in explaining Boethius's text by his friend Lambertus Vrijlinck of Groningen, a doctor in Medicine, who had received his degree in Ferrara, with Agricola as witness on 22 December 1478. This may suggest a date of composition in about 1475, the year in which Agricola moved to Ferrara to improve his knowledge of Greek, which at the time he wrote these notes was not yet very advanced. Agricola did not get far with the commentary, and the only part of the *Consolatio* for which we have his notes is from metre 4 to prose 6 of Book I, although Murmellius's words elsewhere suggest that he had not received all that was left of Agricola's comments on Boethius.<sup>17</sup> Lambertus had shown these notes to Murmellius (probably on a visit to Münster). It seems that, on his sudden departure, Lambertus took the autograph with him but not before Murmellius or someone else had made a transcript.<sup>18</sup> Murmellius had every reason to be excited about these comments (which he nevertheless published only after an interval of more than ten years). Agricola's name had spread far and wide, not so much as a result of his works on education (which were published only much later), but through Erasmus's repeated tribute to this great humanist and through his wide-ranging enquiries about the whereabouts of the manuscripts of the *De inventione dialectica* (for example made in the *Adagia* of 1508, known to Murmellius; he quotes it, for example, at 966C, 984C, and 1060C). It is hardly surprising then that by the time Murmellius came to publish his own commentary on Boethius, he took the opportunity to include Agricola's notes, 'lest they wither away any longer in my bookcase (*dactylotheca*), giving full credit to that 'uir tum doctissimus tum eloquentissimus'.

In my discussion I shall not always draw a firm line between the two commentators, since their approach and explanations are of the same character, possibly owing to some emendation on Murmellius's part.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Murmellius (PL 63.869B), Nicholas Crescius (870C/D), James of Bologna (871B-878A), and Agostino Dati.

<sup>16</sup> For Murmellius's account, see 908D-909C. There may also have been a connection with Cologne and, particularly, with the Albertists in the protracted and enigmatic story of the publication of Agricola's *De inventione dialectica*, viz. in the person of Pompejus Occo, who studied in the Bursa Laurentiana in 1504-1505. His uncle Adolf Occo, to whom Agricola had bequeathed his possessions on his death in 1485, bequeathed these in turn to his nephew Pompejus in 1503. See Tewes, *Die Bursen*, 711 and notes with bibliography; J. M. M. Hermans, 'Rudolph Agricola and his Books, with some Remarks on the Scriptorium of Selwerd', in *Rodolphus Agricola Phrisius 1444-1485*, eds. F. Akkerman and A. J. Vanderjagt, Leiden, 123-135 on 130, and L. Jardine, *Erasmus. Man of Letters. The Construction of Charisma in Print*, Princeton 1993, 83-128.

<sup>17</sup> 'Reliqua Rodolphi Agricolae quae in Boetium scripsisse fertur in manus meas non peruenerunt, quae utinam peruenissent! Nam ut haec, ita et illa sane quam libens tibi communicarem' (949C/D).

<sup>18</sup> At one place, Agricola described his method of writing as disorderly, with many deletions: 'perplexe perturbateque omnia, deleta multa, multa traiecta, interlita...', *epist.* 18, ed. A. H. van der Laan, *Anatomie van een taal. Rodolphus Agricola en Antonius Liber aan de wieg van het humanistische Latijn in de Lage Landen (1469-1485)*, Groningen 1998, 214, though he had a clear handwriting (see *Rodolphus Agricola*, eds. Akkerman and Vanderjagt, Plate VI on p. 125). Perhaps the 'enarrationes autographas' about which Murmellius speaks had already been 'transcribed' and polished by someone else.

<sup>19</sup> Only once does Murmellius take issue with Agricola, and rightly so, because there

#### 4. *Accessus and structure*

Murmellius begins his commentary with a prologue, listing a series of headings under which a text to be read in the class was analysed. He discusses Boethius's life and works, the title, the style, the intention of the writer, the number of books, its utility, and the part of philosophy to which it pertains. Though it had ancient roots, this type of *accessus*, 'type C' in Hunt's pioneering study of this genre, became especially widely popular in the twelfth century and it continued to be used both in Latin and vernacular writings in the later medieval period and throughout the Renaissance.<sup>20</sup> In Murmellius's prologue there is an extensive albeit not original *vita*, using Procopius, Agnellus of Ravenna, Gregory the Great and Cassiodorus as his sources (including king Theoderic's letter to Boethius, according to Cassiodorus's *Variae* 1.45, also drawn upon by Trevet in his prologue). He omits and indeed explicitly rejects some of the explanations of Boethius's names, etymologically often incorrect, which are found in medieval commentaries. His remarks on Boethius's style do not concur with the standard medieval opinion, expressed in traditional *accessus*, that Boethius can measure up to Cicero in prose and Virgil in metre. According to Murmellius, Boethius's style is a 'middle style' ('*mediocris*') more philosophical than oratorical and, though unadorned and plain, not unworthy for an inquirer of truth.<sup>21</sup> Murmellius is more in line with his medieval predecessors when he writes that the utility of the *Consolatio* is the discernment of true from false goods, thereby ultimately arriving at '*solidam perpetuamque beatitudinem bene honesteque vivendo*' (885A), and that it pertains to moral rather than theoretical philosophy and to the active rather than to the contemplative life, though the ultimate part of the *Consolatio* borders on metaphysics and theology. Almost every medieval commentator had stressed the ethical aspect of Boethius and indeed of almost all grammatical *auctores*, including Ovid (in order to sanitize the meaning of Ovid's erotic poetry).<sup>22</sup> Thus, Murmellius's point was a traditional one.

The structure of the commentary represents a conspicuous simplification when compared to the methods employed in scholastic commentaries. There are hardly any divisions of the text in *divisiones*, *partitiones*, *primo/secundo* and so forth (let alone *quaestiones*), which are prominent features of commentaries by scholars such as Nicholas Trevet, Pierre d'Ailly, Renier of St Truiden and Denys the Carthusian, features which were derided by Murmellius;<sup>23</sup>

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'*dignitatem*' (not: '*indignitatem*') is the correct reading (931D, on I pr. 4).

<sup>20</sup> R. W. Hunt, 'The Introductions to the *Artes* in the Twelfth Century', in *Studia mediaevalia in honorem R. M. Martin*, OP, Bruges 1948, 85-112; A. J. Minnis, *Theory of Authorship. Scholastic literary attitudes in the later Middle Ages*, Aldershot 1988<sup>2</sup> (1984<sup>1</sup>), 17-28. For examples of this type of prologue in humanist commentaries, see *Catalogus translationum et commentariorum*, ed. P. O. Kristeller, Washington 1960-, vol. I, 205-6, 211, 212-213; vol. III, 248, 249 and 258; cf. *Medieval Literary Theory*, eds. Minnis and Scott, 14 n. 10.

<sup>21</sup> 'Proinde ridiculum est quod indocti aiunt Boethium eo dictum Severinum, quod Theodorico regi se opposuerit' (883C/D). 'Stylus est mediocris, et philosophicus magis quam oratorius, non fucatus quidem aut phaleratus, sed qui veritatis inquisitori nequaquam improbetur' (884B). According to a standard *accessus* Boethius 'nec Tullio in prosis nec Virgilio in metris cederet' (ed. R. B. C. Huygens, *Accessus ad Auctores*, Leiden 1970, 47; cf. *Guillelmi de Conchis Glosae super Boetium*, ed. L. Nauta, Turnhout 1999, at I pr. 4, lin. 527-28 app. crit.)

<sup>22</sup> J. B. Allen, *The Ethical Poetic of the Later Middle Ages*, Toronto 1982; *Medieval Literary Theory*, eds. Minnis and Scott, 13-14. On Ovid see A. J. Minnis, 'Latin to Vernacular: Academic Prologues and the Medieval French Art of Love', in *Medieval and Renaissance Scholarship*, eds. N. Mann and B. Munk Olsen, Leiden 1997, 153-186.

<sup>23</sup> See his *Scoparius*, cap. 58 (in *Ausgewählte Werke des Münsterischen Humanisten Johannes Murmellius*, ed. A. Bömer, Münster 1892-95, Heft V, 48-49): '(...) supervacuis

only an occasional 'sequitur' (e.g. 926C) reminds one of the medieval commentary idiom. Each section begins with a short introduction to that particular prose or metre, followed by an elucidation of words and phrases. Murmellius's procedure reflects the simple manner of glossing of a teacher, already long since practised in the schools.

Structure is perhaps too grand a word for what is in fact not more than a concatenation of glosses on words and phrases. Like so many other humanist commentaries on classical texts, Murmellius's work shows an overwhelming attention to philological niceties and tiny details, but an explication of philosophical arguments and their place in Boethius's train of thought is lost.<sup>24</sup> From his programme of teaching in the summer of 1511 we know that Murmellius intended to read with his pupils only the first two books of the *Consolatio*, and it is therefore not surprising to see that the last two, more philosophical, books of the *Consolatio* attract far less attention than the other three.<sup>25</sup> Murmellius shows a bare modicum of interest in such philosophical issues as the metaphysical status of evil and the reconciliation of divine providence and freedom of the will. He is happy to direct the reader to Lorenzo Valla's *De libero arbitrio*, and to leave the question open to 'the judgement of wiser scholars' whether Valla had obscured rather than solved the problem of free will.<sup>26</sup> Boethius's use of the term 'fatum', which had caused some anxiety for medieval commentators, elicits only a string of definitions from older authorities, and likewise with the question of the existence of time, he does not commit himself to any of the given definitions.<sup>27</sup>

As we have seen in the case of William of Conches and Nicholas Trevet, the structure of medieval commentaries could at times be upset by the incorporation of long digressions on natural philosophical topics, evoked by Boethius's frequent allusions to planets, stars, comets, winds, and other cosmological and meteorological phenomena. Although in the humanist period too, commentaries continued to be used as a 'scaffold to be decorated with all manner of general information',<sup>28</sup> the nature of this general information was adapted to the prerequisites of the curriculum: to read and write classical Latin fluently. A modicum of science was welcome—Romans had written extensively on the quadrivial arts, after all—but in Murmellius's work this is brought down to the bare minimum of some basic, traditional 'facts'.<sup>29</sup> More relevant to the average pupil was some knowledge of Roman history, daily life, geography and

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quaestiunculis, obiectionibus, dilutionibus, sophismatis (...) etc.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Grafton and Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities*, chapter 1, on the work of the famous 15th-c. humanist Guarino: 'There is little attention to Cicero's train of thought or line of argument—this is entirely lost in the scramble for detail (p. 21).

<sup>25</sup> See his preface to his collection of epigrams where he announces (and thus publicizes) his projected programme of reading at the Ludgeri school in Münster (*Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Bömer, Heft I, 18).

<sup>26</sup> 'Concludit humani libertatem arbitrii et diuinam praescientiam simul consistere: super qua re latius lege et relege Dialogum Laurentii Vallae, qui juste ne taxet Seuerinum nostrum, meliusque eo hanc materiam expediat, an sophisticis cavillis agat, et oratoriis fucis obducat ueritatem, non est nunc meae facultatis iudicare. Verum id censurae doctioribus relinquo' (1072C). Murmellius's turns of phrase suggest that he prefers Boethius's account.

<sup>27</sup> On fatum, see 1054D; on time 1023-1024. Cf. the catalogue of opinions on vision (1068B, on Boethius's words 'iactis radiis', V pr. 4; here Murmellius notes that Boethius follows Plato).

<sup>28</sup> Grafton and Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities*, 20 (on Guarino's commentary on the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, believed by Guarino at that time to be a work of Cicero).

<sup>29</sup> E.g. on the planets (896A/D, in fact a long quotation from Cicero's *De natura deorum*), on Venus and Mercury (935-936).

mythology, and on these topics Murmellius offers some information when necessary (e.g. 920-C/D).

### 5. *Philological niceties*

In the grammar schools of the fifteenth century, Boethius was primarily read for his Latin and his moral commonplaces (an aspect to which we shall return) rather than for his philosophy. Consequently, Murmellius's notes and clarifications focus mainly on grammar, syntax, figures of speech, meaning of words, spelling, other linguistic phenomena and, only occasionally, formal aspects of argumentation. In places, this leads on to textual criticism and the emendation of readings which were found in the medieval manuscripts. The poor quality of manuscripts and early printed books made the activity of *emendatio*, even at an elementary reading level, a necessary job for the humanists. *Emendatio* is explicitly mentioned by Murmellius in his *Enchiridion scholasticorum* (Cologne 1505) as an important element in the humanists' grammar syllabus: 'at the suggestion of his teacher, the diligent student should carefully correct (*emendet*) his textbooks'.<sup>30</sup> His commentary bears witness to the importance of *emendatio*. I shall give a few examples.

In metre 4 (line 11) of Book I, where Boethius speaks about 'cruel tyrants (*saevos tyrannos*) raging with no real power', Murmellius writes that one should read 'feros' and not 'saevos', a reading which Rudolf von Langen had seen in 'quodam exemplari' twelve years ago when he was consulted by Murmellius (913B).<sup>31</sup> Rudolf von Langen is also credited with the reading 'excitantis' in stead of 'exagitantis' (I m. 4, line 6), which can be read in 'exemplaribus depravatis' but which is supposed to be unmetrical (913A). And in the same metre (line 2), Agricola wants us to read 'dedit' instead of 'egit' which 'many copies have' (910C). (Ironically, the most recent editor of the *Consolatio*, Bieler, has opted for the readings rejected by these three humanists.) In the next prose part, Agricola emends (correctly) 'percussi sumus' to 'perculsi sumus', quoting Tacitus to strengthen his case (920B).

To convey some impression of other types of notes and explanations, I shall give some further examples. Shifts of meaning are noticed, for example in a gloss on the word 'barbarorum' (917D). Here Agricola explains that the Greeks were wont to divide the whole human race into two categories: Greek and non-Greek, i.e. *barbari*. After the Greeks, Italians used the word to denote people devoid of 'humanitas et eruditio', and now Christians have appropriated the term to refer to non-Christians ('gentiles'). The negative connotation of the word 'tyrannus' is explained by its Greek origin and the Greeks' craving after freedom (911C). The influence of the vernacular is noticed at least once by Agricola, in the word 'stufa' (not used by Boethius of course), meaning 'heated room' or 'bath', for 'caldaria'.<sup>32</sup> Formal aspects of argumentation are

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<sup>30</sup> Quoted by Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books*, 88; Latin text from the *Opusculum de discipulorum officiis: quod enchiridion scholasticorum inscribitur* in Moss, 295 (= *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Bömer, Heft II, 55; on p. 54 Murmellius voices the usual complaint about the poor quality of editions).

<sup>31</sup> Von Langen had written two letters (dated 15 and 16 July 1501) on the text of the *Consolatio* to Murmellius, which the latter published as an appendix to his *Epistolae morales* (reprinted in K. Krafft and W. Crecelius, *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Humanismus am Niederrhein und in Westfalen*, 2. Heft, Elberfeld 1875, 33-34). Murmellius incorporated Von Langen's suggestions in his commentary.

<sup>32</sup> 'quam hodie barbare stufam vocamus, secundum sonum Germanicae linguae' (911A). Cf. Ari Wesseling, 'Agricola and word explanation', in *Rodolphus Agricola*, eds. Akkerman and Vanderjagt, 229-235, who discusses a letter from Agricola to Hegius, in which a number of loan words are mentioned (not 'stufa' though). Wesseling assumes on account of the term 'corrupted words' ('corrupta') that Agricola 'condemned the introduction of vernacular loan-words into Latin' (231), but in the example quoted here Agricola includes himself among the users of such words ('vocamus'), 'barbare' probably meaning nothing more than 'not according to/found in classical Latin'.

identified as in *`Nonne igitur bonum censes]* Syllogismus est tertii primae figurae modi' (1058C on IV pr. 7).

Many explanations traditionally involved etymologies, but there is a substantial difference in quality between the etymologies of the medieval scholar and the humanist's. Thus, Agricola gives etymologies, often taking into account a Greek origin, as in: *`Caminus]* Α καίωμαι, quod est ardeo, dicitur' (911B). In typically humanist fashion a geographical note on Mount Vesuvius is added, stating that the Vesuvius should not be confused (what is often done by *`indocti*) with the Vesulus in the Alps (cf. Murmellius on Vesuvius, 913A/B). Semantic precision is aimed at in many lexical explanations. Agricola writes on *`coelum*' for example: *`Alii quasi caelatum, id est scalptum propter varias stellarum imagines arbitrabantur: unde et mundus ab ornatu dicitur videtur: quemadmodum apud Graecos etiam κόσμος, id est mundus, ab ornatu dicitur; alii coelum ab eo quod Graece dicitur κοῦλον, id est cavum. Si primum dicatur, scribendum erit per ae diphthongum; si secundum, per oe. Nam quod vulgus dicit coelum quasi casam ≡λίου, id est solis, ineptum est, sicut multa indoctorum'* (934B/C). Another example is offered by Agricola's note on *`auctoritas*': after having listed some derivations which he thinks somewhat far-fetched (*`longius quaesitum*'), such as those stemming from *`augere*' or from the Greek *`α↔τεν*', he prefers to spell the word without *`c*' on analogy with *`fautum*', derived from *`favere*': *`et sicut a faveo fautum, sic ab aveo autum, quod est extra usum; et inde autor descendere videtur, quoniam is sit qui rem factam aveat, hoc est cupiat'* (917B).<sup>33</sup> I shall give also some examples of Murmellius's use of Greek: *`Sirenes]* Graece scribitur Σειρ←ν'. Falluntur igitur qui per υ scribunt. Nec a σύρω, id est traho, sed vel a σείω, vel (quod magis probant) πε τ↑ς σειρ ς derivatur' (893D). When Boethius's diction reveals his debt to the Greek, this is noted too, as in *`notas insigniti frontibus*' (branded on the forehead; I pr. 4): *`Figura loquendi Graeca*', Agricola comments, for *`notis*' would have been more correct (921A). *`Nihil puduit*' in the same passage is a *`locutio Graecanica*' (921C). *`Decretum*' is glossed as corresponding with Greek δόγμα, *`quod indocti pro doctrina accipiunt'* (924B). The examples are endless.

Murmellius may have already received his first lessons in Greek in the school at Deventer and later at Cologne in the class of Caesarius, a former pupil of the great humanist Lefèvre d'Étaples. In 1512 the rector, co-rectors and pupils alike of the chapter school in Münster are found attending lectures by Caesarius.<sup>34</sup> Owing to Murmellius's efforts, the study of Greek was introduced into the curriculum, whereby Münster became the first chapter school in Germany to offer teaching in Greek. His knowledge of the language was not particularly deep, as is clear from his simple lexical explications, but it enabled him at least to print in Greek characters (for the first time) Boethius's Greek quotations, which had up till then been transmitted in a garbled way or simply omitted. For their explanation, he had to call in the help of his friends, Caesarius and Joannes Aedicollus.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> For Agricola's knowledge of Greek see J. IJsewijn, *'Agricola as a Greek Scholar'*, *Rodolphus Agricola*, eds. Akkerman and Vanderjagt, 21-37; A. H. van der Laan, *Anatomie van een taal*, 181-190, with further references.

<sup>34</sup> Reichling, *Johannes Murmellius*, 79-81; Nauwelaerts, *'Joannes Murmellius'*, 202, 209-210, and 222.

<sup>35</sup> See e.g. 918C/D; 932A; 957B; 1056A. Though there is plenty of Greek in the commentary as published, it is not entirely clear whether the Greek was written in Greek characters by Agricola. In one place Murmellius states explicitly that Agricola had written the Greek expression *Λνος πρε ς λύραν* (i.e. an ass hearing the sound of a lyre; I pr. 4, line 2; this proverb is also quoted by Agricola in his letter no. 22, see van der Laan, *Anatomie van een taal*, 366) in *'Latinis litteris'*, perhaps because Lambertus, at whose request Agricola wrote these notes on Boethius, did not know Greek (*'forsitan eo quod is cuius usui scriberet Graeca nesciret'*, 918C). Elsewhere Murmellius writes that Agricola seems to have put a Greek maxim in Greek characters: *ζεππου θε* (Sequere Deum: legitur autem hoc Graecum in exemplari quod mihi commodavit Caesarius, et in epistola Joannis Aedicolli ad me data... Porro Rudolphus Agricola videtur haec Graeca ponere *θεΣ λλ'ο← θεοϑς*, id est, Deo, et non

Sometimes Boethius is by Murmellius and Agricola criticized for his Latin. Living as he did in the early sixth century, he did not always meet the standards of classical Latinity, and certainly not the humanists' ideal (or idea) of pure, classical Latin. His images and metaphors are sometimes not to the taste of humanist commentators. When Boethius writes, for example, 'compta colore' (decked in false colours; I m. 5, line 38), Agricola criticizes him: Boethius ought rather to have written 'tincta colore' (937D). Likewise, 'in sententia locatus' (holding to an opinion; I pr. 6) is called a 'frigida et segnis translatio' for 'locatam in eum sententiam' or 'nixus sententia' which would have been 'plainer and better' (948D). And in I metre 6 the woods are inappropriately called 'purpureum' (from the violets), because Boethius is describing winter, a season in which no violets are found (Agricola seems to rule out that the possibility that the 'saeuis aquilonibus' in the next line may blow in early spring). Boethius might however have alluded to the 'Greek property of word πορφύρεον, which is φυρόμενον, meaning totally confused and stirred up': the woods are heavily shaken by the winds of the winter (945B).

On the other hand, Boethius is sometimes defended against the far more severe criticisms of Lorenzo Valla, who had launched an attack on his philosophy and particularly his Latin, abounding as it did in ungrammatical substantives such as 'summun', 'bonum', 'unum', and 'ens'.<sup>36</sup> Although Valla had famously called Boethius the 'last of the Romans, first of the scholastics', it was especially the second part of this tag that summed up what Valla thought of him in the field of language, namely that with Boethius, and largely because of him, Latin had deviated from its classical path and deteriorated in successive ages. This concern for a return to classical Latin was shared by Agricola, of course, though he was less of a purist than Valla, vindicating words such as 'entitas' and 'Platonitas', which Valla wanted to abolish.<sup>37</sup> To give an example: 'Affectus', Agricola writes, is what the Greeks call πάθος, and what moderns, ignorant of the Latin spoken by Cicero and other classical authors ('nostri hodie ignari Ciceronis et aliorum auctorum Latine loquentium'), incorrectly call 'passio' (943A). Murmellius repeats the point later on (950A/B), but generally takes no heed of Valla's appeal to replace substantives such as 'summun', 'bonum' and the like with 'res'. At one place, he refers to Valla's *De vero falsoque bono* (book 3), but adds that here the great Valla was 'driven by too great a desire for quibbling and hairsplitting' ('nimia cavillandi libidine percitus'; 1047B/D). And elsewhere he defends Boethius's Latin against Valla's criticism.<sup>38</sup>

These examples will hardly come as a surprise to readers of Renaissance editions of classical texts, but together with the impressive array of Greek, Latin, ancient and contemporary sources that Murmellius draws upon, they warrant, I think, the conclusion that his edition is indeed a creditable piece of philological scholarship, and that it may very well have been the first scholarly edition of the *Consolatio*, certainly more sophisticated than the grammatical commentaries from the later medieval period and that of Badius Ascensius of 1498, who had already started to move away from the medieval 'interpretatio Christiana'. But as was noticed above, a price had to be paid for this wealth of philological details and medley

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diis (subaudi) servias seu serviendum' (932A). Aedicollius and Caesarius had supplied Murmellius with readings of Greek quotations in Boethius from 'old copies', probably Carolingian manuscripts (e.g. 'ex pervetusto exemplari', 957B).

<sup>36</sup> For Valla's criticism see *Elegantiae* 6.34 in his *Opera omnia*, 2 vols., Basel 1540, repr. Turin 1962, vol. I, 215-216. Cf. F. Gaeta, *Lorenzo Valla. Filologia e Storia nell'Umanesimo Italiano*, Naples 1955.

<sup>37</sup> See Wesseling, 'Agricola and word explanation', 230-231. On Valla's 'reconstruction' of classical Latin see e.g. D. Marsch, 'Grammar, Method, and Polemic in Lorenzo Valla's *Elegantiae*', *Rinascimento*, 2nd ser. 19 (1979), 91-116.

<sup>38</sup> L. Valla had missed a participle in 'solantur maesti nunc mea fata senis' (I m. 1, l. 8), but Murmellius writes that one should add 'facti', thereby getting the following paraphrase: 'Musae solantur nunc mea fata, qui ob fortunae iniquitatem factus sum moestus senex' (887B-C).

of information on history, mythology, geography and natural history: Boethius's philosophical arguments lie buried under this mass of details. But then, philosophical exegesis was not the aim of schoolmaster Mummellius.

### 6. Platonism and allegory

Boethius was recognized throughout the Middle Ages as a Christian author, but at the same time it was realized that Christianity was conspicuously absent from the *Consolatio*; hence, the urge was always felt to defend Boethius from critics (such as Bovo of Corvey, ca. 900) who associated him with the pagan Platonists. In his Boethius commentary, published in 1498, Badius Ascensius, however, had rejected the 'interpretatio Christiana' of the *Consolatio* without feeling that he thereby jeopardized its status as a morally edifying classic.<sup>39</sup>

This de-christianization of the *Consolatio* became possible, of course, only when a wider knowledge of Boethius's time, culture and its pagan background began to be acquired. Like Badius Ascensius, Agricola and Mummellius felt that a sound interpretation of the *Consolatio* must take Platonic philosophy into account, without denying the fact that Boethius was a Christian. As Agricola writes: 'Boethius was not only a Christian, but also a follower of the old Academy of Plato' (946C). At times, however, even Mummellius cannot refrain from giving passages a Christian twist, for example where Boethius writes about the many ('multos') who 'have sought the enjoyment of happiness not simply through death but even through pain and suffering'. Mummellius glosses 'multos' with: 'Non Stoicos, neque Cynicos, sed magis Christianos martyres accipe' (968D on II pr. 4).<sup>40</sup> And Boethius's description of marriage as a sacred bond is glossed by Mummellius as 'confirmed by the blood of Christ'.<sup>41</sup>

The allusions in the text to Neoplatonic doctrines such as the pre-existence of the soul, knowledge as recollection, the creation of the World Soul and the eternity of the world, are elucidated by ample quotations from, for example, Plato's *Timaeus* ('pulcherrimum librum', 1023A) and Macrobius's *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*. Such typically humanist notions as the immortality of the soul and the divine origin of man's soul are emphasized.<sup>42</sup> The regular occurrence, however, of phrases like 'ex Platonis doctrina', 'ut Platoni placet' and 'ut Platoni visum est' must make it clear that Mummellius, knowing that Boethius was more of a Platonist than an Aristotelian ('magis sit Platonicus quam Aristotelicus'; 1066C), cannot always share Boethius's Platonism: the notion of the soul's preexistence is rejected as 'vanissimum' (1036B); Plato is said to use 'summa et incredibili eloquentia' (1037A/B) and the authority of Augustine ('omnium mortalium longe doctissimus', 1024C) is invoked, though not quoted, to refute this 'Platonicum dogma' (1036B).<sup>43</sup> The concomitant notion of recollection of

<sup>39</sup> Schmidt, 'Jodocus Badius Ascensius', 67-68; Courcelle, *La Consolation de Philosophie*, 331-332.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. 992A (on II m. 8, line 22). Mummellius does not gloss the other passage, where Boethius, according to many medieval commentators, was alluding to Christian martyrs (IV pr. 6.42, ed. L. Bieler, p. 83)—an example of Christian interpretation that Badius Ascensius had rejected (*Commentum duplex in Boetium*, p. 267, quoted by Courcelle, *Consolation de Philosophie*, 332).

<sup>41</sup> Mummellius reads 'sanctos' in stead of 'sancto' in 'Hic sancto populos quoque iunctos foedere continet (...)' (II m. 8, l. 22-23), and comments: 'Sanctos] Justos, pacis amantes, Christi sanguine confirmatos. Vel sanctos, factis sacris et juramentis praestitis consociatos' (992A).

<sup>42</sup> E.g. on III m. 2: 'Unde probat hominis originem coelestem esse, et a summo bono profectam' (997C).

<sup>43</sup> I cannot therefore agree with D'Elia, who suggested (without much evidence) that 'Mummellius [s]equendo questa precisa linea ermeneutica di convergenza del carne boeziano [i.e. III metre 9] con la dottrina biblico-patristica (...) è indotto a minimizzare la concezione dell'anima del mondo e della preesistenza delle anime' ('Il commento', 453). On the history of

knowledge is explained in medieval fashion, using the subjunctive contrary to fact: the soul would have known all the things it could possibly know, if the body had not weighed it down.<sup>44</sup> And the Boethian 'seed of truth', remaining in the soul after embodiment, is vaguely described as a certain principle and beginning by which man is suited to perceive truth and acquire knowledge' ('Principium et inchoatio quaedam qua est homo veritati percipiendae et acquirendae scientiae naturaliter aptus', 1036C). Yet, it is clear from the ample quotations from Plato and Platonic authors such as Ficino, as well as the noncommittal way in which they are often presented, that Murmellius considers his role as commentator primarily to consist in clarifying philological points and providing sources (from which moral lessons could be drawn) rather than in giving verdicts on the doctrinal soundness of the opinions expressed in the text. Thus he even warns the reader that, although Plato's opinions on the world soul and on souls of lesser beings are not approved of by all Christians, 'Boethian Philosophy follows Plato carefully (*diligenter*) and prudently (*caute*)', and in turn Murmellius 'will expound carefully the elements (*singula*) of Platonic doctrine'. A brief catalogue of opinions on the question whether the heavenly bodies are animated must corroborate the same point, viz. that it does not matter which position one takes 'quantum ad Christianam doctrinam spectat' (1029C/D).

Another aspect of Murmellius's interpretation is the apparent absence of a desire to read more into the text than is in fact there. The medieval bent for allegorization is discarded, leaving thereby more room for the humanists' interest in philology and history. Thus, the Orpheus myth at the end of Book III, as well as other mythological passages, are dealt with in a cursory way and are not treated as *integumenta*, that is, the cloaking of more profound (Christian) meanings. Nevertheless, Murmellius follows in the footsteps of his medieval predecessors when he briefly summarizes the standard medieval interpretation, initiated by William of Conches: 'Quam [sc. fabulam] quidem sic interpretantur: Orpheus uxorem habuit Eurydicen (...). Est autem Eurydice humana anima (...)' (1039B/C). He draws also the distinction between 'fabula' and 'veritas', which we find in medieval commentaries (for example in William of Conches's): 'Hic secundum Fabulam Vulcani filius fuit (...). Veritas tamen secundum philologos et historicos hoc habet, hunc fuisse Evandri nequissimum servum ac furem' (1062A). On the whole, however, Murmellius steers clear of allegory.

In this context, there is an interesting remark by Agricola, who notes that Boethius's pervasive use of medical metaphors, such as milder and stronger medicines to cure the patient Boethius, turns the *Consolatio* almost into 'allegoria' (943B). It is clear that this emphasis on the literal sense has a different ring from that in medieval hermeneutics. For medieval scholars the *Consolatio* could be read at several levels, and the term 'allegoria' was especially used for denoting the deeper meanings, for example, of the Orpheus fable and the myth of the creation of the world in the Platonic hymn in Book III, m. 9. The most that Murmellius will allow by way of a figural sense, on the other hand, is the hardly surprising reading of Lady Philosophy as 'recta ratio' and Boethius as a 'homo fortunae adversitatibus afflictus' (889B).

#### 7. 'Studium duplex est: morum et litterarum'

Apart from the *Accessus*, in which Murmellius, like almost all his medieval predecessors, duly stated that the study of the *Consolatio* pertains to ethics, his commentary frequently underlines the high moral-proverbial value of the *Consolatio*. He regularly exclaims: 'Sententia celebrata' (972A), 'Pulchra verissimaque conclusio' (964A), 'Pulchra exclamatio' (981B), 'Vetus

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these Platonic notions, see my 'The Preexistence of the Soul in Medieval Thought', *Recherches de Théologie ancienne et médiévale* 63 (1996), 93-135, and my 'Platonic and Cartesian Philosophy in the Commentary on Boethius' *Consolatio Philosophiae* by Pierre Cally', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 4 (1996), 79-100.

<sup>44</sup> 'Gravitatem perturbationum et oblivionem, non eorum quae quis in alia vita novit (nam homini antequam nasceretur, aliam vitam fuisse sentire vanissimum est), sed eorum quae apta esset suapte natura (nisi corpori infunderetur, conjugereturque) anima cognoscere' (1036B), followed by Sap. 1.9, which was always quoted at this place by commentators on Boethius.

proverbium' (1003C), 'Sententia est notissima' (1008A) and 'Vetus adagium est' (1021B), impressed as he was not only by their edifying contents but also by their stylistic value.<sup>45</sup> He provides strings of quotations not only to illustrate moral maxims but also to explain phrases, apparently picked up at random from the *Consolatio*. Boethius's dictum 'nobody is free from care in this life' (II pr. 4) is called 'a very true *sententia*', which is illustrated with sayings from Hermogenes, Seneca, Horace, 'Erasmus e Graeco', Euripides, Pliny, Livy, Homer (in Filelfo's version), and Claudian (966B-967A). In the same section, pithy sayings on the mixture of sweet pleasure and sorrow are quoted from Plautus, Apuleius, Ovid, Salomon, and Lucretius. The age-old maxim 'Nature is content with few things and small' (II pr. 5) is illustrated with corroborating sayings from Turpilius, Seneca, Lucanus, Gellius, Cicero, Ambrose, Jerome, the Bible, and Prudentius. The maxim 'He who is silent and speaks at the appropriate time, is wise' (II pr. 7) is exemplified by quotations from Salomon, Diogenes and Thales (indirectly quoted of course), Ecclesiastes, Seneca, Macrobius, Valerius Maximus, and Donatus (986A/B). The examples are endless, and demonstrate the extent to which the *Consolatio* was regarded by Murmellius, like by so many other readers in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, as a storehouse of proverbial wisdom and moral maxims.

Recent scholarship, however, has questioned such an enhanced preoccupation with morals in the classrooms, in particular with reference to Italian humanist education. Was there any serious preoccupation with moral philosophy in daily classroom activities apart from the elevated claims humanists made when they advertised or defended their curriculum in prefaces, orations, letters and other appropriate literary genres? Previous generations of scholars often took the humanists' elevated claims at face value, claims to the effect that their training was essential for turning pupils into virtuous and wise persons, fit to be employed by the ruling élite of state and church. The impact of humanist education on society and its ruling classes was taken for granted. Garin, for example, arrived at the following description: 'Such was humanistic education: not as one has sometimes been led to believe, grammatical and rhetorical study as an end in itself, so much as the formation of a truly human consciousness, open in every direction, through historico-critical understanding of the cultural tradition. *Litterae* (literature) are effectively the means of expanding our personality beyond the confines of the present instance, relating it to paradigmatic experience of man's history (...)'.<sup>46</sup> However, closer scrutiny of humanist teachings, laid down in lectures, commentaries, notes, contemporary records from pupils and so forth, shows an overwhelming preoccupation with philological details, and this raises the question whether previous scholars have not been taken in by the humanists' boasts. Grafton and Jardine, for example, have argued that 'the *ideology* of Renaissance humanism is being taken over as part of a historical account of humanist achievement',<sup>47</sup> but that the historical evidence does not match the humanists' elevated claims about the saving, civilising qualities of their education. Influenced by modern critiques of educational ideologies (for example by Pierre Bourdieu), these scholars have gone further and argued that as a result of the inadequacy of the practical classroom activity to match the fervour of the humanist ideal, 'western Europe as a whole (...) became involved in the mystification of arts education—a connivance in overlooking the evident mismatch between ideals and practice—which has clouded our intellectual judgement of the progress and importance of the liberal arts from the days of Guarino down to T. S. Eliot, Leavis and the twentieth-century guardians of European Acivilisation≐'.<sup>48</sup> A gap between ideals and daily

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<sup>45</sup> *Sententia* was also a rhetorical figure, as Robert Black reminded me; see e.g. *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 4.24-25.

<sup>46</sup> E. Garin, *Educazione umanistica in Italia*, 7, quoted by Grafton and Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities*, 25. Cf. Black, 'Italian Renaissance Education', 315-334, for the historical roots of Garin's position in Crocean, neo-Hegelian idealist philosophy.

<sup>47</sup> Grafton and Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities*, 3.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, xiv-xv.

practice is of course a phenomenon not limited to the classroom of the late-medieval and early modern period, but because the humanist programme is believed to lie at the root of modern lofty conceptions of a liberal arts education, the foundations of which are under attack by modern cultural critics, it is especially the 'ideology' of the ancestors of such an education that is sought, rightly or not, to be unmasked.

Others too have seriously questioned the preoccupation with morals in grammar teaching in the face of the abundance of philological details in commentaries and lectures. Black and Pomaro have made an extensive study of manuscript schoolbooks from Florence and come to the conclusion that 'in view of how the *Consolatio* was read and glossed in schools (...) it is clear at least that Renaissance teachers and pupils did not look to Boethius for moral inspiration and guidance'.<sup>49</sup> Grendler, though still holding firm (unlike Grafton and Jardine, and, though for different reasons, Black) to the conviction that the Renaissance was an era of revolutionary change for the better in terms of education, has pointed to the absence of moral lessons in humanist commentaries: 'Despite the barrage of humanistic assertions that Terence taught virtue, printed commentaries did not draw out moral lessons but confined themselves to expository paraphrase, grammatical analysis, and explanation of unfamiliar persons and terms'.<sup>50</sup> And the same can be said of commentaries on Horace, Caesar, Sallust, and Valerius. But when he comes to speak about 'moral philosophy' as such, Grendler writes that, although 'Renaissance pedagogues neither taught a separate subject called moral philosophy nor read specific texts for that purpose', they 'extracted moral lessons from curricular texts. Practically any story of a virtuous or wicked deed might serve as the springboard for a lesson in morals'.<sup>51</sup> Moral and commonplaces were written down and memorized by pupils, and the very same authors—Terence, Horace, Caesar, Sallust, Valerius Maximus—which were just said to have received merely philological glosses, are now held to be responsible for moral values such as honesty, moderation, loyalty, that is, 'a conservative morality of discipline, fortitude, and respect'.<sup>52</sup>

The same sort of ambiguity is found in a recent book by Paul Gehl.<sup>53</sup> He suggests that the curriculum in elementary classes in trecento Florence consisted of a highly restricted list of pagan and Christian texts (the Donadello, Cato, Aesop, Prosper, Prudentius, and Boethius). This claim, however, is unsupported. In fact, there are many examples of classical texts read at a level no less elementary among Florentine manuscripts.<sup>54</sup> According to him, these texts were chosen for their moral contents: 'the purpose of the *studia humanitatis* was the moral reform of the individual and even of society. The trecento humanists consistently put their reforms in a Christian context, not just for political expediency or to advance their careers [motives which have been strongly emphasized by Grafton and Jardine—LN], but also because they had a deep commitment to the spiritual life'.<sup>55</sup> But here too, the available evidence points in another direction. Gehl himself notices that it is often difficult to say exactly how a text was approached in classroom teaching and that 'the elementary commentary tradition does not go deeply into moral lessons; it is necessarily concerned with the essentials of getting the student

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<sup>49</sup> See Black in Black and Pomaro, *Boethius's 'Consolation of Philosophy' in Italian Renaissance Education*. Cf. Black, 'Italian Renaissance Education'.

<sup>50</sup> P. F. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy. Literacy and Learning 1300-1600*, Baltimore-London 1989, 252, and 252-263.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, 263.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, 264.

<sup>53</sup> *A Moral Art. Grammar, Society, and Culture in Trecento Florence*, Ithaca-London 1993.

<sup>54</sup> As Robert Black has suggested to me in private correspondence.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, 2; see also 13, and *passim*.

through the texts linguistically'.<sup>56</sup>

It is beyond my competence to enter into this debate on the moral aspect of humanist education and the consequences of the failure of humanists to put into practice what they taught in theory, but a discussion of Murmellius's methods and aims may throw some light on the seeming discrepancy between the absence of any overtly moral teaching and the preoccupation with morals by grammar teachers. In piling up quotations, Murmellius could draw on a great number of *florilegia*, commonplace-books, dictionaries, and various kinds of reference books, which were flooding the printing market in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but had already long histories behind them. The practice of excerpting, collecting and arranging quotations, arguments, commonplaces and similar categories of memorable words, was of course a time-honoured affaire, already advocated by Pliny, Seneca and other ancient authors, who often used the metaphor of bees gathering the nectar from various flowers.<sup>57</sup> In the Middle Age too, *florilegia* and other kinds of reference books were widely dispersed, often as part of encyclopedic works, and answered the needs of preachers, to mention only one important groups of users. In addition to all this material, which could reach humanists through various channels, they themselves were busy bees as well, culling honey from an ever increasing field of flowers. In an interesting passage from his *Opusculum de discipulorum officiis* (Cologne 1505), which is essentially a guide to student reading, Murmellius describes this method of culling honey and recommends it to his pupils:<sup>58</sup>

Not inadvisedly, but at the suggestion of his teacher, the diligent student should carefully emend his textbooks, pick out phrases and pithy remarks (*sententiae*) by inserting indicators (*versa puncta*), put a mark against the most memorable passages (*loci*), or, better still, excerpt them, and write what he has extracted in a little book designed for the purpose (...) Remarks which relate to the same subject-matter should be noted down and collected together in one particular place in the notebook (*in unum quendam locum*).

Thus, the inculcation of moral lessons and the learning of Latin were of course two sides of the same coin. Murmellius's phrase 'Studium duplex est: morum et litterarum' is yet another restatement of the perennial theme that good morals are inherent in good Latin. He goes on to list the works from which these phrases and pithy sayings are to be extracted: Cato (i.e. the *Disticha Catonis*), Seneca's *De quattuor virtutibus* (in fact by Martin of Braga), 'a golden book' by Isocrates (probably *Ad Demonicum*) and Jacobus Wimpfeling's *Adolescentia*.<sup>59</sup> Latin grammar should be learnt with the aid of the standard manuals by Perotti, Guarino of Verona, Mancinelli, and other humanists. At a more advanced level, the student should learn Latin syntax 'from short phrases excerpted from classical prose-writers and poets, which demonstrate the same construction and contain edifying and interesting maxims and examples,

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<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, 17; cf. 83. Gehl's study however is seriously marred by various shortcomings, e.g. his arbitrary exclusion of MSS signed as schoolbooks (see Black in Black and Pomaro, *Boethius's 'Consolation of Philosophy in Italian Renaissance Education*).

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books*, 32: 'Reading, marking, learning, digesting, and regurgitating excerpted passages was a universal habit of the West-European literate community. It was also a habit that could cloak significant changes'. I am much indebted to this excellent book. On the bee-metaphor, see *ibid.*, 12 (on Seneca), 14 (Macrobius), 87 (Murmellius). The literature on commonplaces is vast, but mention must be made of the seminal work by E. R. Curtius, *Europäische Literatur und Lateinisches Mittelalter*, Bern-München 1973<sup>8</sup> (1st ed. 1948), 79f., 80, 109 and *passim*.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted and discussed by Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books*, 88. For the Latin text, see *ibid.* 295 or *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Bömer, Heft II, 55.

<sup>59</sup> *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Bömer, Heft II, 57.

so that Aby constant repetition they may be imprinted on the memory≡' (*crebra repetitione memoriae quasi imprimantur*).<sup>60</sup> Works that do not teach decent matter are to be avoided.

A good example of Murmellius's method is a collection of quotations from the three elegiac love poets, *Ex elegiacis Tibulli, Propertii ac Ovidii carminibus selecti versus magis memorabiles atque puerorum institutioni aptiores* (Deventer 1503<sup>1</sup>), which, as the title indicates, brought together 'useful' phrases, carefully selected by the teacher from this 'turpis materia'. These extracts with short explanatory headings, called by Murmellius 'argumenta', should be read and memorized for moral improvement. Another illustration of the reading and excerpting habits of Murmellius is his humanist creed, the *Scoparius in barbariei propugnatores et osores humanitatis* (1517-18), that is, the broom against the defenders of barbarism and enemies of humanism.<sup>61</sup> It is a humanist vademecum what to read and above all what to avoid, and as such a concatenation of quotations from a vast number of works. Its tone is highly polemical, attacking the language, books and methods of the scholastics.

Murmellius's work is aptly described by Moss as a 'combination of moral discipline and methodical learning, applied to a programme of study which reflects the linguistic and literary focus of Italian humanism', and though she does not mention the Boethius commentary, her description also fits this work perfectly as well.<sup>62</sup> In it we see Murmellius applying the fruits of his labours to the explication of a school text. The study of the *Consolatio* served two main aims: a sound grasp of the Latin language in all its facets and an emphasis on a universal ethics, shared by pagan and Christian authors alike. Far from functioning solely as literary adornments, these quotations helped to give the *Consolatio* its place in a wider network of edifying works, which comprises not only pagan but also Christian literature (including the Bible), and ancient as well as modern. Such quotations and extracts, carefully selected by the teacher, were the vehicles by which classical literature was delivered to the youth, and they helped to convey the idea of compatibility of the moral sayings from all these different works. In the case of Murmellius, this programme, marked by a love for the classics but at the same time by moral restrictions on the reading of them, may owe something to his contacts with Rudolf von Langen and the circle of pious Albertists in the Bursa Laurentiana at Cologne, where Murmellius had been taught, but it was of course not limited to this group of scholars. It is characteristic feature, for example, of the programme of Jacobus Wimpfeling, who was, even more than Murmellius, suspicious of the moral influence of especially the Roman poets on young minds, and advocated the replacement of these elegiac poets and Martial by Christian authors such as Sedulius, Prudentius, Battista Mantuan, Buschius and Murmellius.<sup>63</sup>

The notion that good Latin is in itself the vehicle of good moral training is of course

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<sup>60</sup> I quote Moss's paraphrase, *Printed Commonplace-Books*, 89; Latin text on 295 (= *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Bömer, 58). Cf. also Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy*, 263-264.

<sup>61</sup> *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. A. Bömer, Heft V. On this work see Nauwelaerts, 'Johannes Murmellius', 222-224 ('zijn humanistische geloofsbelijdenis'); Herding, 'Probleme des frühen Humanismus', 357-358, and esp. J. V. Mehl, 'Johannes Murmellius' *Scoparius* (1517-18): Another German Defense of Humanistic Study', *Acta Conventus Neo-Latini Torontonensis*, ed. A. Dalzell et al., Binghamton, NY, 1991, 471-480.

<sup>62</sup> *Printed Commonplace-Books*, 87.

<sup>63</sup> The two northern humanists recommended each other's work: see letter no. 344 in *Jakob Wimpfeling. Briefwechsel*, eds. O. Herding and D. Mertens, Munich 1990, vol. II, 845-846, which he wrote 'ut ab eis grammatica pure et sincere absque faecibus et paleis iuventuti traderetur' (cf. Murmellius's phrase 'turpis materia' quoted above). Murmellius refers to Wimpfeling in his *Opusculum* (see above). On Wimpfeling see Herding, 'Probleme des frühen Humanismus', esp. 348-361 on the 'Motiv Tugend und Latein', and his excellent introduction to his ed. of Wimpfeling's *Adolescentia*, Munich 1965; cf. Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books*, 84.

one of the basic assumptions of the *studia humanitatis*. Although a pragmatic approach towards language teaching may often have been the more dominant one,<sup>64</sup> that grammar teaching also aimed at the inculcation of moral lessons is shown by the selection of the texts quoted, the way they are quoted (viz. as moral maxims and commonplaces), and the notion that close reading itself was believed to engender morality.<sup>65</sup> The absence of explicit moral teaching can thus be reconciled with a predominantly philological nature of commentaries. Much also depends on our understanding of 'morality' in this context. Murmellius's morality was of a practical kind, which had more to do with everyday 'virtues' such as decent behaviour and assiduity, modesty and moderation than with elevated notions such as truth, goodness, freedom, immortality of the soul and civilisation, with which the humanist programme in upholding the 'dignitas hominis' was credited. If morality is not identified with the extravagant claims, sometimes made by humanists for the saving, civilizing qualities of their teaching, the gap between practice and theory in humanist schooling is not necessarily as wide as some scholars have made us to believe.

Trecento Florence and quattrocento Ferrara are not sixteenth-century Münster, and it would be unfair to compare copies of school texts glossed by Italian schoolboys with Murmellius's published commentary. The context, however, is roughly the same, viz. the grammar school, though Murmellius's work seems to have aimed at an audience that was already initiated in the basic principles of Latin grammar, including pupils from the higher classes who wanted to read the entire text for themselves (instead of the first two books which were read in class), teachers in other schools and mature scholars. Murmellius's knowledge of Latin and classical literature was naturally vastly superior to that of his medieval predecessors, but they would not have demurred to the basic assumption of the teaching of Murmellius and many of his contemporaries: 'studium duplex est: morum et litterarum'.

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<sup>64</sup> The remark by Walter Ong seems to me too sweeping (but perhaps inspired by the pragmatic approach towards learning by Ramists): 'Latin was certainly not taught to Aform character≡ or to Atrain the mind≡. These are rationalizations which appear only with the nineteenth century when it was on its way out.' In the Renaissance and long thereafter, 'such rationalizations were uncalled for and unreal' (*Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*, Cambridge, Mass. 1958, 11).

<sup>65</sup> On this last point see Grafton and Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities*, 22-23 n. 52 and 148-149, and Black, 'Italian Renaissance Education', 330.

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