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"A Humanist Triumph?": Marsilio Ficino's Christian Neoplatonism, Medici Patronage, and Republicanism in Renaissance Florence (1433-1495)

Kenneth Wong

Boston University

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Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), the Italian Renaissance Philosopher, and the Medici Family, emphasizing how the Medici’s cultural patronage stretched far beyond financial patronage to influence Florence’s philosophical and political landscape. Ficino’s translations of Platonic texts and his interpretation of Neoplatonism and Christian theology were closely intertwined with his correspondence with Cosimo de’ Medici and Lorenzo de’ Medici. While Ficino himself abstained from direct political involvement, his letters provided a forum for the articulation of virtues derived from ancient philosophy and intended to inculcate republican ideals in the Medici rulers. This research paper traces the evolution of the Medici-Ficino intellectual discourse through Ficino’s philosophical insights and sees how it shaped their moral and political decisions and ultimately contributed to Florence’s cultural image. By examining Ficino’s correspondence and the broader patronage network, this interdisciplinary study draws upon perspectives from philosophy, literary criticism, and intellectual history to reassess the shifting currents of power in Medici patronage. The paper proposes that the Medici family, influenced by Ficino’s philosophical direction, not only preserved Florence’s status as a cultural nexus, but also used their patronage to improve the common good in accordance with republican virtues.

Keywords: Christian Humanism, Christian Theology, Florence, Italian Renaissance, Marsilio Ficino, Medici, Republicanism, Neoplatonism, Patronage Network, Rhetoric

Introduction

Marsilio Ficino's correspondence with the Medici family demonstrates the techniques he used for translating Greek philosophy into a vernacular language for public understanding, as well as the beneficial effects on patrons, intellectuals, and Florentine citizens on a humanistic level. His most frequent correspondences with Medici leaders concentrate on friendship, happiness, self-love, prudence, and tolerance. A clear picture emerges by historically contextualizing their intellectual dialogues, including Cosimo, Lorenzo, and Giuliano's responses to Ficino's advice on conducting a virtuous life. Cosimo and Ficino relished their cultural and intellectual patronage relationship, proving how friendship may improve intellectual and human flourishing.

The power structure of the Medici family, in connection with their wealth and patronage, are exemplified in the Medici Chapel, which features a renowned fresco of the Magi and their retinue by the artist Benozzo Gozzoli, executed between 1459 and 1463. Each wall shows visible portraits of members of the Medici family, depicted alongside their respective groups. The subject is Caspar, the youngest monarch.[1] The young Caspar was portrayed as Lorenzo, a self-assured, religious, Platonic future Florence monarch. His white stallion and sparkling golden armor as he led a throng of common folk and other Medici figures, including Cosimo and Lorenzo's oldest son Lorenzo, on a white horse and wore brilliant gold armor.[2]

Gozzoli's *Magus* serves as an aesthetic representation that aptly reflects the significance of his cultural patronage in disseminating intellectual thought through the interchange of ideas in philosophy, art, and literature. The system of cultural patronage revealed a tri-directional flow, encompassing the powerful and affluent, the intellectual and artistic minds, alongside the artefacts of art and literature, forming a complete circle. This demonstrates how the Medici family and their associates, particularly Ficino, illustrated their influence in the expansion of knowledge and the common good.

[1] Rebecca Howard, "Benozzo Gozzoli, The Medici Palace Chapel Frescoes" (Smarthistory, April 11, 2022), https://smarthistory.org/benozzo-gozzoli-magi-chapel-medici-palace-frescoes/.
[2] Rebecca Howard, "Benozzo Gozzoli, The Medici Palace Chapel Frescoes" (Smarthistory, April 11, 2022), https://smarthistory.org/benozzo-gozzoli-magi-chapel-medici-palace-frescoes/.

(Figure 1: Benozzo Gozzoli, *Procession of the Youngest King, Caspar*, east wall, Magi Chapel, 1459, Medici Palace, Florence)[3]

Marsilio Ficino, Christian Neoplatonism, and Republicanism

Born in Figline Valdarno, Florence, Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) was one of Italy's most well-established early Renaissance humanist philosophers. He was a Roman Catholic priest, scholar, astrologer, Christian Neoplatonist, and the first to translate all Platonic intellectual treatises from ancient Greek to Latin.[4] His knowledge of Greek philosophy and Latin literature stemmed from his classical education. This placed as him a key intellectual mediator between the classical past and the humanist Medici rulers, who sought his patronage network counsel.

Ficino started his intellectual journey in the 1450s by writing and sharing his ideas in stimulating Socratic-style dialogues with Medici and Platonic groups. Cosimo's support in the 1460s helped Ficino become famous for his clear writing and made Greco-Roman ideas accessible. Paul Oskar Kristeller notes that Ficino adopted "vernacular humanism," an intellectual movement designed to render profound philosophical precepts more obtainable in common discourse. Ficino sought to engage an audience of "merchants, artisans, and ladies" by tailoring the "style, literary genres, methods, and ideas of humanism" to the Florentine tongue. This general audience usually held an understanding of literature, morals, and religion, yet demonstrated an insufficient command of Latin.[5] Ficino's nomination as a canon of Santa Maria del Fiore and his consecration as a Catholic priest in 1473 spoke to his notion of Christian Neoplatonism transcending political and intellectual worlds. Rather, Neoplatonism was more

[3] Rebecca Howard, "Benozzo Gozzoli, The Medici Palace Chapel Frescoes" (Smarthistory, April 11, 2022), https://smarthistory.org/benozzo-gozzoli-magi-chapel-medici-palace-frescoes/.
[4] "Marsilio Ficino," in *Britannica*, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Marsilio-Ficino.
[5] Paul Oskar Kristeller, "Ficino and His Work," 5.

about helping Christians to have a more systematic awareness of Greek philosophy and Christian theology.[6]

I.i. Ficino's Self-Reflection: A Virtue of Philosophical Prudence

In Letter 33, titled "*Benefacta male locata, malefacta arbitror*" (translated as "Good deeds wrongly placed are, in my opinion, bad deeds"), Ficino discusses how philosophy helps preachers and pupils reciprocally for the common good, and how he benefits intellectually as a preacher. Ficino uses critical self-examination to demonstrate that philosophy is more than just philanthropic work for the common good. As an appeal to not sacrifice oneself in order to help others, he asks a rhetorical question to himself, expressing a cynicism in ridiculing his job as an intellectual missionary: "Have you, for so long, with the aid of philosophy, studied so many things pertaining to others that you have forgotten your own?"[7] For Ficino, philosophy is more than a subject taught by humanist teachers to instruct others in the virtue of prudence, as his correspondence with his Medici reveals. Rather, it is a subject matter that teaches educators self-awareness as well. This relates to Ficino's parodies of intellectuals, including himself, who profess to be seeking wisdom but frequently do so without the requisite humility and depth of understanding. Ficino believes that their pursuit of knowledge lacks wisdom because they ignore intellectual and moral issues. He says they seek information "with too little wisdom," demonstrating their lack of humility. This implies that the general public sought insight without understanding its intellectual and moral depth.[8] Ficino's philosophy, at its core, advocates for virtuous actions in human conduct, aimed not solely at the common good but also as a model for self-improvement through free will.

II. Cosimo de' Medici: Cultural Patronage and Ficino's Christian Neoplatonism in the Moral Foundations of Florentine Republicanism

Cosimo de' Medici (1389-1464), also known as Cosimo di Giovanni de' Medici, was a Florence-born Italian statesman and banker with a keen appreciation of humanist philosophy. When he was in his early twenties, he married Contessina de' Bardi, the eldest daughter of Giovanni de' Bardi, one of his father's banking partners in Rome. Through their marriage, one can imagine the close intertwining of financial and political power and networks between prominent families of the time.[9] Right after the death of his father, Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici (1360-1429), Cosimo inherited Giovanni's professional duties as "head of the banks and campaign manager for the emerging Medici party."[10] By leaving Cosimo a large fortune,

[6] Christopher S. Celenza, "Marsilio Ficino," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2021 Edition., https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2021/entries/ficino/.
[7] "Letter 33: Good Deeds Wrongly Placed Are to My Mind Bad Deeds (*Benefacta Male Locata, Malefacta Arbitror*)," in *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, by Marsilio Ficino, Vol. 2 (London: Shepheard-Walwyn, 1982), 41.
[8] "Letter 33: Good Deeds Wrongly Placed Are to My Mind Bad Deeds (*Benefacta Male Locata, Malefacta Arbitror*)," in *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, by Marsilio Ficino, Vol. 2 (London: Shepheard-Walwyn, 1982), 41.
[9] Christopher Hibbert, "Part One: Il Quattrocentro - Section II: The Rise of the Medici," in *The House of Medici: Its Rise and Fall* (New York: William Morrow & Company, INC, 1975), 38–39.
[10] Christopher Hibbert, "Part One: Il Quattrocentro - Section II: The Rise of the Medici," 38–39.

including 180,000 florins and rights to bank and land holdings around Florence, Giovanni made room for Cosimo to have a secure, powerful financial base for his future intellectual and artistic endeavors and for his network of cultural patronage.[11] Unlike Giovanni, who seemed more "business" and "family" oriented in his banking career, Cosimo's young classical education made him more ambitious in embracing "the intellectual excitement of early fifteenth-century humanism," which could be seen as a major turning point in re-shaping the way the Medici would later conduct politics.[12]

When Cosimo reached the age of 51 in 1440, he sought to consolidate his political authority in Florence by transforming the Palazzo della Signoria, formerly known as the Town Hall, into his official palace residence. This strategic relocation effectively projected his authority into the heart of the Republic, with both visual and symbolic effects. It was also a forerunner of his subsequent endeavors to consolidate all sectors of society under his de facto power, in order to achieve the outcomes he anticipated for himself in the years to come. Some of the decisive measures he implemented were effective, such as reducing the influence of the Florentine patriciate while strengthening the authority of his new bureaucracy. Cosimo's radical paradigm shift in Florentine politics allowed him to consolidate his control over the Florentine state by suppressing internal conflicts, assuming control of the local militia, and constructing additional fortifications. In this case, his political choices were instrumental in transforming the initial perception of his weakness into a more robust and reliable image as the ruler of the Medici dynasty, both at home and abroad.[13]

On September 28, 1433, prior to the Signoria's decision to expel Cosimo to Padua for a period of ten years, Cosimo delivered an oration in which he displayed his best philosophical virtues by caring for Florence's common good, but refraining from self-defense in the trial.[14] With courage and determination, he declared, "If I thought that this my misfortune and terrible ruin might serve to bring peace to this blessed people, not only would exile be acceptable, but I should even welcome death."[15] For his noble "death," Cosimo took his gesture of selflessness to a level that proved his commitment to ethical principles in spite of his political failure. By preserving Florence's political and social stability while avoiding further tensions with the *Signori*, Cosimo's respect for the honor of collective harmony led him to draw on Ficino's wisdom for more prudent foresight in future political decisions, such as how Ficino's notion of happiness, discussed below in their correspondence, relates to how Cosimo sacrificed his personal life to maintain Florence's prosperity as a benevolent ruler within the exchange of intellectual growth in their close-knit Medici-Ficino network.

[11] Christopher Hibbert, "Part One: Il Quattrocentro - Section II: The Rise of the Medici," 38–39.
[12] Hibbert, "Part One: Il Quattrocentro - Section II: The Rise of the Medici," 38–39.
[13] Alison M. Brown, "The Humanist Portrait of Cosimo de' Medici, Pater Patriae," 186.
[14] "Part One: Il Quattrocento - Section II: The Rise of the Medici," in *The House of Medici: Its Rise and Fall*, by Christopher Hibbert (New York: William Morrow & Company, INC, 1975), 52.
[15] Marsilio Ficino, "Diary of Cosimo de' Medici and His Oration to the Signory of Florence When Sentence of Exile Was Pronounced Against Him," in *Lives of the Early Medici: As Told in Their Correspondence*, ed. and trans. Janet Ross (London: Chatto & Windus, 1910), 21.

II.i. Cosimo and Ficino's Dialogues on Good Life: Happiness, Honor, and Prudence

Although there was sparse correspondence between Ficino and Cosimo, Cosimo wrote one known letter to Ficino during Cosimo's final months at Careggi in 1464.[16] Entitled "On the Desire for Happiness" ("*De foelicitatis desiderio*"), this letter provides insight into Cosimo's thoughts on the pursuit of happiness. Between them, their minds were ignited by the discussion of happiness in the search for personal identity. Cosimo wrote to Ficino that his visit to his estate at Careggi was not for a leisurely occasion; instead, it was "for the sake of cultivating [his] mind."[17] It is probable that Cosimo's patronage toward the end of his life was as intellectually beneficial as he expected, having ultimately acquired Ficino's knowledge by meditating his translated Platonic treatise, "The Supreme Good."[18] Despite their professional relationship, they naturally grew into a close friendship, and Cosimo expressed his gratitude for Ficino's translation of this treatise "from Greek to Latin," making ancient wisdom all the more comprehensible for his pseudo-humanistic pursuit.[19] The mutual interest of Cosimo and Ficino about the philosophical exploration of pleasure resulted in an immense alteration in their shared affection and esteem for the joy of friendship. When Cosimo said that there is "nothing more wholeheartedly than to know which way leads most surely to happiness," both Christian and humanistic folk were dissatisfied with only attaining a conceptual concept of pleasure.[20] Rather, they were far more enthusiastic about implementing philosophy as a practical approach to developing and learning through the act of intellectual curiosity collectively, a virtue that was embraced in their patronage network.

II.ii. Ficino's Philosophical Response to Cosimo's Pursuit of Happiness

In response to Cosimo's reflections on the nature of happiness in his final moments, Ficino replied to Cosimo with another letter titled "The Way to Happiness" ("*Quae sit ad foelicitatem via*").[21] Cosimo internalized the philosophical knowledge Ficino handed down to him in his pursuit of happiness. Ficino's recognition of Cosimo's political accomplishments (which likely included his political accomplishments as a ruler and his cultural or intellectual contributions to Florence as a patron) led him to conclude that Cosimo had surpassed his capabilities as a scholar and that he could do nothing to "show the way to a man who has already nearly reached the goal."[22] The only difference between them is that Ficino was much more analytical and systematic in his approach to the attributes that make up *happiness*. He did not, like Cosimo, use what he had been through in life as a person to define happiness. For instance, he made his last effort to explain to Cosimo that things like "riches, health, beauty, strength, nobility of birth, honours, power, prudence, as well as justice, fortitude and

[16] J. R. Hale, "Chapter I: The First Steps to Power," 42.
[17] Marsilio Ficino, "Letter 2: The Way to Happiness (*Quae Sit Ad Foelicitatem Via*)," 32–34.
[18] Marsilio Ficino, "Letter 2: The Way to Happiness (*Quae Sit Ad Foelicitatem Via*)," 32–34.
[19] Marsilio Ficino, "Letter 2: The Way to Happiness (*Quae Sit Ad Foelicitatem Via*)," 32–34.
[20] Marsilio Ficino, "Letter 2: The Way to Happiness (*Quae Sit Ad Foelicitatem Via*)," 32–34.
[21] Marsilio Ficino, "Diary of Cosimo de' Medici and His Oration to the Signory of Florence When Sentence of Exile Was Pronounced Against Him," 73.
[22] Marsilio Ficino, "Letter 2: The Way to Happiness (*Quae Sit Ad Foelicitatem Via*),", 32–34.

temperance, and above all else wisdom," were the Platonic objects that "comprehends the whole essence of happiness."[23] Ficino's emphasis on "wisdom" as the mother of all virtues is justified by the reasons he gives for it: good will and moral conscience in knowledge. It appears that Ficino was a great admirer of Cosimo's fulfillment of this humanistic vision for the greater part of his life. In terms of the relationship between Cosimo as patron and Ficino as intellectual commissioner, their patronage project proved successful in defining the place of happiness in the self, in human affairs, and in the political world for moral conduct.

The earliest surviving marble sculpture, the portrait of Cosimo (Fig. 3), was carved by a Florentine sculptor named Antonio Rossellino (c. 1427-1479), who was famous for adding fine intricate detail and realistic features to his artworks.[24] Rossellino's intricate, stylistic sculpture for Cosimo is meticulously rendered in its depiction of Cosimo's facial complexion, which bears a striking resemblance to his other sculptures, including the Chapel of the Cardinal of Portugal in San Miniato al Monte (1553). The majority of his works follow the elaborate and decorative pattern observed in architecture and figurative sculpture.[25] Rosellini's sculptures were intended to honor Ficino's fame both during his lifetime and after his death. His choice of white marble for this sculpture reminds the viewer of Cosimo's royal lineage through its elegance. Since this sculpture was probably commissioned in Cosimo's lifetime, it is possible that Rossellino was a close acquaintance of Cosimo, learning alongside him and possibly Ficino from their patronage network.

(Figure 3: Marble sculpture of Marsilio Ficino's portrait, engraved by sculptor, Antonio Rossellino around the year of 1460, located in Staatliche Museen, Berlin)[26]

[23] Marsilio Ficino, "Letter 2: The Way to Happiness (*Quae Sit Ad Foelicitatem Via*),", 32–34.
[24] *Antonio Rossellino: Italian Sculptor* (Britannica, April 4, 2024), https://www.britannica.com/biography/Antonio-Rossellino.
[25] Antonio Rossellino, *Bildnis Des Cosimo de'Medici*, 1460, Berlin, Germany, Staatliche Museeen zu Berlin, https://recherche.smb.museum/detail/863391.
[26] Rossellino, *Bildnis Des Cosimo de'Medici*, 1460, https://recherche.smb.museum/detail/863391.

III. Lorenzo the Magnificent: Humanism, Politics, and Philosophical Patronage

Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici (1469-1492), known as Lorenzo the Magnificent, came to power following the death of his father, Piero di Cosimo (1464-1469), on December 1, 1469, at a period of uncertainty when many were hoping for political change.[27] Lorenzo, who was not yet twenty-one at the time, was known for having an "incalculable temperament," a radical departure from his father's political magnanimity.[28] Rather than aspiring to be a firm ruler similar to Piero, who not only claimed the Via Larga palace to be his own, but also kept the constitutional crisis of 1465-66 under control in order to secure the Medici reputation as a "dynasty of princes," Lorenzo was far more inclined to be a dedicated humanist.[29] In contrast to Cosimo, his grandfather, Lorenzo was not reliant upon inherited renown or the political and economic legacies of his forebears to establish his reputation; rather, he charted a new trajectory, marked by his pursuit of intellectual rigor and cultural pursuits, including the engagement with classical traditions of poetry and epics.

Lorenzo's humanistic acumen was evident as he began to become involved in the educational and intellectual circles of the Platonic Academy. Under the tutelage of a priest and Latin scholar named Gentile Becchi, Lorenzo grew to love reading Latin, and by the age of twelve he was enjoying the works of Ovid and Dante.[30] This early exposure laid the groundwork for his later efforts at writing poetry, a skill he honed by the time he reached the age of sixteen. Until 1462, the young Lorenzo was in the Platonic circle with Ficino, Leon Battista Alberti, and Argyropoulos, the Greek scholar, to tackle questions about the nature of "true nobility," "the active life" as opposed to the "contemplative life," and "the nature of God" for his neo-Platonic exploration of human flourishing.[31] This illustrates the extent to which Lorenzo and Cosimo shared similar interests with Ficino in their network of patronage. However, Lorenzo was even more interested in understanding how philosophy could be employed to aestheticize his own pursuits, which were characterized by an extroverted demeanor.

III.i. Lorenzo's Political Ambitions and Ficino's Philosophical Influence

During the tenure of Lorenzo (1469-1492), the consolidation of political authority was markedly more evident than in the era of his Medici forebears, particularly Cosimo. Despite the enactment of new laws that bestowed primary authority upon the Accoppiatori regarding the selection of successors, the *Signoria*, initially elected by the *Accoppiatori*, retained a more substantial political mandate in governing this electoral process.[32] Lorenzo aspired to rule with centralized authority, by prioritizing stability over republican democracy.

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[27] J. R. Hale, *Florence and the Medici: The Pattern of Control*, "Chapter II: The Medicean Regime" (Thames and Hudson; Plymouth, Great Britain, 1977), 48.
[28] J. R. Hale, "Chapter II: The Medicean Regime," 48.
[29] J. R. Hale, "Chapter II: The Medicean Regime," 46.
[30] J. R. Hale, "Chapter II: The Medicean Regime," 49.
[31] J. R. Hale, "Chapter II: The Medicean Regime," 49.
[32] Nicolai Rubinstein, *The Government of Florence under the Medici (1434 to 1494)*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), Part III: "Lorenzo di Piero: The Medici at the Height of their Power," 181.

Ficino's letters to Lorenzo were written while Florentines, long Medici loyalists, were becoming dissatisfied with Lorenzo for his lack of political legitimacy. Lorenzo's drastic legislative changes of 1466 removed electoral control and reinstalled *Signoria*'s lot-based election, which contradicted republican democracy.[33] Nicolai Rubinstein asserts that although Ficino opted to engage in intellectual discourse with Lorenzo, he was presumably aware of the political challenges and consequently refrained from explicit commentary. By emphasizing republican values such as civic engagement and responsibility, Ficino reminded Lorenzo of the intellectual basis of republican democracy and its emphasis on the common good.[34]

Despite the philosophical influence of Ficino on Lorenzo's political thought, neither could have anticipated the unforeseen events that transpired, culminating in the attempted, albeit unsuccessful, assassination of Lorenzo and his brother Giuliano by their rival family, the Pazzi, during the Pazzi Conspiracy on April 26, 1478.[35] Besides the hatred of these Florentine families, the dissatisfaction of the papal authority with Lorenzo was just as ominous. Pope Sixtus IV, alongside his nephew Riario and Francesco Salviati, the archbishop of Pisa, joined forces with the Pazzi and orchestrated the plot to assassinate Lorenzo and Giuliano during Easter Mass in the Duomo on April 26.[36] Giuliano's death was a pivotal moment: Ficino's Neoplatonic philosophy was not a reliable tool for helping the Medici, especially Lorenzo, achieve their political goals.

Notwithstanding the unfortunate fate that later befell Lorenzo's nearest kin in this political narrative, it remains that Ficino endeavoured through various philosophical means to persuade Lorenzo to disengage from his privileged peers, enabling him to thrive both spiritually and intellectually through the pursuit of classical wisdom. In his inaugural letter, Ficino praised Lorenzo for his renunciation of secular "pleasures" in favor of the loftier realm of the literary world.[37] For Ficino, the spiritual and divine form of pleasure transcended the secular self, elevating a person to the "delight of the Muses," as Lorenzo did.[38] In speaking of the "Muses," Ficino went on to mention how Lorenzo's patronage for the support of Angelo Poliziano, a scholar of ancient Greek, was the catalyst for the works of Homer, known as "the high priest" among "the Muses," to be scattered throughout the city of Florence.[39] Figuratively, Ficino's reiteration of "Muses" was a strategy to align Lorenzo's humanist identity with the classical intellectual tradition, illustrating his commitment to intellectual pursuits, transforming the intricate, archaic Homeric Greek into a Latin style that would render the Florentines more philosophically "illustrious" than ever before.[40]

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[33] Nicolai Rubinstein, *Lorenzo de' Medici: The Formation of His Statecraft, 72*, Italian Lecture, the British Academy, London, 1977, from the Proceedings of the British Academy, London, Volume LXIII (1977), Oxford University Press.
[34] Nicolai Rubinstein, *Lorenzo de' Medici: The Formation of His Statecraft,* 72.
[35] "*Lorenzo de' Medici: Italian Statesman*," section on the Pazzi conspiracy, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Lorenzo-de-Medici.
[36] *Lorenzo de' Medici: Italian Statesman*, in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Lorenzo-de-Medici.
[37] Marsilio Ficino, "Letter 17: How useful it is to maintain scholars (*Quantum utile sit alere doctos*)," in *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, by Ficino Marsilio, trans. the Language Department of the School of Economic Science, London, Vol. 1 (London: Shepheard-Walwyn, 1983), 56.
[38] Marsilio Ficino, "Letter 17: How useful it is to maintain scholars (*Quantum utile sit alere doctos*)," 56.
[39] Marsilio Ficino, "Letter 17: How useful it is to maintain scholars (*Quantum utile sit alere doctos*)," 56.
[40] Marsilio Ficino, "Letter 17: How useful it is to maintain scholars (*Quantum utile sit alere doctos*)," 56.

III.ii. Patronage Relationship between Lorenzo and Ficino: Expectations, Disappointment, and Contradictions

Lorenzo's letter to Ficino, entitled "A Request for a Letter" (*Invitatio ad scribendum*), seems to have been published after 1481, the period following the Pazzi conspiracy, and may have been written by Lorenzo at that time.[41] Lorenzo's letter to Ficino, marked by an angry and frustrated tone, expresses his exasperation over the delayed response, hinting at the anxiety stemming from his brother's tragic death in the assassination plot. Lorenzo, adopting a rather imperious tone, unnecessarily insists on a fast answer from Ficino, despite Ficino being away from home in Pisa at the time of the correspondence:

> I fully believed that if good will were equally strong in us both there would be equal enthusiasm in correspondence, which is a duty of life … But since I saw that I must count in many days what I had thought should be measured in hours, there no longer appeared any room for excuses. Now I, who had taken up your defense, began to think only of how I should prosecute you, since many ways came to mind.[42]

Lorenzo and Ficino shared intellectual and humanistic interests, yet they were socially distinct and had different personalities: Lorenzo was outgoing, whereas Cosimo was introverted. We can see how Lorenzo sought to assert dominance in their intellectual discourse, even resorting to exaggerated terms such as "I should persecute you" to illustrate his desperation in seeking Ficino's advice for help in his political setbacks.[43] Lorenzo recognized that he had not yet fully internalized Ficino's philosophical teachings, as he was confronted with moral confusion. Lorenzo's emotive rhetoric, in contrast to the virtue of prudence that Ficino had originally taught him, veered into unrealistic territory, demonstrating the detrimental influence that Pulci had upon him.

Conclusion

This study advances knowledge of the complex interaction between the Medici dynasty and thinkers, like Marsilio Ficino, during Florence's Renaissance from 1433 to 1495. Rather than seeing their patronage network as a linear process, such as the Medici commissioning Ficino to translate ancient Greek texts for aspirational endeavors, Ficino benefited from the Medici's financial backing for intellectual pursuits. I argue that the Medici's humanist initiative was far more reciprocal and extended beyond their own collective network, contributing to Florence's common good in terms of human flourishing, intellectual stimulation, and social harmony. His interpretation and translocation of ancient Greek writings for the Medici family circle shaped his Platonic ideals. By applying their expertise through political statesmanship or Ficino's translations, these benefactors either directly or indirectly affected the larger group of intellectuals and the people in Florence.

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[41] Marsilio Ficino, "Letter 23: A Request for a letter (*Invitatio ad scribendum*)," in The Letters of Marsilio Ficino, by Ficino Marsilio, trans. the Language Department of the School of Economic Science, London, Vol. 1 (London: Shepheard-Walwyn, 1983), 61.
[42] Marsilio Ficino, "Letter 23: A Request for a letter (*Invitatio ad scribendum*)," 61.
[43] Marsilio Ficino, "Letter 23: A Request for a letter (*Invitatio ad scribendum*)," 61.

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