
The Secret Letters of Gasparo Contarini to Trifon Gabriele*

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Abstract: Gasparo Contarini (1483-1542) was born into one of the wealthiest and most powerful families in the Venetian Republic, and rose to become one of the most prominent intellectuals of the first half of the Cinquecento. His philosophical work is mainly known for the dispute with his teacher Pietro Pomponazzi on the immortality of the soul. His vast philosophical oeuvre has gone practically unnoticed. It is my intention here to examine certain features of Contarini's thought that might serve to illustrate his intellectual sophistication as well as his views on the immortality of the soul. My focus will be on three letters that Contarini sent to Trifon Gabriele (1470-1549), who was known as the "new Socrates" because he left no written documents. The correspondence between these two "titans" of Venetian culture in the Cinquecento is of the utmost interest not only because of the calibre of the writers themselves, but also because Contarini urges Gabriele not to divulge their letters. The fact that Contarini calls for secrecy for these letters, however, is a matter of interest: what do they contain? Was there anything that might compromise Contarini in a context of extreme Counter-Reformation tension?

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1. Introduction

Gasparo Contarini (Venice, 16 October 1483 - Bologna, 24 August 1542) was born into one of the wealthiest and most powerful families in the Venetian Republic, and rose to become one of the most prominent intellectuals of the first half of the Cinquecento. When still only twelve years old, he was sent to San Marco school of humanities,¹ which at that time had among its teachers the likes of Marc'Antonio Coccio, known as Sabellico (1436-1505), and Giorgio Valla (†1500). It was here that he struck up a relationship with Aldo Manuzio and the circle of intellectuals connected to his printing house, including names such as Giovanni Battista Egnazio and Marco Musuro. Upon the death in January 1500 of his teacher, Giorgio Valla, Contarini started attending lessons in logic with Antonio Giustinian and Lorenzo Bragadin at the School of Rialto.² In

1501 he transferred to the University of Padua to complete his education, and there studied Greek rhetoric with Marco Musuro, whom he had met in Venice, Latin with Giovanni Calfurnio, mathematics and astronomy with Benedetto Tiriaca, and natural philosophy with Alessandro Achillini and, more importantly, Pietro Pomponazzi. In 1535, he was appointed cardinal by Pope Paul III, and in 1541 he took part in the Council of Ratisbon, representing the moderate reformists in the cardinals' college in talks with Lutheran delegates. Given the nature of these facts of Contarini's life, his religious views and activities as a diplomat have come under close historical scrutiny;³ far less, if anything, has been done to reconstruct his philosophical views, and it is only thanks to the efforts of Andrea Robiglio over the past two years that Contarini's complex personality as a philosopher has come to light.

His philosophical work is tied closely to that of his teacher, Pomponazzi, and the question of the immortality of the soul, a theme that has come under the spotlight in studies by Enrico Peruzzi and Pietro Bassiano Rossi.⁴ His vast philosophical *oeuvre*, however, which is available for consultation in the *Opera Omnia* published in Paris in 1571, has gone practically unnoticed until recently.⁵

It is my intention here to examine certain features of Contarini's thought that might serve to illustrate his intellectual sophistication as well as his views on the immortality of the soul. My aim is not to examine the *Opera Omnia*, however, despite their need for a great deal more study; my focus will be rather on three practically unknown letters that Contarini sent to Trifon Gabriele (San Polo di Piave, 20 November 1470 - Venice, 20 October 1549) in the early 1530s.⁶ Gabriele was one of the most prominent figures in Venetian culture in the first half of the sixteenth century who profoundly influenced the development of intellectuals and philosophers such as Antonio Brocardo, Bernardino Daniello, Giason De Nores, Vettor Soranzo, Sperone Speroni, Bernardo Tasso, and Agostino Valier, to name but a handful of the most renowned. He was known as the "new Socrates" because he left no written documents.⁷

The correspondence between these two "titans" of Venetian culture in the Cinquecento is of the utmost interest not only because of the calibre of the writers

themselves, but also because Contarini urges Gabriele not to divulge their letters:

I warmly exhort you that you may indulge me in this particular request of mine. In other words, that you do not divulge these letters of mine in the same way as my earlier correspondence. It will be enough to give them to four, or even fewer, of your and our closest and truest friends.⁸

Contarini implies that the content of his earlier correspondence was divulged without his consent, most likely falling into the hands of individuals who might use it against him in a particularly dangerous juncture in the religious life of the West. Hence his injunction to keep the letters secret, at most allowing them to circulate among a trusted group of friends. What these previously divulged letters were, why their divulgence annoyed Contarini, and who the people were who came to know about their content is impossible to determine. The fact that Contarini calls for secrecy for these letters, however, is a matter of interest: what do they contain? Was there anything that might compromise Contarini in a context of extreme Counter-Reformation tension? What is certain is that the three extant letters addressed to Gabriele were never published by Contarini during his lifetime, and only came to light after his death.

A first letter, which has no date but from its contents may be traced back to Christmas Eve 1530, hinges upon the distinction between mind and intellect. It was published in Venice by Aldo Manuzio in his 1544 collection, *Delle lettere volgari di diversi nobilissimi huomini et eccellenti ingegni*.⁹ The other two letters were published in 1558 by Lorenzo Torrentino in the collection *Quattro lettere di monsig. Gasparo Contarini*.¹⁰ The first, dated 10 January 1531, deals with the difference between intellect and will, whereas the second, dated 13 December 1532, examines the division of sciences and moral virtues. This collection also contains the more well known epistle to Vittoria Colonna of 13 November 1536 on the theme of free will, which has been closely studied by Antonino Poppi,¹¹ and a letter to Galeazzo Florimonte on the usefulness of the Council, erroneously attributed to Contarini.¹²

These three letters appear to constitute a unified doctrinal corpus on the question of the intellect and the will, as if Contarini were concerned with explaining to Gabriele this particular aspect of his thought. Moreover, all three were written in vernacular without a corresponding Latin text, unlike the letter on free will, for instance, whose Latin version was published in its Latin version in the *Opera omnia*.

2. Letter 1. On the difference between mind and intellect

As mentioned, the first letter was written towards the end of 1530 and turns upon the significance of two basic concepts in Aristotelian psychology, namely

“mind” and “intellect”. In Contarini, both concepts have a wide breadth of meaning and are often confused as a result, giving rise to interpretations that in fact conflict with Aristotle’s thought. The idea of human mind, angelic mind and divine mind is open to ambiguity, as is that of human intellect, angelic intellect and divine intellect. But Contarini also shows that in Aristotle the term “intellect” may refer not only to the faculty or potential of the soul, but also to the habit thanks to which the first principles of science are apprehended, in other words something innate in the physiological structure of the soul and something that is acquired over time.¹³ For Contarini it is therefore necessary to limit the range of application of these two concepts to avoid dangerous misinterpretations of Aristotle’s psychology that may lead to heretical positions.

Contarini adopts a quintessentially humanistic approach to Aristotle’s text, examining every instance in which Aristotelian concepts are discussed. Rather than reconstructing the actual thought of Aristotle, however, his purpose is to apprehend the rational truth that transcends all authority.

“*Mente*”, he writes, derives from the Latin *mens*, and refers to the operation of the soul that is known in Latin as *comminiscentia*, which corresponds to the Greek *διάνοια*.¹⁴ “*Intelletto*” also derives from the Latin, *intellectus*, which properly denotes the power by means of which we understand, and corresponds to the Greek *νοεῖν*.¹⁵ Unlike the Latins, according to Contarini, the Greeks have always paid close attention to philosophical terminology, distinguishing between the faculty or the operation of the understanding, properly called *νοεῖν*, and its principle, namely the substance that supports the operation, properly called *νοῦς*. The operation of *νοεῖν* properly designates the activity of understanding, while *νοῦς* in some sense characterises the substance, and *διάνοια* defines an operation of the soul that is different from *νοεῖν*.

Contarini sees the difference between mind and intellect in the differing operations of *διάνοια* and *νοῦς*, a distinction, however, that is not always clear. Mediaeval, Arab and Latin commentators produced elaborate phenomenologies of the various intellects, presenting subtle distinctions between the various functions of the human soul. There were material and immaterial intellects, for instance, possible and agent intellects, intellects *in potentia* and *in actualitate*, a passive (or passible) intellect, a common intellect, an adept intellect, an acquired intellect, a speculative intellect, to name but a few of the designations that occur in the Aristotelian commentaries.

Hence establishing a clear distinction between mind and intellect, that is between their Greek correspondents *διάνοια* and *νοῦς*, was understandably challenging for Contarini. In order to explain their difference, he starts by tackling the question of *νοῦς*, or the intellect as substance. His choice of approach is determined by the principle that “*operari sequitur esse*”, according to which the operation can only be clearly known by first establishing its being. Since in this case the opera-

tions are not clear, it is best to start with an ontological rather than a functionalist analysis. Here, too, the starting point is Aristotle, in particular the eighth book of the *Historia Animalium*,¹⁶ where nature is said to order and conjoin all beings, from the lowest to the highest, in a manner that is gradual, continuous and almost imperceptible:

In the great majority of animals there are traces of psychical qualities which are more markedly differentiated in the case of human beings. For just as we pointed out resemblances in the physical organs, so in a number of animals we observe gentleness or fierceness, mildness or cross temper, courage or timidity, fear or confidence, high spirit or low cunning, and, with regard to *intelligence*, something equivalent to sagacity. Some of these qualities in man, as compared with the corresponding qualities in animals, differ only quantitatively [...] other qualities in man are represented by analogous qualities: for instance, just as in man we find knowledge, wisdom, and sagacity, so in certain animals there exists some other natural capacity akin to these. The truth of this statement will be the more clearly apprehended if we have regard to the phenomena of childhood; for in children may be observed the traces and seeds of what will one day be settled habits, though psychologically a child hardly differs for the time being from an animal; so that one is quite justified in saying that, as regards man and animals, certain psychical qualities are identical with one another, whilst others resemble, and others are analogous to, each other. Nature proceeds little by little from things lifeless to animal life in such a way that it is impossible to determine the exact line of demarcation, nor on which side thereof an intermediate form should lie.¹⁷

Aristotle here makes no direct mention of νοῦς, referring instead to a general capacity to intend (τὴν διάνοιαν συνέσεως), a kind of intelligence (σύνεσις). In the *Nicomachean Ethics* VI.11, Aristotle distinguishes between intelligence (σύνεσις) and intellect (νοῦς). Intelligence in his view is not science (επιστήμη), ‘for intelligence is not concerned with the things that exist eternally and cannot be affected, nor with all and any of the things that come into existence, but only with the things about which one may feel doubt and deliberate.’¹⁸ This does not entail a correspondence between intelligence and practical wisdom (φρόνησις), since the latter is imperative (φρόνησις ἐπιτακτική) while the former is critical (σύνεσις κριτική). There does appear to be a correspondence between intelligence (σύνεσις) and a certain form of perspicacity (εὐσυνεσία), however, because σύνεσις is the capacity to judge the subject under consideration morally. Placing intelligence squarely within the realm of ethics Aristotle marks a radical departure from Plato, who viewed intelligence as the capacity to understand on the basis of previously acquired science.¹⁹ So by equating νοῦς and σύνεσις Contarini appears to have espoused a position that is more Platonic than Aristotelian, or at least to have found a way of reconciling these two divergent views. This becomes especially clear when Contarini seeks to determine the real ‘ontological’ position of the intellect within the great chain of being. His approach is reminiscent of Themistian exegesis, which often led to a convergence of Aristotelian and Platonic positions. According to Contarini, the

entire chain of being can be viewed as a movement from the material to the immaterial, from that which is farthest from God to that which is closest, a conception, in other words, which expresses a latent Neo-Platonism, evident also in the Scholastics, according to which also the higher beings, namely those closest to God, exhibit substances that are more corporeal and substances that are in fact more non-corporeal.²⁰ Between these two types of being Aristotle places a middle term, identified by Contarini as the human intellect, which although not in itself corporeal can nonetheless come into contact with the corporeal substances.

As mentioned, the intellect for Contarini is an entirely non-corporeal substance corresponding to the capacity to judge the truth of things intuitively, without discursive reasoning. Proximate to the intellect there is the highest part of the human soul, the mind. The mind cannot know immediately and intuitively, but only through great effort by means of reasonings of a primarily syllogistic nature. Moreover, the understanding of the mind is frequently imperfect because its knowledge is mediated through the senses. Nonetheless, Contarini attributes to the mind the noble task of uncovering the causes of things, which explains why it is called *comminiscentia*, from the Latin verb *comminiscor* (discover or invent). The mind in Contarini is therefore that part of the soul which is connected with and acts through the body, whereas the intellect is entirely separate from the body and acts through it only accidentally.

Matters become increasingly complex as the distinctions multiply, however. By way of example, Contarini describes a situation with an educated man and an illiterate boy who start reading a book:

If you take a boy and a man who is already educated, this educated man, if presented with a book, without thinking twice about it, will read it, understand it and describe it. The little boy is capable of neither reading nor understanding it without first combining the letters, and then the syllables, exerting great effort and making frequent mistakes because of the imperfection that is in him. If more advanced and able to read, but still needing to learn grammar, still he will not understand it without, as we say, constructing it, and first discovering the main verb with its names [...] hence from the order extracting the sentiment. Thus, my lord, the nature of the discourse of the human mind; which proceeds and constructs in sensible things, and from them understanding truths imperfectly, and this is the Latin verb *comminisci*, and the power which is the principle of this operation is the Mind. That of the educated man is intellect, and is similar to the incorporeal intellects.²¹

The educated man will be able to read the book immediately, while the boy will have to laboriously connect all the letters, syllables and words, knowing what is written only imperfectly. Unlike the boy, the educated man has already developed the faculty called “*intelligentia*”, which is said to correspond to Aristotle’s νοεῖν. By characterizing the intellect of the educated man in this manner, Contarini appears to be suggesting that the “*intelligentia*”, or the faculty that is capable of immediate understanding, in fact corresponds to Aris-

tote's νοῦς, or the intellect that comprehends principles. This particular type of intellect is what makes man similar to incorporeal intellects.

But there is more. Contarini adds to the complexity of the understanding of these distinctions by asserting that the part of the human mind, that intelligible light, which allows us to understand things, is properly called agent intellect, and it is thanks to this that the mind learns and knows. Hence an intellect is seemingly a component of the mind, and the separation between the two is far from clear. Equally unclear is the distinction between agent intellect, which allows us to understand things, and intellect as a habit that apprehends first principles. Could there be a correlation between the two?

Contarini must therefore provide an account of the relationship between mind and agent intellect, which, as we have seen, must be other than a corporeal substance.

The problem is to understand whether this agent intellect is substance in respect of the mind, or whether it is merely an accident. If a substance, then it is not properly speaking a substance that is typical of men, but must be collocated within the domain of superior intellects – as Contarini points out, the first intellect for Alexander of Aphrodisias, the last for Avicenna.²² If on the other hand it is an accident, it is nothing more than a reflection of the superior intellects in our mind, in the same way, he adds, as the light in the air derives from the light of the sun. Contarini opts for neither one nor the other, saying that he is certain only that the intellect is the habit by means of which the mind knows the first principles of science immediately. Hence the agent, or rather active intellect to some extent correlates to the habitual intellect. Intellect as a habit of the mind, or part of it, knows immediately, whereas the mind in itself knows only discursively. This mind, by means of its habit, which is the intellect, may know the principles, but only ‘with the intelligible light of the active intellect’.²³ We can therefore say that the agent intellect is both separate intellect, and therefore substance, and intellect within the mind of man, as a habit, being that which allows understanding of things. In this sense, it derives from superior intellects. It is essentially separate from the mind, hence it is properly called agent intellect, but it is operatively conjoined to it when it allows the cognition of things, and in this sense it is termed intellect as habit. There is no actual difference between the two, except for the fact that the intellect is agent when it allows things to be known immediately, whereas it is habit when it is considered a disposition of the mind that is capable of knowing immediately. Insofar as it is capable of immediately knowing the first principles and causes, the intellect that pertains to the mind can know that which is divine, eternal and immutable, in other words those very same principles and causes that are the basis of all knowledge. And this is why the human intellect that knows divine things can become itself divine, because the intellect, especially

what Aristotle calls potential intellect, can become its own objects.²⁴

This dual conception of the agent intellect is of the utmost importance because it constitutes the theoretical groundwork for Contarini's conception of the immortality of the soul. The intellect of man is partly a “derivation” of the higher intellects in the human mind, almost a secondary reflection of the actual separate agent intellect. In the subsequent letter on the distinction between intellect and will, Contarini appears to identify this separate agent intellect wherein all principles reside that may then be apprehended immediately by the human intellect as habit, with God:

Alternatively we say that truth is in God, and that God is true, and truth is in our intellect, and the intellect is true. Except that the divine intellect has the same truth with regard to all nature, and all other things that are beneath him, as the maker's intellect has with regard to artificial things, made by him.²⁵

Insofar as it enlightens the human mind, or soul, the agent intellect constitutes that which is properly called the human intellect that knows the principles of science. This human intellect is immortal and incorporeal because it is a reflection of the agent intellect, which is equally incorporeal and immortal. Hence when the body of man dies, it is properly speaking only his mind, that is that discursive faculty that is capable of discovering the truth and the causes of things, that dies with it, not the immediately knowing intellect. This intellection without the corporeal and material element affords the human soul a certain immaterial substance from which the immortality of the soul in general may be deduced. In order to explain the transition from the immateriality of the intellect's operation to the immateriality of the intellect, and hence its immortality and the immortality of the soul in general, Contarini resorts to arguments derived from Themistius.

Underlying the Aristotelian interpretation of Themistius is the correspondence between Aristotle's form and Plato's idea. There is according to Themistius a hierarchically ordered chain of forms constituting the various degrees of being, each of which is perfection and act of the last and potential of the next. This chain ascends from inanimate bodies to men, in relation to whom the agent intellect, which is at the top of the scale, is the form of all previous forms. Unlike in Alexander of Aphrodisias, the agent intellect in Themistius cannot be God, because if the agent intellect is the form of previous forms, and the form is always the essence of a thing, the agent intellect can only be the true essence of man.²⁶ It is moreover unique, because otherwise there could be no knowledge and communication,²⁷ but its uniqueness does not prevent it from being multiplied in men, just like light, which is unique but is perceived by many different visual powers.²⁸ The same example is used in Contarini, as we have seen, and it is a typical Platonic concept of the one that communicates to the many, being at once both transcendent and immanent. Thus Contarini resolves the question of the

immortality of the soul while salvaging the unity and unicity of the person without falling into some kind of Averroist trap whereby immortality was an attribute only of potential and active intellects, unique to the human species, or a kind of Alexandrism in which immortality was denied altogether and the human soul was completely separate from the divine intellect.

3. Letter 2. On the difference between intellect and will

Having established the difference between mind and intellect, Contarini then turns to the difference between intellect and will. Widely debated during the Middle Ages, the topic went through something of a comeback towards the end of the Quattrocento with Florentine Neoplatonism and a renewed interest in questions pertaining to Thomism and Scotism.²⁹ As Trifon Gabriele formulates it in his letter to Contarini:

As it occurs that, God being true and good, we attain him more through will than through intellect, so that which is true is the object of the intellect, just as that which is good is the object of the will.³⁰

The answer, according to Contarini, consists in demonstrating how on the one hand through the intellect we attain divine truth, and how on the other we attain divine goodness through the will. But first we must clarify what is meant by “happiness” and “divine fruition”.

Generally speaking, Contarini believes that the truth of things depends on the truth that is in the intellect of God, since God himself is the first truth. Hence the truth consists simply in the correspondence of a thing with the existing idea of the divine intellect. Human truth, however, is something else entirely. It is not the adaptation of the thing to the idea that is in God, but the compliance of our intellect to the known thing. This truth is validated by the agent intellect that illuminates and clarifies the forms, which are impressed upon the intellect like seals in wax, in the same way as light makes bodies visible. Thus may the human intellect grasp the divine truth, which in Contarini is the measure of truth for the knowledge of divine things. And as the goodness and perfection of God is reflected in these natural things, in the act of understanding them in their truth, which comes from God because God is the origin of all things, we partly understand God himself, and in this manner, albeit indirectly, we attain knowledge of him. The fact of knowing God only indirectly is a matter of some importance for Contarini, because through the intellect man does not know him intuitively and within himself, by means of *scientia*, but only through things he himself has generated.³¹

Opposite the intellect there is the human will. Contarini demonstrates it by asserting that God is good, not as a matter of convenience, but in an absolute sense. The goodness of all things springs from divine goodness because God generates all things. The object of

the human will, however, is not the goodness of the things generated by God, because otherwise, and here Contarini echoes the third book of Aristotle’s *De Anima*,³² it would be nothing other than a sensible appetite moving passively in the presence of the object and its reception.

The human will does not act in this way, but is driven by the impulse towards and desire for its object when the object is absent, and by the enjoyment of its possession once the object has been attained. A human being can achieve happiness thanks to this drive towards the desired object.

Contarini rejects the notion that perfect happiness consists in the knowledge of God by means of the intellect, because, as we have seen, this is possible only through created objects, which a man can stop and indulge himself with, thereby satisfying only his sensible appetite. Perfect happiness must lead to the immediate understanding of God, without medium, something that appears not to be entirely possible through the human intellect. Neither is Contarini persuaded by the view that happiness consists in the operation of the will with which one loves God. Rather he points to third more correct way of understanding human happiness:

which is that being, nature, truth, which our souls are entwined with more than with any other thing outside of ourselves, conjoins and becomes one with the being, the truth and the goodness of God, almost becoming absent to itself and transforming into it.³³

For Contarini this idea derives from what Pseudo-Dionysius the Aeropagite writes in his *De Divinis Nominibus*, which is based on the doctrines expounded in the second chapter of Paul’s *First Letter to the Corinthians*,³⁴ an interesting and by no means marginal reference. Yet the careful reader is bound to note that Contarini is in fact suggesting a form of *copulatio* between the human soul and God, especially after reading the letter on the difference between mind and intellect. This contact, this transmutation of the human soul into God, would appear to be an appropriate description of the transition of the intellect from potential to actual, or the moment of contact between the possible intellect and the agent intellect, that is to say when the light of God allows the transformation of potential intelligibles into actual intelligibles. If this were the case, however, intellectual knowledge would suffice to reach God and attain happiness, but, as we have seen, it is not so, at least not primarily.

Contarini further illustrates this union between man and God with reference to John 17:20-23:

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

The doctrines presented in the Gospel of John appear far closer to Paul's teaching in the *Letter to the Galatians*, which is cited directly in the *De divinis nominibus*, than to the second chapter of the *First Letter to the Corinthians*. The death and love of Christ in Paul represent the union of man with the Son of God.

In God's identification with the Son, and the Son's with the whole of humanity through his own sacrifice, Contarini sees an analogy with the transmutation of the human soul into divine intellect and the attainment of perfect happiness. To view it as a form of crypto-Averroism would be misguided, however, because – it bears reiterating – happiness for Contarini is not given by the *copulatio* of two intellects, but is rather attained through the will. It is the union of the human soul as will with the goodness that leads to happiness, by which man is completely absorbed and transcends all actions, be they in relation to the intellect or the will.

This suffices to show why it is that man can reach God primarily and directly through the will, without 'so many sciences' and without 'the curiosity of the intellect'.³⁵ To start with, the intellect is passive and understands through the reception of an impression generated by the object of knowledge created by God, whereas the will acts through an impulse towards its object, which is goodness. Secondly, the will partakes of happiness much more closely than the intellect, because its object is the goodness, and the ultimate goodness is God.³⁶ The will attains a direct understanding of God, joining with him, whereas for the intellect this union is possible only indirectly, through the kinds of other objects and their impressions. This leads us to the third letter to Gabriele on the question of the order and hierarchy of the speculative sciences and moral virtues.

4. Letter 3. On the speculative sciences and the moral virtues

The central concern in this third letter is to establish whether the speculative sciences are more or less noble than the virtues.³⁷ Contarini's answer makes sense only in light of his earlier comments on the intellect and the will. In order to resolve the matter, Contarini writes, he first 'reduced to memory certain passages of Aristotle', but then resorted to 'the natural light'.³⁸ As in his treatise *De Immortalitate Animae*, Contarini takes his cue from Aristotle, but then proceeds according to natural reason, that is logical arguments that are free from authority. With this topic in particular, Contarini states, one cannot rely on Plato because he made perfect virtue coincide with the intelligible idea of the good.

The solution to the key problem raised in the letter rests upon an explanation of what is virtue, how it differs from the sciences, how one virtue can be nobler than another, and whether man can always pursue the noblest and worthiest virtue of all.³⁹ As for the definition of virtue, following what he believed to be Aristotle's position in the first book of *De Caelo* and the seventh of *Physica*, not to mention the second book of

Ethica Nicomachaea, it is 'a perfection of potentials, from which the operations proceed [...], from which potential the good and perfect operation is obtained.'⁴⁰

Contarini writes that in some cases the perfection of powers is natural, by which he means not acquired through practice. Such powers include vision, hearing, taste, etc., and they are known as natural virtues.⁴¹ Another type of power, which may be sharpened and acquired through use and practice, are the inclinations and principles that nature has placed within the human soul. Such virtues are properly known as "habits".⁴² These "habits" are what Contarini specifically designates as "sciences" and "moral virtues", following the famous distinction made by Aristotle in the *incipit* of the second book of his *Ethica Nicomachaea*.⁴³ But the sciences and moral virtues are also different from each other because they are learned in different ways, the former through discipline and speculation, the latter by means of good customs and action.

In accordance with Aristotle in the first book of the *Ethica Nicomachaea*,⁴⁴ Contarini considers the goodness and the excellence of each thing to be in the perfect operation, that is the perfection that is specific to the nature of that thing. The same book of Aristotle's also teaches us that excellence is happiness, which is not a virtue, but the result of a virtuous operation. This means that for Contarini it is only by operating virtuously, or perfecting one's nature, where the perfecting consists in a movement from the potential to the actual of something, that it is possible to achieve happiness. Thus, to conclude, Contarini asserts that

virtue generally is a perfection of the potentials yielding perfect and inculpable operations without defect. This perfection, when given by nature, is nothing other than the very same perfect potential. When acquired, they are habits, for which potentials are able to operate perfectly, without difficulty, even with pleasure.⁴⁵

It is with good reason, therefore, that the sciences and moral virtues may be called 'habits'. In order to establish their relative degrees of nobility, it is necessary first to determine their differences.

Contarini affirms that science is not to be understood as Aristotle intended it in the sixth book of *Ethica Nicomachaea*, namely as a habit opposed to wisdom and the intellect.⁴⁶ Rather it is to be viewed more generally as 'a habit of the intellectual part, which is the perfection of our intellect, by means of which we understand nature and the properties of things.'⁴⁷ Clearly Contarini is moving away from the Aristotelian conception of "science" in the narrowest sense of the word, embracing the broader concept of a dianoetic virtue by means of which the essence of things may be known. It is a habit acquired with great effort, discipline and concentration that is guided by the natural light of the intellect. Science as habit has the specific task of fulfilling the function for which the intellect was originally intended, i.e. to know that which is intelligible. The acquired intellect is therefore that which

allows man to perfect his nature, thus in the act of understanding bringing it closer to divine nature.⁴⁸

Moral virtue, on the other hand, according to Aristotle in the second book of the *Ethica Nicomachaea*,⁴⁹ is ‘a perfective habit of the appetitive powers [...] the operation of which is election.’⁵⁰ As we have seen, Contarini includes among the appetitive powers the will itself, which is ‘the appetite that by nature follows reason.’⁵¹ Hence, he concludes that moral virtue is the perfection of the appetitive power geared to the operation of choosing the things we want and discarding the things we do not. This virtue is the will, and the more the will follows the guidance of reason, the better and more perfect it will be. “Reason” here, in this case in line with Plato, refers to the higher part of the soul which is neither irascible nor concupiscible,⁵² but encourages the perfection of virtuous inclinations whether in the sciences or morality.

Having explained the relationship between science and virtue, Contarini goes on to determine which of the two is the most worthy and noble. Ultimately, this means determining whether learning and knowing are more worthy and noble than choosing and acting. In other words, Contarini, following Aristotle, wants to understand whether the theoretical dimension of speculation or the practical dimension of action is the more important. In other words, Contarini is addressing the question of the superiority of the active life as compared to the contemplative life, a central concern also for other intellectuals of the time such as Sperone Speroni and Alessandro Piccolomini.

Contarini believes that the highest order of contemplation is to know things that are eternal, superior and incorruptible, hence we can say that this operation is nobler than choosing, especially as choice pertains to matters that are human, not divine. In an absolute sense, therefore, ‘science is nobler than moral virtue.’⁵³ This becomes clear when we consider the two powers that are in play, the appetitive and intellectual: the intellect is a guide whereas the appetite appears to be guided. This view accords with what Aristotle states on several occasions, namely that speculation raises man to a higher nature, divine nature, an idea that reconciles the Aristotelian and Platonic perspectives. Contarini is quick to point out, however, that it is precisely for this reason that speculation and contemplation are convenient for man not as man, but as a being that elevates itself above its human nature towards something higher. Choice and action, on the other hand, are proper to man and the active life, and it is only man that can be prudent, just and good. Unlike science, therefore, moral virtue is specific to man as man, but science is the nobler of the two. This is a typically Aristotelian *topos* that lay at the heart of Pomponazzi’s conception of man and completely fills Contarini’s philosophy, as Rossi has rightly observed.⁵⁴ A civil and active life for Pomponazzi was the only one that could properly be considered human, in other words was intrinsically a part of humanity’s essence, whereas a theoretical and speculative life typical of angels and God himself was

possible only sometimes, and only for a chosen few. As Pomponazzi’s pupil, Contarini goes even further in emphasizing the practical dimension of action as proper to man against the theoretical dimension. This new focus on action naturally entailed a reassessment of the will as compared to the intellect that was absent in Pomponazzi’s writings.

Contarini posits a separation between science and moral virtue and asks which of the two is preferable, whether science without virtue or virtue without science. Note that Contarini here is speaking merely hypothetically since in his view it is always best if science and virtue support each other mutually, which is in fact the case. However, his conjecture serves to show what the true hierarchy between science and moral virtue should be.

The general premise of Contarini’s argument is based upon a simple observation. A thing may be more perfect in an absolute sense than something else, but there may be aspects in which the latter is more perfect than the former. The example he uses to clarify the argument is effective. The human being is the most perfect of all creatures, but the lion is more perfect than man in terms of strength and the eagle in terms of flight. Likewise, the will, although absolutely less perfect than the intellect, can be “more perfect” in certain aspects. More specifically, the will is that which allows an action to be executed; an important fact because speculating, knowing, and contemplating would not be possible without it. Hence the will is more fundamental than the intellect, but in no way does this mean that ‘the will is absolutely more perfect than the intellect.’⁵⁵ Contarini provides an elaborate example to explain the relationship between will and intellect:

We have seen Captain Doria in a fleet leading an army to perform exploits in the Peloponnese. No doubt his fleet had a helmsman, that is an admiral who took charge of the voyage and whose orders everyone obeyed for the navigation. There is no question that the absolute leader was Captain Doria, because he initiated the endeavour, and all the navigation was intended to support him in carrying out his purpose, and the Governor of the Fleet guided and moved the army according to the purpose provided to him by Captain Doria. But in terms of leading the navigation and executing it, the Governor was the head, not Captain Doria. And if the Governor had the virtue that was proper to him, namely to allow himself to be guided by the Captain and to be diligent and vigilant and so on, he would have moved the army well, leading it to its proper end. But if the Governor had lacked the virtue that was right for him, becoming rebellious through following the persuasions of others, he would have been a traitor; or through negligence and drunkenness had acted in a depraved manner and been a bad governor, he would have run the fleet on the rocks or into some other circumstance in which the operations of the Captain would have been in vain, imperfect, even pernicious to himself, the fleet and the whole army. This in my view is the relationship between the intellect and the will. The Captain is the intellect, in the operation of which there is perfect CONTEMPLATIVE HAPPINESS, above the nature of man, as Aristotle says, and also the active, in the administration of the family, the republic and oneself. The will is the admiral of the fleet, that is of all our parts, who tends towards the fulfilment of the end that is justly prescribed by just, uncorrupted reason.

Who, when in possession of its rightful virtues, that is morals, moves all potential to the proper end, and all is well.⁵⁶

In sum, the intellect knows and speculates and then reaches contemplative happiness if and only if the right will operate according to the end, guided by reason. In this way, although

absolutely speaking the intellect, and consequently its virtue, is nobler than the will and its virtue, which is morality, in terms of the execution of the operation and its virtue it exceeds the intellect and its virtue, which is contemplative science.⁵⁷

For these reasons Contarini is able to conclude, in line with Aristotle at the beginning of the third book of the *Topica*,⁵⁸ that it is not always the case that the good that is nobler and more perfect is the one that must be followed. Rather each person should choose the good that is most fitting ‘to his nature, condition, time, and taking into consideration all the other factors.’⁵⁹ This because, in Aristotelian terms, Contarini believes the good to be followed is that of one’s own nature, not necessarily the absolute one that might prove alien to the intimate essence of the individual. Nonetheless, almost paradoxically, in Aristotle human nature achieves realisation through contemplative activity. In *Ethica Nicomachaea* X.7, Aristotle explicitly states that happiness is an activity according to the virtue of that which is best. That which is best in the human being is the intellect, either because ‘it orders and leads and has knowledge of beautiful and divine realities, or because it is in itself the most divine thing of that which is in us.’⁶⁰ The intellect’s activity is thus mostly contemplative. Hence the full realisation of human nature occurs through the contemplative, not the practical or active life. Contarini is aware of this, and for this reason separates between intellect and will, science and virtue, in purely hypothetical terms, because in reality they should always be conjoined. Even so, Contarini clearly argues in favour of the practical life being characteristic of man rather than the contemplative life, thus undeniably demonstrating the influence of his teacher, Pomponazzi.

To conclude, Contarini summarises the answer to the opening question in this third letter, stating

that moral virtue is for us more eligible, albeit less perfect in an absolute sense, than science, however more perfect it may be in absolute terms. [...] Moral virtue and the active life are proper to man, while the contemplative is above man.⁶¹

Thus the superiority of the will over the intellect for Contarini is a direct consequence of human essence itself, which makes it more an active, or rather practical, than a theoretical animal.

5. Conclusion

Contarini’s three letters to Gabriele reveal dimensions and clarify questions that had remained unexplored in

his better-known philosophical work, the *De Immortalitate Animae*. It is sufficient to bear in mind that his primary argument in support of the immortality of the soul is the demonstration of the immateriality of the intellect and the will. The intellect is immaterial essentially because it knows either incorporeal forms or forms that, although tied to the synolon, may nonetheless be conceived separately from it. In particular, Contarini states that *intelligere sine phantasia* is possible because the phantasm is required by the intellect only when manifesting within the hylomorphic and synological structure of man, but once freed from the body the intellect is also completely free from the bonds of the imagination. Hence, according to Contarini, one need only demonstrate that a single operation happens without matter, for instance self-reflection or the apprehension of universals, to deduce the immateriality, and therefore the immortality of the intellect. But the will is even more immaterial than the intellect because it is more independent from the body, in that it does not desire a specific object like the natural appetite that moves the soul, but rather the ultimate good, which is immaterial. Moreover, the will is free, in other words it is not made necessary by matter, it can choose independently of the material restrictions that are characteristic of the sensible appetite, and is therefore immaterial.⁶² These statements remain obscure without reference to the letters examined here, on the basis of which we can say that immortality is possible in the act of the intellection of the intelligible species, which is the moment when the human soul is enlightened by the light of God, thus becoming immortal.

These letters also offer a lucid account of the predominance in Contarini’s thinking of the active life and the will over the intellect. The theoretical foundations on which the superiority of the active life over the contemplative life is based are the same as for Pomponazzi, namely that only sometimes, and only in a mediated manner, is it given to man to live completely in speculation, whereas it is properly human “to act”.

Contarini’s conclusions, however, are diametrically opposed to Pomponazzi’s. While the Mantuan philosopher combines an inability to speculate all the time with a mortalist theory of the soul, the cardinal managed to demonstrate the absolute immateriality of one part of the human soul, namely the will,⁶³ and therefore its immortality.

Echoes of Contarini’s conception may be found in the *Dialogo della vita attiva e contemplativa* by Sperone Speroni published in 1542. Speroni imagines a meeting in 1529 in Cardinal Contarini’s home in Bologna between Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga, Luigi Priuli, Bernardo Navagero, Gianfranco Valerio, Antonio Brocardo and a guest from Padua who most likely represents the author of the dialogue. As in other works by Speroni, the author’s position is difficult to ascertain, the aim supposedly being to explore all points of view. Importantly, and not surprisingly, the dialogue opens with a discussion on the immortality of the human soul, which is, as we have seen, central to Contarini’s

characterisation of the predominance of the active over the contemplative life. Speroni's Contarini faithfully replicates the image we have of him from the letters, in other words as a supporter of the greater absolute nobility of the contemplative life compared to the active life, but also of the superiority of the active life compared to the contemplative life in respect of man:⁶⁴

[...] hence the philosopher comes to be more noble than the man of virtue, and his life of contemplation noble beyond every other. Nor do I wish to believe that whatever usefulness the active life affords us, or because it is honoured by the people, you consider it more beautiful and more worthy of you: and when speaking of that which is good and useful, but not vulgar, how much better it is to enrich the intellect with the treasure of science than to have one's bags filled with material gold, so much is speculation more useful to man than action. Without it being a more honourable profession to liberate the intellect from earthly ties, so that it may pass with its wings from sphere to sphere in every place of nature and God [...] This the vulgar do not know, because they are not as aware of the immaterial power, wherefrom our mind understands, as the feelings around which mortals enact virtuous actions in the world with consummate art. [...] And for sure one who is good and does good things, he it is who does that which it is his lot to do: whereas the one who is not like that more often than not pretends to be that way out of desire to be liked, or out of fear of the magistrates and the laws of the city. But the philosopher, who without blame or danger of any kind could do otherwise, freely deals with and contemplates the reasons of things; thence until the pinnacle of his concepts, as if he were another Moses, face-to-face he sits and speaks with God.⁶⁵

The contemplative life is superior to the active life, but it is not proper to man. Not to man, that is, but only to the philosopher is it given to contemplate God and the first causes. With the letters we are better able to appreciate Contarini's answer and perhaps correct the image of Contarini presented by Speroni: God for human beings, and therefore philosophers too, is never immediately attainable, but is known as a reflection in his creatures. And this without detracting from the truth of the immortality of the soul, which on the contrary is forcefully asserted with the demonstration of the total immateriality of the will.

The secret letters to Trifon Gabriele thus allow us to completely review Contarini's philosophy beyond the image presented to us traditionally of a thinker frustrated in his life of philosophy by the burden and difficulties of his work as ambassador first, and then as cardinal.

Notes

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¹ Vittore Branca, *La sapienza civile. Studi sull'Umanesimo a Venice* (Florence: Olschki, 1997), 59–65.

² Ludovico Beccadelli, *Vita del Contarini* (Brescia: Rizzardi, 1746), f. 2r.

³ On Gasparo Contarini Cf. Hubert Jedin, *Gasparo Contarini e il contributo veneziano alla Riforma cattolica, in La civiltà veneziana del Rinascimento* (Florence: Sansoni, 1958), 103–124; Félix Gilbert, 'Cristianesimo, umanesimo e la bolla Apostolici Regiminis del 1513', *Rivista storica italiana*, 79 (1967), 976–990; Félix Gilbert, 'The Date of the Composition of Contrarini's and Giannotti's Books on Venice', *Studies in the Renaissance*, 14 (1967), 172–184; Marvin W. Anderson, *Biblical Humanism and Roman Catholic Reform: (1501–1542) Contarini, Pole and Giberti*, *Concordia Theological Monthly*, 39 (1968), 686–707; William J. Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty. Renaissance Values in the Age of the Counter Reformation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 144–153; Félix Gilbert, *Religion and Politics in the Thought of Gasparo Contarini, in Action and Conviction in Early Modern Europe. Essays in memory of E. H. Harbison*, edited by T.K. Rabb and J. B. Seigel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 90–116; James B. Ross, 'Gasparo Contarini and his Friends', *Studies in the Renaissance*, 17 (1970), 192–232; Giuseppe Alberigo, 'Vita attiva e vita contemplativa in un'esperienza cristiana del XVI secolo', *Studi veneziani*, 16 (1974), 117–225; D. Cantimori, *Umanesimo e religione nel Rinascimento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1975), 247–258; Gigliola Fragnito, *Memoria individuale e costruzione biografica. Beccadelli, Della Casa, Vettori alle origini di un mito* (Urbino: Argalia, 1979); Gigliola Fragnito, *In museo e in villa. Saggi sul Rinascimento perduto* (Venice: Arsenal, 1988); *Gaspare Contarini e il suo tempo* (Venice: Studium Cattolico Veneziano, 1988); Gigliola Fragnito, *Gasparo Contarini. Un magistrato veneziano al servizio della cristianità* (Florence: Olschki, 1988); Antonino Poppi, *Il libero arbitrio nella lettera del Contarini a Vittoria Colonna*, in *Concordia discorsi. Studi su Nicolò Cusano e l'Umanesimo europeo offerti a Giovanni Santinello*, edited by G. Piaia (Padua: Antenore, 1993), 529–541; Elisabeth G. Gleason, *Gasparo Contarini: Venice, Rome, And Reform* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Gigliola Fragnito, *Cinquecento italiano. Religione, cultura e potere dal Rinascimento alla Controriforma* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2011).

⁴ See Enrico Peruzzi, 'Gli allievi di Pomponazzi: Girolamo Fracastoro e Gasparo Contarini', in *Pietro Pomponazzi: tradizione e dissenso*, edited by M. Sgarbi (Florence: Olschki, 2010), 349–364; Pietro B. Rossi, 'Sempre alla pietà et buoni costumi ha exortato le genti: Aristotle in the milieu of Cardinal Contarini (†1542)', in *Christian Readings of Aristotle from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, a cura di L. Bianchi (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 317–395; Enrico Peruzzi, *Natura e destino dell'anima umana: le critiche di Gasparo Contarini al "De immortalitate animae" di Pietro Pomponazzi*, in *Fenomeno, trascendenza, verità. Scritti in onore di Gianfranco Bosio*, edited by F.L. Marcolungo (Padova: il Poligrafo, 2012), 169–183. On this topic cf. Giovanni Di Napoli, *L'immortalità dell'anima nel Rinascimento* (Turin: SEI, 1963), 279–297.

⁵ See Luca Burzelli, *La natura e Aristotele insegnano. Studio sulla filosofia di Gasparo Contarini* (Venice: IVSLA, 2022).

⁶ Cf. Marco Sgarbi, 'Il Socrate veneziano: Trifon Gabriele. Tre scritti filosofici', *Historia philosophica*, 13 (2105), 11–31.

⁷ Cf. Sperone Speroni, *Opere* (Padua: Forcellini, 1740), II, 345; Agostino Valier, *De recta philosophandi ratione libri duo* (Verona: Dalle Donne, 1577), 67; Agostino Valier, *Memoriale a Luigi Contarini* (Venice: Curti, 1803), 11.

⁸ Gasparo Contarini, *Quattro lettere* (Florence: Torrentino, 1558), 9–10.

⁹ Cf. *Delle lettere volgari di diversi nobilissimi huomini et eccellenti ingegni* (Venice: Manuzio, 1544), 76v–79v. Quotations are from *Lettere di XIII. huomini illustri* (Venice: Porcacchi, 1584), 209r–211v.

¹⁰ Cf. Contarini, *Quattro lettere*, 9–40.

¹¹ Cf. A Latin version of this letter exists in the *Opera omnia* (Paris: Nivelli, 1571), 597–603.

¹² Cf. Gigliola Fragnito, *Contarini, Gasparo*, in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1983), 172–192. On these letters see now Marco Sgarbi, 'Le lettere volgari sul libero arbitrio e la predestinazione di Gasparo Contarini', *Rivista di letteratura religiosa italiana*, 3 (2020), 37–50 and Luca Burzelli, 'Una causalità auto-limitata. Note su libero arbitrio e predestinazione secondo Gasparo Contarini', *Rinascimento*, 62 (2022), 257–276.

¹³ *Lettere di XIII. huomini illustri*, 209v.

¹⁴ *Lettere di XIII. huomini illustri*, 209v.

¹⁵ *Lettere di XIII. huomini illustri*, 209v.

¹⁶ *Lettere di XIII. huomini illustri*, 210r.

¹⁷ Aristotle, *Historia animalium*, VIII.1 588a 16–588b 6. Italics mine.

¹⁸ Aristotle, *Ethica nicomachea*, VI.11 1143 a 4–5.

- ¹⁹ See also the insightful comments in the French edition edited by René Antoine Gauthier and Jean Yves Jolif, *L'Éthique à Nicomaque* (Louvain-Paris: Publications Universitaires, 1958), t. 1, p. 2, 527-533.
- ²⁰ Incorporeal substances for Contarini are in fact the essences, the forms, in other words the essential acts of things. Cf. *Lettere di XIII. huomini illustri*, 210r.
- ²¹ *Lettere di XIII. huomini illustri*, 210v-211r.
- ²² See Luca Burzelli, 'Aspetti della tradizione aristotelica nel *De immortalitate animae*: Gasparo Contarini lettore di Avicenna', *Rinascimento*, 59 (2019), 365-390.
- ²³ Cf. *Lettere di XIII. huomini illustri*, 211v.
- ²⁴ Cf. Aristotle, *De anima*, III.4 429 b 6-8; 430 a 4-5.
- ²⁵ Contarini, *Quattro lettere*, 11.
- ²⁶ Cf. Themistius, *Themistii in libros Aristotelis de anima paraphrasis* (Berlin: Reimer, 1899), 100.
- ²⁷ Cf. *Themistii in libros Aristotelis de anima paraphrasis*, 104.
- ²⁸ Cf. *Themistii in libros Aristotelis de anima paraphrasis*, 103.
- ²⁹ See also Paul Oskar Kristeller, *The Philosophy of Marsilio Ficino* (Gloucester, Mass.: Smith, 1964), 256-288; Paul Oskar Kristeller, 'The Scholastic Background of Marsilio Ficino', in *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1984), Vol. 1, 35-97; Paul Oskar Kristeller, 'Lay Traditions and Florentine Platonism', in *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, Vol. 1, 99-122; Paul Oskar Kristeller, 'Florentine Platonism and Its Relations with Humanism and Scholasticism', in *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1993), Vol. 3, 39-48; Paul Oskar Kristeller, *A Thomist Critique of Marsilio Ficino's Theory of Will and Intellect, Fra Vincenzo Bandello O. and his Unpublished Treatise Addressed to Lorenzo de' Medici*, in *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, Vol. 3, 147-171; Tamara Albertini, 'Intellect and Will in Marsilio Ficino Two Correlatives of A Renaissance Concept of Mind', in *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, edited by M.J. Allen – V. Rees – M. Davies, Brill, Leiden 2002, 203-225.
- ³⁰ Contarini, *Quattro lettere*, 10.
- ³¹ Contarini, *Quattro lettere*, 12-14.
- ³² Cf. Aristotle, *De anima*, III.6 431 a 9-20.
- ³³ Contarini, *Quattro lettere*, 16.
- ³⁴ Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, *De divinis nominibus*, 693 B-696 A, 712 A.
- ³⁵ Contarini, *Quattro lettere*, 17.
- ³⁶ Cf. Contarini, *Quattro lettere*, 18-19.
- ³⁷ Cf. Contarini, *Quattro lettere*, 21.
- ³⁸ Contarini, *Quattro lettere*, 22.
- ³⁹ Cf. Contarini, *Quattro lettere*, 23.
- ⁴⁰ Contarini, *Quattro lettere*, 24. Cf. Aristotle, *Ethica nicomachea*, II.5 1106 a 16-24. Contarini here is probably referring to *Sententia libri Ethicorum* 3.14 by Thomas Aquinas.
- ⁴¹ Cf. Contarini, *Quattro lettere*, 24-25.
- ⁴² Cf. Contarini, *Quattro lettere*, 25.
- ⁴³ Cf. Aristotle, *Ethica nicomachea*, II.1 1103 a 14-18.
- ⁴⁴ Cf. Aristotle, *Ethica nicomachea*, I.6 1098 a 16-17.
- ⁴⁵ Contarini, *Quattro lettere*, 27.
- ⁴⁶ Cf. Aristotle, *Ethica nicomachea*, VI.6 1140 b 31-32.
- ⁴⁷ Contarini, *Quattro lettere*, 28.
- ⁴⁸ Contarini, *Quattro lettere*, 28.
- ⁴⁹ Cf. Aristotle, *Ethica nicomachea*, II.6 1106 b 36-1107 a 2.
- ⁵⁰ Contarini, *Quattro lettere*, 28.
- ⁵¹ Contarini, *Quattro lettere*, 29.
- ⁵² Contarini, *Quattro lettere*, 29.
- ⁵³ Contarini, *Quattro lettere*, 30.
- ⁵⁴ Cf. Rossi, *Sempre alla pietà et buoni costumi ha exortato le genti: Aristotle in the milieu of Cardinal Contarini (†1542)*, 327.
- ⁵⁵ Contarini, *Quattro lettere*, 33.
- ⁵⁶ Contarini, *Quattro lettere*, 33-35.
- ⁵⁷ Contarini, *Quattro lettere*, 36.
- ⁵⁸ Aristotle, *Topica*, III.1-2 116 a 12-116 b 26.
- ⁵⁹ Cf. Contarini, *Quattro lettere*, 37.
- ⁶⁰ Aristotle, *Ethica nicomachea*, X.7 1177 a 14-16.
- ⁶¹ Cf. Contarini, *Quattro lettere*, 38.
- ⁶² Cf. Contarini, *Opera*, 189-201. For a more detailed reconstruction, see Di Napoli, *L'immortalità dell'anima nel Rinascimento*, 279-297.
- ⁶³ Also the intellect is immaterial for Contarini, although to a lesser degree because it may have a relationship with the corporeal in the act of knowing.
- ⁶⁴ Cf. Antonino Poppi, 'Il prevalere della vita activa nella paideia del Cinquecento', in *Rapporti tra le Università di Padova e Bologna. Ricerche di filosofia, medicina e scienze*, a cura di L. Rossetti, (Trieste: LINT, 1988), 97-125.