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On Grammar and Justice: Notes on *Convivio*, II. xii. 1–7

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Dante's ideas about education and learning can be traced primarily in the first two books of his *Convivio*. Here the poet develops a specific programme of dissemination of knowledge in the vernacular, presents a description of disciplines and provides autobiographical details concerning his own learning experience. The treatise clearly sets out its aims from the beginning, where Dante offers a rather peculiar elaboration of two themes that were topical in medieval philosophical writing: the desire for knowledge and the impediments to its fulfilment. The *incipit* of the *Convivio* notoriously quotes an Aristotelian adage, recurrent also in discourses in praise of philosophy delivered by masters in medieval university Faculties of Arts: 'Sì come dice lo Filosofo nel principio della Prima Filosofia, tutti li uomini naturalmente desiderano di sapere' (*Cvo*, I. i. 1) [As the Philosopher says at the beginning of the *First Philosophy*, all men by nature desire to know].[1] In line with the exegetical tradition on this passage, Dante immediately confronts the topic of the impediments that limit the acquisition of knowledge. Yet his approach is radically new. Proceeding in an unprecedented way, the poet plans with his *Convivio* to overcome at least some of the obstacles, which impede certain categories of men from learning.[2]

The complex dialectic between the universal character of the desire for knowledge and the actual identification of a limited audience to whom the treatise seems to be addressed is a matter for debate among scholars.[3] However, we can safely state that Dante's ground-breaking pedagogical programme, which he intends to realise through the auto-commentary on his doctrinal *canzoni*, marks a new step in the development of a vernacular philosophy created by lay authors for a lay public.[4] Dante's plan is to bridge the gap between the most learned, who enjoy the 'bread of

angels', and at least a part of those who are doomed to 'share the food of sheep' (*Cvo*, I. i. 7). This aim has led him to set up his own 'banquet', whose main courses are his *canzoni*. Such a decision, Dante tells us, was inspired by friendship and mercy, which move both those who sit at the highest table and himself:

> Ma però che ciascuno uomo a ciascuno uomo naturalmente è amico, e ciascuno amico si duole del difetto di colui ch'elli ama, coloro che a così alta mensa sono cibati non sanza misericordia sono inver di quelli che in bestiale pastura veggiono erba e ghiande se[n] gire mangiando. E acciò che misericordia è madre di beneficio, sempre liberalmente coloro che sanno porgono della loro buona ricchezza alli veri poveri […]. E io adunque, che non seggio alla beata mensa, ma, fuggito della pastura del vulgo, a' piedi di coloro che seggiono ricolgo di quello che da loro cade, […] misericordievolemente mosso, […] per li miseri alcuna cosa ho riservata.
>
> (*Cvo*, I. i. 8–10)
>
> [But since man is by nature a friend of all men, and every friend is grieved by defects found in the one he loves, they who are fed at so lofty a table are not without compassion toward those whom they see grazing about on grass and acorns in animal pastures. And since compassion is the mother of generosity, they who possess knowledge always give liberally of their great riches to the truly poor […]. Therefore I (who do not sit at the blessed table, but, having fled the pasture of the common herd, gather up a part of what falls to the feet of those who do sit there […], and moved by compassion […]) have set aside for those who are unfortunate something.]

In commenting on this passage, Sonia Gentili has pointed out that the concept of the benefit derived from mercy ('misericordia è madre di beneficio') relies on an Augustinian doctrine, which conceived mercy as strictly related not to charity (as in Aquinas), but to justice.[5] According to Augustine, the virtue of justice actualises itself in helping the wretched, 'in subveniendo miseris' (*De trinitate* XIV. ix. l. 38). This description, which originally appears as part of Augustine's discussion of the role of the four cardinal virtues in the afterlife, crystallises as a clear definition of the same virtues in the relevant chapter of the most widespread theological work of the late Middle Ages, Peter Lombard's *Sentences* (III. d. xxxiii. ch.1.2: 'iustitia est in subveniendo miseris'). Augustine's definition sparked a whole tradition according to which mercy towards *miseri*

provides a *beneficium* that amends the imbalance in distributional justice created by greed and hoarding.[6] Hence we may conclude that the *Convivio* itself has to be seen as the product of an act of justice.

One could argue that such an ideological stance ought not tolerate any sort of restriction of the prospective audience. However, I do not see any insurmountable incongruity between acting with mercy and liberality and the identification of a specific group of recipients for a single act.[7] As a matter of fact, Dante sets up a banquet exclusively for those who are affected by external impediments to their pursuit of knowledge. What is more, this is a two-tier banquet, whose arrangement is based on a moral appraisal.[8] Those impeded by civic or domestic duties will sit at the table, while the indolent deserve only to sit at their feet:

> vegna qua qualunque è [per cura] familiare o civile nella umana fame rimaso, e ad una mensa colli altri simili impediti s'assetti; e alli loro piedi si pongano tutti quelli che per pigrizia si sono stati, ché non sono degni di più alto sedere.
>
> (*Cvo*, I. i. 13)
>
> [Let come here all those whose human hunger derives from domestic or civic responsibilities, and let them sit at the same table with others likewise handicapped; and at their feet let all those place themselves who do not merit a higher seat because of their indolence.]

The kind of indolence ('pigrizia') that Dante aims to overcome is that which frustrates any attempt to obviate the inconvenience of living far from an adequate intellectual environment. However generic, the explanation reveals a remarkable awareness of the importance of educational facilities and intellectual milieus: '[…] lo difetto del luogo dove la persona è nata e nutrita, che tal ora sarà da ogni studio non solamente privato, ma da gente studiosa lontano' [… the handicap that derives from the place where a person is born and bred, which at times will not only lack a university (*studio*) but be far removed from the company of educated persons] (*Cvo*, I. i. 4).[9] Such concern for the material and social aspects of learning resonates with Dante's renowned account of his own educational experience as an adult, in *Cvo*, II. xii. 7. Here he refers to his attendance at the 'scuole delli religiosi' and 'disputazioni delli filosofanti' [to the schools of the religious orders and to the disputations held by the philosophers], sometime after Beatrice's death. The process that led Dante to frequent these schools and disputes is described in some detail, in a passage that is well worth re-examining.

After the loss of 'lo primo diletto della mia anima' [the first delight of my soul], that is, after the death of Beatrice, the poet experiences an existential crisis – 'rimasi di tanta tristizia punto' [pierced by such sorrow] – which calls for support (*Cvo*, II. xii. 1). Hence, Dante approaches two prominent consolatory texts: the *Consolation of Philosophy*, in which Boethius searches for relief from his imprisonment and wretchedness, and the *De amicitia*, where Cicero elaborates Laelius's loss of his friend Scipio. The effects of these readings go well beyond consolation, and impact on Dante's intellectual experience in a twofold way. First, the desire to penetrate the meaning of the two texts (the 'sentenza') pushes the poet's interpretative abilities to their limits. It requires the best of both his grammatical skills – 'l'arte di gramatica ch'io avea' – and his personal *ingegno* [intellect]:

> E avegna che duro mi fosse nella prima entrare nella loro sentenza, finalmente v'entrai tanto entro, quanto l'arte di gramatica ch'io avea e un poco di mio ingegno potea fare; per lo quale ingegno molte cose, quasi come sognando, già vedea, sì come nella Vita Nova si può vedere.
>
> (*Cvo*, II. xii. 4)
>
> [Although it was difficult for me at first to penetrate their meaning, I finally penetrated it as deeply as my command of Latin and the small measure of my intellect enabled me to do, by which intellect I had perceived many things before, as in a dream, as may be seen in the *New Life*.]

Second, the two works open up to Dante a whole new intellectual world to explore:[10]

> E sì come essere suole che l'uomo va cercando argento e fuori della 'ntenzione truova oro, lo quale occulta cagione presenta, non forse sanza divino imperio; io, che cercava di consolar me, trovai non solamente alle mie lagrime rimedio, ma vocabuli d'autori e di scienze e di libri: li quali considerando, giudicava bene che la filosofia, che era donna di questi autori, di queste scienze e di questi libri, fosse somma cosa.
>
> (*Cvo*, II. xii. 5)
>
> [And just as it often happens that a man goes looking for silver and apart from his intention finds gold, which some hidden cause presents, perhaps not without divine ordinance, so I who sought to console myself found not only a remedy for my tears but also the words of authors, sciences, and books. Pondering these, I quickly

determined that Philosophy, who was the lady of these authors, sciences, and books, was a great thing.]

From this arises the decision to go to those 'places' – schools and disputations – where philosophy, that is knowledge, thoroughly unfolds. To sum up, we could say that an existential demand sparked a personal search in texts of moral philosophy. In turn these readings nurtured a desire for further in-depth learning, pursued through strenuous study and through attendance at institutions of higher education.

The position of this passage is of paramount importance for the overall project of the *Convivio*. At the beginning of book II, chapter xii, Dante embarks on the allegorical *and true* explanation of the *canzone* – 'esposizione allegorica e vera' (*Cvo*, II. xii. 1) – interpreting the conflict between the memory of the 'glorious lady' who had passed away and the interest in a new 'gentle' or 'noble' lady, as a tension between different intellectual stances, with the *donna gentile* in the role of Lady Philosophy.[11] The accounts of both personal and intellectual life fruitfully converge to complete the profile of the author himself. He was not allowed to eat the bread of angels at the noblest table of wisdom, but was able to sit at its foot and to 'collect' the crumbs that he now shares.[12] Indeed, there is no reason not to think that his mid-to-high position in the hierarchy of the banquet was granted first and foremost by his attendance at schools and disputations.[13] Not by chance, it was precisely after 30 months of attendance and of study that – Dante says – he started writing what is now the first 'main course' of the *Convivio, Voi che 'ntendendo* (*Cvo*, II. xii. 8). Hence Dante's presentation of his own personal intellectual experience and formation is perfectly attuned with both the underpinning metaphor of the banquet and his intermediate position in the intellectual hierarchy – one that allows him to recompose the leftovers of wisdom and to offer them to his prospective audience. At the same time, this portrait both sets the limits of Dante's educational project and legitimises it.[14] Finally, it paves the way for his description of the system of knowledge, which is the subject of the following chapters and was certainly perceived by the author as an essential element.[15]

Dante's declaration about the limits of his 'arte di gramatica' has raised substantial speculation. 'Grammar' could well refer either to his knowledge of Latin language or his expertise in the liberal art of grammar. The first interpretation is quite restrictive, even though it is supported by Dante's wide use of the term *gramatica* with such a meaning, in both Latin and vernacular works. Far from considering it a mere topos, some scholars read this passage as an explicit declaration of weakness in Latin. Most recently, Robert Black has gone as far as to list 'remnants of

Dante's imperfect Latin education […] evident in his mature writings' to support this interpretation.[16]

Whatever we might think about Dante's Latin – whose excellence, in my view, thoroughly unfolds in the magnificent late *Eclogues*[17] – the poet's own career seems to outline the profile of a skilful, proud and valued *dictator*. In the *Vita nova*, he mentions an epistle that he supposedly sent to the city's governors to mark Beatrice's death (*VN*, 19. 8 [Barbi XXX. 1]); in the following decade, he acted as chancellor of the exiled Florentine *Universitas Alborum* [Association of the Whites]. Moreover, one could wonder why Dante should choose to declare such a deficiency while promoting himself as a competent mediator of wisdom and doctrine.

As regards the second possible interpretation of 'grammar', it should be pointed out that, since the grammar curriculum of the time was founded on the learning of the Latin language, this option *de facto* incorporates the first.[18] Not by chance, Mengaldo admitted the difficulty of interpreting this passage, stating that it is not possible to exclude that 'arte di gramatica' could actually mean 'knowledge of grammar rules', 'grammar technique', with the noteworthy comment that 'comunque il senso non cambia' [the ultimate meaning does not change anyhow].[19]

It is worth noting that the passage specifically refers to the '*art* of grammar'. *Arte* is another ambiguous term, employed by Dante mainly to describe an operational and practical expertise, based on the command of a technique.[20] The description of grammar as a discipline, which features in the following chapter, is not particularly helpful – primarily because in this section Dante labels the seven liberal arts as 'sciences', a term that undoubtedly points to theoretical knowledge.[21] What is more, he describes grammar as a 'science of language'. This includes lexicon, conjugations and constructions and, most notably, their changes over time (*Cvo*, II. xiii. 10). Certainly a historical linguistics of this kind could hardly find much space in late-medieval teaching of grammar, and in the pedagogy of literacy, which included prescriptive morphology and syntax. What is more, it is anything but useless in understanding either the 'art of grammar', on which Dante relied in his reading of Boethius and Cicero, or the kind of grammar education he could have acquired, either at school or independently.

Just as Mengaldo recognised the ultimate ambiguity of the term 'grammar', so we could well think that the boundaries of 'art' are equally blurred. We could thus state, as a provisional conclusion, that the 'art of grammar' refers to Dante's command of the Latin language, as well as a set of grammatical rules and techniques which pertained to the art of grammar as a discipline – and whose ultimate aim, at its highest levels, was a full mastery of writing and reading in Latin.[22]

The discussion about *gramatica* intersects with Dante's likewise troubling definition of the *Consolation* as a text 'non conosciuto da molti' [not known to many] (*Cvo*, II. xii. 2). In fact, Boethius's work was 'the most widely read […] in Italian schools from 1300 to 1450'.[23] It featured in reading lists at the highest stages of grammatical education and was widely copied.[24] This is why most scholars understand Dante's statement as referring not to a poor dissemination of the text, but rather to superficial and partial understanding of it.[25]

Further light could possibly be shed on the gap between the surviving evidence and the poet's own experience – or his presentation of it – by properly framing the *Consolation* within the curriculum of grammar schools in late medieval Florence. According to Paul Gehl, Boethius's long and quite challenging text, hardly subject to cuts, 'could not have been a regular part of the early latinizing curriculum […]. It must have been seen as an advanced special-case text, appropriate for the best and most promising students'.[26] And so Dante autonomously climbed the upper levels of the grammatical curriculum, relying on all the linguistic and literary knowledge he had acquired so far,[27] finally to take a step forward towards the whole new level of higher education represented by schools and disputations. In my opinion, what the account emphasises most is not the knowledge acquired at that time, but first and foremost the whole process of self-improvement. The reference to the 'arte di gramatica', therefore, has to be reframed within this context.

Moreover, Gehl demonstrates how, from around 1260–70 through to the end of the fourteenth century, the scope of grammar teaching extended well beyond the boundaries of literacy, Latin and literature, to promote an ambitious programme of moral education. Despite its professional marginalisation in favour of specific rhetorical skills (the *ars dictaminis*), grammar teaching in pre-university schools aimed to have a profound educational impact: 'both medieval and humanist grammar masters had assumed that practical moral philosophy was learned through the study of Latin school authors, and that these moral lessons were inseparable from the linguistic ones'.[28] Despite the conspicuous efforts that Dante scholars have made in interpreting this passage and in detecting the role played by the *Consolation* in Florentine education, it seems to me that Gehl's underlying assumption, epitomised by the title of his book, has been widely disregarded. The syllabus included both pagan and Christian 'classics', such as the *Consolation of Philosophy*, following a scheme that resonates significantly with Dante's reference to grammar in his account of his existential and profoundly philosophical search for relief after Beatrice's death.[29]

With these remarks, I do not want to suggest that Dante was deliberately hinting at something more than the 'art of grammar' as I previously defined it. I rather wish to point out that the actual practice of grammar teaching in his time included texts that *de facto* pertained to moral philosophy. This fact could help us better to explain the whole passage as a flowing account that traces an educational development, starting from an advanced art of grammar applied to texts of moral philosophy and finally approaching the higher level of teaching and learning provided by schools and disputations.

Recent publications have extensively retraced the reception of the *Consolation* in thirteenth-century Florence. Here the dissemination of the original text was complemented by literary production clearly modelled on Boethius's work, including both vernacular texts – such as Bono Giamboni's *Libro de' vizi e delle virtudi* – and Latin works that were vernacularised very quickly, for example Arrigo da Settimello's *Elegy* and the treatises by Albertano da Brescia, such as the *Liber consolationis et consilii*.[30] This impressive body of works clearly shows how deep the influence of the *Consolation* was, and is a further element appearing to contradict Dante's remark about its being scarcely known. Even before the rather belated attempts at vernacularisation of the original text, Boethius's lesson had a profound impact on Florentine civic culture through a vital vernacular literary production. Against this Dante could well claim his unmediated, integral and laborious reading of the original text. If the vernacular tradition aimed to lay the foundations of a civic culture, detached from the Latin one produced mainly by ecclesiastical institutions (particularly in Florence, where a university was still to come),[31] Dante apparently went in the opposite direction. He identified in the *scuole delli religiosi* (and possibly other *studia*) the source of a broad, direct and Latinate knowledge, mastered by professional teachers and by *filosofanti* well trained in the specialised exercise of the academic dispute.[32] However limited to crumbs, only direct access to such knowledge could legitimise Dante's own project of vernacular dissemination of a doctrinal, Latinate culture.[33]

The prominence of Latin in late medieval education emerges in a passage of the *Convivio* itself, where Dante clarifies the many reasons for his love for the vernacular. The third one points out the 'benefit' that his mother tongue provided in granting him access to Latin, and so allowing him to advance along the 'path of knowledge':

> questo mio volgare fu introduttore di me nella via di scienza, che è ultima perfezione [nostra], in quanto con esso io entrai nello latino

> e con esso mi fu mostrato: lo quale latino poi mi fu via a più inanzi andare. E così è palese, e per me conosciuto, esso essere stato a me grandissimo benefattore.
>
> (*Cvo*, I. xiii. 5)
>
> [Moreover, this vernacular of mine was what led me into the path of knowledge which is our ultimate perfection, since through it I entered upon Latin and through its agency Latin was taught to me, which then became my path to further progress. So it is evident that it has been a very great benefactor to me, and this I acknowledge.]

As Fioravanti's commentary points out, this statement seems to support the evidence we have of a use of the vernacular in teaching Latin texts.[34] What is more important to my argument, however, is that, in Dante's view, the most advanced improvement in knowledge seems to have been granted to him exclusively by his Latin-based education. The author defines the service that the vernacular made in helping him to access Latin texts a 'grandissimo beneficio' [very great benefit] (*Cvo*, I. xiii. 3). Such a label ought not to be overlooked in the light of the 'benefit' that Dante himself seeks to provide to his readers with the *Convivio*. The recognition of the importance that Dante grants to the Latin training in his own education cannot but further enhance his role as founder of a new philosophy that he aims to convey in the new bread of his own vernacular ('luce nuova, sole nuovo' [a new light, a new sun], *Cvo*, I. xiii. 12). This would be a language eventually able to 'manifestare conceputa sentenza' [to make manifest the meaning conceived] (*Cvo*, I. x. 9).[35]

In justifying the use of the vernacular in his auto-commentary, Dante notoriously dismisses the previous philosophical vernacular culture. While the polemic against Taddeo Alderotti is explicit, Brunetto Latini's choice to write his *Tresor* in *langue d'oil* is addressed in more oblique, but rather unequivocal terms (*Cvo*, I. x. 10–11).[36] Most recently, Barański has fruitfully emphasised the relationship to Brunetto in Dante's development of an alternative intellectual profile. Lombardo has specifically pointed out the foundational role that the *Tesoretto*, as an unrealised *prosimetrum*, played for the mixture of lyric verse and prose that characterises both the *Vita nova* and the *Convivio*.[37] Brunetto's attempt, however, seems to impact on the *Convivio* in even wider ways. These involve not only matters of literary genre, but also of language, and the development of a vernacular poetry thoroughly able to convey philosophical doctrine. In several points of the *Tesoretto*, Brunetto declares his intention to open up the meaning of his poetry through vernacular prose,

on the basis of the fact that rhymes constrain writing, and to undermine the understanding of the 'sentenza' [meaning]:

> Ma perciò che la rima
> si stringe a una lima
> di concordar parole
> come la rima vuole,
> sì che molte fïate
> le parole rimate
> ascondon la sentenza
> e mutan la 'ntendenza,
> quando vorrò trattare
> di cose che rimare
> tenesse oscuritate,
> con bella brevetate
> ti parlerò per prosa
> e disporrò la cosa
> parlando in volgare,
> ché tu intende ed apare.[38]
>
> (*Tesoretto*, 411–26)
>
> [Since rhyme constrains to make words match on its basis, in such a way that rhymed words often hide their meaning and affect their understanding, when I will deal with subjects that would remain obscure in poetry, I will speak in a pleasantly brief prose, and I will explain the whole thing in the vernacular, so that you will understand and learn.]

Brunetto's insistence on metaphors of light and obscurity is prominent: he will use a 'pure' vernacular so as not to be obscure ("n bel volgare e puro, | tal che non sia oscuro | vi dicerò per prosa', 1119–21); at the very end, he announces the intention to switch to prose 'per dir più chiaramente' [to speak more clearly, 2901]. I have little doubt that Dante had these lines in mind while announcing the 'luce nuova, sole nuovo' of his new 'bread'.[39] What is more, Brunetto's remark about the constraints of poetry is first embraced by Dante:

> per questo comento la gran bontade del volgare di sì [si vedrà]; però che si vedrà la sua vertù, sì com'è per esso altissimi e novissimi concetti convenevolemente, sufficientemente e aconciamente, quasi come per esso latino, manifestare; [la quale non si potea bene

> manifestare] nelle cose rimate per le accidentali adornezze che quivi sono connesse, cioè la rima e lo tempo e lo numero regolato.
>
> (*Cvo*, I. x. 12)
>
> [by means of this commentary the great goodness of the vernacular of *sì* will be seen, because its virtue will be made evident, namely how it expresses the loftiest and the most unusual conceptions almost as aptly, fully, and gracefully as Latin, something that could not be expressed perfectly in verse, because of the accidental adornments that are tied to it, that is, rhyme and meter.]

This is then to be reformulated at the end of the first book as the vernacular's ultimate aim:

> Ciascuna cosa studia naturalmente alla sua conservazione: onde, se lo volgare per sé studiare potesse, studierebbe a quella; e quella sarebbe aconciare sé a più stabilitate, e più stabilitate non potrebbe avere che [in] legar sé con numero e con rime. E questo medesimo studio è stato mio.
>
> (*Cvo*, I. xiii. 6–7)
>
> [Everything by nature pursues its own preservation; thus if the vernacular could by itself pursue anything, it would pursue that; and that would be to secure itself greater stability, and greater stability it could gain only by binding itself with meter and with rhyme. This has been precisely my purpose.]

As Ascoli has pointed out, rhythm and rhyme, 'previously dismissed as external adornments to be stripped away in order to reveal the true conceptualizing beauty and goodness of vernacular prose, are now recuperated as the instruments by which Dante-poet imposes unifying stability on the "volgare," a stability which echoes both the "nobility" and the "bellezza" earlier attributed to Latin'.[40]

As Dante scholars, we cannot but lament the laconic concision of Dante's account of his intellectual formation, as we painfully try to explain it better, step by step. Yet none of the words and parentheses of *Cvo*, II. xii. 1–7, which feature at a turning point of the book, is less than carefully chosen and crafted. It seems to me that Dante intentionally excludes the previous doctrinal vernacular culture from the account of his formation, in order to draw an intellectual self-portrait that proudly achieves the level of middle and higher education, up to the foot of the

high table of wisdom. He does so by staging himself strenuously reading two key Latin texts. One of them, Boethius's *Consolation*, was leaving an imprint on Florentine vernacular culture in massive, but mainly oblique and mediated ways; the other, the *De amicitia*, had apparently disappeared from the curriculum of the schools and was generally disregarded by Florentine intellectuals in favour of Cicero's political and rhetorical works.[41] Once this position was acquired and his credentials were declared, Dante could finally and legitimately unfold his own project of founding a new lay philosophy in a new, strengthened vernacular. A project, which has to be understood as a *beneficio* and as an individual act of justice, that aims partially to amend the imbalances in the distribution of the 'bread of the angels'.

Notes

1. *Dante's 'Il Convivio',* trans. by Richard H. Lansing (New York: Garland, 1990). The original text is that established by Ageno, with the minor amendments introduced by Gianfranco Fioravanti in his commented edition.
2. The remarkable novelty of such a move has been fully recognised by Francis Cheneval in his introduction to Dante Alighieri, *Das Gastmahl*, trans. by Thomas Ricklin, introduction and commentary by Francis Cheneval, Ruedi Imbach, Thomas Ricklin, 4 vols (Hamburg: Meiner, 1996), I, li–lii. See most recently, with full bibliography, Anna Pegoretti, '"Da questa nobilissima perfezione molti sono privati": Impediments to Knowledge and the Tradition of Commentaries on Boethius' *Consolatio Philosophiae*', in *Dante's 'Convivio': Or How to Restart a Career in Exile*, ed. Franziska Meier (Bern: Peter Lang, 2018), 77–97.
3. Some persuasively argue that Dante delimits its addressees to the 'principi, baroni, cavalieri e molt'altra nobile gente, non solamente maschi ma femmine' [princes, barons, knights and many other noble people, not only men but women] mentioned in *Cvo*, I. ix. 5. See Luca Bianchi, '"Noli comedere panem philosophorum inutiliter". Dante Alighieri and John of Jandun on Philosophical "Bread"', *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 75 (2013): 335–55; Gianfranco Fioravanti's introduction to his commentary on the *Convivio*: Dante Alighieri, *Opere*, dir. Marco Santagata, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 2011–2014), II (2014): *Convivio, Monarchia, Epistole, Ecloghe*, 1–805 (53–59, and *ad loc*.); Gianfranco Fioravanti, 'La nobiltà spiegata ai nobili. Una nuova funzione della filosofia', in *Il Convivio di Dante*, ed. Johannes Bartuschat and Andrea A. Robiglio (Ravenna: Longo, 2015), 157–63; Mirko Tavoni, *Qualche idea su Dante* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2015), esp. 77–103.
4. The characteristics of a lay philosophy of this kind have been fully recognised and described by Ruedi Imbach, *Laien in der Philosophie des Mittelalters: Hinweise und Anregungen zu einem vernachlässigten Thema* (Amsterdam: Grüner, 1989); Imbach, *Dante, la philosophie et les laïcs* (Fribourg, Suisse: Éditions universitaires, 1996); Ruedi Imbach and Catherine König-Pralong, *La sfida laica. Per una nuova storia della filosofia medievale* (Rome: Carocci, 2016; first edition *Le défi laïque: existe-t-il une philosophie de laïcs au Moyen Age?* Paris: Vrin, 2013).
5. Sonia Gentili, *L'uomo aristotelico alle origini della letteratura italiana* (Rome: Carocci–Università degli studi di Roma La Sapienza, 2005), 141–6.
6. See Gentili, *L'uomo aristotelico*, 143–4. It is worth noting that Gentili develops her remarks in a substantially different direction and with partially different aims. On the basis of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, she discusses the *Convivio*'s overarching combination of ethical and artistic values, and thus Dante's self-presentation as both benefactor and good *artifex.* What is most interesting for my argument is the connection between dissemination and justice. As Gentili effectively points out, the idea of dissemination as providing a benefit to an audience, identified on the basis of their moral constitution and potential, is widespread in thirteenth- and early

fourteenth-century Italian vernacular culture: Gentili, 'La filosofia dal latino al volgare', in *La filosofia in Italia al tempo di Dante*, ed. Gianfranco Fioravanti and Carla Casagrande (Bologna: il Mulino, 2016): 191–224 (196–8).

7. In *Cvo*, I. viii. 2, Dante presents his choice of writing the auto-commentary in the vernacular, and not in Latin, as a further act of liberality – a moral attitude that is characterised by giving to many, giving useful things and giving without being asked ('dare a molti; […] dare utili cose; […] senza essere domandato lo dono, dare quello'). In paraphrasing this passage, Gentili talks about the universality of the gift ('universalità del dono', *L'uomo aristotelico*, 146; 'La filosofia dal latino al volgare', 199) and about the endeavour of giving to as many as possible (*L'uomo aristotelico*, 157). Paolo Falzone writes: 'a beneficiare dei contenuti del trattato è ammesso in teoria chiunque sia libero dagli impedimenti suddetti [i.e. the internal impediments] […]. Ciò esclude che i destinatari ideali dell'opera […] possano essere identificati meccanicamente con un qualsivoglia gruppo sociale' [those who benefit from the contents of the treatise are in theory any who are free from the aforementioned impediments. […] This excludes the possibility that the ideal addressees of the work […] be mechanically identified with any given social group]: Falzone, 'Il *Convivio* di Dante', in *La filosofia in Italia*, 225–64 (231). Of course, Dante chose the vernacular in order to reach a wider, albeit regional, non-Latinate audience (*Cvo*, I. vii. 11–16). Yet I am not entirely persuaded that 'giving to *many*' immediately and necessarily means giving to *anyone* lacking internal impediments, or that the widening of the audience should automatically mean that Dante had in mind a universal act of dissemination. In his seminal article, '"Noli comedere panem philosophorum inutiliter"', Luca Bianchi persuasively compares Dante's strategy to Aristotle's identification of his audience in *Nic. Eth.* I. iii (340–43; see also 353–54). In her essay '"Miseri, 'mpediti, affamati": Dante's Implied Reader in the *Convivio*', in *Dante's 'Convivio'*, 207–21, Enrica Zanin rather perplexingly tries to keep everything together, identifying a progressive narrowing of the audience from 'those with the natural desire to know' (207), namely anyone, up to 'noblemen' (210).
8. Bianchi, '"Noli comedere panem philosophorum inutiliter"', 343: 'Dante devotes a specific passage of the introduction provided in the first book of his *Convivio* […] to making clear that, however large, his own audience must also have certain physical and moral prerequisites'. Restriction of the audience had not involved the earliest dissemination of the *canzoni*, whose shameful previous interpretation by some is what compels the author to write his auto-commentary (*Cvo*, I. ii. 16).
9. However, the text could be over-interpreted as 'being far removed from institutions of higher education': that is why some editors print '*Studio*' with a capital 'S'. Dante Alighieri, *Il convivio*, ed. Maria Simonelli (Bologna: Pàtron, 1966), *ad loc.; Convivio*, ed. Giorgio Inglese (Milan: BUR, 1993), *ad loc*. Lansing's translation further narrows this interpretation, referring to the 'university', even though the title of *studium* was also conferred on religious institutions.
10. This is the most flexible and possibly safest explanation of Dante's reference to 'the words of authors, sciences, and books' that I am able to offer. A discussion of this passage is found in Zygmunt G. Barański, 'On Dante's Trail', *Italian Studies* 72.1 (2017): 1–15 (10–11), which emphasises especially the limits of Dante's 'intellectual formation' in Florence.
11. On the Boethian roots of this personification, see most recently Paola Nasti, '"Vocabuli d'autore e di scienze e di libri" (*Conv*. II xii 5): percorsi sapienziali di Dante', in *La Bibbia di Dante: esperienza mistica, profezia e teologia biblica in Dante. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi (Ravenna, 7 novembre 2009)*, ed. Giuseppe Ledda (Ravenna: Centro dantesco dei Frati minori conventuali, 2011), 121–78 (136–9); Luca Lombardo, '"In sembianza di donna". Reperti boeziani nei testi toscani delle origini: dal rifacimento al *Convivio* di Dante', *Le Tre Corone* 4 (2017): 11–46.
12. New light on the foundational role of the imagery of bread in the *Convivio* has been recently shed by Bianchi, '"Noli comedere panem philosophorum inutiliter"'; Nicolò Maldina, 'Raccogliendo briciole. Una metafora della formazione dantesca tra *Convivio* e *Commedia*', *Studi danteschi* 81 (2016): 131–64; Zygmunt G. Barański, '"Oh come è grande la mia impresa": Notes towards Defining Dante's *Convivio*', in *Dante's 'Convivio'*, 9–26; Albert R. Ascoli, '"Ponete mente almeno come io son bella": Prose and Poetry, "pane" and "vivanda", Goodness and Beauty, in *Convivio* I', in *Dante's 'Convivio'*, 115–43, who extensively discusses the 'slipping' referents of Dante's different breads. On this remarkable difficulty see also Laurence Hooper, 'Dante's *Convivio*, Book 1: Metaphor, Exile, Epochē', *Modern Language Notes* 127.5, Supplement (2012): 86–104. In an extremely interesting recent essay by Gianfranco Fioravanti, 'Il pane degli angeli nel *Convivio* di Dante', in *Nutrire il corpo, nutrire l'anima nel Medioevo*, ed. Chiara Crisciani and Onorato Grassi (Pisa: ETS, 2017), 191–200, Dante's bread is read in the light of the liturgy of the *Corpus Domini*.

13. Fioravanti points out that 'l'immagine della mensa […] ha tutta l'aria di rimandare ad un contesto istituzionale. Per questo sembra plausibile che Dante stia pensando anche ad un sapere concreto e curriculare ed alle istituzioni che lo forniscono' [the image of the banquet […] seems to recall an institutional environment. Thus, it is possible that Dante also has in mind an actual study curriculum and the institutions that provide it] (*ad Cvo*, I. i. 7). It is not possible here to discuss which *studia* Dante had in mind precisely. What is relevant to my discussion is that Dante claims an institutional training.
14. On the *Convivio* as an educational project, see Franziska Meier, 'Educating the Reader: Dante's *Convivio*', *L'Alighieri* 45 (2015): 21–33. Far from contrasting with my proposal, Meier's idea that Dante's *Convivio* offers 'an audacious counterproposal of philosophical education in opposition to a domineering and highly professionalized academic training' (23) could to some extent be seen as the other side of the same coin.
15. The tradition of the so-called *divisio scientiae*, through which knowledge was described as a hierarchical structure of disciplines and sub-disciplines, flourished throughout the Middle Ages, to reach a climax in the thirteenth century. Such descriptions can be found in all sorts of academic and encyclopaedic texts, including vernacular texts very close to Dante, such as the first book of Brunetto Latini's *Tresor* and his *Rettorica*. See at least James A. Weisheipl O.P., 'The Nature, Scope, and Classification of the Sciences', in *Science in the Middle Ages*, ed. David C. Lindberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 461–82; Gilbert Dahan, 'La classificazione delle scienze e l'insegnamento universitario nel XIII secolo', in *Le Università dell'Europa: le scuole e i maestri. Il Medioevo*, ed. Jacques Verger and Gian Paolo Brizzi (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 1994), 19–43; Olga Weijers, *Le maniement du savoir: pratiques intellectuels à l'époque des premières universités (XIIIe–XIVe siècles)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996).
16. Robert Black, 'Education', in *Dante in Context*, ed. Lino Pertile and Zygmunt G. Barański (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 260–76, 268.
17. In his commentary on the *Eclogues*, Marco Petoletti fully brings to light the exquisite resurgence of Latin bucolic poetry promoted by this work: see Dante Alighieri, *Egloge*, ed. Marco Petoletti, in Dante Alighieri, *Epistole. Egloge. Questio de aqua et terra* (Rome: Salerno, 2016), 489–650. On the *Eclogues*, and their rhetorical sophistication, see Sabrina Ferrara's essay in this volume.
18. This is how I understand Fioravanti's gloss *ad loc.*: 'qui "gramatica" indica tanto la lingua latina, quanto la disciplina che ne permette lo studio'.
19. Pier Vincenzo Mengaldo, 'Gramatica', in *Enciclopedia Dantesca* (*ED*) (Rome: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1970–8), III (1971), 259–64 (260).
20. See, albeit with some caution, the entry 'Arte' by Fernando Salsano in the *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, I (1970), 397–99.
21. *Cvo*, II. xiii. 8: 'alli sette primi [i.e. *cieli*] rispondono le sette scienze del Trivio e del Quadruvio' [to the first seven [heavens] correspond the seven sciences of the Trivium and the Quadrivium]; see also §§ 14, 16–17, 26. On the identification of sciences on the basis of their object, see Fioravanti, *ad* xiii. 3. As Luca Bianchi has pointed out to me, the coincidence of liberal arts and sciences is not striking in Dante's time. Even in the *Convivio, perspettiva* is at first labelled as an art – *Cvo*, II. iii. 6: 'un'arte che si chiama perspettiva' [the art called optics] – and later on listed among the sciences as the 'handmaid' of geometry (xiii. 27).
22. For the levels of the grammar curriculum, see the effective summary provided by Black, 'Education', 262.
23. Robert Black, *Education and Society in Florentine Tuscany: Teachers, Pupils and Schools, c. 1250–1500* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 151. The situation with regard to the thirteenth century is much more perplexing. However, even Black – whose scepticism about 'classical' education at that time is well known – admits the *Consolation* among the books of the grammar curriculum from the twelfth century onwards: see Black, *Education and Society*, 48–50.
24. A useful and extensive summary of available research on the *Consolation* in the Middle Ages is provided by Luca Lombardo, *Boezio in Dante: la 'Consolatio Philosophiae' nello scrittoio del poeta* (Venice: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2013), 13–136.
25. See in particular Thomas Ricklin, '" … quello non conosciuto da molti libro di Boezio". Hinweise zur *Consolatio Philosophiae* in Norditalien', in *Boethius in the Middle Ages: Latin and Vernacular Traditions of the Consolatio Philosophiae*, ed. Maarten J. F. M. Hoenen and Lodi Nauta (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 267–86; Robert Black and Gabriella Pomaro, *La 'Consolazione della Filosofia' nel Medioevo e nel Rinascimento Italiano/Boethius's 'Consolation of Philosophy' in Italian Medieval and Renaissance Education: Schoolbooks and Their Glosses in Florentine Manuscripts*

(Florence: Sismel-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2000), 1–50; Giuseppina Brunetti, 'Guinizzelli, il non più oscuro Maestro Giandino e il Boezio di Dante', in *Intorno a Guido Guinizzelli, Atti della Giornata di studi (Università di Zurigo, 16 giugno 2000)*, ed. Luciano Rossi and Sara Alloatti Boller (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2002), 155–91; Paola Nasti, '"Vocabuli d'autore"', 142; Luca Lombardo, '"Quasi come sognando". Dante e la presunta rarità del "libro di Boezio" (*Convivio* II xii 2–7)', *Mediaeval Sophia* 12 (2012): 141–52; Lombardo, *Boezio in Dante*, 164–9. Paola Nasti has analysed the manuscript tradition of the *Consolation* in Dante's time, fruitfully pointing out a diversified and scattered transmission of commentaries to the text which could explain Dante's statement, in 'Storia materiale di un classico dantesco: la *Consolatio Philosophiae* fra XII e XIV secolo tradizione manoscritta e rielaborazioni esegetiche', *Dante Studies* 134 (2016): 142–68. See also Luca Lombardo, '"Ed imaginava lei fatta come una donna gentile". Boezio, Brunetto Latini e la prima formazione intellettuale di Dante', *Le Tre Corone* 5 (2018): 39–71 (66–70).

26. Paul F. Gehl, *A Moral Art: Grammar, Society, and Culture in Trecento Florence* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 156.
27. See Fioravanti, *ad Cvo*, II. xii. 4.
28. Gehl, 26. See also Ronald G. Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients: The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 197.
29. The most widespread Boethian commentary at that time was the profoundly philosophical one by William of Conches, whose influence is clearly detectable in several passages of Dante's *oeuvre*. On the diffusion of William's commentary in thirteenth-century Florence, see Black and Pomaro, *La 'Consolazione della Filosofia',* 85–88; Brunetti, 'Guinizzelli, il non più oscuro maestro Giandino'. As regards its influence on Dante, see Claudio Giunta, 'Dante: l'amore come destino', in *Dante the Lyric and Ethical Poet. Dante lirico e etico*, ed. Zygmunt G. Barański and Martin McLaughlin (London: Legenda, 2010), 119–36 (this essay substantially informs Giunta's commentary on *Amor che movi* in Dante Alighieri, *Opere,* dir. by Santagata, I (2011): *Rime, Vita nova, De vulgari Eloquentia*, 384–409); Nasti, '"Vocabuli d'autore"',136–53; Lombardo, *Boezio in Dante, ad ind.*; Bianchi, '"Noli comedere panem philosophorum inutiliter"'.
30. Nasti, '"Vocabuli d'autore"', 136–53; Johannes Bartuschat, 'La littérature vernaculaire et la philosophie en Toscane dans la deuxième moitié du 13ème siècle', *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* 75 (2013): 311–33; Lombardo, '"In sembianza di donna"' and '"Ed imaginava lei"'. In the first of his two articles, Lombardo provides the transcription of a thirteenth-century letter in the vernacular (44–5), written by a certain Tepertus (possibly Tiberto Galliziani da Pisa, 29), which vernacularises extensive portions of Boethius's work. A further early partial vernacularisation is the one found in a manuscript in Florence's *Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana*, MS Laur. Plut. 23 dex. 11, pointed out by Black and Pomaro, 85–8; Brunetti, 'Guinizzelli, il non più oscuro maestro Giandino', identified the author with the Giandino 'master at the *studium*', named by Giovanni Villani alongside the Franciscan friar Arlotto da Prato in relation to the death of Charles I of Anjou in January 1285. This attempt, which consists principally of a vernacular paraphrase of the poetic metres, could possibly be related to teaching techniques: see below, note 34.
31. See Lombardo, '"In sembianza di donna"', 26–7.
32. The meaning of the word 'filosofanti' is discussed in Anna Pegoretti, 'Filosofanti', *Le tre corone* 2 (2015): 11–70.
33. Ascoli aptly states that 'initially "pane" is used to figure the philosophical content currently available only to an intellectual elite fluent in "grammatica," that is, Latin' (19). More complex is Barański's focus on the table of Wisdom as a 'supernatural feast […] a rare privilege that needs to be undertaken with the utmost humility', one which deals with Dante's concept of 'true Wisdom' that 'resides exclusively in God'. However, there is no doubt that Dante's intermediate position actually is 'a mark of great personal merit' (Barański, "Oh come è grande"', 25). On the limits and consequences of Dante's 'recollection', see Zygmunt G. Barański, 'Sulla formazione intellettuale di Dante: alcuni problemi di definizione', *Studi e problemi di critica testuale* 90 (2015): 31–54 (47–8).
34. Fioravanti, *ad loc*. See Gehl, 27, 30. See also Black, *Education and Society*, 48: 'From the thirteenth century, […] teachers began to offer synonyms for Latin words to explain their meaning to pupils'. Evidence is provided by several Tuscan manuscripts of Boethius's *Consolation*: see Robert Black, *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy: Tradition and Innovation in Latin Schools from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 275–81.

35. On Dante's foundation of a new philosophical culture, which overcomes mere dissemination and vernacularisation, see Imbach and König-Pralong, *La sfida laica*, 64–8. On Dante's dismissal of Brunetto's compilatory strategy, see Nasti, '"Vocabuli d'autore"', 153–9.
36. See Gentili, 'La filosofia dal latino al volgare', 201.
37. Barański, 'On Dante's Trail', 8; Lombardo, '"Ed imaginava lei"'.
38. Brunetto Latini, *Poesie*, ed. Stefano Carrai (Turin: Einaudi, 2016): 5–155.
39. This hypothesis does not undermine the prominent importance of the sustained biblical imagery in Dante's presentation of his project: for the people illuminated by a new light see Is. 9, 1–2 and Matth. 4, 16. See Fioravanti, 'Il pane degli angeli', 200.
40. Ascoli, 137. On Dante's foundation of a vernacular poetry, worthy of being named as such, see Tavoni, 295–334. On the development of rhyme in Dante's *Commedia*, see most recently the acute observations by Franco Suitner, 'Sul condizionamento della rima in Dante: primi appunti', *Letteratura Italiana Antica* XX (2019). *Studi in onore di Antonio Lanza*, forthcoming.
41. On the rhetorical-political preferences of thirteenth-century Ciceronianism, see for instance *The Rhetoric of Cicero in its Medieval and Early Renaissance Commentary Tradition*, ed. Virginia Cox and John O. Ward (Leiden: Brill, 2006), especially the essays by Cox, Johnston and Milner (I would like to thank Catherine Keen for pointing me in the right direction). The impact of Cicero's philosophical works in Dante's time is not something that I could even try to touch on here, and that deserves extensive investigation. My focus on the *Consolation of Philosophy* is justified by the wide and documented impact that this work had on Florentine vernacular culture. The use of the *De amicitia* in grammar teaching (alongside the *De senectute*) is attested in the twelfth century: see Black, *Humanism and Education*, 192 and Robert Black, 'The Origins of Humanism, its Educational Context and its Early Development: a Review Article of Ronald Witt *In the Footsteps of the Ancients*', *Vivarium* 40.2 (2002): 272–97 (277–8). Manuscripts containing both the *Consolatio* and the *De amicitia* have been traced by Nasti, 'Storia materiale'.