

**ANCESTRY, BLOOD, AND HEREDITY.**  
**ATTITUDES TOWARDS BIOLOGICAL DESCENT**  
**IN LATE MEDIEVAL TUSCANY, c. 1250-1400**



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‘For Man is joined spirit and body,  
And therefore must serve as spirit and body.  
Visible and invisible, two worlds meet in Man;  
Visible and invisible must meet in His ‘Temple;  
You must not deny the body.’

T. S. Eliot, *Choruses from the Rock*.

## Short Abstract

This thesis examines intellectual and social attitudes to biological descent in late medieval Tuscany. In recent decades, historians have paid increasing attention to the body as a locus of experience, individuality, and identity. Yet bodies, like individuals, always have a genealogy. Thus, in this thesis, I set out to explore how ideas of biological descent shaped medieval understandings of the body and the significance of biological ties. First, I argue that medieval society developed a proto-materialistic approach to human personality that highlighted the role of hereditary physiological principles in the interpretation of character and behaviour. As a result, biological ancestry and blood emerged at the centre of individual and group identities. Subsequent chapters explore thinking about biological descent in the family, social units like the nobility, and political communities. A final chapter explores the diffusion of theories of natural love and demonstrates how similar patterns of thinking about biological descent can be identified across different dimensions of social life. In this thesis, intellectual and literary sources delineate the framework of ideas, beliefs, and values which informed attitudes to biological descent. On the other hand, normative and documentary sources illustrate how ideas of biological descent informed, and were informed by, social, legal, and political practices and structures. In this manner, biological descent emerges as a valuable category for the analysis of social relationships, offering fresh insights into a number of intertwined historiographical areas of concern. My study reveals that against dualist conceptions of human personhood, late medieval society held that human beings ‘were’ rather than ‘possessed’ bodies. As a result, the body and descent were perceived to be imbued with meaning and a source of normative values. Ultimately, this thesis lends support to the idea that late medieval society recovered nature as an ordering principle of society.

## Long Abstract

This thesis examines intellectual and social attitudes towards biological descent in late medieval Tuscany in the period 1250-1400. In recent decades, many medieval historians have chosen the body as their object of study, adopting a wide variety of interdisciplinary approaches to it. They have paid increasing attention to the body not just as a locus of physical needs but also of experience, individuality, and identity. Yet bodies, like individuals, always have a genealogy. Thus, my examination of attitudes to the biological dimensions of ancestry adds to this growing scholarship and offers fresh insights into the cultural and social significance of the body and of biological ties. In particular, this thesis explores the ways in which medieval people thought biological descent shaped individual identities: the physiological makeup of bodies, character, and behaviour. In addition, it proposes biological descent as a valuable category for the analysis of social relationships in late medieval society.

This thesis is a history of ideas of biological descent. However, it also explores the ways in which ideas informed, and were informed by, the life and behaviour of individuals and groups. To do so, I adopt – and adapt – the methodology proposed by David d’Avray in his work *Rationalities in History* (2010). Drawing upon Max Weber, d’Avray proposes a middle way between universal and culture-specific models of human rationality; that is, the systems that dictate or condition human rational behaviour, both individual and social. Intended as a method for comparative analysis, d’Avray’s work is also a wonderful tool to bridge the gap between intellectual, cultural, and social history in productive ways. The examination of intellectual and literary sources in my thesis helps delineate the *value rationality*, that is the framework of ideas, beliefs, and values – medical, philosophical, social, and religious – which informed medieval attitudes to biological descent. On the other hand, normative and documentary sources help specify the *instrumental rationality*, that is the ways in which beliefs and values were furthered and how individuals and groups reacted to them. This model assumes a symbiosis between both spheres: ideas are embodied in practice and reinforced in images, rituals, experience, memory, and emotions, while changes in the conditions or means for the attainment of goals can lead to reworkings of value rationalities. This form of analysis allows me to assess the extent to which intellectual discourses shaped social practice. In addition, it facilitates the interpretation of the ideas underlying practice and demonstrates that even when the behaviour of groups and individuals was seemingly at odds with those values, the deviations from the norm were, to some extent, explained, justified, and legitimised by reference to the framework imposed by the value rationality. With the exception of the first,

which is a more conventional history of ideas, the structure of each chapter reflects this methodological approach.

One of the contentions of this thesis is that similar patterns of thinking about biological descent can be identified across different dimensions of social life. For this reason, I employ a wide variety of textual evidence and my examination is structured around a series of concentric circles of analysis with each chapter moving from the individual experience outwards to the wider interactions between groups: the family, social units, and political communities. Intellectual sources (e.g., medical, philosophical, and theological writings) allow me to reconstruct the ways in which late medieval thinkers thought about the body, blood, and biological descent. Literary and normative sources show how ideas of biological descent had the potential to reach a wide audience and illustrate practices that documentary sources often remain silent about such as those taking place in the intimacy of the household. Literature (e.g., chronicles, stories, poems) is not a perfect reflection of social realities, but it works within a set of paradigms that are conceived as possible by its intended audience and can betray genuine anxieties. Normative sources (e.g., laws, didactic literature, and sermons) describe the prescriptive behaviour expected of individuals and groups. But their existence always implies, when it does not specify, deviations from the norm. Documentary sources (e.g., adoption and naturalisation records), for their part, provide vivid detail and concrete examples but are complemented by literary and normative sources that help situate them into context.

The argument underlying this thesis is that throughout the course of the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Tuscan society developed a proto-materialistic approach to human personality that highlighted the role of hereditary physiological principles in the interpretation of character and behaviour. As a result, intellectual and social attitudes towards the body were informed by ideas of biological descent and the biological ties that bound people together – both synchronic and diachronic – took on a new significance that shaped social, legal, and political practices and structures as well as norms of emotional valuation and expression. In other words, ancestry and blood emerged at the centre of individual and group identities. My study thus reveals that against dualist conceptions of human personhood, late medieval society held that human beings ‘were’ rather than ‘possessed’ bodies. Accordingly, the body and descent were perceived to be imbued with personal and social meaning and a source of normative values. Thus, in contrast to modern-day scholarship that tends to emphasise the performative character of social relationships, I show that in late medieval Tuscany relationships were modelled upon procreative notions of kinship and that ideas of blood and descent were important in the rationales of each of those relationships. Ultimately, this thesis

lends support to the idea that late medieval society recovered nature as an ordering principle of society.

This thesis includes an **Introduction** where I explain how I use the concept of biological descent – a useful anachronism – to approach the ways in which medieval society thought about a series of questions deeply interrelated with each other: how is one’s body and personality influenced by one’s ancestry? Does birth determine an individual’s social status? In which ways is the relationship between individuals who are genealogically related different from that of individuals not related to one another ‘by blood’? I then discuss the historical context of my analysis and argue that due to a series of intellectual and cultural transformations as well as the nature of its social structures, late medieval Tuscany is a particularly revealing context for the examination of ideas of biological descent. Two further sections put into perspective my research questions. In the first, devoted to a literature review, I show how my analysis draws on the work of scholars in the history of medicine, philosophy, the family, the nobility, political thought and identities, and the history of emotions. I also explain some of the ways in which my thesis offers fresh insights into these intertwined historiographical areas of concern. In the second, I show how this thesis can shed light on a series of anthropological questions which have emerged out of a modern-day enthusiasm for genealogy and genetic ancestry. Finally, the introduction develops my methodological approach and how it informs my choice and use of source material.

The **first chapter** focuses on the relationship between individual identity and biological descent and by examining a series of key philosophical and scientific questions it sets out the intellectual background of my study. First, I show how from the mid-thirteenth century medieval thinkers formulated material theories of individuation that emphasised the relationship between the physiological body and personal identity. I also show how insofar as the physiological makeup of individuals was considered, to some extent, hereditary, the re-discovery of classical theories of embryology had a marked influence on the ways medieval society thought about the biological dimensions of descent. Finally, I show how the reception of the Aristotelian concept of ‘aptitudes’ or ‘inclinations’ (*inclinaciones, praedispositiones, idoneitates*) help medieval scholars emphasise the role of hereditary physiological principles in the configuration of character and behaviour and to develop elaborate theories that could explain the transmission of moral and intellectual traits from parents to children. All these developments established a close relationship between personality and bodily complexion in late medieval intellectual culture but, as the rest of this thesis demonstrates, ideas of biological descent were not restricted to a learned and Latinate elite.

In **chapter two**, I study the social, legal, and emotional dimensions of biological ties within the family. To do so, I analyse the roles that medieval parents were expected to fulfil towards their children and the way in which ideas of biological descent and blood shaped the perception and realisation of those roles in theological and didactic literature. In addition, I examine responses to wet nursing, supposition, paternity fraud, and the adoption of abandoned and orphaned children in late medieval Florentine hospitals. By looking at scenarios where biological ties were either absent or displaced, I illustrate how their importance was articulated by contemporaries. This chapter shows that the family was closely interpreted in biological grounds and that male descent and blood were crucial to establish family identity in late medieval Tuscany.

**Chapter three** examines how ideas of biological descent shaped social identities such as the nobility. In contrast to a widespread tendency among modern-day scholars to conceptualise the debate about the true nature of nobility as a confrontation of the values of birth and virtue, in this chapter I argue that birth and virtue were not two diametrically opposed ways of thinking about nobility. Instead, from the late thirteenth century, medieval thinkers developed a new concept of nobility, namely natural nobility (*nobilitas naturalis*), that was thought to be determined by an individual's bodily complexion. Accordingly, some bodies were nobler than others because they were endowed with physical perfections and good dispositions that facilitated intellectual activity and moral behaviour. Such dispositions, moreover, were thought to be hereditary and established at the moment of conception. Thus, by establishing a mutual relationship between the physiology of the body and the development of virtue, medieval thinkers created a connection between nobility and descent; even as they kept insisting that *true* nobility was never wholly determined by one's birth. Throughout this chapter, I also show how the concept of natural nobility disseminated across textual genres and informed the perception of the nobles as a group of descent whose origin was traced to the very beginning of human society. I also show how by emphasising the physical and moral excellence of the nobles and their ancestors medieval thinkers justified the authority of the aristocracy and its right to rule. Finally, I examine how the concept of natural nobility mapped into the social perception of the Florentine nobility as a social class.

In the **fourth chapter**, I consider the claims to common descent of urban communities, the various social functions these performed, and how they made sense within the wider context of political theory and practice. In the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, political authors posited common biological descent as a potential source of political identity. They suggested that a plurality of independent states best corresponded to the nature

of man and of temporal power. To demonstrate this, they pointed to the markedly different character of peoples presenting them as naturally distinct from one another and ascribing their differences to historical and natural causes such as bodily complexion and the hereditary influence of climate. My analysis of origin myths demonstrates that common biological descent became an important component of the city's identity as a *gens*. In Florence, historical narratives and other literary texts claimed for its citizens genealogical continuity with its ancient Roman founders. They show that biological ancestry was an important source of collective political identity. When the Florentines' Roman ancestry was called into question, humanist scholars like Rino Rinuccini and Coluccio Salutati were readily to defend it. Finally, this chapter analyses the practice of naturalisation. It demonstrates that ideas of common biological descent informed the legal and political practices of the commune as well as its rules for membership and participation.

A final **fifth chapter** explores the diffusion from the mid-thirteenth century of theories of natural love (*dilectio* or *amor naturalis*), namely the belief that an affective inclination arises between individuals with shared biological ancestry. Medieval thinkers drew upon Aristotle's definition of friendship between relatives in the *Ethics* (*amicitia cognata*) to establish a relationship between love, similarity, and genealogical relatedness: if individuals loved themselves first and foremost, they were inclined to love those similar to themselves and, first and foremost, those who were more closely related to them by blood. This naturalisation of love was one of the many ways in which late medieval scholars combined the Aristotelian virtue-ethics approach to morality with the law-based approach of Scripture. It helped rationalise the instinct to love one nearest and dearest and harmonise it with the ethical command to love one's neighbour. The association of love and consanguinity was very compelling: it featured in political writing, religious didactic literature, sermons, popular encyclopaedias, deeds of adoption, letters, poetry, and even in civic decrees. It was invoked to promote peace and concord in times of violence and helped reconceptualise marriage as a means for the wider distribution of kinship networks that could alleviate social conflict.

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## Notes

In this thesis, works, both medieval and modern, are referred to by their Latin or vernacular titles unless their English title is normally the one used by scholars (e.g., Dante's *Divine Comedy* and the *Prose Salernitan Questions*). All translations from primary and secondary sources are mine, unless otherwise indicated. Where instructive, the Latin has been added to the body of the text between parentheses. Throughout this thesis, I present the Italian and Latin as it appears in my sources, without corrections or modernisations.

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## List of Abbreviations

Quotes from the Bible are taken from the Vulgate for Latin and the Douay-Rheims for English.

- Alderotti, *Isagoge* Taddeo Alderotti. *Expositio in subtilissimum Joannitii Isogogarum libellum*. In *Thaddei Florentini expositiones*. Venice: Giunta, 1527.
- Aquinas, *De virtutibus* Thomas Aquinas. *De virtutibus in communi*, edited by P. A. Odetto. In *Quaestiones disputatae*, vol. 2. Turin: Marietti, 1949.
- Aquinas, *In Politicorum* Thomas Aquinas. *Sententia libri Politicorum*. In *Opera omnia*, editio Leonina, vol. 48. Rome: Ad Sanctae Sabinae, 1971.
- Aquinas, *In sententias* Thomas Aquinas. *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum magistri Petri Lombardi*, edited by Pierre Mandonnet and Maria Fabianus Moos, 4 vols. Paris: P. Lethielleux, 1929-47.
- Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* Thomas Aquinas. *Summa contra gentiles*, edited by Ceslaus Pera, Petrus Marc, and Petrus Caramello, 3 vols. Turin: Marietti, 1961-67.
- Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* Thomas Aquinas. *Summa theologiae*. In Aquinas, *Opera omnia*, editio Leonina, vols. 4-12. Rome, 1888-1906.
- Aquinas, *Super I Cor.* Thomas Aquinas. *Super primam Epistolam ad Corinthios lectura*. In *Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, edited by Raffaele Cai, vol. 1. Turin: Marietti, 1953.
- Albert, *De animalibus* Albert the Great. *De animalibus*, edited by Hermann Stadler, 2 vols. Münster: Aschendorff, 1916-1920.
- Albert, *Quaestiones de animalibus* Albert the Great. *Quaestiones super de animalibus*, edited by Ephrem Filthaut. In *Opera omnia*, edited by Bernhard Geyer, vol. 12. Münster: Aschendorff, 1955.
- AOIF Archivio dell'Ospedale degli Innocenti di Firenze.
- Aristotle, *Categoriae* Aristotle. *Categoriae, translatio Guillelmi de Moerbeka*, edited by Lorenzo Minio-Paluello. Aristoteles Latinus I, 1-5. Bruges-Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1961.
- Aristotle, *De generatione* Aristotle. *De generatione animalium, translatio Guillelmi Moerbeka*, edited by H. J. Drossaart Lulofs. Aristoteles Latinus XVII, 2 vols. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1966.
- [Aristotle] *GA* Aristotle. *Generation of Animals*, translated by Arthur L. Peck. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1942.
- Aristotle, *Ethica* Aristotle. *Ethica Nicomachea, translatio Grosseteste*, edited by R. A. Gauthier. Aristoteles Latinus, XXVI, 1-3, 4. Leiden, Brussels: Brill, 1972.

Aristotle, <i>Politica</i>	Aristotle. <i>Aristotelis Politicorum Libri Octo, cum vetusta translatione Guilelmi de Moerbeka</i> , edited by Franz Susseml. Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1872. References are to page and line number.
ASF	Archivio di Stato di Firenze.
Beauvais, <i>Speculum naturale</i>	Vincent of Beauvais. <i>Speculum naturale</i> . In <i>Speculum quadruplex, sive Speculum maius</i> , vol. 1. Douai, 1624, repr. Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1964.
CIC	<i>Corpus iuris canonici</i> , edited by E. Friedberg, 2 vols. Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1959.
CUP	<i>Chartularium universitatis parisiensis</i> , vol. 1, edited by Heinrich Denifle and Émile Châtelain. Paris: Delalain, 1889.
Dante, <i>Inf.</i> / <i>Purg.</i> / <i>Par.</i>	Dante. <i>The Divine Comedy</i> , translated by Charles S. Singleton, 3 vols. Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1970-75.
<i>Dig.</i>	<i>Digesta</i> . In <i>Corpus Iuris Civilis</i> , edited by Paul Krueger, vol. 1. Berolini: Apud Weidmannos, 1954.
Giles, <i>De formatione</i>	Giles of Rome. <i>De formatione humani corporis in utero</i> , edited by Romana Martorelli Vico. Florence: SISMEL, 2008.
<i>Inst.</i>	<i>Institutes</i> . In <i>Corpus Iuris Civilis</i> , edited by Paul Krueger, vol. 1. Berolini: Apud Weidmannos, 1954.
Isidore, <i>Etymologiae</i>	Isidore of Seville. <i>Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX</i> , edited by Wallace M. Lindsay, 2 vols. Oxford: E Typographeo Clarendoniano, 1911.
Peter Lombard, <i>Sententiae</i>	Peter Lombard. <i>Sententiae in IV libris distinctae</i> , 2 vols. Rome: Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, 1971-81. Vol. 1 contains books 1-2 and vol. 2 contains books 3-4.
Peter Lombard, <i>Sentences</i>	Peter Lombard. <i>The Sentences</i> , 4 vols., translated by Giulio Silano. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2007-10.
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> , edited by J. P. Migne, 221 vols. Paris, 1841-61.

## Introduction

In the chronicle of the Florentine Dino Compagni (c.1255-1324), amid vivid descriptions of political and social conflict, one can read about individuals of ‘noble blood,’ of ‘ancient blood,’ of ‘royal blood,’ and ‘of low blood.’ Blood was important to medieval reproductive thought but, to what extent was Compagni speaking of blood – the bodily fluid – and not just using the term as a proxy to denote ancestry, social status, and character? Were all these senses not bound up together for writers of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries?

This thesis explores intellectual and social attitudes to biological descent in late medieval Tuscany. It argues that in this period biological ancestry and blood emerged at the centre of individual and group identities. Against dualist conceptions of human personhood, late medieval society held that human beings ‘were’ rather than ‘possessed’ bodies. This anthropological shift contributed to the development of a proto-materialistic approach to human personality that highlighted the role of hereditary physiological principles in the interpretation of character and behaviour. As a result, the biological ties that bound people together – both synchronic and diachronic – took on new significance and shaped social, legal, and political practices and structures as well as norms of emotional valuation and expression.

### Biological Descent: A Useful Anachronism

This thesis does not attempt to reconstruct the genealogies of medieval individuals, families, and other groups. Nor is it about how people in the past traced their own ancestry and built their family trees.<sup>1</sup> Ancestry can be employed in this restricted sense, that is to denote the ensemble of ancestors, real or imagined, from whom individuals or groups can or claim to

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<sup>1</sup> For the former, see Jost Eickmeyer, Markus Friedrich, and Volker Bauer, eds., *Genealogical Knowledge in the Making. Tools, Practices, and Evidence in Early Modern Europe* (Berlin, 2019). For the latter, Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *L'ombre des ancêtres: essai sur l'imaginaire médiéval de la parenté* (Paris, 2000).

trace their origin. My thesis aims to explore, rather, how late medieval society thought about biological descent or simply the biological dimensions of ancestry. Attitudes to biological descent, in turn, can be analysed from the perspective of its personal and social effects. Thus, on the one hand, I am interested in the ways medieval people thought biological descent shaped individual identities: the physiological makeup of bodies, character, and behaviour. And, on the other hand, I want to explore how ideas of biological descent informed social identities and relationships.

The term ‘biological descent’ is anachronistic. It is mainly employed by modern-day anthropologists and evolutionary biologists and, needless to say, it features nowhere in late medieval sources. However, using modern concepts to study the medieval past can be a fruitful effort.<sup>2</sup> Twenty years ago, Peter Biller published *The Measure of Multitude*, a ground-breaking study of medieval demographic thought which offered a novel account of the ways in which medieval scholars looked at population issues and thought about the problems that the absence, abundance, or simply the presence of people posed for their contemporaries.<sup>3</sup> Like ‘demography,’ ‘biological descent’ is a useful concept to approach the ways in which medieval society thought about a series of questions deeply interrelated with each other: how is one’s body and personality influenced by one’s ancestry? Does birth determine an individual’s social status? In which ways is the relationship between individuals who are genealogically related different from that of individuals not related to one another ‘by blood’?

Moreover, although the concept of biological descent is absent from the historical record, one can easily point to a semantic field that is relevant for its study. Among others, we will frequently encounter in late medieval sources the following terms: *consanguinitas* (consanguinity), *sanguis* (blood), *affinitas* (relationship by marriage), *propinquitias* (genealogical

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<sup>2</sup> For a recent discussion, see Miri Rubin, “Presentism’s Useful Anachronisms,” *Past & Present* 234, no. 1 (2017).

<sup>3</sup> Peter Biller, *The Measure of Multitude: Population in Medieval Thought* (Oxford, 2000).

relationship), *agnatio* (consanguinity through the male line), *genus* (origin, race), *prosapia* (lineage), *progenies* (progeny), *stirps* (stock, lineage); and their vernacular equivalents such as *consanguinitate*, *sangue*, *schiatte*, *stirpe*, *nazione*, *progenia*, and *lignaggio*.

## Why the Period 1250-1400 in Tuscany?

This thesis argues that a series of intellectual and cultural transformations in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries informed ideas and attitudes to biological descent in the Latin West. On the one hand, the reception of classical Greek and Arab philosophy changed the way in which medieval scholars thought about the natural world, human beings, and their bodies. Of special importance was Aristotelian natural philosophy which, as evidenced by its literary production, rapidly permeated medieval culture.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, from the mid-thirteenth century, medieval society underwent a process of ‘medicalisation’ which contributed to emphasising the religious and social significance of the body. Practical medicine greatly developed both in technique and in the number of its practitioners,<sup>5</sup> and theoretical medicine became an important part of the curriculum of medieval universities.<sup>6</sup> As a result, medical knowledge began to influence other fields of learning such as theology, politics, and law.<sup>7</sup>

More generally, the late Middle Ages display a growing concern with bodilyness. The human body became more salient in religious, artistic, and social discourses. Eschatological anxieties stimulated theologians to reflect on the corporeal resurrection and the relationship between the body’s materiality and personal identity.<sup>8</sup> The naturalism of the visual arts and the

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<sup>4</sup> See Kellie Robertson, *Nature Speaks: Medieval Literature and Aristotelian Philosophy* (Philadelphia, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Michael R. McVaugh, *Medicine before the Plague: Practitioners and their Patients in the Crown of Aragon, 1285-1345* (Cambridge, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> See Danielle Jacquart, “Medical Scholasticism,” in *Western Medical Thought from Antiquity to the Middle Ages*, ed. Mirko D. Grmek (Cambridge, MA., 1998). On the influence of Arabic medical knowledge in this period, see Danielle Jacquart and Françoise Micheau, *La médecine arabe et l’Occident médiéval* (Paris, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> See the essays in Peter Biller and Joseph Ziegler, eds., *Religion and Medicine in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, 2001); Joel Kaye, “Equalization in the Body and the Body Politic: From Galen to Marsilius of Padua,” *Mélanges de l’École française de Rome - Moyen Âge* 125, no. 2 (2013); and the essays in Wendy Turner and Sara Butler, eds., *Medicine and the Law in the Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2014) respectively.

<sup>8</sup> Caroline W. Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York, 1995).

rise of portraiture exhibits a desire to capture the human figure more accurately.<sup>9</sup> And the proliferation of affective piety and devotion to the humanity of Christ similarly points to an increasing concern with the body, and the senses, as a seat of religious experience.<sup>10</sup> As I will show in this thesis, ideas of biological descent reflect a similar emphasis on bodiliness arising from a new anthropological view of humanity.

Finally, there are considerations of a social character that make Tuscany a particularly revealing context for this study. In the late Middle Ages, Tuscan society was structured around patrilineal principles of descent. Family clans – multigenerational family groups united by a sentiment of common kinship – were central to the life of the communes up until the fifteenth century.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, these families were not just clans but lineages, kinship groups whose cohesion arose from the belief in descent from a specific common ancestor.<sup>12</sup> In cities like Florence, these lineages were, in addition, patrilineages: groups of kinsmen tracing descent in the male line. And since several lineages could claim descent from a common ancestor, individual lineages were often considered branches of much larger ones or *consorterie*.<sup>13</sup>

Tuscan patrilineages informed political, economic, and spatial forms of social organisation. Lineage, as Christian Liddy has recently argued, ‘was a mentality and a structure, [...] it was the vertical perception and construction of family, binding past, present, and future.’<sup>14</sup> As a result, in late medieval Tuscany ancestry and blood were highly regarded values,

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<sup>9</sup> See John W. Pope-Hennessy, *The Portrait in the Renaissance* (London, 1966), chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>10</sup> Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Jacques Heers, *Family Clans in the Middle Ages. A Study of Political and Social Structures in Urban Areas*, trans. Barry Herbert (Amsterdam, Oxford, 1977).

<sup>12</sup> David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans and their Families: A Study of the Florentine catasto of 1427* (New Haven, 1985), 342-43.

<sup>13</sup> See Francis W. Kent, *Household and Lineage in Renaissance Florence: The Family Life of the Capponi, Ginori, and Rucellai* (Princeton, 1977), 5-10.

<sup>14</sup> Christian D. Liddy, “Family, Lineage and Dynasty in the Late Medieval City: Re-Thinking the English Evidence,” *Urban History* 47, no. 4 (2020), 661.

a source of honour and status. These values were expressed in coats of arms,<sup>15</sup> houses and private chapels,<sup>16</sup> surnames,<sup>17</sup> and family books or *ricordanze*.<sup>18</sup>

Admittedly, patrilineal values and their various forms of display were more characteristic of the urban patriciate or *magnati* than of other groups in Tuscan society.<sup>19</sup> Over the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries there were continuous attempts by the *popolo* to overturn this urban elite. But even when these popular movements succeeded, patrician culture survived. Unlike in other parts of Europe, the Tuscan aristocracy was heavily involved in commerce and trade and its members were quick to embrace new values, to alter some of their symbols of power, and to present themselves more as prudent merchants than valiant fighters.<sup>20</sup> And while the 'old' families adapted to the new social aspirations and behavioural expectations of rising merchant ones, the latter attempted to adopt the lifestyle, ideals, and cultural capital of the older patrilineages with whom, in addition, they often sought to marry.<sup>21</sup>

The patrilineal values of late medieval Tuscan society suggest that ideas of biological descent were, to some extent, informed by social realities. Yet they also explain why cities like Florence became a fertile ground for their dissemination and development.

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<sup>15</sup> Peter W. Sposato, "The Chivalrous Life of Buonaccorso Pitti: Honor-Violence and the Possession of Arms in Late Medieval Florence and Italy," *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 13 (2018).

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Butterfield, "Social Structure and the Typology of Funerary Monuments in Early Renaissance Florence," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 26 (1994); Samuel Kline Jr. Cohn, *The Cult of Remembrance and the Black Death: Six Renaissance Cities in Central Italy* (Baltimore, 1997), 211-227; and Anne Leader, "The Sepulchralization of Renaissance Florence," in *Memorializing the Middle Classes in Medieval and Renaissance Europe*, ed. Anne Leader (Kalamazoo, MI., 2018).

<sup>17</sup> David Herlihy, "Tuscan Names, 1200-1530," *Renaissance Quarterly* 41, no. 4 (1988).

<sup>18</sup> See Giovanni Ciappelli, *Memory, Family, and Self: Tuscan Family Books and other European Egodocuments (14th-18th Century)* (Leiden, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> See Carol Lansing, *The Florentine Magnates: Lineage and Faction in a Medieval Commune* (Princeton, 1991).

<sup>20</sup> John M. Najemy, "The Dialogue of Power in Florentine Politics," in *City-States in Classical Antiquity and Medieval Italy*, ed. Anthony Molho, Kurt Raaflaub and Julia Emlen (Ann Arbor, 1991), 277-278; and Michel Pastoureau, "Stratégies héraldiques et changements d'armoiries chez les magnats florentins du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Annales. Economies, sociétés, civilisations* 43, no. 5 (1988).

<sup>21</sup> Anthony Molho, *Marriage Alliance in Late Medieval Florence* (Cambridge, MA., 1994), 233-97.

## Historiography

Despite some recent work on medieval ideas of blood and heredity,<sup>22</sup> attitudes to biological descent remain largely unexplored. This thesis aims not only at developing this field of study; it also offers fresh insights into a number of intertwined historiographical areas of concern. In some cases, my thesis reinforces the arguments that have been made by others. At times, it challenges some of their assumptions and conclusions. Invariably, it shows that late medieval society is better understood the more we know about the ways individuals and groups perceived the relationship between the body and identity and the significance they imparted to blood relationship.

In the first place, this thesis is informed, and contributes to, the growing scholarship on medieval bodies. In recent decades, many scholars have chosen the body as their object of study, adopting a wide variety of interdisciplinary approaches to it.<sup>23</sup> They have explored its significance in religious literature and sexuality,<sup>24</sup> in theological thought,<sup>25</sup> in art,<sup>26</sup> and in the perception of individual figures such as kings and popes.<sup>27</sup> These studies reveal increasing interest among modern-day scholars in ‘bodiliness’ but also, and perhaps more importantly, the ways in which conceptions of the body and experiences of embodiment shaped the life and identity of individuals in the medieval past. My thesis contributes to this historiographical tradition by placing blood and biological descent at the centre of my analysis of the body.

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<sup>22</sup> See, for instance, Bettina Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood* (Cardiff, 2006); and the essays in Maaïke Van der Lugt and Charles de Miramon, eds., *L'hérité entre Moyen Âge et époque moderne. Perspectives historiques* (Florence, 2008).

<sup>23</sup> See, for instance, Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin, *Framing Medieval Bodies* (Manchester, 1994); Linda Kalof, ed., *A Cultural History of the Human Body: The Medieval Age* (Oxford, 2010); Suzanne C. Akbari and Jill Ross, eds., *The Ends of the Body: Identity and Community in Medieval Culture* (Toronto, 2013); and Gaia Gubbini, ed., *Body and Spirit in the Middle Ages* (Berlin, 2020).

<sup>24</sup> Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York, 1988); Danielle Jacquart and Claude Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, trans. Matthew Adamson (Princeton, 1988); and Caroline W. Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York, 1991).

<sup>25</sup> Peter Biller and Alastair J. Minnis, eds., *Medieval Theology and the Natural Body* (Woodbridge, 1997).

<sup>26</sup> Jack Hartnell, *Medieval Bodies: Life, Death and Art in the Middle Ages* (London, 2018).

<sup>27</sup> Sergio Bertelli, *The King's Body: The Sacred Rituals of Power in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, trans. R. Burr Litchfield (University Park, PA., 2001); and Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, *The Pope's Body* (Chicago, 2000).

My thesis has also profited from the history of medicine and, in particular, of embryology. In addition to studying the reception of classical medical knowledge, recent scholarship has illustrated the distinctiveness of medieval approaches to human generation, the contributions made by physicians, theologians, and philosophers, and the gendered dimensions of physiological views of the body.<sup>28</sup> Medieval ideas of descent, blood, and heredity were also shaped by anthropological thought. As a result, my thesis also draws on the work of intellectual historians of medieval scholastic thought and, in particular, on studies on the problem of individuation, the body-soul relationship, and the role of aptitudes in medieval moral theology.<sup>29</sup>

The abundant literature on the late medieval family is instrumental to my analysis too. Historians of medieval Italy have amply investigated the patrilineal structure of communal society, the position of women within the lineage, and the intersection of political, economic, and familial forms of social organisation.<sup>30</sup> My thesis adds a valuable dimension to their work by focusing on the role that ideas of blood and descent played in shaping the family as a legal and social institution. It also contributes to the work of scholars like Thomas Kuehn and Franck Roumy who have explored questions of illegitimacy and adoption primarily from a legal perspective.<sup>31</sup>

My thesis also revisits the theme of nobility and, in particular, the concepts of nobility of birth and nobility of virtue.<sup>32</sup> While the former has usually been interpreted as a reactionary ploy to preserve the power and status of the old aristocratic elite, the latter has been regarded as symptomatic of a humanistic approach to ideas of authority and merit or, as Alexander

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<sup>28</sup> Gordon R. Dunstan, ed., *The Human Embryo: Aristotle and the Arabic and European Traditions* (Exeter, 1990); Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages. Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge, 1993); Maaïke Van der Lugt, *Le ver, le démon et la Vierge: Les théories médiévales de la génération extraordinaire* (Paris, 2004).

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, the work of Jorge J. E. Gracia, Antonia Fitzpatrick, and Antoine Côté in the bibliography.

<sup>30</sup> Heers, *Family Clans in the Middle Ages*; Herlihy and Klapisich-Zuber, *Tuscans and their Families*; and Lansing, *The Florentine Magnates*.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Kuehn, *Illegitimacy in Renaissance Florence* (Ann Arbor, 2001); and Franck Roumy, *L'adoption dans le droit savant du XIIIe au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1998).

<sup>32</sup> Maurice H. Keen, *Chivalry* (New Haven, London, 1984), 143-161.

Murray put it, as part of a campaign ‘against the social rights of birth.’<sup>33</sup> My analysis challenges these interpretations and argues, by contrast, that ideas of biological descent made these two forms of nobility compatible with, and complementary to, each other.

Medieval thinkers thought about the nature of political communities and, in particular, about their identity as *gentes* or collective groups of descent.<sup>34</sup> This thesis argues that historians have downplayed the significance of claims of descent in medieval historical narratives. Against a growing tendency towards the deconstruction of ethnic identities, I show how such claims need to be taken seriously in order to understand the administrative and political practices of the late medieval commune as well as its rules of membership.

In addition, this thesis contributes to placing ideas of biological descent in relation to the history of emotions.<sup>35</sup> It shows how the significance of biological ties in late medieval society informed affective norms and expectations and how genealogical relatedness played a key role in medieval understandings of the order of love.

Finally, it is important to note that many of the attempts to reconstruct a history of attitudes towards biological descent have been undertaken by scholars working on the history of ideas of race and ethnicity. Often, this has been with the goal of fitting retrospectively social phenomena that seems otherwise unintelligible, such as the emergence of an obsession with purity of blood in Spain in the fifteenth century or the rise of racial thought in the early modern world.<sup>36</sup> Although this thematic stream has proven very productive, this thesis rarely engages with the concept of race; and this, for two reasons.

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<sup>33</sup> Alexander Murray, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2002), 271.

<sup>34</sup> Patrick J. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton, 2002); and Susan Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe 900-1300* (Oxford, 1997).

<sup>35</sup> Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling: A History of Emotions, 600-1700* (Cambridge, 2016); and Damien Boquet and Pirooska Nagy, *Medieval Sensibilities: A History of Emotions in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2018).

<sup>36</sup> David Nirenberg, “Was There Race Before Modernity? The Example of “Jewish” Blood in Late Medieval Spain,” in *The Origins of Racism in the West*, ed. Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin H. Isaac, and Joseph Ziegler (Cambridge, 2009); and Monica H. Green, “The Diversity of Human Kind,” in *A Cultural History of the Human Body*, 184-190.

On the one hand, the work of Michel Foucault and his assumption that power is at the heart of human relationships has led many scholars to believe that discrimination animates all forms of racial thinking. Accordingly, historians have expanded the concept of race to include forms of discrimination that have little to do with the biological body, that is with characteristics that are perceived to be physiological and hereditary.<sup>37</sup> Thus, since the goal of this thesis is to understand how late medieval society thought about the *biological* dimensions of ancestry, the concept of race would – as William Chester Jordan put it – ‘confuse and obscure more than it illuminates’ my analysis.<sup>38</sup>

On the other hand, many of the studies that have invoked the concept of race in the medieval past have assumed, explicitly or implicitly, that hereditary physiological thinking emerged to reinforce racist attitudes and behaviours, that is prejudices, oppression, and discrimination.<sup>39</sup> However, ideas of race and ethnicity were more often informed by a related, yet distinct, area of medieval thought, namely environmental and climatic medical theories.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, as this thesis will show, most of my sources very rarely discuss ethnic or racial categories. Thus, my work suggests that even if medieval society developed certain racial attitudes to biological descent, racism cannot be taken to be the main reason for the centrality of ancestry and blood in this period.

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<sup>37</sup> See Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2018), 3, where she claims that race is ‘one of the primary names we have [...] that is attached to a repeating tendency [...] to demarcate human beings through differences among humans that are selectively essentialized as absolute and fundamental, in order to distribute positions and powers differentially to human groups [...] It is a structural relationship for the articulation and management of human differences, rather than a substantive content.’ See also Robert Bartlett, ‘Medieval and Modern Concepts of Race and Ethnicity,’ *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 (2001). The fact that most scholars have rejected a purely biological concept of race, however, does not mean that some do not espouse a view of race as a social category whose membership is determined by birth, and which considers certain biological features; where the selection of those particular biological features which are deemed relevant is socially conditioned. In other words, race is still understood by some scholars as a socially constructed notion that is based on inherited physical morphology. See, for instance, the genetic common-bundle view of race of the late Jorge J. E. Gracia in *Surviving Race, Ethnicity, and Nationality: A Challenge for the Twenty-First Century* (Lanham, MD., 2005), 85.

<sup>38</sup> William Chester Jordan, ‘Why “Race?”’ *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 31 (2001): 171.

<sup>39</sup> Steven Epstein, *Speaking of Slavery: Color, Ethnicity, and Human Bondage in Italy* (Ithaca, NY., 2018).

<sup>40</sup> See Peter Biller, ‘Proto-Racial Thought in Medieval Science,’ in *The Origins of Racism*; and Claire Weeda, *Ethnicity in Medieval Europe, 950-1250: Medicine, Power and Religion* (York, 2021).

## Past Questions, Modern Concerns

The desire to know one's biological ancestors is not a thing of the past.<sup>41</sup> Like late medieval society, our contemporary world displays an enthusiasm for genealogies.<sup>42</sup> TV shows like BBC's *Who do you think you are?* trace the family history of celebrity participants and attract regular audiences of millions of viewers. Travel agencies have begun promoting 'genealogy tourism' to help people see for themselves the places that defined the lives of their ancestors. More significantly perhaps, in recent years genealogical research has become a billion-dollar industry. Technological developments have enabled the creation of platforms where one can access millions of online records to build a family tree. Meanwhile, the surge in DNA ancestry testing suggests that this genealogical interest shares with its medieval counterpart a concern for the biological origin and makeup of the body. Debates regarding the morality of third-party reproduction techniques – sperm and egg donation, and surrogacy – show that the significance of biological ties is still very much at the heart of ethical and legal thinking.<sup>43</sup> And the widespread sense of frustration felt by donor-conceived children at the lack of knowledge of one or both their biological parents demonstrates that the identity of one's biological ancestors still matters to people today.<sup>44</sup>

To some extent, the fact that increasingly large numbers of people are investing time, money, and effort to uncover their biological ancestry feels antithetical to modern thought. Following the existentialist maxim that 'existence precedes essence,' postmodern scholars have spent the last few decades paving the way for the emergence of constructivist and performative conceptions of selfhood.<sup>45</sup> As Charles Taylor has argued, whereas in the past the subject was

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<sup>41</sup> Eviatar Zerubavel, *Ancestors and Relatives: Genealogy, Identity and Community* (Oxford, 2012).

<sup>42</sup> Jennifer Mason, "Tangible Affinities and the Real Life Fascination of Kinship," *Sociology* 42, no. 1 (2008).

<sup>43</sup> Naomi R. Cahn, *The New Kinship: Constructing Donor-Conceived Families* (New York, 2012)

<sup>44</sup> See "All Anonymous Us Stories," Anonymous Us, accessed August 24, 2022, <https://anonymousus.org/stories/>.

<sup>45</sup> For instance, Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, 1990).

defined in relation to a cosmic order, the modern subject in Western civilisation is primarily self-defining.<sup>46</sup> Our identities are more and more psychologised than ever before and concepts like ‘self-expression’ and ‘authenticity’ have become much more important than ‘nature.’<sup>47</sup> The body is still imbued with meaning, but it is no longer regarded as a normative reality. Without going so far as to deny biological facts, modern thinkers have presented biology not only as contingent but also as a potentially alienating form of external authority that individuals need to be liberated from.<sup>48</sup> Critical gender, queer, and transgender theories are just some of most recent and widespread manifestations of this approach to human personality which has widened the divide between biology and the self. But they are not the only ones. In its quest for morphological freedom, transhumanism is increasingly calling into question the embodied dimension of human identities.<sup>49</sup> And as Byung-Chul Han has noted, digital communication is causing a loss of the material self: our identities have become fragmented between the physical and the digital worlds and our life online is accelerating even more our transformation – and that of our bodies – from subjects into projects.<sup>50</sup>

Yet despite the popularity of constructivist theories, scientific advances in the fields of evolutionary biology, cognitive psychology, and genetics are keeping the nature vs nurture question alive.<sup>51</sup> In the social sciences, there is an ongoing debate between those who think that human beings are primarily the product of their environment and choices and those who see genetics playing a significant role in the configuration of personality and behaviour and in the production of social, educational, and economic outcomes.<sup>52</sup> Anthropologists are similarly

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<sup>46</sup> Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge, 1975), 6.

<sup>47</sup> Carl Trueman, *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution* (Wheaton, IL., 2020).

<sup>48</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York, 2011), 80, 139.

<sup>49</sup> Jennifer Huberman, *Transhumanism: From Ancestors to Avatars* (Cambridge, 2021).

<sup>50</sup> Byung-Chul Han, *In the Swarm: Digital Prospects*, trans. Erik Butler (Cambridge, MA., 2017).

<sup>51</sup> Steven Pinker, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (London, 2003); and Robert Plomin, *Blueprint. How DNA Makes Us Who We Are* (Cambridge, MA., 2018).

<sup>52</sup> Gregory Clark, *The Son also Rises: Surnames and the History of Social Mobility* (Princeton, 2014); and Kathryn Paige Harden, *The Genetic Lottery: Why DNA matters for Social Equality* (Princeton, 2021).

engaged in debates regarding the focal status of kin. In 1984, David Schneider challenged the idea that biological kinship was a universal structuring principle of human societies.<sup>53</sup> Yet critics have raised questions regarding the most fundamental assumption shared by the members of the ‘New Kinship Studies,’ namely whether the performative notions of kinship that Schneider’s work introduced are, in fact, modelled on procreative ones.<sup>54</sup> In the humanities too, the body has by no means been forgotten. As Caroline W. Bynum noted almost three decades ago, although many contemporary theorists no longer seem to think that there is such a thing as ‘the body,’ scholars seem unable to stop talking about it.<sup>55</sup>

Thus, the question is not so much whether the body and descent still matter but why: how can we explain our contemporary fascination with genealogy or the fact that more and more people are taking ancestry tests with every passing year?<sup>56</sup> To answer this question, a wholly different thesis would be required. Yet I hope that this one at least illustrates why and how they mattered in the medieval past. Perhaps by considering their significance then, we can begin to understand why it is that ‘blood’ is still important to many today.

## Sources and Methodology

This dissertation constitutes a history of ideas and attitudes to the biological dimensions of ancestry. However, it also wants to explore the ways in which ideas informed, and were informed, by the life and behaviour of individuals and groups. To do so, I employ a wide variety of textual evidence. Intellectual sources (e.g., medical, philosophical, and theological

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<sup>53</sup> David M. Schneider, *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (Ann Arbor, 1984).

<sup>54</sup> See Warren Shapiro, “Towards a Post-Schneiderian Perspective on Kinship,” *Journal of Anthropological Research* 73, no. 2 (2017). This same criticism can be levelled against the work of some medieval historians who have seen in the proliferation of kinship terminology outside the strictly biological and procreative sphere an indication that kinship in the Middle Ages was a non-biological form of sociality. See Hans J. Hummer, *Visions of Kinship in Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 2018).

<sup>55</sup> Caroline W. Bynum, “Why All the Fuss About the Body? A Medievalist’s Perspective,” *Critical Inquiry* 22 (1995): 1-6.

<sup>56</sup> Antonio Regalado, “More than 26 Million People Have Taken an At-Home Ancestry Test,” *MIT Technology Review*, February 11, 2019, <https://www.technologyreview.com/2019/02/11/103446/more-than-26-million-people-have-taken-an-at-home-ancestry-test/>.

writings) allow me to reconstruct the ways in which late medieval thinkers conceptualised the biological body and the significance of biological ties. Literary and normative sources can illustrate practices that documentary sources often remain silent about such as those taking place in the intimacy of the household. Literature (e.g., chronicles, stories, poems) is not a perfect reflection of social realities, but it works within a set of paradigms that are conceived as possible by its intended audience and can betray genuine anxieties. Normative sources (e.g., laws, didactic literature, and sermons) illustrate the prescriptive behaviour expected of individuals and groups. But their existence always implies, when it does not specify, deviations from the norm. Documentary sources (e.g., adoption and naturalisation records), for their part, provide vivid detail and concrete examples but they need to be complemented by literary and normative sources that help situate them into context.

My methodology is inspired by David d'Avray's *Rationalities in History* (2010). In this work, d'Avray draws upon the work of Max Weber to find a middle way between universal and culture-specific models of human rationality; that is, the systems that dictate or condition human rational behaviour, both individual and social.<sup>57</sup> Intended as a method for comparative analysis, d'Avray's work is also a wonderful tool to bridge the gap between intellectual, cultural, and social history in productive ways. The examination of intellectual and literary sources in my thesis helps delineate the 'value rationality,' that is the framework of ideas, beliefs, and values – medical, philosophical, social, and religious – which informed attitudes to biological descent. On the other hand, normative and documentary sources help specify the 'instrumental rationality,' that is the ways in which convictions and values were furthered and how individuals and groups reacted to them. This model assumes a symbiosis between both spheres: ideas are embodied in practice and reinforced in images, rituals, experience, memory, and emotions,

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<sup>57</sup> David L. d'Avray, *Rationalities in History: A Weberian Essay in Comparison* (Cambridge, 2010).

while changes in the conditions or means for the attainment of goals can lead to reworkings of value rationalities.

This model does not assume that all human behaviour is rational, that individuals and groups are completely determined to act in certain ways because of the values they hold, or that at any given time in a certain group, society, or culture, there is one monolithic rationality at work. Hence, it is valuable not because of its ability to predict behaviour but rather due to its flexibility. Using ideal types, it can help us understand concrete cases in a much broader perspective without losing their specificity. Value rationalities define the range of possible answers that make sense within a certain society and culture. Circumstances compel certain behaviours and courses of action that often create frictions with a certain value rationality. And actors navigate between the two in creative ways.

With the exception of the first, which is a more conventional history of ideas, the structure of each chapter reflects this methodological approach. Each delineates the ways in which intellectual discourses shaped ideas, beliefs, and values. I then analyse legal, literary, and documentary sources to assess the extent to which those ideas, beliefs, and values underlined social practice as well as how changing social and material conditions, in turn, shaped intellectual discourses.

## **Chapter Structure**

One of the contentions of this thesis is that similar patterns of thinking about biological descent can be identified across different dimensions of social life. As a result, my examination is structured around a series of concentric circles of analysis with each chapter moving from the individual experience outwards to the wider interactions between groups: the family, social units, and political communities.

The first chapter focuses on the relationship between individual identity and biological descent and in so doing it sets out the intellectual background of my analysis. By examining a series of key philosophical and scientific questions it addresses the development of a proto-materialistic approach to human personality that enabled medieval scholars to develop elaborate theories that could account for the transmission of moral and intellectual traits. In particular, I examine the problem of individuation, late medieval embryological ideas, and the late medieval reception of the Aristotelian concept of aptitudes or inclinations.

In chapter two, I study the social, legal, and emotional dimensions of biological ties of descent within the family. I focus on the roles that medieval parents were expected to fulfil towards their children and the way in which blood relation shaped the perception and realisation of those roles. In addition to theological and didactic literature, I study responses to wet nursing, supposition, paternity fraud, and the adoption of abandoned and orphaned children in late medieval Florentine hospitals. By examining these cases where biological ties were either absent or displaced, I show how their significance was articulated by contemporaries.

Chapter three examines how the perception and formation of a social identity, namely the nobility, was shaped by the belief in the distinctiveness of a group's biological descent. This chapter focuses on the idea of the noble body to illustrate the complex relationship between birth and virtue and its impact on the identity of noble individuals as well as of the nobility as a group.

In chapter four, I consider the claims to collective biological descent of urban communities, the various social functions these claims performed, and how they made sense within the wider context of late medieval political theory and practice. In this chapter, the legal practice of naturalisation helps illustrate how the perception of the Florentine commune as *gens* placed constraints on the integration of immigrants into the body politic.

Finally, in the fifth chapter I explore the diffusion of theories of natural love, namely the belief that an affective inclination arises between individuals and groups with shared biological ancestry. I show how this belief was pervasive across society and shaped normative expectations with regards to forms of emotional valuation and expression. Natural love also informed late medieval discussions of the order of love: it explained the instinct to love one's nearest and dearest as well as the need to love our neighbour. Thus, in this final chapter I show that while biological descent could be perceived and employed to demarcate identities and differentiate groups, genealogical relatedness arising from common descent could also be invoked to foster charity, peace, and concord.

### **Limitations and Omissions**

I have explained some of the ways in which my methodology makes use of different source material to bridge the gap between intellectual discourses and social practice. Yet, at times, my analysis heavily relies on texts written by medieval scholars trained at universities and other centres of study. This raises a number of questions: to what extent was the knowledge shared by this intellectual and Latinate elite disseminated and assimilated by other groups in society? And do intellectual sources reflect wider social attitudes?

My thesis shows that learned ideas about biological descent had the potential for reaching a wide audience via literature, art, religious instruction, and preaching. Moreover, although hard evidence for the direct influence of scholastic ideas on social mentalities is in some cases notoriously difficult to establish, it is often possible to show that there were homologies between the ways in which medieval thinkers and individuals outside the intellectual elite thought about the biological dimensions of ancestry.

In addition, it is important to note that learned and popular epistemologies were not necessarily that different. On the one hand, one should remember that medieval science was

not entirely based on textual learning. Rather, as Katharine Park has argued, it also relied on observational and experiential practices.<sup>58</sup> The knowledge that medieval scholars acquired about the natural world and the human body was built on the basis of induction, moving from particular observations to universal laws, and from universal laws to prediction of particulars. This facilitated the dissemination of new ideas because, although not everyone was able to express them in quite the sophisticated terms employed by theologians, philosophers, and doctors, they were exposed and could observe the same phenomena that had stimulated their formulation.<sup>59</sup> Besides, unlike modern-day academics, medieval scholars did not introduce many new and complicated terms into the embryological, medical, and social vocabulary. What they most often did was to provide new depths of meaning to words like ‘blood,’ ‘milk,’ or ‘inclination’ that were common currency.

On the other hand, most of the authors whose work I examine were not ‘ivory tower’ intellectuals. As John Baldwin, Peter Biller, and Joel Kaye have demonstrated, medieval scholars were not detached from their local environments.<sup>60</sup> They were often engaged in pastoral work, paid close attention to the social realities that surrounded them, and when they wrote, offered solutions to help people deal with practical problems. In other words, although they were often engrossed in abstract and speculative ideas, they also produced a lot of concrete thought. Thus, reading their writings, one can, with due precaution, make conjectures about society.

For instance, confession manuals often deal with questions regarding adultery and the rights of illegitimate offspring. The advice they offer can be taken as indicative of the sort of

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<sup>58</sup> Katharine Park, “Observation in the Margins, 500-1500,” in *Histories of Scientific Observation*, ed. Lorraine Daston and Elizabeth Lunbeck (Chicago, London, 2011).

<sup>59</sup> By contrast, Hannah Arendt argued that the development of modern physical science brought with it a lack of common frames of reference that created a profound divide between scientific and social understandings of the world. See Arendt, “The Conquest of Space and the Stature of Man,” in *Between Past and Future. Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York, 1969).

<sup>60</sup> John W. Baldwin, *Masters, Princes, and Merchants: The Social Views of Peter the Chanter and his Circle* (Princeton, 1970); Biller, *The Measure of Multitude*; and Joel Kaye, *A History of Balance, 1250-1375: The Emergence of a New Model of Equilibrium and Its Impact on Thought* (Cambridge, 2014).

problems that illegitimate children posed to their families both in affective and legal terms. Likewise, when we observe that didactic writers and moral theologians devoted considerable efforts to discuss the morality of wet nursing, we can take this as evidence that its practice was widespread. We can also identify some of the material circumstances and motivations that motivated couples to hire a wet nurse. And when we observe that preachers denounced wet nursing in their sermons because of the ill moral effects that a nurse's milk could have on children, we can assume that their audience was familiar with that idea or that, at least, they did not find it implausible.

It is also important to note that in some respects this dissertation echoes a predominantly male set of voices. In some areas, like medicine, the preponderance of male authors is dictated by the social circumstances that determined the production of knowledge. As Monica H. Green has argued, by the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries much medical science was dominated by men, because the institutionalisation of practical and theoretical medicine side-lined female authors and practitioners even in those areas where one would have expected to find more female voices such as gynaecology.<sup>61</sup> The same can be said with regards to philosophical and theological literature. Drawing on these sources, my analysis suggests that late medieval ideas and attitudes towards ancestry were gendered and that they were informed by the differences – real or imagined – between male and female bodies as much as by social structures and the law. However, this gendered dimension was probably experienced differently by women. As Caroline W. Bynum has argued with regards to medieval religious literature, 'it is men who develop conceptions of gender, whereas women develop conceptions of humanity.'<sup>62</sup> Thus, further study and additional source material might contribute to defining

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<sup>61</sup> Monica H. Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine. The Rise of Male Authority in Pre-Modern Gynaecology* (Oxford, 2008).

<sup>62</sup> Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 156.

more precisely female attitudes to biological descent and to assessing whether women, for instance, were more prone to value bilateral kinship even in strong patrilineal societies.

Finally, like many others, this research project was affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Many other documentary sources could shed further light on this work. For example, the analysis of peace pacts between feuding families might illustrate whether the practice of vendetta and conflict resolution was informed by ideas of biological descent. The fourteenth-century jurist Angelo degli Ubaldi (1328-1407) affirmed that ‘to him who is descended of the male blood of the offended person pertains vendetta and revenge [...] or making peace or compensation.’<sup>63</sup> Were illegitimate children (*spuri*) not related to their father by blood allowed to partake in these conflicts despite Angelo’s assertion that ‘*de iure* it does not pertain to them’?<sup>64</sup> This and many other questions could had been answered if travel and access to the archives had been easier. But, as a colleague commented, the shortcomings of our own work will be opportunities for others.

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<sup>63</sup> Angelo degli Ubaldi, *Consilia* (Frankfurt, 1575), cons. 401, fol. 291 rb: ‘Namque ad illum, qui descendit ex sanguine masculino offensi, pertinet facere vindictam, et levare faidam id est iniuriam offensi, vel facere pacem, seu compositionem.’

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*: ‘Non sequitur ergo de iure ad eos spectat omnis vindicta, quia imo non spectat, ex quo paterno beneficio sunt indigni, ut in fallentia iuris, secundum naturam.’

## **The Body and Individual Identities**

The rediscovery and availability of classical Greek and Arabic knowledge had a deep and long-lasting influence on the ways in which late medieval thinkers thought about the human person and, in particular, about the body. Like classical authors, late medieval scholars believed that ancestry determined an individual's physical characteristics. But beginning in the mid-thirteenth century, they developed elaborate philosophical theories that posited a connection between the body and the development of intellectual and moral traits. To put it simply, they believed that the physiological makeup of a person played a key role in determining his moral character and behaviour. And insofar as one's physiological makeup was inherited from one's parents and ancestors, biological descent became crucial to interpret individual identities.

In order to illustrate these developments, we need to proceed in several steps. I will first examine a philosophical question which had a major impact on the role that the body played in late medieval anthropological thought, namely the problem of individuation. Understanding how scholastic thinkers thought about individuation is crucial because theories of individuation reveal why the body and descent came to be at the centre of late medieval accounts of identity. I will then present the theories of embryology that were available to late medieval thinkers in the period 1250-1400 and how they informed ideas about the biological dimensions of ancestry. Finally, I will show how theories of individuation and embryology were combined to develop theories of moral and intellectual trait inheritance.

### **1.1 The Problem of Individuation**

Medieval scholars distinguished between human nature and personhood. Human nature is what makes an individual substance a human being, a member of the species. Personhood, on

the other hand, is what makes a man or a woman an individual subject – of a rational nature – distinguishing them from other men and women. This distinction reflects the Aristotelian ontology prevailing in the late Middle Ages which established the existence of individual primary substances (this man, this cat, this tree) which exist both as individuals and as members of a larger universal groups (men, cats, trees). The question of what makes a human being an individual person, therefore, was part of a larger philosophical question commonly known as the problem of individuation. The problem of individuation is one of the most important intellectual debates in late medieval scholasticism. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, it superseded the question of universals which had been of greater concern for classical Greek philosophers. One of the reasons for this shift of interest, as some scholars have noted, was ‘the emphasis that Christianity places on individual persons, their identities, and individual personal responsibility.’<sup>1</sup>

The problem of individuation can be divided into two main questions: (1) What makes a given individual *an* individual? And (2) what makes a given individual *this* individual? The first question seeks an explanation for the individuality of a member of a species: its indivisibility – the impossibility of being divided into two or more individuals of the same species – and its numerical diversity or separate existence. The second question is about accounting for an individual’s identity and impredicability. Identity is the capacity of some things to remain the same through time and partial, that is non-substantial, change. Impredicability is that attribute of an individual which cannot be predicated of something else.

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<sup>1</sup> See Daniel D. Novotný and Jorge J. E. Gracia, “Individuation,” in *The Routledge Companion to Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Richard Cross and J. T. Paasch (New York, 2021), 149, which is a good introduction to the problem of individuation in the Middle Ages. See also Gracia, *Introduction to the Problem of Individuation in the Early Middle Ages* (Munich, 1984); Gracia, ed., *Individuation in Scholasticism: The Later Middle Ages and the Counter-Reformation 1150-1650* (Albany, 1994), 1-20; Peter King, “The Problem of Individuation in the Middle Ages,” *Theoria* 66 (2000); Martin Pickavé, “The Controversy over the Principle of Individuation in Quodlibeta (1277-ca. 1320): A Forest Map,” in *Theological Quodlibeta in the Middle Ages. The Fourteenth Century*, ed. Chris Schabel (Leiden, 2007); and Michal Glowala, *Singleness. Self-Individuation and Its Rejection in the Scholastic Debate on Principles of Individuation* (Boston, 2016).

The goal for medieval thinkers was to identify the principle or principles that could provide an answer to these questions (*principium individuationis*), where principles were understood as ‘metaphysical constituents of beings, [...] the ground or source of some feature possessed by its subject.’<sup>2</sup> The problem of individuation concerned all beings perceived to have individual existence, but different solutions could be provided depending on the type of being in question. In the case of human beings, who are material substances, that is beings composed of matter and form, there were three main candidates for the principle of individuation: accidents, form, and matter.<sup>3</sup> In the thirteenth century, medieval scholars developed theories of material individuation that placed the biological body at the centre of individual identities. In order to fully comprehend the significance of this development, however, we need to understand how these material theories differed from those which posited accidents and form as the principle of individuation.

### 1.1.1 Principles of Individuation

From a chronological perspective, the first candidate for the principle of individuation were accidents. Boethius (c.480-524/5) introduced the problem of individuation to the Middle Ages and put forward a bundle view of individuation, namely that the uniqueness of a collection of accidents as a whole individuates a substance.<sup>4</sup> This is often called the ‘Standard Theory of Individuality’ or STI.<sup>5</sup> According to the STI, individuals can be discerned by their observable traits. Yet these traits do not merely serve an epistemic function, allowing us to tell individuals apart from one another, but also ensure their distinctness. Some of these traits are physical features: height, hair colour, weight. Others are relational ones such as position in a spatial-temporal continuum, for two material substances cannot occupy the same place

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<sup>2</sup> King, “The Problem of Individuation,” 4.

<sup>3</sup> For a complete list of candidates for the principle of individuation of substances, see Gracia, *Introduction to the Problem of Individuation*, 39-46.

<sup>4</sup> Boethius, *De Trinitate* in *The Theological Tractates*, ed. and trans. H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand, and S. J. Tester (Cambridge, MA., 1973), 1.24-25, 6: ‘Sed numero differentiam accidentium varietas facit.’

<sup>5</sup> Gracia, *Introduction to the Problem of Individuation*, 123-193, 125.

simultaneously.<sup>6</sup> In most versions of the STI, accidents are not regarded as individual in themselves. Rather, they are common to all the members of a certain species. It is their variety which ensures individuality, for the same collection never repeats itself in two individuals. Accidents had the advantage of ensuring the unity of the species: if two individuals are fully human then nothing essential should distinguish them. The STI was the most popular theory of individuation in the early Middle Ages and was espoused by a great variety of thinkers like John Scotus Eriugena (c.810-877), Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), and Thierry of Chartres (c.1100-1150).

By the twelfth century, Peter Abelard (c.1079-1142) launched a powerful attack on the STI. In his *Logica ingredientibus*, he rejected the role of accidents in the individuation of substances. There were two main reasons for this. Firstly, accidents are often subject to change and as such they threaten the identity of an individual. Secondly, if accidents were the principle of individuation, then they would have to be prior to their substance.<sup>7</sup> Accidents are features of something – a subject – which must be individual before and independently of the accidents it possesses.<sup>8</sup> Thus, establishing accidents as the principle of individuation ran against Aristotelian metaphysics which affirmed that accidents depend on their substance to exist and not vice versa. As a result of Abelard's critique, medieval philosophers turned to substantial rather than accidental principles of individuation, that is to the essential constituents of an individual human being: form, matter, or a combination of them both.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> This relates to the modern question of persistence and the identification of individuals with space-time worms. See Neil McKinnon, "The Endurance/Perdurance Distinction," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 80, no. 3 (2002).

<sup>7</sup> Peter Abelard, *I Logica "ingredientibus": Glossae super Porphyrium*, in *Peter Abaelards Philosophische Schriften*, ed. Bernhard Geyer (Münster, 1919), 13: "Si enim ex accidentibus individua esse suum contrahunt, profecto priora sunt eis naturaliter accidentia."

<sup>8</sup> To put it in terms of the aforementioned theory of the space-time worms, a path is not the individual but rather evidence that the individual who has traced it has prior existence to it.

<sup>9</sup> The STI remained important for epistemological theories of individuation in the work of some scholars like Roger Bacon. Critically, however, Bacon rejected accidents as metaphysical principles of individuation. See Camille Berubé, *La connaissance de l'individuel au Moyen Âge* (Montreal, 1964), 73-74.

Form was a good candidate for the principle of individuation because forms are part of the essence of an individual and individuality might be construed as a form. Boethius had already put forward in his logical works the idea that the principle of individuation might be some type of form when he suggested that the ‘unshareable distinctive property’ (*singularem qualitatem et incommunicabilem alicui alii*) belonging to Plato could be called ‘Platonicity.’ This property would belong only to Plato whereas humanity, on the other hand, to anyone who deserves to be called a man, like Socrates.<sup>10</sup> Some medieval scholars proposed form – or rather the soul as substantial form – as a candidate for the principle of individuation. However, this theory presented a serious challenge. If the principle of individuation of material substances is a formal principle and this is, in turn, a distinctive essential property of an individual, then individuals would be essentially different from one another and as a result they would not only be different in number but in kind. In other words, a formal principle of individuation threatened the unity of the human species. Forms are always common and never in themselves individual. They are what unites, not what separates, individuals of the same species. Thus, although humans might be numerically different, two individuals must have the same substantial form if they are both to be essentially human.

The other main candidate for the principle of individuation was matter. In the medieval West, this third theory first appeared in Latin translations of Maimonides’ (d. 1204) *Guide for the Perplexed* and had Aristotelian roots.<sup>11</sup> It became the standard theory of individuation throughout the later Middle Ages despite attacks from some philosophers. It was championed by many, but it is most famously associated with Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) who more than

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<sup>10</sup> Boethius, *Commentarius in librum Aristotelis Peri hermenias*, ed. Karl Meiser (Leipzig, 1877-80), 2.07, 137, lines 3-16.

<sup>11</sup> Tamar M. Rudavsky, “The Jewish Tradition: Maimonides (b. 1135; d. 1204), Gersonides (b. 1288; d. 1344), and Bedersi (b. 1270; d. 1340),” in *Individuation in Scholasticism*, 73-76. For the *Guide*’s early Latin reception, see Diana di Segni, “Early Quotations from Maimonides’ *Guide for the Perplexed* in the Latin Middle Ages,” in *Interpreting Maimonides. Critical Essays*, ed. Charles H. Manekin and Daniel Davies (Cambridge, 2018).

anyone else contributed to its development and diffusion.<sup>12</sup> As Christopher Hughes has put it, for Aquinas ‘the property *being this [...] substance of this kind*, is the same as, or is at least co-intensive with, the property, *being a substance of this kind with this matter*.<sup>13</sup> If two material substances have the same nature or form (e.g., two identical coins) but are numerically different, it seems that the individuality of any such composite being derives from the individuality of the matter its nature informs. This matter Aquinas calls designated matter (*materia signata* or *designata*).<sup>14</sup> To the question of what makes matter designated, Aquinas argues that it is dimensive quantity or matter ‘considered under determined dimensions’ (*que sub determinatis dimensionibus consideratur*). Thus, designated matter is not placed in the definition of man as man but it would be placed in the definition of Socrates, if Socrates had a definition.<sup>15</sup> That is, designated matter is not just any matter, but *this* matter; not just any body, but *this* body; not just flesh and bones, but *this* flesh and *these* bones (*hoc os et hec caro*).<sup>16</sup>

The interpretation of Aquinas’ theory of individuation was amply contested among his followers and critics. Some argued that positing matter as the principle of individuation made it challenging to explain the individuation of non-material substances.<sup>17</sup> Others saw in Aquinas’ definition of quantity and dimensionality as corporeal accidental forms a threat to the unity

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<sup>12</sup> Aquinas’ theory of individuation has been the subject of many studies. See, e.g., Patrick W. Hughes, “Aquinas’ Principle of Individuation,” *Episteme* 2 (1991); John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, D.C., 2000), 351-375; Andrew Payne, “Gracia and Aquinas on The Principle of Individuation,” *The Thomist* 68, no. 4 (2004); Christopher Hughes, “Matter and Individuation in Aquinas,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 13, no. 1 (1996); Uwe Meixner, “Aquinas on Forms, Individuation, and Matter,” *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 43, no. 1-2 (1996); and Jeffrey E. Brower, “Aquinas on the Individuation of Substances,” in *Oxford Studies in Medieval Philosophy*, vol. 5, ed. Robert Pasnau (Oxford, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> Hughes, “Matter and Individuation,” 1.

<sup>14</sup> For what follows, see Thomas Aquinas, *De ente et essentia*, in *Opera Omnia*, editio Leonina, vol. 43 (Rome, 1976), cap. II, 371, lines 67-84.

<sup>15</sup> As Aquinas notes, Socrates cannot really have a definition because definitions are, properly speaking, universal.

<sup>16</sup> A similar idea is put forward by Aquinas in *Summa theologiae*, Ia, q. 119, a. 1, co.: ‘Ad veritatem igitur naturae alicuius in communi consideratae, pertinet forma et materia eius in communi accepta, ad veritatem autem naturae in hoc particulari consideratae, pertinet materia individualis signata, et forma per huiusmodi materiam individuata. Sicut de veritate humanae naturae in communi, est anima humana et corpus, sed de veritate humanae naturae in Petro et Martino, est haec anima et hoc corpus.’

<sup>17</sup> Yet Aquinas contended that not every type of being is necessarily individuated in the same way and that species of immaterial beings, like angels, have only one member because they do not need many members to go on existing. See *ibid.*, q. 47, a. 2, co. See also Giorgio Pini, “The Individuation of Angels from Bonaventure to Duns Scotus,” in *A Companion to Angels in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Tobias Hoffmann (Leiden, 2012).

and identity of the substance.<sup>18</sup> Yet his theory of material individuation had a profound impact on how late medieval thinkers perceived the role of the body in the configuration of human personality because it proposed that the body individualises the human person not just numerically but qualitatively. In order to illustrate this, I will now turn to a series of answers given to a question that was first raised in the mid-twelfth century by Peter Lombard (1100-1160).

### 1.1.2 Qualitative Effects of Material Theories of Individuation

In the second book of the *Sentences*, the Lombard raised the following question: ‘are souls on account of [their] creation equal in natural gifts?’<sup>19</sup> The question is raised within the Lombard’s discussion of propagation of original sin and he poses it so as to provoke reflection on the phenomenon of human diversity and, in particular, of intellectual ability. If all human beings are descended from Adam and Eve, and we all derive the same fallen nature from them, how can one explain such differences? The Lombard’s answer to this question is that human souls are created diverse. Some souls ‘excel others in natural gifts, as in their essence; one is more acute than another and better able to understand and remember, in as much as it is endowed with a sharper mind and a more far-seeing intellect.’ However, this diversity of souls – or hierarchy with regards to intellectual ability – should not be a concern ‘because sharpness or dullness of intellect does not determine the reward or punishment in future.’ In other words, the quality of the intellect does not have eschatological significance.

In his commentary on the *Sentences*, Aquinas took a very different approach to this question. Qualitative differences among souls could easily be construed as formal differences because souls were considered to be such simple substances that any non-numerical difference

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<sup>18</sup> For this reason, some scholars like Duns Scotus returned to formal principles of individuation. See Timothy B. Noone, “Individuation in Scotus,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 69 (1995). On dimensive quantity as accidental form, see Antonia Fitzpatrick, *Thomas Aquinas on Bodily Identity* (Oxford, 2017), 96-100.

<sup>19</sup> For what follows, see Peter Lombard, *Sententiae*, vol. 2, lib. II, dist. 32, cap. 8, 517, translated in Peter Lombard, *Sentences*, 163.

between them would amount to an essential difference.<sup>20</sup> As we have seen, this would make human beings differ from each other not only in number but in kind, like angels, threatening the unity of the human species and posing serious theological problems. Thus, Aquinas had to affirm that souls must be created equal and any diversity in intellectual ability has to originate in the bodily complexion of an individual. He argues that when the soul is infused in the body it is adapted to it because ‘everything received by something exists in it according to the mode of the recipient.’<sup>21</sup> It is likely that Aquinas had encountered this principle, which he uses elsewhere in his work,<sup>22</sup> in the pseudo-Aristotelian *Liber de causis*.<sup>23</sup> The same principle circulated Western Europe from the twelfth century in one of the earliest Latin physiognomic treatises. It helped explain why from the quality of the body the quality of the soul could be considered and understood. And it was accompanied by an illustrative analogy: a liquid is shaped by the recipient into which it is poured.<sup>24</sup>

As we can see, Aquinas’ answer to the Lombard’s question is informed by his stance on the problem of individuation. The body is treated not just as the principle of numerical diversity among individuals of the human species: it is also what individualises qualitatively human souls and the origin of the diversity in intellectual ability.<sup>25</sup> It is important to note that

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<sup>20</sup> Aquinas, *In sententias*, lib. 2, d. 32, q. 2, a. 3, co.: ‘anima et angelus naturae simplices sunt, et non est in eis compositio, nisi ex esse et quod est; ideo oportet quod quaecumque differentia in eis est ex seipsis, sit differentia formalis, et speciei diversitatem inducens [...] ideo non est possibile ut diversitas animarum ponatur ad modum illum quo distinguuntur gradus in natura angelica, cum omnes animae rationales unius speciei sint, differunt autem numero solo.’

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*: ‘Omnis autem talis diversitas ex materia causatur; et ideo cum anima non habeat materiam partem sui, oportet quod diversitas et distinctio gradus in animabus causetur ex diversitate corporis; [...] cum omne quod in aliquo recipitur, per modum recipientis sit receptum.’

<sup>22</sup> See Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans*, trans. F. R. Larcher, and ed. J. Mortensen and E. Alarcón (Lander, WY., 2012), cap. 5, l. 3, 138; and Aquinas, *Sententia libri Metaphysicae*, ed. M.-R. Cathala and R. M. Spiazzi (Turin, 1950), lib. 1, l. 10, n. 17 where he attributes it to Plato.

<sup>23</sup> *Le Liber de causis*, ed. Adriaan Pattin (Leuven, 1966), prop. IX (X), 99, 72: ‘Et similiter aliqua ex rebus non recipit quod est supra eam nisi per modum secundum quem potest recipere ipsum, non per modum secundum quem est res recepta.’

<sup>24</sup> *Anonymi de physiognomonia liber*, in *Scriptores physiognomonici graeci et latini*, vol. 2, ed. Richard Foerster (Leipzig, 1893), 4-5: ‘ex qualitate corporis qualitatem se animi considerare atque perspicere [...] quam ex qualitate corporis animam speciem mutuari, sicuti humor constitutus in vasculo qui speciem ex vasculo mutuatur et sicut spiritus infusus in fistulam vel in tibiam vel in tubam, nam cum uniformis sit spiritus, diversum tamen sonat tuba, fistula, tibia.’

<sup>25</sup> Aquinas dealt specifically with the question of differences in intellectual ability in *Summa theologiae*, Ia, q. 85, a. 7.

Aquinas does not suggest that the body is the principle of numerical individuation *of souls*, for souls are created individually by God. To put it in terms of the two questions into which we first divided the problem of individuation, the body does not account for this soul being *an* individual soul but it accounts for it being *this* soul and not another.

Aquinas' position was condemned in 1277 in Paris by bishop Stephen Tempier. The text of the condemnations established that souls must be unequal because otherwise one would have to affirm that the soul of Judas is equal to that of Christ.<sup>26</sup> This view was primarily endorsed by Franciscan thinkers like Eustachius of Arras, Richard of Middleton, Guillaume de la Mare, and the Florentine Franciscan Matteo d'Acquasparta (1240-1302).<sup>27</sup> All these adhered to the theory of universal hylomorphism, that is, they believed that souls have matter because they subsist after death once they become separated from their bodies. Thus, although they also thought that the principle of individuation was matter, they did not think it was the human body but rather the matter of each soul.<sup>28</sup> This facilitated introducing differences between souls without threatening their subsistence as individual entities after death.

Yet in spite of all this fierce criticism, many scholars continued to propose theories of material individuation that posited the body as the origin of the differences among souls. Indeed, shortly after 1277, some scholars developed Aquinas' argument in order to comply with Tempier's condemnation while maintaining the role of the body in the individuation of

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<sup>26</sup> *CUP*, 550, no. 124: 'Quod inconveniens est ponere aliquos intellectus nobiliores aliis; quia cum ista diversitas non possit essere a parte corporum, oportet quod sit a parte intelligentiarum; et sic anime nobiles et ignobiles essent necessario diversarum specierum, sicut intelligentie. – Error, quia sic anima Christi non esset nobilior anima Jude.' See John F. Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas and the Condemnation of 1277," *The Modern Schoolman* 72 (1995): 261-264.

<sup>27</sup> See, for instance, Sophie Delmas, "La question disputée *de equalitate animarum* d'Eustache d'Arras dans les controverses universitaires de la seconde moitié du XIIIe siècle," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 75, no. 1 (2008).

<sup>28</sup> For a succinct formulation of this position, see Matthew of Aquasparta, *Quaestiones disputatae de anima XIII*, ed. A. J. Gondras (Paris, 1961), q. 12, 200: 'Oportet enim ponere naturam essentialem et naturam in supposito, ut angelum et hunc angelum, animam et hanc animam, ut supra. Principium autem individuationis est materia. Quare oportet hunc angelum et hanc animam esse compositam ex vera materia et vera forma. Cum igitur plures angeli vel plures animae possint participare consimilem formam et consimilem materiam illi formae proportionatam, ac per hoc consimilem naturam ex illa compositione resultantem, istud facit unitatem secundum speciem et pluralitatem individuorum.'

souls. Giles of Rome (1243-1316) is a paradigmatic example. In his commentary on the *Sentences*, Giles argued that souls are equal with respect to their species, that is, with respect to their formal aspect. But they are unequal once they are received in the body, for different bodies have different complexions.<sup>29</sup> As a result, some souls have better sensitive and intellectual functions than others, for the operation of the intellect relies on the operation of the bodily senses.<sup>30</sup> Thus, although souls can be said to be created equal, with respect to their natural properties (*quantum ad naturalia*), namely once they are infused in the body, they are unequal, as the text of the condemnations affirms.<sup>31</sup> Other scholars such as John of Paris (c.1255-1306),<sup>32</sup> Durandus of Saint-Pourçain (c.1275-1332/4),<sup>33</sup> and Peter de la Palud (c.1275-1342) took similar approaches. They all ventured to defend the equality of souls and the role of the body in the production of intellectual inequalities because, as the latter deftly proclaimed, ‘the article only said that souls are unequal, not determining in what.’<sup>34</sup>

Eventually, the Church strengthened the philosophical position of Aquinas and his followers. In 1312, the Council of Vienne proclaimed as an article of faith the unicity of substantial forms in men.<sup>35</sup> The question of the unicity or plurality of substantial forms had

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<sup>29</sup> Giles of Rome, *In secundum librum Sententiarum*, vol. 2 (Venice, 1581, repr. Frankfurt, 1969), dist. 32, q. 2, a. 3, res., 472a: ‘Sint enim animae aequales in his, quae spectant ad speciem [...] sed non aequales quantum ad ea, quae respiciunt individua. Quod potest primo declarari, ut comparantur ad corpora, et ut recipiuntur in suis corporibus. Nam quia recipiuntur in corporibus aliter, et aliter complexionatis, et per aliam, et aliam individuationem diversificatis.’

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*: ‘Ideo quantum ad proprietates naturales individuales, oportet eas esse inaequales, et aliquas meliores esse aliis: non solum quantum ad sensum, et quantum ad partem sensitivam: sed etiam quantum ad mentem, et quantum ad partem intellectivam, secundum quae modum loquitur Philosophus in *de Anima* [book 2, cap. 9], quod molles carne dicimus, aptos mente.’

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 472b.

<sup>32</sup> For an analysis of John’s answer to this question, see pp. 182-3.

<sup>33</sup> Durandus de Saint-Pourçain, *In Petri Lombardi Sententias theologicas commentariorum libri IIII* (Venice, 1571; repr. Ridgewood, NJ., 1964), vol. 1, lib. 2, dist. 32, q. 3, 186ra-va.

<sup>34</sup> Vatican MS Lat 1073, Peter de la Palud, *In secundum sententiarum*, fols. 132v-135r, 133va: ‘cum solum dicat articulus quod animae sunt inaequales, non determinando in quibus.’

<sup>35</sup> *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner, vol. 1 (London, 1990), 360-61: ‘Porro doctrinam omnem seu positionem, temere asserentem aut vertentem in dubium, quod substantia animae rationalis seu intellectivae vere ac per se humani corporis non sit forma, velut erroneam ac veritati catholicae fidei inimicam praedicto sacro approbante concilio reprobamus [...]’

been the most heated intellectual controversy of the thirteenth century.<sup>36</sup> To put it simply, the question was whether human bodies could have more than one substantial form. By denying the existence of any substantial form other than the soul, the Council implicitly condemned the theory of universal hylomorphism and its dualistic overtones. Body and soul had to be regarded as one single substance, and not as two composites of matter and form which happened to be united. No longer was there a place to posit the existence of any matter for the soul – other than the body – which could explain the differences in intellectual ability. Any qualitative differences between souls had to be either formal, and thus problematic for the unity of the human species, or derive from the body, which had been Aquinas’ proposal.

Material theories of individuation are critical to understand late medieval attitudes towards biological descent. As we will see in the third part of this chapter – and indeed throughout this dissertation – medieval scholars not only believed that the human body determined intellectual ability but also moral inclinations. Yet if the body could account for the diversity of character traits among individuals, how did late medieval scholars explain the diversity of bodies themselves? In order to answer this question, we must now shift from the consideration of the individual body as an isolated object of study to its consideration as the ‘end product’ of a line of descent. According to late medieval thought, the physiological makeup of individuals was largely determined in conception and, to a large extent, by the blood and bodily complexion of their parents and ancestors.

## 1.2 Late Medieval Embryological Theories

The question of the formation of the human body was explored in antiquity at least since the presocratic philosopher Alcmaeon of Croton began to speculate about the process of

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<sup>36</sup> For a recent analysis, see Antonia Fitzpatrick, “The Unicity of Substantial Form in the *Correctoria Corruptorii Fratris Thomae* of Richard Knapwell, Robert Orford and John of Paris,” in *Individuals and Institutions in Medieval Scholasticism*, ed. Antonia Fitzpatrick and John Sabapathy (London, 2020).

conception early in the fifth century BC.<sup>37</sup> In 1992, Jan Blayney identified four different aspects of conception which were commonly addressed by a long series of presocratics, tragedians, philosophers, poets, and medical writers. These are (1) the nature of the male and the female contribution to the child, (2) the origin of semen, (3) the determination of the sex of the child, and (4) the transmission of hereditary – physical – characteristics.<sup>38</sup> In this part, I will examine the reception and elaboration by late medieval thinkers of these four aspects of conception identified by Blaney and show how they informed late medieval understandings of the biological dimensions of ancestry.

### 1.2.1 Male and Female Contribution

All authors in antiquity and the Middle Ages believed that both parents contributed something to the process of generation. This seemed obvious since human reproduction could not take place without the participation of a man and a woman.<sup>39</sup> However, not everyone thought that each parent contributed equally to this process.

Aristotle (384-322 BC) believed that the father contributed actively to procreation while the mother's role was passive. His ideas on human generation were informed by hylomorphism, a metaphysical view which established that every natural body is composed of a potential principle, that is matter, and an actual principle of form or movement that shapes that matter into an individual substance. Thus, in his *Generation of Animals* Aristotle affirmed that 'we may safely set down as the chief principles of generation the male factor and the female factor; the male as possessing the principle of movement and of generation, the female as possessing that of matter.'<sup>40</sup> For Aristotle, the menses were the chief female contribution to

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<sup>37</sup> A good introduction to the subject is Joseph Needham, *A History of Embryology* (Cambridge, 1959).

<sup>38</sup> Jan Blayney, "Theories of Conception in the Ancient Roman World," in *The Family in Ancient Rome. New Perspectives*, ed. Beryl Rawson (London, 1992).

<sup>39</sup> This is not to say that other theories of reproduction in the natural world, like spontaneous generation, were not imaginable to medieval scholars. See Van der Lugt, *Le ver, le démon et la Vierge*.

<sup>40</sup> Aristotle, *De generatione*, lib. 1, cap. 2, 5: 'Quedmadmodum enim diximus, generationis principia utique quis non minime ponet masculum et feminam: masculum quidem ut motus et generationis habens principium, femininum autem ut materie.' Translated in *GA*, 11.

generation: it was the material out of which the body of the child was fashioned. By contrast, the father provided the child's shape through the action that his semen effected upon the female menses. From a functional point of view, therefore, the contributions of man and woman were very different. Yet they were similar in one respect. The menses and the semen were both considered to be produced from the same raw material, that is, blood. But each was blood at different degrees of concoction. The male was able to produce semen because thanks to his hotter complexion he was able to concoct blood to a degree higher than the woman.<sup>41</sup>

By contrast, Hippocratic treatises written in the fifth or fourth century BC pointed to the existence of two seeds with formative power.<sup>42</sup> Galen, writing in the second century AD, adopted Aristotle's scientific methodology but affirmed that both men and women produce semen.<sup>43</sup> It is likely that Galen's ideas were informed by an anatomical discovery made by the Alexandrian anatomist Herophilus (335-280 BC) who, thanks to his systematic use of scientific dissections of human cadavers, was able to identify the existence of spermatic ducts leading from the female testes directly into both sides of the uterus.<sup>44</sup> From this observation, Galen was able to note a parallel between the reproductive systems of the male and the female. Although less perfect than that of man because of her inability to supply the same amount of heat, Galen believed that the woman's contribution to procreation was true seed, even though in the early stages after conception its main function was that of providing nourishment, a role in which it would be later replaced by menstrual blood.

During the early and central Middle Ages, Galen was the main source for embryological knowledge. The authors of some of the most popular medieval encyclopaedias

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<sup>41</sup> Aristotle, *De generatione*, lib. 4, cap. 1, 123: 'Sed quoniam masculus et femella determinate sunt potential quadam et impotentia; potens quidem enim digerere et constare facere et segregare sperma habens principium specie masculus [...] suscipiens autem impotens autem constare facere et emitter femella, adhuc si omnis digestion operator calido, necesse et animalium masculine femellis esse calidiora: propter frigiditatem enim et impotentiam multum sanguinat per loca quedam femella magis.'

<sup>42</sup> Needham, *A History of Embryology*, 31-37.

<sup>43</sup> Rebecca Flemming, "Galen's Generations of Seeds," in *Reproduction: Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. Nick Hopwood et al. (Cambridge, 2018), 100-104.

<sup>44</sup> Blayney, "Theories of Conception," 234.

like Isidore of Seville (c.560-636)<sup>45</sup> and William of Conches (c.1090-1154)<sup>46</sup> adopted his two-seed theory of reproduction. However, in the thirteenth century Aristotelian ideas of embryology started to become increasingly widespread, a process mediated by Latin translations of Aristotle's works and their commentaries by Arab authors like Avicenna (980-1037). Confronted with this new knowledge, Latin scholastic thinkers faced two critical questions: do women produce sperm? And, if so, what role does it have in generation?

Late medieval thinkers did not develop Aristotelian ideas in isolation. Rather, like Avicenna himself, they attempted to reconcile the Aristotelian view of semen as a shaping force with the two-seed theory and other tenets from the Galenic and Hippocratic tradition. Galen himself had not rejected Aristotle's one-seed theory in favour of a theory which established two equivalent seeds. Rather, he had proposed a model which combined the need for two seeds with qualitative differences. Some thirteenth-century scholastic thinkers seem to have adopted this approach. In his commentary on the *Book of Wisdom* (7:2), Bonaventure (1221-1274) acknowledged the existence of male and female sperm when he affirmed that 'the seed of a woman is full of blood, the seed of a man is white; from a mixture of these, one acting as passive, the other as active, curdling takes place.'<sup>47</sup> The work of Albert the Great (1200-1280), who contributed to Aristotle's establishment as a competing authority to Galen in matters of reproduction, constitutes another good example of this syncretic approach.<sup>48</sup> In his *Questiones de animalibus*, Albert asserted that women cannot produce sperm because their bodies lack the heat to concoct blood to its highest degree. Moreover, since the woman

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<sup>45</sup> Isidore, *Etymologiae*, vol. 2, lib. XI.i, 145.

<sup>46</sup> William of Conches, *Dragmaticon philosophiae*, ed. Italo Ronca, in *Opera omnia*, vol. 1 (Turnhout, 1997), lib. VI, 8, 3, 206-207: 'Duplex igitur est mulieris in coitu delectation, uidelicet in emissione proprii seminis et in receptione alterius.' And lib. VI, 8, 6, 208: 'Conceptio ex uno semine fieri non potest: nisi enim conueniant uiri sperma et feminae, non concipit mulier.'

<sup>47</sup> Bonaventure, *Commentarius in librum Sapientiae*, in *Opera Omnia*, vol. 6 (Quaracchi, 1882), cap. VII, de sec., 151: 'Semen mulieris sanguinolentum est, semen viri candidum; ex quorum commixtione unius tanquam passivi et alterius tanquam activi fit coagulation.' Bonaventure is quoting the *Glossa Ordinaria* (12<sup>th</sup> century) which, in turn, draws upon Rabanus Maurus' (c.780-856) commentary on the same text.

<sup>48</sup> On Albert's embryological ideas, see Luke Demaitre and Anthony A. Travill, "Human Embryology and Development in the Works of Albertus Magnus," in *Albertus Magnus and the Sciences. Commemorative Essays*, ed. James A. Weisheipl (Toronto, 1980).

contributes the matter for generation and matter and form cannot coincide, she cannot produce sperm.<sup>49</sup> Yet in his later work *De animalibus*, Albert took a more moderate stance establishing the need of female sperm in conception if only in a material, not a formative, capacity.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, Aristotelian and Galenic views were not necessarily understood as diametrically opposed. This does not mean that the authors who attempted to integrate Galen's position within an Aristotelian philosophical framework were trying to call gender concepts into question. Although they might have accepted the existence, and even the necessity, of female sperm, it was always in a qualified sense and in an attempt to reconcile authorities, not to undermine the negative views of women and of female bodies.<sup>51</sup> Even if females could produce sperm, it could never be equivalent to that of men because otherwise women would possess both the active and the passive principle of generation and be able to reproduce without men.

The distinction between the active and passive nature of the male and female seeds in the work of many late medieval authors testifies to the influence that Aristotelian hylomorphism had on Galen and, as a result, on those who drew upon Galen's work later on. Five years after Albert the Great died, however, in 1285, Averroes' (1126-1198) *Colliget* was translated to Latin for the first time. Averroes had argued that the female seed (*sperma mulieris*) did not perform any substantial role in the generative process and was consequently unnecessary for reproduction.<sup>52</sup> His work provided an alternative for those unhappy with Avicenna's syncretic approach.

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<sup>49</sup> Albert, *Quaestiones de animalibus*, lib. XV, q. 19, 271.

<sup>50</sup> Albert, *De animalibus*, vol. 2, lib. 15, tract. 2, cap. 11, 144-5, 1056-57.

<sup>51</sup> See Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, 117-127.

<sup>52</sup> Averroes, *Colliget libri VII* (Venice, 1562), lib. 2, cap. 10, fols. 22v-23v, 22va: 'Sed testiculi, quos dicit Gal[enus] foeminam habere, apparet q[uo]d non habeant effectum in generatione: quia sperma mulierum, quod generatur in mulieribus, in generatione intentionem non habet.'

Soon thereafter, the first attempt was made at developing an exclusively Aristotelian model of reproduction. In his *De formatione corporis humani in utero*, Giles of Rome rejected the existence of two seeds.<sup>53</sup> For Giles, the female contribution to procreation was auxiliary and accidental. He admits that the vaginal secretion is sometimes called ‘seed’, but he affirms that it is by no means seed in the sense in which the male semen is ‘seed.’ The generative spirit of the male seed is the only responsible for the development of the child. This *spiritus gignitivus* – or *spiritus emissus* – is the power that generates first vegetative life, then animal life, and prepares the foetus to receive the human soul infused by God.<sup>54</sup> Giles’ embryological treatise was the first full-fledged Latin work that adopted a ‘pure’ Aristotelian theory of reproduction. However, the main ideas had already been echoed by Aquinas in his theological writings where he had often affirmed that the father contributed the active principle of generation and the mother the matter to be fashioned.<sup>55</sup>

Critically, Aristotle’s theory of reproduction was embraced without many reservations by late medieval physicians and, in particular, by the medical authors at the University of Bologna. Many of these were Florentine, of Florentine origins, or had connections with Florence: Taddeo Alderotti (d. 1295) and his disciples Dino del Garbo (c.1280-1327), the latter’s son Tomasso del Garbo (c.1305-1370), Mondino de’ Luzzi (c.1270-1326), and Pietro Torrigiano de’ Torrigiani (d. c.1320), also known as Turisanus.<sup>56</sup> With the exception of Iacopo da Forlì (c.1364-1414) and the Paduan professor of medicine Pietro d’Abano (c.1257-1316) – whose work attempted to reconcile the authorities of Aristotle and Galen – all of them

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<sup>53</sup> Giles, *De formatione*, cap. 19, 196: ‘falsa est opinio Galieni quo sunt duo activa.’

<sup>54</sup> See M. Anthony Hewson, *Giles of Rome and the Medieval Theory of Conception: A Study of the De formation corporis humani in utero* (London, 1975), 67-75.

<sup>55</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, q. 26, a. 10, co.: ‘Pater autem habet excellentiorem rationem principii quam mater, quia pater est principium per modum agentis, mater autem magis per modum patientis et materiae.’

<sup>56</sup> Alderotti, Dino, Tomasso, and Turisanus were all Florentines. Mondino de’ Luzzi was member of a prominent Florentine family but since his family were Ghibellines, he was born and lived in Bologna. For their biographies see Nancy G. Siraisi, *Taddeo Alderotti and his Pupils: Two Generations of Italian Medical Learning* (Princeton, 1981), 27-42 (Alderotti), 55-64 (Dino), 64-66 (Turisanus), and 66-69 (Mondino).

endorsed the idea that the female contribution did not have an active or formative role.<sup>57</sup> Thus, although Alderotti spoke of a female seed, he treated it much as Aristotle had treated menstrual blood, that is, as a passive and merely nutritive component of generation.<sup>58</sup> In his commentary on Galen's *Tegni*, Turisanus identified the female sperm with menstrual blood.<sup>59</sup> And Dino, who was acquainted with Averroes' *Colliget* and Giles' work, simply explained the existence of a female sperm away with a semantic distinction: there are two senses of the word 'sperm' and the one that denotes the fluid that causes generation must be restricted to the male semen.<sup>60</sup>

As Nancy Siraisi has argued, one of the reasons for these physicians' adoption of the one-seed theory was their desire to incorporate medical knowledge into natural philosophy. The one-seed theory fitted better within a philosophical framework dominated by hylomorphic thought as well as with a general trend to support a scientific view of women that placed them as inferior to men because of the female's colder and more imperfect nature.<sup>61</sup> To ignore Aristotle's ideas on biology, medicine, and embryology would have meant to cut medicine off from the mainstream of western scientific thought.

The one-seed theory of Aristotle provided a new way of looking at the reproductive process. It introduced the concepts of matter and form into the equation and gave a prominent role to the father in procreation. As we will see, the belief that the male seed had an active role and the female a passive one served to reinforce the importance of male descent and blood in late medieval society and, in particular, in patrilineal societies like Florence.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 195-201; and Joseph Ziegler, "The Scientific Context of Dante's Embryology," in *Dante and the Human Body: Eight Essays*, ed. John C. Barnes and Jennifer Petrie (Dublin, 2007), 74-87.

<sup>58</sup> Alderotti, *Isagoge*, fol. 358r.

<sup>59</sup> Turisanus, *Plusquam commentum in Microtegni Galieni* (Venice, 1512), fols. 58v-59r.

<sup>60</sup> Dino del Garbo, *Scriptum super libro de natura fetus Hypocratis*, in *De generatione embrionis*, comp. Bassanius Politus (Venice, 1502), fols. 46v-47v. See also Siraisi, *Taddeo Alderotti*, 55-64.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 201-2. On the complexion, shape, and disposition of women, see Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, 171-188 and her discussion of sodomites as women in Cadden, *Nothing Natural is Shameful: Sodomy and Science in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia, 2013), 106-138.

### 1.2.2 The Origin and Role of the Seed

One of the oldest and most extended embryological beliefs was that sperm was the result of pangenesis.<sup>62</sup> The pangenetic theory posited that the constituent parts of sperm were drawn from every single part of the body. It was adopted by the writer of the Hippocratic treatise *Peri gones* and later by Galen.<sup>63</sup> For these authors, the experience of sexual activity itself – which entailed a sensation of pleasure throughout the whole body – seemed to confirm that seed was being drawn not only through the testes but from every member by means of a network of spermatic ducts.<sup>64</sup> This theory helped explain why children bore a resemblance to their parents, and it could also explain why a child sometimes resembled more one of them by alluding to the different quantity or quality of the male and female seeds.<sup>65</sup> One of its corollaries was the inheritance of acquired characteristics, for the child of a one-armed man would apparently not be able to have two hands unless his father’s seed had been formed before the hand had been lost.

By contrast, Aristotle rejected pangenesis because ‘children also resemble their parents in voice, nails, and hair and even in the way they move; but nothing whatever is drawn from these parts.’<sup>66</sup> Moreover, parents do not always possess some of those parts, such as hair, when they generate the child. Besides, Aristotle pointed out that ‘children sometimes resemble their remoter ancestors, from whom nothing has been drawn for the semen.’<sup>67</sup> Finally, he affirmed

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<sup>62</sup> This belief can be traced back to Anaxagoras and Democritus. See, Jacquart and Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, 53-56. For a list of authorities who endorsed this theory in antiquity, see Conway Zirkle, “The Early History of the Idea of the Inheritance of Acquired Characters and of Pangenesis,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 35, no. 2 (1946), 120-23.

<sup>63</sup> See Michael Boylan, “Galen’s Conception Theory,” *Journal of the History of Biology* 19, no. 1 (1986). Galen sometimes vacillates between epigenesis and a preformist position, but his theory of the origin of the semen is always pangenetic. See *ibid.*, 74-76.

<sup>64</sup> Hippocrates, *Generation*, ed. and trans. Paul Potter (Cambridge, MA., 2012), 7, 9.

<sup>65</sup> Steven Epstein, *The Medieval Discovery of Nature* (Cambridge, 2012), 97-99; and Boylan, “Galen’s Conception Theory,” 54.

<sup>66</sup> Aristotle, *De generatione*, lib. 1, cap. 18, 18-19, translated in *GA*, 53.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 19, translated in *GA*, 53. See also Aristotle, *De historia animalium*, *ALD*, lib. VII (9 sec. Guillelmum), cap. 6.

that in his experience not all offspring of mutilated parents are mutilated, any more than all offspring resemble their parents.<sup>68</sup>

For Aristotle, rather than a collection of particles drawn from every part of the body, semen was blood, or rather a residue of blood generated after a series of successive concoctions that took place in the stomach, intestine, heart, and finally in all the members of the body.<sup>69</sup> Semen communicated the principle of movement and form to the foetus, so that the resemblance between parents and children was not based on the qualities of the material but rather on the way this was fashioned, its order and structure.<sup>70</sup>

Some medieval authors supported a classical account of pangenesis. In the twelfth century, William of Conches (1090-1154) affirmed that sperm is ‘made of the purest substance [drawn] from all the members of the body.’<sup>71</sup> Writing in the first half of the thirteenth century, Bartholomaeus Anglicus (d. 1272) similarly thought that the sperm was drawn from all the parts of the father and the mother.<sup>72</sup> But from the mid-thirteenth century, Aristotle’s theory concerning the origins of the sperm began to gain popularity. In the *Speculum naturale*, the great encyclopaedia compiled towards 1250 by Vincent of Beauvais, one can find passages in favour of pangenesis and others against it which draw on Aristotle’s writings.<sup>73</sup> Other thirteenth-century authors like Albert the Great, Roger Bacon, Thomas Aquinas, and Giles of Rome adopted Aristotle’s view of the semen as a shaping force or *virtus informativa* rather than a collection of parts drawn from all the members of the body.<sup>74</sup> Aquinas argued that the semen cannot simply be a solution from the substance of the members because this would imply that

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<sup>68</sup> Aristotle, *De generatione*, lib. 4, cap. 3, 127-133.

<sup>69</sup> GA, Book I, chapter XVIII, p. 81, and chapter XIX, p. 89.

<sup>70</sup> Aristotle, *De generatione*, lib. 1, cap. 21, 36.

<sup>71</sup> William of Conches, *Dragmaticon philosophiae*, lib. VI, 7, 1, 204: ‘Sperma igitur est hominis semen ex puriore substantia omnium membrorum compositum.’

<sup>72</sup> Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *De proprietatibus rerum* (Strasbourg, 1505), lib. VI, cap. III.

<sup>73</sup> See Beauvais, *Speculum naturale*, lib. 22, cap. 35, col. 1628-29 (in favour) and lib. 24, cap. 80, col. 1769 (against it).

<sup>74</sup> For an overview of thirteenth-century debates surrounding the precise role of the *virtus formativa* in forming and animating the embryo, see Van der Lugt, *Le ver, le démon et la Vierge*, 79-87.

the semen is a small animal in act and generation a simple process of division and growth. Yet like Avicenna before him, he affirmed that for the *virtus informativa* to have the power to transform something else into its likeness, the semen needs to have been formed out of the residue of the best digested food drawn from all the parts of the body.<sup>75</sup> The emphasis on the formative role of the male seed also helped displace pangenesis. Aristotelian scholars like Giles argued that the male semen could in no way serve a material function and that, as a result, it was never part of the foetus' body.<sup>76</sup>

By rejecting pangenesis, Aristotle and his late medieval followers were able to explain more accurately the epigenetic process of development of the foetus, that is, its progressive differentiation from an originally undifferentiated structure. The shaping power of the male seed resembles our modern understanding of the role that DNA plays in the process of generation. It became instrumental for scholars in accounting both for the individuation of persons and for the inheritance of traits because it could explain how particular bodies were formed as well as how they were shaped by one's ancestors. Lastly, the identification of sperm with blood helped endow blood with hereditary significance.<sup>77</sup>

### 1.2.3 Sex Differentiation

In antiquity, sex differentiation was very diversely accounted for.<sup>78</sup> There was an ancient belief attributed to Anaxagoras that posited that the uterus was divided into two parts – left and right – and that depending on which side the child developed, it would become a male or a female. For his part, Galen posited heat as the main factor for sex differentiation. However, he combined this idea with the former belief when he affirmed that the right side of the womb

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<sup>75</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia, q. 119, a. 2. See also Avicenna, *Liber canonis medicine* (Venice, 1555), lib. III, fen. 20, tract. 1, cap. 3, 372r. For Albert the Great, see *De animalibus*, vol. 1, lib. 3, tract. 2, cap. 8, 152, 343-344 and *ibid.*, vol. 2, lib. 15, tract. 2, cap. 2, 1019-1022.

<sup>76</sup> Giles, *De formatione*, cap. 8, 114. On this question, see Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, 127-30.

<sup>77</sup> See Charles de Miramon, "Aux origines de la noblesse et des princes du sang. France et Anglaterrre au XIVe siècle," in *L'hérédité entre Moyen Âge et époque moderne*.

<sup>78</sup> A good synthesis can be found in Sophia M. Connell, "Aristotle and Galen on Sex Difference and Reproduction: A New Approach to an Ancient Rivalry," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 31, no. 3 (2000).

was warmer than the left side and for this reason males were engendered in the right side and females on the left.<sup>79</sup> Some texts of the Hippocratic corpus advanced the idea that the sex of the child was determined by the quantity of the male and female sperms. By contrast, Aristotle thought that the process of generation was always intended to produce males. It was some defect in this process or in the seed that led to the formation of a female. If the heart, which is the source of heat, is not able to concoct the male seed enough, its principle of movement can lose its mastery over the female material and lead to the production of a female body.<sup>80</sup>

For late medieval scholars, Aristotle's solution in this matter also seemed more appropriate since they generally agreed that the role and power of the male seed was more powerful than the female – if such thing existed at all.<sup>81</sup> Albert the Great asserted that since the father's sperm is the most determining factor and its goal is to produce like from like, nature always intends to produce a son. But sometimes the father's heat is not strong enough to do so and as a result females are born.<sup>82</sup> Giles of Rome argued that the sex of the child cannot be said to be determined by the struggle between the male and the female seeds because, according to Galen himself, the male semen is always more active than the female, and as a result only boys would be born.<sup>83</sup> Instead, the production of a female – and resemblance to the mother more generally – should be explained in terms of the more or less successful role of the male seed in taking over the female material so that the lack of similarity to the father would be proportional to the resistance that the female seed is able to put up to the generative power of the male seed. However, this resistance must be explained in terms of

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<sup>79</sup> Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, 35.

<sup>80</sup> GA, Book IV, chapter I, p. 391: 'When the "principle" [movement derived from the male's semen] is failing to gain the mastery and is unable to effect concoction owing to deficiency of heat, and does not succeed in reducing the material into its own proper form, but instead is worsted in the attempt, then of necessity the material must change over into its opposite condition. Now the opposite of the male is the female, and it is opposite in respect of that whereby one is male and the other female.'

<sup>81</sup> See Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, 130-134.

<sup>82</sup> Albert, *De animalibus*, vol. 2, lib. 16, tract. 1, cap. 14, 72-73, 1099-1100.

<sup>83</sup> Giles, *De formatione*, cap. 19, 194: 'semper filius erit similis patri quia sperma maris semper se habet ut activum, sperma femine, secundum ipsum Galienum, ut subactivum.'

the male seed's weakness because although the male seed (*agens*) always needs to have some control (*dominium*) over the matter (*materiam*) for generation to take place, it does not always have complete control over it.<sup>84</sup> In other words, the weakness of the *agens* and the resistance of the matter are but one thing.<sup>85</sup> This weakness is explained in terms of a lack of heat<sup>86</sup> which varies according to the quality of the sperm and the menstrual blood, and other circumstances such as air, astral influences, and nutrition.<sup>87</sup> A similar argument was put forward by Alderotti.<sup>88</sup>

It is important to note that the belief that females were 'imperfect' or rather 'unintended males' (*mas occasionatus*) did not necessarily mean that medieval scholars considered women 'a mistake.' As Aquinas affirmed in the *Summa theologiae*, the production of a female might not be intended by the male semen but it is certainly intended by nature.<sup>89</sup> Like inferiority, imperfection was not taken to be wrong but merely evidence that the imperfect thing existed for the sake of another. With regards to generation, the woman apparently existed for the sake of man because right after being created *Genesis* (2:24) said that 'they shall be two in one flesh.'<sup>90</sup> Moreover, imperfection was always relative to something else. Just as women were imperfect in relation to man, so too was man imperfect in relation to God. Indeed, Aquinas considered imperfection a necessary condition for diversity and this, in turn, a means for God to manifest his goodness.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, from his perspective, sex differences – just as

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., cap. 18, 184: 'unam damus materiam, ut id quod prestat femina, et unum agens, ut sperma maris, et semper agens, si fit generatio, habet aliquod dominium super materiam; sed non semper habet totale dominium propter resistantiam materie.'

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 184-5: 'Una ergo erit causa generalis masculinitatis: dominium agentis et obedientia passi. Et quamvis hec videantur due cause, una tamen causa est, quia dominium agentis non est sine obedientia passi et e converso, quia non esset ibi obedientia, non esset dominium et e converso. Sic etiam una est generalis causa femineitatis: debilitas agentis et inobedientia passi. Nam ad debilitatem agentis sequitur passi inobedientia.'

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 188: 'Omnes causas masculinitatis et femineitatis voluisse reducere ad caliditatem et frigiditatem.'

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., cap. 19, 202.

<sup>88</sup> Alderotti, *Isagoge*, fol. 372ra: 'Fortitudo virtutis spermatis maris super sperma mulieris facit masculum, et eius debilitas super ipsum facit feminam.'

<sup>89</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia, q. 92, a. 1, ad 1.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., co. See also 1 Corinthians 11:10.

<sup>91</sup> Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, vol. 2, lib. 3, cap. 97, n. 2.

Peter Lombard had affirmed with respect to intellectual ability – had no impact on the merits of one’s soul.<sup>92</sup>

#### 1.2.4 The Transmission of Physical Hereditary Characteristics

The inheritance of physical traits does not seem to have posed much of a problem to medieval scholars. The fact that height, colour of the eyes, hair, and skin were inherited from the parents was not so much a doctrine as an observable fact. Moreover, classical theories of embryology were all able to explain, in one way or another, this process. For those who believed in pangenesis, however, there was a problem. How could it be that sometimes a healthy child was born from a sick or maimed father? William of Conches found a solution to this problem by arguing that nature ‘avoids imperfection and tries to make each human being perfect in its own offspring’ by drawing material from other parts of the body to make up for deficiencies elsewhere.<sup>93</sup> The same argument was adopted by Vincent of Beauvais (1190-1264). In his *Mirror of Nature*, he affirmed that with the material gotten from other parts, the formative force perfects in the young what is lacking in the parent. This is possible because different body parts are not entirely dissimilar from each other so that ‘what it has taken from the bones of other members it converts into bones of the hands; flesh from one part into flesh of another part; nerves from one part into nerves of another, etc.’<sup>94</sup>

By contrast, Aristotelian thinkers believed that the child’s resemblance to his parents in physical traits depended on the struggle between the male seed and the menstrual blood. This also presented a problem, namely that children often resembled their fathers in some traits and their mothers in others. In this case, the solution consisted in emphasising that this struggle was not a one-dimensional process. As Albert argued, the seed of man might

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<sup>92</sup> Aquinas, *In sententias*, lib. 2, d. 21, q. 2, a. 1, ad 2: ‘unde secundum diversitatem meritorum erit anima unius alia dignior, et corpus gloriosius; unde non erit differentia propter sexum diversum.’

<sup>93</sup> William of Conches, *Dragmaticon philosophiae*, lib. VI, 7, 3, 205: ‘Natura, imperfectionem fugiens, unumquemque in suo genere perficere laborat.’

<sup>94</sup> Beauvais, *Speculum naturale*, lib. 31, cap. 11, col. 2300-1.

overcome the seed of the woman in some qualities, such as sex, and not in others, making it possible for a daughter to resemble her father or for a son to resemble his mother.<sup>95</sup>

Giles of Rome, for his part, divided the resemblance of children to their parents into two categories: substantial and accidental. Substantial resemblance always takes place because a man and a woman always produce a human being (*semper homo generat hominem*), a member of the human species. On the other hand, Giles distinguishes two types of accidental traits: natural ones, derived from the complexion of the body, and those *ex ingenio acquisitis*. The latter are never transmitted from parents to children.<sup>96</sup> The former he ranks into three types, from stronger to weakest: masculinity (or, in its defect, femininity), characteristics of the parent, and characteristic of ancestors. If the process of procreation is optimal, a child will be a man and will resemble his father. If the quality decreases, the child would resemble – in this particular order – some of his father’s ancestors, his mother, or some of her ancestors.<sup>97</sup>

Medieval theories of embryology, whilst diverse, could explain the physiological makeup of individuals. In turn, this mattered because, as we have seen, material theories of individuation posited the body as the origin of the diversity in non-physical traits like intellectual ability. In the third and final part of this chapter, I will show how late medieval scholars combined embryological knowledge with new philosophical concepts to develop theories that could explain the transmission of moral and intellectual traits from parents to children.

### 1.3 Moral and Intellectual Trait Inheritance

In his commentary on the *Epistle to the Romans*, Aquinas made the following observation: children frequently resemble their parents not only in bodily defects but also in defects of the

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<sup>95</sup> Albert, *De animalibus*, vol. 1, lib. 9, tract. 1, cap. 6, 63, 699.

<sup>96</sup> Giles, *De formatione*, cap. 19, 197.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 201-203.

soul (*in defectibus animae*), as when irascible individuals (*iracundus*) beget irascible children.<sup>98</sup> Likewise, in his discussion of the propagation of original sin in the *Summa theologiae*, he said that ‘some bodily defects are transmitted by way of origin from parent to child, and [...] even some defects of the soul are transmitted in consequence, on account of a defect in the bodily habit (*propter corporis indispositionem*), as in the case of idiots begetting idiots.’<sup>99</sup>

Irascibility and intelligence have to do with operations of the soul. However, by the thirteenth century traducianism had been rejected and the creatianism of the soul had been firmly established as doctrine.<sup>100</sup> In the *Sentences*, Peter Lombard affirmed that ‘the Catholic faith utterly rejects this [traducianism] and condemns it as opposed to truth since [...] that faith admits that the flesh alone, and not souls, is transmitted from parents [to children].’<sup>101</sup> Souls were not inherited or produced by the parents but created by God *ex nihilo* for each individual.<sup>102</sup> If parents only generate the child’s body, how could one explain that children resemble them in non-physical traits?

In this part, I will show how late medieval scholars adopted the concept of aptitudes – the second species of Aristotelian quality – to provide an answer to this question. But first, I will show how this concept helped medieval scholars emphasise the role of hereditary physiological principles in the configuration of character and behaviour.

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<sup>98</sup> Aquinas, *Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, cap. 5, l. 3, 138: ‘Et exinde videmus quod filii simulantur parentibus, non solum in defectibus corporalibus, sicut leprosus generat leprosum et podagricus podagricum, sed etiam in defectibus animae, sicut iracundus iracundum et amentes ex amentibus nascuntur.’

<sup>99</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, q. 81, a. 1, co.

<sup>100</sup> Robert Pasnau, “Human Nature,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Arthur S. McGrade (Cambridge, 2006), 208.

<sup>101</sup> Peter Lombard, *Sententiae*, vol. 1, lib. II, dist. 31, cap. 3, 1, 506: ‘Hoc autem fides catholica respuit, et tanquam veritati adversum damnat; quae non animas, sed carnem solam, sicut superius diximus, ex traduce esse admittit.’ Translated in Peter Lombard, *Sentences*, 154. See also Robert Kilwardby, *Quaestiones in librum secundum Sententiarum*, ed. Gerhard Leibold (Munich, 1992), q. 157, 429: ‘Et quia haec causa non potest esse secundum quod docet Ecclesia nisi in carne quia nihil aliud transit a parente in prolem.’

<sup>102</sup> The only exception to the creationist theory of the soul in the body was Adam. See Alastair J. Minnis, *From Eden to Eternity: Creations of Paradise in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 2015), 66-73.

### 1.3.1 Aptitudes in Late Medieval Thought

From the mid-thirteenth century, aptitudes played a key role in scholastic theories of virtue ethics, helping explain how the body determines an individual's moral and intellectual traits. In the *Categories*, Aristotle had defined virtues, both intellectual and moral, as inclinations or propensities of the soul which belonged to the first species of quality (*habitus* or *hexeis*).<sup>103</sup> Although they were thought to enjoy a large degree of permanence and stability, virtues were not inborn qualities. Rather, they had to be acquired through practice and were subject to change. Yet medieval authors also believed that there exists in the human person a certain innate ability or capacity that disposes the individual to the acquisition of virtue. Thus, they often raised the following question: are virtues present in the human soul at birth? Aptitudes (*aptitudines*, *idoneitates*, *inclinaciones*, or *praedispositiones*) played a key role in supplying an answer to this question because in the *Categories* Aristotle had defined them as innate capacities to do something easily.<sup>104</sup>

Aquinas was one of the first authors who dealt at great length with this question.<sup>105</sup> His familiarity with the concept of aptitudes seems to originate in Simplicius' work.<sup>106</sup> Nonetheless, it is likely that he also encountered the concept in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, a text which rapidly became the most influential in late medieval moral thought.<sup>107</sup> According to Aquinas there are two types of aptitudes. The first ones belong to every member of the human species and are sometimes referred to as *virtutes naturales* or *habitus naturales*. For example, every human being by reason of its rational nature possesses an aptitude to apprehend the most basic intellectual

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<sup>103</sup> Aristotle, *Categoriae*, VIII, 8b27-35, 102.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 9a14-19, 102: 'potentiam naturalem vel impotentiam dicuntur,' and 'magis in potentiam habere naturalem vel impotentiam faciendi aliquid de facili vel nichil patiendi.'

<sup>105</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, q. 51, a. 1, co., and q. 63, a. 1, co.; and especially in Aquinas, *De virtutibus*, a. 8, co.

<sup>106</sup> Vivian Boland, "Aquinas and Simplicius on Dispositions - A Question in Fundamental Moral Theory," *New Blackfriars* 82 (2001).

<sup>107</sup> See, for instance, Aristotle, *Ethica*, lib. VI, cap. X, 492. On the reception of Aristotle's ethical writings, see Georg Wieland, "The Reception and Interpretation of Aristotle's *Ethics*," in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Norman Kretzmann, et al. (Cambridge, 1982); and the introduction to the collected essays in Itsván Pieter Bejczy, ed., *Virtue Ethics in the Middle Ages: Commentaries on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics, 1200-1500* (Leiden, 2008), 1-9.

principles (*habitus principiorum*).<sup>108</sup> On the other hand, there are aptitudes – both intellectual and appetitive – that belong to each individual and arise out of his particular bodily complexion (*secundam propriam complexionem*).<sup>109</sup> Accordingly, in the first sense all men are equally apt, while in the second sense some are better disposed than others to the acquisition of virtues.<sup>110</sup>

Aquinas' use of the concept of aptitudes was not entirely new. Throughout the twelfth century, in sacramental-theological writings regarding the infusion of theological virtues in baptism, many before him had affirmed the existence of certain innate dispositions or aptitudes. Yet different authors, and sometimes the same author in different works, employed very diverse terminology to refer to them. Anselm of Canterbury (d. 1109) describes them as inclinations of the instrument-for-willing or *affectiones*.<sup>111</sup> In the twelfth century, Peter the Chanter (d. 1197) affirmed that 'some say that the virtues are not present *in habitu* in the infant child but rather that there exists in him a certain ability (*habilitas*).'<sup>112</sup> Alan de Lille (d. 1202/3) called them *virtutes naturales* and described them as forms-in-potency of an innate character. By contrast, he defined virtues as accidental qualities.<sup>113</sup> Simon of Tournai (d. 1201) defined natural aptitudes as inborn inclinations for the acquisition of virtue or *qualitates substantiales* and

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<sup>108</sup> Aquinas, *De virtutibus*, a. 8, co.: 'in homine est aptitudo naturalis ad virtutem; partim quidem secundum naturam speciei, prout aptitudo ad virtutem est communis omnibus hominibus [...]'; and Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, q. 51, a. 1, co.: 'Secundum quidem naturam speciei, ex parte ipsius animae, sicut intellectus principiorum dicitur esse habitus naturalis.'

<sup>109</sup> Aquinas, *De virtutibus*, a. 8, co.: 'Est autem aliqua inchoatione virtutis, quae consequitur naturam individui, secundum quod aliquis homo ex naturali complexionem vel caelesti impressione inclinatur ad actum alicuius virtutis.'

<sup>110</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, q. 63, a. 1, co.: 'Secundum vero naturam individui, in quantum ex corporis dispositione aliqui sunt dispositi vel melius vel peius ad quasdam virtutes, prout scilicet vires quaedam sensitivae actus sunt quarundam partium corporis, ex quarum dispositione adiuvantur vel impediuntur huiusmodi vires in suis actibus, et per consequens vires rationales, quibus huiusmodi sensitivae vires deserviunt. Et secundum hoc, unus homo habet naturalem aptitudinem ad scientiam, alius ad fortitudinem, alius ad temperantiam.'

<sup>111</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *De concordia*, in *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Anselm of Canterbury*, trans. Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson (Minneapolis, 2000), III, 11, 565.

<sup>112</sup> Peter the Chanter, *Summa de sacramentis et animae consiliis*, vol. 3.2b, ed. Jean-Albert Dugauquier (Louvain, 1967), cap. 58, 359, 521: 'Alii dicunt quod paruulo non inest habitus uirtutum, sed quedam habilitas.'

<sup>113</sup> Alan de Lille, *De virtutibus et de vitiis et de donis Spiritus Sancti*, in *Psychologie et morale aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles*, ed. Odon Lottin (Louvain, 1960), 47-48: 'Accidentale est enim ei esse uirtutem, sed substantiale est esse qualitatem. Sunt enim uirtutes naturales potentie rationali creature a creatione indite. [...] Similiter homo non dicitur fortis a potentia illa qua aptus est ad hoc uel illud faciendum, sed potius ab usu potentie; unde, cum uentum est ad annos discretionis, si homo utitur illa potentia bene que dicitur fortitudo uel illa que dicitur prudentia, fortis uel prudens dicitur.'

affirmed that these enable men to develop some moral attributes whether good or evil.<sup>114</sup> What all of them were saying is that while in one sense the possession of virtue is accidental, in another sense there is an inborn natural capacity or inclination which disposes all men to develop moral characteristics. However, while most of Aquinas' predecessors focused their discussion on those natural aptitudes which are common to all men, Aquinas was the first author who drew attention to the role that the bodily complexion of an individual plays in the configuration of individual aptitudes and, as a result, in the acquisition of virtue.

Godfrey of Fontaines (d. 1306) was greatly influenced by Aquinas' thought and he too emphasised the role of the body in the configuration of individual aptitudes. In one of his disputed questions, Godfrey revisited the question of whether virtues can be said to be inborn by nature (*utrum virtutes insint nobis a natura*). He says that nature can be spoken of in two senses. In one sense, 'nature' can refer to the nature of the species, a form shared by all members of that particular species. In another sense, 'nature' can refer to the nature of the individual person, and this varies among individuals because the way in which the matter of the body is disposed to the reception of the form of the species is not the same in everyone.<sup>115</sup> In this second sense, each person is differently inclined by his own bodily dispositions (*corporales dispositiones*) so that some are more prone to charity, some to gentleness, some are more apt to

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<sup>114</sup> Simon of Tournai, *Summa Symonis Tornacensis*, in *Psychologie et morale aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles*, vol. 3, ii, ed. Odon Lottin (Louvain, 1949), 107-108: 'dico uirtutes esse qualitates humano generi substantiales,' and 'qualitas autem nunquam abest, cum sit hominis naturalis.' Whereas the ability to develop virtue can be said to be natural, virtue itself can be considered an accident: 'uirtutibus intelligendum eas esse naturales qualitates homini et immobiles et ex accidenti esse uirtutes.'

<sup>115</sup> Godfrey of Fontaines, *Der Mensch und die himmlische Seligkeit nach der Lehre Gottfrieds von Fontaines*, ed. Bernhard Neumann (Limburg, 1958), 158: 'Et natura sic dicta dividitur in naturam speciei quae est ipsa forma a qua unumquodque habet speciem, et naturam individui quae dicitur materia, non secundum proportionem qua per se respicit formam specificam, sed secundum quod diversimode potest disponi ad formam in diversis individuis, quia dispositio qua materia disponitur ad aliquam formam specificam non est punctualis, immo habet quandam latitudinem et potest variari in diversis individuis.' Aquinas' and Godfrey's distinction of these two senses of the term "nature" probably derived from Aristotle, *On the Parts of Animals*, trans. James G. Lennox (Oxford, 2020), book I, 641a25, or from some similar statement within the Aristotelian corpus.

intellectual activity, and some to vice. Accordingly, Godfrey argues, not everyone is by nature equally inclined to everything.<sup>116</sup>

Thus, inasmuch as a good bodily disposition could help in the perfection of a virtue, a bad disposition could lead to a vice.<sup>117</sup> But from a moral perspective, individual aptitudes were neither positive nor negative. Aptitudes were intended to bridge the gap between incompleteness and completion; they were a foretaste of the form and not perfections.<sup>118</sup> As Marie I. George has noted, Aquinas affirmed that bodily dispositions must be subjected to reason, that is prudence, because following them blindly would be dangerous. Sometimes, a good moral act demands acting against our natural inclinations. Besides, aptitudes can cause inflexibility in moral life and, worst of all, they might induce individuals prone to virtue to think that they already are.<sup>119</sup>

Accordingly, aptitudes merely conditioned, rather than determined, moral life. Moral behaviour was thought to be ultimately regulated by virtues (*habitus*) which, unlike aptitudes, are within human control. Virtues are acquired by continuous practice until they become stable dispositions, a sort of second nature.<sup>120</sup> Once they are ingrained in the soul, these *qualitates inclinantes* or habits of living and reasoning are difficult to eradicate but even then there is full recognition of the inherent capacity to do so.<sup>121</sup> Thus, virtues allowed theologians to define

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<sup>116</sup> Godfrey of Fontaines, *Der Mensch*, 155-156: 'Illud ergo est naturale secundum naturam individui ad quod quis inclinatur secundum suas corporales dispositiones; sed secundum tales dispositiones aliqui magis inclinantur ad caritatem, aliqui ad mansuetudinem, aliqui ad contraria horum. Et similiter aliqui magis inclinantur ad speculationem quam alii [...] Et ex hoc etiam patet quod secundum modum istum non omnes aequae naturaliter omnibus conveniunt, sed quaedam quibusdam.'

<sup>117</sup> Indeed, from the first third of the thirteenth century, bodily complexion became important to explain the various inclinations to sin (*pronitas peccati*) of individuals. Medieval scholars believed that all men were equally prone to sin in relation to the soul but not in relation to their complexion taken as an accident. See Joseph Ziegler, "Medicine and Immortality in Terrestrial Paradise," in *Religion and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, 214-215.

<sup>118</sup> See Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, ed. Gudrun Vuillemin-Diem (Leiden, 1995), V.20, 1022b10-14, 116.

<sup>119</sup> Marie I. George, "Aquinas on the Dangers of Natural Virtue and the Control of Natural Vice," *Tópicos* 40 (2011).

<sup>120</sup> Medieval scholars sometimes referred to the possession of a natural *habitus* to develop virtues. When the term *habitus* was used in this sense, it was to refer to the first type of aptitudes, that is those that belong to the species and are common to all individuals such as the speculative and practical principles. For this sense of the term, see Antoine Côté, "Deux questions inédites de Jacques de Viterbe sur les "Habitus,"" *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge* 79 (2012).

<sup>121</sup> Aristotle, *Categoriae*, X.13a23-31, 111-12.

moral conduct as a quality acquired by the individual through personal effort, translated in acts, and endowed with merit.<sup>122</sup>

The influence of individual aptitudes, determined by bodily complexion, was thus limited by the presence of the rational soul. As Aquinas affirms, the rational soul transcends natural forms and endows the individual with the capacity of acting ‘against’ or ‘beyond’ what is determined by nature.<sup>123</sup> Likewise, the different vegetative, sensitive, and intellectual functions of the soul are more or less under the command of the rational soul. The soul cannot command vegetative functions like growth and does not have complete control over the sensitive powers.<sup>124</sup> Moral and intellectual acts, insofar as they are mediated by the use of corporeal organs but somehow subject to reason stand in a middle mode. Hence, it is possible to overcome the inborn inclinations of the body, but not completely.<sup>125</sup> For this reason, although the possession of aptitudes deserves no merit, they can help (or hinder) moral progress by disposing the individual more easily (or with more difficulty) to the acquisition of intellectual or moral virtues.

### 1.3.2 Moral and Intellectual Trait Inheritance

In this final section, I will show how medieval scholars incorporated the concept of aptitudes to elaborate theories of intellectual and moral trait inheritance. As it should be clear by now, technically speaking, moral and intellectual traits were not passed on from parents to children. But insofar as children’s complexions were inherited from their parents, they could resemble

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<sup>122</sup> Cary J. Nederman, “Nature, Ethics, and the Doctrine of ‘Habitus’: Aristotelian Moral Psychology in the Twelfth Century,” *Traditio* 45 (1989-1990): 88.

<sup>123</sup> George, “Aquinas on the Dangers,” 20-23.

<sup>124</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, q. 17, a. 8, ad 1; and *De virtutibus*, a. 4, ad 4. See also George, “Aquinas on the Dangers,” 24-25, 48. Aquinas and other authors were likely drawing on Avicenna, *Liber de anima seu sextus de naturalibus I-II-III*, ed. Simone Van Riet (Louvain, Leiden, 1972), vol. 1, lib. I, cap. 5, 83-94.

<sup>125</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, q. 17, a. 7, co.: ‘Omnis autem actus virtutis utentis organo corporali, dependet non solum ex potentia animae, sed etiam ex corporalis organi dispositione. [...] Unde et actus appetitus sensitive non solum dependet ex vi appetitiva, sed etiam ex dispositione corporis. [...] Qualitas autem et dispositio corporis non subiacet imperio rationis. Et ideo ex hac parte, impeditur quin motus sensitivi appetitus totaliter subdatur imperio rationis.’ For a detailed discussion, see Irene Zavattero, “Moral and Intellectual Virtues in the Earliest Latin Commentaries on the *Nicomachean Ethics*,” in *Virtue Ethics in the Middle Ages*, ed. István Bejczy (Leiden, 2007).

them in those bodily dispositions that determined one's moral and intellectual aptitudes. To illustrate this way of reasoning, I will turn to a series of answers given to a question that one of the masters of the medical school of Salerno raised sometime in the late twelfth century: 'Why do wise men generate (*generant*) stupid children?'<sup>126</sup>

The *Prose Salernitan Questions* are an encyclopaedia of scientific knowledge dating from the last quarter of the twelfth century and one of the most important witnesses to the development of medical learning in medieval Europe. They demonstrate a knowledge of classical Latin and Greek medical sources, as well as the vast corpus of works translated by Constantine the African, but they were produced before the large campaign of translations that made Aristotelian natural philosophy and key Arabic texts available to Latin Western scholars.<sup>127</sup> The entries in this encyclopaedia are usually very concise, in question-and-answer form, and virtually without any trace of the disputative style which will characterise scholastic learning from the thirteenth century. The answer given to the question at hand is short and to the point: 'Wise men think a lot, and from abundant thought both the members and the sperm are dried up, whence they beget rough brains which are not apt for reason. For the contrary reason, stupid men beget wise men.'<sup>128</sup>

This response chiefly rests on the Galenic model of the balance of humours.<sup>129</sup> According to classical medical learning, each individual possessed a physical complexion or temperament which was the result of the balance of four basic qualities of the body – hot,

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<sup>126</sup> *The Prose Salernitan Questions: Edited from a Bodleian Manuscript (Auct. F.3.10): An Anonymous Collection Dealing with Science and Medicine*, ed. Brian Lawn (London, 1979), R33, 350: 'Quare sapientes generant stultos?' As Joseph Ziegler has pointed out, the question of why wisdom is not automatically transferred from parents to children already engaged the mind of scholars in antiquity and continued to engage early modern scholars like Erasmus of Rotterdam. See Ziegler, "Hérédité et physiognomie," in *L'hérédité entre Moyen Âge et époque moderne*, 245-48.

<sup>127</sup> Brian Lawn, *The Salernitan Questions: An Introduction to the History of Medieval and Renaissance Problem Literature* (Oxford, 1963), 63 ff.

<sup>128</sup> *The Prose Salernitan Questions*, R33, 350: 'Responsio. Sapientes multum cogitant, et ex multa cogitatione et membra et sperma multum desiccantur, unde durum procreatur cerebrum quod ad rationem non est habile. Ratione contraria stulti sapientes generant.'

<sup>129</sup> On the early reception of Galen, see Monica H. Green, "Gloriosissimus Galienus: Galen and Galenic Writings in the Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Latin West" in *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Galen*, ed. Petros Bouras-Vallianatos and Barbara Zipser (Leiden, 2019).

cold, wet, and dry – resulting from the mixing of four bodily fluids; that is blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile. Health was associated with proper balance and disease with imbalance.<sup>130</sup> In addition, humoral medicine posited a connection between different parts of the body and corporeal functions so that balance in each member was crucial for the organs to operate properly. If intellectual activity desiccated the body, it was not unreasonable to think that it could affect the heart – the source of heat – and the concoction of sperm.<sup>131</sup> If the damage to the sperm were significant, yet not as great as to impair the reproductive process, it could affect the development of the organs of the embryo. A lack of natural heat could result in a cold brain which was commonly assumed to cause stupidity.<sup>132</sup> Thus, our Salernitan master considered that mental qualities such as intelligence could be explained in relation to the physiological makeup of the body or of some of its parts. But he did not believe that human reproduction necessarily transmitted certain physical qualities which would reproduce the parents' intellectual traits in their children.

By the mid-thirteenth century, medical knowledge had spread to many other centres of learning in medieval Europe. In addition, the translation into Latin of numerous works by Aristotle (or attributed to him) had a profound impact in Western scholasticism. The reception of Aristotle's works on natural philosophy was particularly remarkable, rapidly becoming part of the curriculum at the faculties of Arts and Medicine.<sup>133</sup> This is the context in which two great scholars revisited the question posed by our Salernitan master. Peter of Spain (d. 1277)

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<sup>130</sup> On late medieval complexion and humoral theory, see Nancy G. Siraisi, *Medieval & Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* (Chicago, 1990), 101-06. On health and disease as balance, see Maaïke Van der Lugt, "Neither Ill nor Healthy: The Intermediate State between Health and Disease in Medieval Medicine," *Quaderni storici* 136 (2011). On the development of ideas of balance in medieval society more generally and its connection with medical theory, see Kaye, *A History of Balance*, ch. 3, 128-182, and ch. 4, 183-240.

<sup>131</sup> Thomas de Cantimpré, *Liber de natura rerum: editio princeps secundum codices manuscriptos* (Berlin, Boston, repr. 2011), lib. 1, 72, 72: 'Est autem sperma conveniens geniture, quod non nimis sit calidum vel frigidum vel siccum vel humidum. Si autem modum excedat in una istarum qualitatuum, conveniens sperma non est nec aptum ullatenus geniture.'

<sup>132</sup> William of Conches, *Dragmaticon philosophiae*, lib. VI, 18, 6, 241: 'si enim cerebrum illius est frigidissimum, est homo stupidus et sine ingenio. Et quanto plus erit frigidum, erit tardioris ingenii; quanto minus, acutioris.'

<sup>133</sup> Baudouin Van den Abeele, "Le 'De animalibus' d'Aristote dans le monde latin: modalités de sa réception médiévale," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 33, no. 1 (1999).

addressed it in his commentary on Aristotle's *De animalibus* where he simply presented a slightly different version of the principle of imbalance. Using Avicenna's *De anima* as his source, Peter explained that 'the more a power is used in one operation the more it is removed from another.'<sup>134</sup> Since all the powers of the soul have one source, the more this power is invested in understanding, the less will it be applied to procreation.

In a series of lectures on *On Animals* given in Cologne in the year 1258, Albert the Great returned to this question, which is likely he had encountered in Peter's own work, and discussed it at greater length.<sup>135</sup> First, he says that we would expect children to resemble their parents. Then he introduces a distinction between physical and mental qualities. The power of the soul is in the sperm and, therefore, children should resemble their parents in the soul's dispositions (*dispositione animae*) such as wisdom as much as they resemble them in bodily ones (*dispositionibus corporalibus*). Albert does not delve into this distinction. Yet he seems to suggest that the transmission of mental and physical characteristics is equally reliant on a biological component, namely on the quality of the sperm and its *virtus informativa*. Finally, he simply reiterates the argument given by Peter and the Salernitan masters: because philosophers engage very intensely on thoughts and meditations the natural power in them is weakened and their sperm is of bad quality and, as a result, they produce weak children. Since sperm has to be digested with the power of the soul present in the heart, the weakening of that power by intense study and thoughts prevents philosophers from procreating children after their own image. Following this line of argument, Albert has to concur with the Salernitan masters that simple

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<sup>134</sup> Peter of Spain, *Questiones super libro 'De animalibus,' Aristotelis*, ed. Francisca Navarro Sánchez (Farnham, 2015), book I, q. 2, 128: 'Ad aliud dicimus quod sicut dicit Auicenna, una uirtus quanto magis intendit uni operationi, tanto magis remittitur respectu alterius. Et ideo dicit quod qui bonus est in studio non es bonus in foro. Et per hanc uiam dicit Auicenna quod sapientes generant stultos. Et hoc est quia cum omnes anime et uirtutes radicentur in una radice, quanto magis intendit uni, tanto minus alteri.' Avicenna, however, did not address specifically this question, see *Liber de anima*, vol. 1, lib. V, cap. 3, 110-111.

<sup>135</sup> For what follows, see Albert, *Quaestiones de animalibus*, lib. XVIII, q. 4 (Quare sapientes et philosophi ut plurimum generant filios fatuos?), 299. On Peter's influence on Albert, see Miguel de Asúa, "The Organization of Discourse on Animals in the Thirteenth Century. Peter of Spain, Albert the Great, and the Commentaries on "De animalibus"" (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 1991), 117-9.

men, on the other hand, would procreate wise children (*homines simplices toti sunt circa virtutem naturalem et ideo bene digerunt sperma; unde proles sapiens generatur*).

In his *Disputatio quarta de quolibet*, written sometime between 1293-1298, the Augustinian James of Viterbo (1255-1307) became the first scholar to adopt the Aristotelian concept of aptitudes to provide an answer to this question.<sup>136</sup> James had encountered the concept of aptitudes in William of Moerbeke's (d. 1286) translation of the commentary on the *Categories* by the Neoplatonist Simplicius. Simplicius, who in turn relied on Porphyry's commentary, had referred to Aristotle's natural capacities as 'propensities' (*epitēdeiotēs*) and Moerbeke translated them into Latin as *idoneitates*. James sometimes employed this term but like Aquinas he often preferred that of *aptitudines*.<sup>137</sup> Drawing on his Parisian and Augustinian fellow Giles of Rome and his account of inherited physical characteristics, he offers a more elaborate theory of the transmission of non-physical traits which, to some extent, deviates from the Galenic model of humoral medicine.<sup>138</sup>

First of all, it is important to note that James changes the question slightly. He does not ask 'why' (*quare*) wise men generate stupid children but rather 'whether' (*utrum*) they do. Like Giles, he begins by making a distinction between resemblance according to the species (*in forma specie*) and resemblance according to the accidents of the individual (*in accidentibus individu*). A child will always resemble his parents in those properties that belong to the species (*in proprietatibus consequentibus speciem*). Regarding those accidents that pertain to the individual, however, resemblance is not always achieved. Then, James distinguishes between two types of individual accidents: corporeal ones and those which pertain to the soul. If one speaks of

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<sup>136</sup> The concept of aptitudes appears elsewhere in James' work. As incomplete actualities or forms-in-potency of an innate character, James deployed aptitudes to uphold an Augustinian voluntarism in Aristotelian terms that run against the principle found in the *Physics* (241b24) according to which 'everything that is moved is moved by another.' See Francis Ruello, "La liberté humaine selon Jacques de Viterbe," *Augustiniana* 24 (1974), 320-28.

<sup>137</sup> See Antoine Côté, "Simplicius and James of Viterbo on Propensities," *Vivarium* 47, no. 1 (2009).

<sup>138</sup> For what follows, see James of Viterbo, *Disputatio quarta de quolibet*, ed. Eelcko Ypma (Würzburg, 1975), q. 23, 79-82, 79: 'Utrum pater sapiens ut plurimum generet stultos filios.'

corporeal accidents (*accidentibus corporis*), resemblance will be more or less according to the power of the male seed and the resistance of the female matter. The stronger the male power and the more compliant the matter supplied by the woman, the more likely the child will resemble his father. If one speaks of those accidents that pertain the soul (*de accidentibus animae*), on the other hand, James affirms that it is evident that these are the result of acquisition (*per acquisitionem*) and cannot be transmitted in reproduction (*non assimilatur ex ipsa ratione generationis*). Thus science, vices, intelligence and so on, are never passed on from parents to children except in one sense; namely, that through education (*per instructionem*) parents often make their children like them. In other words, wise men generate neither wise nor stupid children.

However, just when it looks that James has arrived at a satisfactory conclusion, he goes on to complicate matters still further. He says that there are certain inborn or innate accidents of the soul (*accidentia animae indita vel innata*) that have their origin in the complexion of the body (*ortum habent ex complexionem corporis*). These aptitudes (*aptitudines*) cannot be said to be perfections, although in some sense they dispose the individual to acquire certain perfections whether physical, intellectual, or moral. They are like corporeal accidents in that they can be transmitted from parents to children when there is no obstacle either on the part of the generative power of the male (*virtutis agentis*) or the disposition of the matter of the female (*indispositionem materiae*).<sup>139</sup> Since they are determined by the bodily complexion of an individual, James affirms that they will produce further resemblance in moral than in intellectual capacities because the former are more reliant on the operation of the body.<sup>140</sup> Thus, in a certain sense, when no obstacles are present, children resemble their parents so that a wise man generates a wise son

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 81: 'Si vero sit defectus aliquis, vel ex parte virtutis agentis vel ex contraria dispositione materiae quam mater ministrat, non erit assimilatio in talibus accidentibus, sed ex patre sapiente nascetur filius stultus.'

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.: 'Et haec assimilatio magis habet esse in aptitudinibus ad virtutes morales quam ad intellectuales, tum quia magis conveniunt homini in quantum homo est, tum quia magis dependet earum operatio a corpore.'

and a stupid man a stupid son.<sup>141</sup> James concludes with a caveat: resemblance to the parents is not always achieved because there are many factors which cause great diversity in generation.<sup>142</sup>

By adopting the Aristotelian notion of aptitudes, James expands Albert's explanatory framework, and in one respect, his account diverges from his and his predecessors'. Humoral theory and ideas of balance remain vital in his account of reproduction – a bad sperm still constitutes an obstacle to the production of a wise child – but nothing in James's writing suggests that a simple man who does not possess an aptitude for science or knowledge will pass on that aptitude to his child.<sup>143</sup>

James' answer to this question constitutes the most elaborate description of the late medieval theory of moral and intellectual trait inheritance. However, others had previously advanced similar ideas. Aquinas had affirmed not only that spiritual operations are reliant on the body, but also that the various aptitudes (*habitudines*) of men to them are produced from the various dispositions of the body.<sup>144</sup> Thus, since the soul follows the organic disposition of the body, and children inherit their bodies from their parents, their souls can resemble theirs.<sup>145</sup> For his part, Giles of Rome had affirmed that only physical characteristics were passed on from parents to children. But in his view, these ranged from masculinity to stupidity; some

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid.: 'Et tunc in talibus accidentibus assimilabitur genitus generanti, ita quod sapiens generabit sapientem et stultus stultum, accipiendo sapientiam et stultitiam ut important aptitudines naturales.'

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 82: 'Verius tamen esse videtur quod in talibus non posset accipi regula uniformis, propter multam diversitatem proveniente in generatione quandoque ex parte agentis, quandoque ex parte materiae, quandoque ex parte utriusque.'

<sup>143</sup> This idea fits the late medieval theories of the propagation of original sin as *caerentia* developed, among others, by Giles of Rome. See Romana Martorelli Vico, "La dottrina della giustizia originale e del peccato originale nel trattato *De peccato originali* di Egidio Romano," *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* I, no. 1 (1990).

<sup>144</sup> Aquinas, *Sententia libri De sensu et sensato*, in *Opera omnia*, ed. Leonina, vol. 45/2 (Rome, Paris, 1985), tr. 2, cap. 1, 104: 'Cuius ratio est quia diuerse habitudines hominum ad opera anime proueniunt ex diuersa corporis dispositione.'

<sup>145</sup> Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia*, ed. Pauli M. Pession, in *Quaestiones disputatae*, vol. 2 (Turin, 1953), q. 3, a. 9, ad 7: 'dicendum quod ipsam dispositionem corporis sequitur dispositio animae rationalis; tum quia anima rationalis accipit a corpore; tum quia secundum diversitatem materiae diversificantur et formae. Et ex hoc est quod filii simulantur parentibus etiam in his quae pertinent ad animam, non propter hoc quod anima ex anima traducatur.'

were strictly physical, and some attributed to the soul but ultimately derived from bodily complexion (*que per complexionem attribuntur anime*).<sup>146</sup>

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Throughout this chapter, I have shown how late medieval thinkers elaborated philosophical theories that positioned the body at the centre of individual identities. In particular, material theories of individuation contributed to the development of a ‘proto-materialistic approach’ to human personality.<sup>147</sup> In other words, the body was considered an integral part of the human person and as such it was necessary to study it in order to interpret character and behaviour. Indeed, the belief that body and soul were intimately united was also the basis for the rapid development of physiognomic science in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.<sup>148</sup>

In addition, we have seen how the body was considered to be the fount and origin of human diversity, a diversity that was not restricted to physical characteristics but also included intellectual and moral aptitudes. Since the physiological makeup of a person was believed to be determined in conception, and according to theories of embryology nature intended to produce like from like, ancestry could account for the differences and similarities among groups of individuals. Thus, having common ancestors meant much more than simply having a common history. It also meant sharing the same blood and a series of physical, intellectual, and moral traits. In the next four chapters, I will show how the affinities, commonalities, and sense of belonging resulting from perceptions of common biological ancestry could serve to unite as well as to discriminate, that is to inform social identities.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Giles, *De formatione*, cap. 19, 199: ‘Masculinitas, quia oportet patrem esse marem, complexio, quia forte est colericus vel fleumaticus, color, quia est albus vel niger, quantitas, quia est magnus vel parvus, figura, quia est forte bene lineatus et formatus, mores et passiones, quia est iracundus vel mitis, audax vel timidus, alia etiam que per complexionem attribuntur anime, ut puta quia est ingeniosus vel hebes.’

<sup>147</sup> I have borrowed this expression from Joseph Ziegler, “The Biology of the Virtues in Medieval and Early Renaissance Theology and Physiognomy,” in *Im Korsett Der Tugenden: Moral Und Geschlecht Im Kulturhistorischen Kontext*, ed. Mariacarla Gadebusch Bondio and Andrea Bettels (Hildesheim, New York, 2013), 3.

<sup>148</sup> Irene Caiazzo, “Animae sequuntur corpora,” in *Body and Spirit in the Middle Ages*.

<sup>149</sup> For “identity” in this sense, see Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond “Identity,”” *Theory and Society* 29, no. 1 (2000).

## Biological Descent and the Family

Human beings are social animals. Throughout life, we develop all sort of personal relationships. However, some of these seem to be given or imposed on us at birth. We do not choose the family, ethnicity, or nation – and sometimes even faith – in which we are born. Of these relationships, not all of them are structured according to the same principles. While nationality, for instance, can be determined by place of birth, our family is determined by our ancestry. The ‘given’ nature of our familial relationships does not ensure that they are necessarily more lasting and meaningful than others we freely choose to form later in life. Yet we are always connected to our family, even if just genetically so. This is true for individuals in the twenty-first century just as it was for people in medieval times. What might be different in each culture and society is the significance of those biological ties.<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, one of the goals of this chapter is to answer the following questions: what was the significance of biological ties within the family in the period 1250-1400 in Tuscany? To what extent did the philosophical and medical developments we have examined influence the way these ties were perceived? And finally, how did the biological family map onto the family as a legal and social institution? Here, I will focus chiefly on the relationship between parents and their children. The significance of blood relation within the extended family will be further explored in the fifth chapter.

First, I will show how late medieval thinkers reflected on the various roles that parents were expected to fulfil towards their offspring and how their understanding of those roles was shaped by ideas of biological descent. They discussed somewhat separately the relationship

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<sup>1</sup> David J. Velleman, “Family History,” *Philosophical Papers* 34, no. 3 (2005); and Sally Anne Haslanger, “Family, Ancestry and Self: What is the Moral Significance of Biological Ties?” *Adoption & Culture* 2 (2009).

between a child and his mother and between a child and his father: there were some key gendered dimensions to parenthood and filiation that originated in the differences – real or imagined – between male and female bodies.

However, outside the realm of intellectual literature, medieval sources rather rarely address the significance of blood ties between parents and children in explicit ways. For this reason, the rest of this chapter will focus on a series of scenarios where those ties were either absent or displaced. By looking at the reactions of contemporaries to their absence we will be able to better reconstruct their significance. Thus, in the second part, I will examine late medieval attitudes to wet nursing. In the third part, I will consider attitudes towards children who appeared to be the biological offspring of their parents but were not, in fact, biologically related to one or both of them. Finally, in the fourth part, I will explore the lives of children who had lost by reason of death or abandonment their biological parents. In particular, the medieval practice of adoption will illustrate the extent to which blood relationship was considered a key component of parenthood and filiation.

## 2.1 Parental Roles

The life and experience of the Florentine Giovanni Morelli (1371-1444) has often been employed to illustrate late medieval ideas on childhood and parenthood.<sup>2</sup> His father Pagolo, himself an orphan, died when Giovanni was very young. Shortly thereafter his mother Telda remarried into the Spini family, a powerful clan of Florentine bankers. He remained in the care of his maternal grandparents who together with Telda had been made joint tutors of the Morelli children by Pagolo in his will. When Giovanni wrote his *Ricordi*, he listed the damages caused by the absence of a father on his children: the loss of the main guide in their education,

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<sup>2</sup> Claudia Tripodi, “Il padre a Firenze nel Quattrocento. L’educazione del pupillo in Giovanni Morelli,” *Annali di Storia di Firenze* 3 (2008); and Cécile Terreaux-Scotto, “Les enfants dans les Ricordi de Giovanni Morelli, de la réalité à l’idéal,” *Italies* 22 (2018).

the loss of economic and social position, of political influence, of protection against the abuses of government and taxation, and, indirectly, the absence of their mothers who, especially if they were young widows, often remarried.<sup>3</sup>

Morelli's account reminds us that to say that the family is a universal phenomenon in human societies does not mean that it is uniform or static.<sup>4</sup> When we think about the relationship between parents and children, we cannot expect it to be the same always and everywhere. Nonetheless, there is a set of parental roles that are very common: begetting and bearing, nurturing, training, sponsorship, and legal identity.<sup>5</sup> In any given society these roles are fulfilled by both parents but the responsibility allocated to each may vary from culture to culture, according to social circumstances and status, and to the age and gender of the child. Likewise, these roles are not necessarily the same in theory and practice. Parents do not always live up to the expectations that society has of them while, in some cases, they exceed those expectations. Lastly, each of these parental roles has a cluster of meanings in overlapping areas of life: biological, legal, social, and religious.<sup>6</sup>

A quick survey of the scholastic and didactic literature of the period 1250-1400 shows that parents were expected to feed, educate, and financially support their children. The first two were often grouped together. In his *Libre de doctrina pueril*, Ramon Lull (c.1232-c.1315) refers to them as forms of nourishment and nutrition (*nudriment*). One pertains to the body and the development of corporal senses. The other, education, pertains to the properties of

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<sup>3</sup> Giovanni Morelli, *Ricordi*, ed. Vittore Branca (Florence, 1956), 202-206.

<sup>4</sup> Suzanne Dixon, "The "Other" Romans and Their Family Values," in *Childhood, Class and Kin in the Roman World*, ed. Suzanne Dixon (London, 2001), 1.

<sup>5</sup> For a comparative framework for the analysis of parental roles, see Esther N. Goody, *Parenthood and Social Reproduction: Fostering and Occupational Roles in West Africa* (Cambridge, 1982), 6-19.

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, Philip Grace, *Affectionate Authorities: Fathers and Fatherly Roles in Late Medieval Basel* (Farnham, 2015) who explores the overlapping meaning of the terms "fatherhood" and "father." Other examples of works that have explored the plurality of meanings of terms and concepts drawn from the familial sphere are Caroline W. Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1982); and Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton, 1993).

the soul, namely memory, reason, and will.<sup>7</sup> As Aquinas affirms, unlike the offspring of other animals, children are called to intellectual life and this is why they need instruction for their souls as much as physical nourishment.<sup>8</sup>

However, this twofold nourishment was allocated differently to mothers and fathers. In many species the male and the female unite just for reproductive purposes and after the sexual act is over it is the female that remains in charge of the offspring. However, in the human species, children need to rely on the prudence and experience of their parents. Especially, Aquinas argued that children need a father for education, because men have a more perfect reason to instruct them and more strength to impart discipline. Thus, he affirmed that children need to be nurtured by their mothers and educated by their fathers.<sup>9</sup>

Many authors in this period proposed a similar division of labour. In his encyclopaedic work *On the Properties of Things*, Bartholomaeus Anglicus (c.1203-1272) devotes a whole chapter to the role of the father and another to the mother's. The child, he says, comes of the substance of the father and the mother and cannot live without their help so that, 'in feeding and nourishing of their children stands the most business and charge of the parents.'<sup>10</sup> Of the father, he says that a man who loves his child feeds and nourishes him, teaches him in his youth with speech and words, chastens him with beatings, and puts him to learn under the care of tutors.<sup>11</sup> In stark contrast, Bartholomaeus' chapter on the mother only pays attention

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<sup>7</sup> Ramon Lull, *Libre de doctrina pueril. Text original, directament trelladat d'un m.s. quatrecentista* (Barcelona, 1907), 250-1: 'Sapies, fill, que dues maneres son de nudriments: la una pertany al cors, l'altra a la anima.'

<sup>8</sup> Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, vol. 2, lib. 3, cap. 112, n. 8: 'homo autem ratione vivit, quam per longi temporis experimentum ad prudentiam pervenire oportet; unde necesse est ut filii a parentibus, quasi iam expertis, instruantur,' and *ibid.*: 'Nec huius instructionis sunt capaces mox geniti, sed post longum tempus, et praecipue cum ad annos discretionis perveniunt. Ad hanc etiam instructionem longum tempus requiritur.'

<sup>9</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, q. 154, a. 2, co.: 'Manifestum est autem quod ad educationem hominis non solum requiritur cura matris, a qua nutritur, sed multo magis cura patris, a quo est instruendus et defendendus, et in bonis tam interioribus quam exterioribus promovendus.'

<sup>10</sup> Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *De proprietatibus rerum*, lib. VI, cap. XIII.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, cap. XIV.

to pregnancy and breastfeeding of a child during infancy. No mention is made of any educational or social role of the mother.<sup>12</sup>

As Philip Grace has argued, one can observe certain parallels between parental roles and embryological and humoral theories. Men's bodies were considered to be hotter than women's and their heat, in turn, was associated with activity, strength, and intelligence. The father was seen to be more active while the mother took on a more passive role, more fitting to her colder biological constitution.<sup>13</sup> The father had to impart form and order not only in generation but also within the household. As Grace explains, 'the anatomical role of fatherhood as its role in conception, in catalysing and forming the child, was seen as continuous with the father's later responsibility to discipline his child toward virtue, and the normative, active man's responsibility to supervise his servants and household, as well as a lord or ruler's responsibility to punish wrongdoers.'<sup>14</sup> Moreover, according to prescriptive texts, which often drew parallels between the state and the household, authority rested on male hands.<sup>15</sup>

By contrast, late medieval thinkers accorded mothers primarily a nutritive role. Today, we tend to dissociate generation and nursing, but for a society which believed that breast milk was made of the same substance that had been feeding the foetus in the womb – that is menstrual blood – breastfeeding was perceived as a natural continuation of pregnancy and not as a wholly different process. Moreover, since late antiquity, theologians had foregrounded the procreative role of women. Commenting on Eve's creation as a helper (*adjutorium*) of Adam, Augustine had affirmed that apart from the purpose of procreation, it is difficult to see how the woman might be of help to man.<sup>16</sup> Likewise, Aquinas affirmed that the woman was created

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, cap. VII.

<sup>13</sup> Philip Grace, "Aspects of Fatherhood in Thirteenth-Century Encyclopedias," *Journal of Family History* 31, no. 3 (2006): 223-26.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, *Politica*, 49, ll. 6-12, 50, ll. 1-7.

<sup>16</sup> Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram*, ed. Joseph Zycha (Vienna, 1894), lib. 9, cap. 7, 275: 'Non itaque video, ad quod aliud adjutorium mulier facta sit viro, si generandi causa subtrahitur.'

chiefly for the purpose of procreation because in every other respect a man would be more fitting to help another man than a woman.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, we have to remember that scholastic and didactic literature was largely prescriptive, often seeking to alter practice which, by necessity, differs from prescriptive advice. Parental roles were exercised within the intimacy of the home and, as Felicity Riddy has argued, ‘the circumstances of everyday domestic living – especially urban living – mitigated any simple model of male power and female subordination.’<sup>18</sup>

After children reached the age of reason, about seven years old, scholars advised parents to begin teaching them to read, write, and count.<sup>19</sup> Some children were educated at home with private tutors, some were sent to study at schools, and others were sent to learn a profession or to a monastic institution.<sup>20</sup> Generally daughters received less education but this was not a strict rule.<sup>21</sup> The task of education, or the responsibility to provide for it, relied more heavily on the father, especially if the child was a boy.<sup>22</sup> However, it is important to remember that most didactic texts were written by men and for a male readership. There is ample evidence that mothers also contributed to the education of children, teaching their daughters and other female servants in the household.<sup>23</sup> Sometimes, mothers were actively encouraged to instruct

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<sup>17</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia, q. 92, a. 1, co.: ‘necessarium fuit feminam fieri, sicut Scriptura dicit, in adiutorium viri, non quidem in adiutorium alicuius alterius operis, ut quidam dixerunt, cum ad quodlibet aliud opus convenientius iuvari possit vir per alium virum quam per mulierem; sed in adiutorium generationis.’ A similar argument, purely on medical grounds, had been put forward by Galen. See Connell, “Aristotle and Galen on Sex Difference,” 419-422.

<sup>18</sup> Felicity Riddy, “Looking Closely: Authority and Intimacy in the Late Medieval Urban Home,” in *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Ithaca, NY., 2003), 215.

<sup>19</sup> Bernard de Gordon, *De conservatione vitae humanae* (Leipzig, 1570), cap. V, 27: ‘Deinde postquam pervenit ad vii annos, ponatur ad litteras et discat legere, scribere, et numerare.’

<sup>20</sup> Shahar, *Childhood*, 162-253 for a summary of educational training in different classes and contexts.

<sup>21</sup> Shulamith Shahar, *The Fourth Estate. A History of Women in the Middle Ages* (London, 2003), 154-165 on noblewomen, and 214-219 on townswomen. See also Joan M. Ferrante, “The Education of Women in the Middle Ages in Theory, Fact and Fantasy,” in *Beyond Their Sex. Learned Women of the European Past*, ed. Patricia H. Labalme (New York, 1980).

<sup>22</sup> Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *La famiglia e le donne nel Rinascimento a Firenze* (Bari, 2004), 285-303.

<sup>23</sup> For mothers as instructors of their daughters, see Felicity Riddy, “Mother Knows Best: Reading Social Change in a Courtesy Text,” *Speculum* 71 (1996); and Shahar, *Childhood*, 166-7.

and discipline their children.<sup>24</sup> And as Michael Clanchy has shown, women often taught their children to read, an expectation reinforced by religious imagery.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to ensuring the proper physical and spiritual development of a child, parents also had to financially support their children. In this regard too, fathers were considered to have more responsibility than mothers. In his encyclopaedia, Bartholomaeus says that a father gives his child clothing, meat, and drink, and ‘purchases lands and heritage for his children, and does not cease to increase it.’<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Aquinas says that in addition to education a father should provide his children with external goods.<sup>27</sup> Inheritance practices and strategies also explain why this was regarded as a paternal responsibility. In the late Middle Ages, Tuscan families were structured around principles of patrilineal descent so that male children were perpetuators of the family line and its economic, social, and political status.<sup>28</sup> Sons shared among themselves their father’s inheritance while daughters did not generally inherit from their parents because they effectively left their fathers’ house and lineage when they got married. Instead, parents provided them with a dowry that remained attached to their persons and came to be regarded as their share in the paternal estate.<sup>29</sup> Thus, since family property was transmitted through the male line, it is natural that fathers were considered to be responsible for financially supporting their children.

Mothers were not often in the position to bequeath lands or houses, but they supported their children and their husbands’ with their dowry, left monetary bequests in their

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<sup>24</sup> Vincent of Beauvais, *De eruditione filiorum nobilium*, ed. Arpad Steiner (Cambridge, MA., 1938), 159, 202.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Clanchy, “Did Mothers Teach their Children to Read?” in *Motherhood, Religion, and Society in Medieval Europe, 400-1400: Essays Presented to Henrietta Leyser*, ed. Conrad Leyser and Lesley Smith (Farnham, 2011); and Pamela Sheingorn, ““The Wise Mother”: The Image of St. Anne Teaching the Virgin Mary,” *Gesta* 32, no. 1 (1993).

<sup>26</sup> Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *De proprietatibus rerum*, lib. VI, cap. XIV.

<sup>27</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, q. 154, a. 2, co.: ‘et in bonis tam interioribus quam exterioribus promovendus.’

<sup>28</sup> On the patrilineage and its inheritance strategies, see Andrea Romano, *Famiglia, successioni e patrimonio familiare nell’Italia medievale e moderna* (Turin, 1994), 11-22; and Lansing, *The Florentine Magnates*, 29-40 for Florence.

<sup>29</sup> On dowry as inheritance in late medieval Mediterranean Europe, see Diane Owen Hughes, “From Brideprice to Dowry in Mediterranean Europe,” *Journal of Family History* 3 (1978): 276-81; and David Herlihy, *La famiglia nel Medioevo* (Roma, Bari, 1989), 107-114.

testaments, and objects from their trousseau to daughters, relatives, and friends.<sup>30</sup> Their economic contribution to the family's financial status could nevertheless be considerable. From the late thirteenth century onwards, a powerful link between daughters, dowries, and family status was established and, as a result, the value of dowries sharply increased. Thus, the woman's financial contribution to the household's economy was increasingly substantial, as complaints over the remarriage of young widows attest to.<sup>31</sup>

It is important to note that these parental roles – nourishment, education, and financial support – were regarded as responsibilities inextricably connected with the one role that preceded them all, namely begetting and bearing. In other words, parents were responsible for their children not just because these were under their care, but rather because by bringing them into this world they had simultaneously acquired those responsibilities. Thus, in the thirteenth century, canon law established that it was the duty of any man, even an adulterous one estranged from his wife and children, to provide for the nourishment of his natural offspring.<sup>32</sup> Like nourishment, education and inheritance were also regarded as natural obligations. Aquinas affirmed that because fathers have the responsibility of educating their children, they have a natural concern to be certain of their offspring, that is, to ensure that the children born to their wives are biologically their own.<sup>33</sup> In the supplement to the *Summa theologiae*, Reginald of Piperno (1230-1290) maintained that marriage is directed towards the rearing of the offspring, not just for a while, but throughout their whole life, so that 'it is of natural law that parents should lay up for their children, and that children should be their parent's heirs.'<sup>34</sup> All

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<sup>30</sup> Julius Kirshner, *Marriage, Dowry, and Citizenship in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (Toronto, 2015), 89-90, 289 n. 80.

<sup>31</sup> Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, "La "mère cruelle." Maternité, veuvage et dot dans la Florence des XIVe-XVe siècles," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 38, no. 5 (1983).

<sup>32</sup> *Decretals of Gregory IX*, in *CIC*, vol. 2, lib. 4, tit. 7, cap. 5, 689; and Gratian, *Decretum*, in *CIC*, vol. 1, pars. 1, D. 30, c. 14, 109. See also, James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago, 1987), 102, 245.

<sup>33</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, q. 154, a. 2, co.: 'Et inde est quod naturaliter est maribus in specie humana sollicitudo de certitudine prolis, quia eis imminet educatio prolis.'

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, IIIa, Supp. q. 67, a. 1, res.: 'matrimonium ex intentione naturae ordinatur ad educationem prolis non solum ad aliquod tempus, sed per totam vitam prolis. Unde de lege naturae est quod parentes filiis thesaurizent [2 Cor 12:14], et filii parentum heredes sint.'

this was in stark contrast with antiquity. In Roman times, men were not legally obliged to rear all the children born to them, not even those born to their lawful wives. Indeed, nothing in the law suggested that Roman parents could or should be punished for abandoning or selling their children into slavery.<sup>35</sup>

A mid-fourteenth-century commentary on the Lord's prayer written by Jordan of Quedlinburg (c.1300-1380), an Augustinian hermit from Saxony, similarly underscores that the responsibilities of educating and providing for a child flow naturally from the fact of generation. Like many other medieval commentaries on the Lord's prayer, John's starts by focusing on the first two words, namely the 'Our Father'. He notes that God is called father in a threefold way, according to the threefold being we have received from him: the natural being, the state of grace, and the state of glory. The first was given to us in creation, the second through redemption, and the third will come in the kingdom of heaven.<sup>36</sup> Then Jordan adds that this threefold being corresponds 'to the threefold benefits which a natural son (*filius carnalis*) receives from his father,' namely: birth (*generationis*), education (*educationis*), and heredity (*hereditationis*).<sup>37</sup> It might be surprising that instead of analogising from the family to our relationship with God, John proceeds the other way around. But for Christians theologians, as St Paul had affirmed (*Ephesians* 3:15), all paternity on earth derived from God. And since God's fatherhood was defined by the Son's eternal generation, human fatherhood was likewise regarded to be principally characterised by the generative act.

As we will see, although parents were expected to feed, teach, and financially support their natural offspring, at times they discharged these roles on other men and women. This

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<sup>35</sup> John Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance* (New York, 1990), 57-75; and Mireille Corbier, "Child Exposure and Abandonment," in *Childhood, Class and Kin in the Roman World*.

<sup>36</sup> Jordan of Quedlinburg, *Catechesis in the Later Middle Ages I: The Exposition of the Lord's Prayer of Jordan of Quedlinburg, OESA (d. 1380)*, trans. Eric Leland Saak (Leiden, 2015), 78-79: 'Est autem notandum, quod ipse deus dicitur pater noster tripliciter, secundum triplex esse quod ab eo accepimus, scilicet nature, gratie, et glorie. Esse nature dedit nobis in creatione; esse gratie in recreatione sive redemptione; et esse glorie dabit in regni communicatione.'

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 80-81.

could provide an opportunity, though, to remind readers that parenthood was primarily defined by generation. Commenting on the passage in which St Paul reminds the Christian community in Corinth that they can count on him as a father (*I Corinthians* 4:15), Aquinas says that properly speaking the father is the one who generates, that is, the one that causes someone else to advance towards life (*est autem generatio processus ad vitam*). The one who nurtures and educates a child, on the other hand, is properly speaking the *paedagogus*.<sup>38</sup> It is important to note that Aquinas does not restrict himself to speaking of physical life or of physical generation. In his view, Paul can be justly considered a father to the Christian community in Corinth because he has engendered them to the Christian life. Nonetheless, he maintains a distinction between generation as the role which pertains specifically to the father, and education which can be fulfilled by someone else. It is, he says, the same distinction that can be drawn between ‘he who plants and he who waters; between he who builds and he who lays the foundations.’<sup>39</sup> The same can be said of mothers. As Erin Maglaque has noted, the idea that care work outside the biological family – and only then – could be waged ‘was dependent upon the naturalisation of care work within the family as a moral, religious and affective responsibility.’<sup>40</sup>

Because parental roles were thought to issue from generation, the absence of biological parents, or the delegation of these roles on strangers, had important practical consequences for the raising, education, and socio-economic status of a child. In the rest of this chapter, I will explore different scenarios that illustrate this emphasis on generation and provide an opportunity to further examine the significance of biological ties within the family by looking

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<sup>38</sup> Aquinas, *Super I Cor.*, cap. 4, l. 3, n. 221, 275: ‘Ubi considerandum est quod pater est qui primo generat: paedagogus autem est qui iam natum nutrit et erudit.’

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*: ‘Unde verbum Dei est semen, quo apostolus eos genuit in Christo. Unde Iac. I, 18: voluntarie nos genuit verbo veritatis. Alios autem dicit paedagogos, quia postquam fidem receperant, eos adiuvarunt: ut intelligatur esse eadem comparatio, quantum ad praedicationem Evangelii, paedagogi ad patrem, quae supra III, 6 ss. posita est, rigatoris ad plantatorem, et superaedificatoris ad fundatorem.’

<sup>40</sup> Erin Maglaque, “Care Work and the Family in Catholic Reformation Tuscany,” *Past & Present* 253, no. 1 (2021): 128.

at how their importance was articulated when they were lacking. I will begin with wet nursing: the delegation of the nutritive role to a woman other than the child's biological mother.

## 2.2 Wet Nursing

Breastfeeding's cultural significance might change across societies, but thanks to modern psychology we know that the bond that is formed between a mother and her child or between a nurse and her nursling is extremely strong and resilient and that breastfeeding plays a fundamental role as one of the first stages in the process of socialisation.<sup>41</sup> First and foremost, however, breastfeeding plays a crucial role in the physical development of an infant.

Medieval writers realised that children were born defenceless and not fully developed. Medical texts explained the imperfect state of new-born infants by alluding to the ill effects that menstrual blood had on the development of children in the uterus. It was because the menses constituted a deficient means of nutrition during pregnancy that children were not able to talk, stand, sit, and walk immediately after birth.<sup>42</sup> Accordingly, medieval authors affirmed that during the first two years of their life children have to be raised with extreme care.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, it was during these first two years that children were more likely to die and the role of the mother or nurse was of extreme importance.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (London, 1984), 62-63. Already in the second century, Soranus, the famous Greek physician, had affirmed that: 'To be sure, other things being equal, it is better to feed the child with maternal milk; for this is more suited to it, and the mother become more sympathetic towards the offspring [...]' See *Gynecology*, trans. Owsei Temkin (Baltimore, 1991), book II, 90.

<sup>42</sup> *The Prose Salernitan Questions*, B228, 115: 'Queritur quare pueri statim post nativitatem non habeant complementum actionum, ut ambulandi, loquendi, standi, sedendi, seipsos conservandi, et similibus [...]' R. Hoc contingit quoniam menstruali sanguine nutriuntur, qui non potest adeo cito purgari ut decens et oportunitate esset.' Similarly, William of Conches, *De philosophia mundi libri quatuor*, in *PL* 172, lib. 4, cap. XIV, col. 89: 'Quare homo cum natus est non graditur.' And Thomas de Cantimpré, *Liber de natura rerum*, lib. 1, 78, 80: 'Infans natus omnium animalium nascentium debilitatem excedit, et hoc, ut dictum est, quia de sanguine menstruo nutritus est.'

<sup>43</sup> See Luke Demaitre, "The Idea of Childhood and Child Care in Medical Writings of the Middle Ages," *The Journal of Psychobiology* 4, no. 4 (1977).

<sup>44</sup> On medieval infant mortality rates, see Shahar, *Childhood*, 23, 149-51 who suggests that between 20 to 30 per cent of children died in the first year and approximately 50 per cent before they reached the age of 5. For his part, Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers*, 13-14 says that approximately a third of infants died.

The bodies and minds of infants were considered to be so malleable that they were often described as being made of wax.<sup>45</sup> Hence, it is not surprising that medieval writers believed that breastfeeding could have wide-ranging effects on the health and development of children. Breast milk was so important that if a child was ill some authors recommended giving the medication to his nurse.<sup>46</sup> But the importance of breastfeeding apparently transcended its physiological effects. Insofar as it could inform the bodily complexion of an infant, breastfeeding had also a moral significance that was underpinned by ideas of biological descent.

### 2.2.1 The Ideal of Maternal Care

Children were generally expected to be breastfed by their biological mothers. Yet in some cases they were nourished by other women. Wet nursing was a common practice in ancient times. In Rome, it was widespread among the higher classes of society.<sup>47</sup> During the fourteenth century in Italy, it was common for nobles and members of the urban elite to send their children to be wet nursed away from home or, if the family had enough resources, to pay to an in-house wet nurse. By the fifteenth century, it also became widespread among the lower urban classes and even in some peasant households.<sup>48</sup> Yet in spite of wet nursing's increasing popularity, authors of religious, medical, and didactic works continued to favour maternal nursing.<sup>49</sup> Since breast milk was considered to be menstrual blood purified at the breast,<sup>50</sup> it

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<sup>45</sup> Shahar, *Childhood*, 88-9; Bernard de Gordon, *De conservatione vitae humanae*, cap. I, 11-12; and Giovanni Dominici, *Regola del governo di cura familiare* (Florence, 1860), 137: 'È tale età come disposta cera, e piglia quella impronta vi s'accosta [...]'

<sup>46</sup> Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *De proprietatibus rerum*, lib. VI, cap. IV: 'Nec est danda medicina infantulum cum egrotant, sed nutrix in mundicina et in conuenienti dieta procuranda est: ut sic infantis defectum suppleat ut Gerule siue nutricis.'

<sup>47</sup> Keith R. Bradley, "Wet-Nursing at Rome: A Study in Social Relations," in *The Family in Ancient Rome: New Perspectives*, ed. Beryl Rawson (London, 1992); and Valerie A. Fildes, *Wet Nursing: A History from Antiquity to Present* (Oxford, 1988). For ancient medical perspectives on breastfeeding, see Robert Étienne, "La conscience médicale antique et la vie des enfants," *Annales de Démographie Historique. Enfant et Sociétés* (1973).

<sup>48</sup> Shahar, *Childhood*, 58-61. For Tuscany, see Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, "Parents de sang, parents de lait: la mise en nourrice à Florence (1300-1530)," *Annales de Démographie Historique. Mères et nourrissons* (1983): 34-36.

<sup>49</sup> James B. Ross, "The Middle-Class Child in Urban Italy, Fourteenth to Early Sixteenth Century," in *The History of Childhood*, ed. Lloyd de Mause (New York, 1974): 184-96; Demaitre, "The Idea of Childhood and Child Care," 474; and Rebecca Lynn Winer, "Conscripting the Breast: Lactation, Slavery and Salvation in the Realms of Aragon and Kingdom of Majorca, c.1250-1300," *Journal of Medieval History* 34, no. 2 (2008): 165-66, 174-75.

<sup>50</sup> Beauvais, *Speculum naturale*, lib. 22, cap. 55, col. 1640: 'Mulieres lactantes et impregnate non menstruant: quia natura lactis et sanguinis menstrui eadem est.'

was believed that the mother's milk was more similar to the sort of nutrient that the child had received during pregnancy and, therefore, more suitable to his humoral complexion.<sup>51</sup>

The preference for maternal breastfeeding was also underscored by religious ideas and imagery. A long Christian tradition represented God's care for his people as a breastfeeding mother.<sup>52</sup> And the Virgin Mary, the role model of Christian mothers, was often depicted breastfeeding the infant Jesus.<sup>53</sup> An early fifteenth-century painting originally placed at the Duomo of Florence (Fig. 1) presents the Virgin as a breastfeeding mother who intercedes for men saying: 'Most sweet Son, for the milk I gave you, have mercy on this people' (*Dolcissimo figliuolo pellacte chio tidie abbi mia di chostoro*). The popularity of this iconography from the late fourteenth century onwards can be interpreted as a response to the increasing employment of wet nurses, a concerted attempt on behalf of religious authorities to remind people of the ideal of maternal nursing.

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<sup>51</sup> Bernard de Gordon, *De conservatione vitae humanae*, cap. I, 12: 'mater lactet infantem, quoniam aliis paribus existentibus lac matris est melius, et est magis conveniens cum sit magis simile generationi foetus et nutritioni intrinsecae.'

<sup>52</sup> Dawn LaValle, "Divine Breastfeeding: Milk, Blood, and Pneuma in Clement of Alexandria's Paedagogus," *Journal of Late Antiquity* 8, no. 2 (2015); and Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 113-25.

<sup>53</sup> Cecelia M. Dorger, "Studies in the Image of the Madonna *Lactans* in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy," (PhD diss., University of Louisville, 2012), 4-5; and Felipe Pereda, "Vox Populi: Carnal Blood, Spiritual Milk, and the Debate Surrounding the Immaculate Conception, ca. 1600," *Medieval Encounters* 24 (2018).



Figure 1

Ambivalent attitudes towards wet nursing feature prominently in medieval preaching. In a sermon to the citizens of Pisa in the year 1427 devoted to the morality of marital intercourse, Bernardino of Siena talks at length about wet nursing, setting the animal world as an example of what nature expects humans to do, namely, to feed and raise their offspring.<sup>54</sup> Bernardino criticises couples who resort to wet nursing in order to resume marital intercourse after childbirth. According to clerical and medical authorities alike, spouses were recommended to abstain from intercourse up until the child was weaned. Intercourse and pregnancy were thought to stop the process of lactation and to spoil and dwindle the milk, so that a pregnant woman should not breastfeed a child because of the risk of hurting him.<sup>55</sup> Thus, employing a wet nurse could demonstrate a lack of sexual restraint and be dangerous for the parents' salvation.

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<sup>54</sup> Bernardino of Siena, *Le prediche volgari*, ed. Luciano Banchi, vol. 2 (Siena, 1884), sermon 21, 155-172.

<sup>55</sup> Shahar, *Childhood*, 69-71. Hence, Albert the Great points to the danger that a wet nurse would have intercourse while is breastfeeding a child, *De animalibus*, vol. 1, lib. 3, tract. 2, cap. 9, 170, 352: 'et ideo praecipitur a sapientibus medicorum, quod nutrices non coeant dum lactant infantes quia si coeunt, subtilius substantiae lactis separator ad coitum, et nutrietur puer grosso alimento lactis et inconvenienti.'

Yet wet nursing was also deemed risky because in addition to his physical complexion and health, milk was believed to shape the moral character of a child. ‘Even if he is your son,’ Bernardino says in the same sermon,

and you are wise and well bred, and discreet, you might send your child to be wet nursed at a sow [female pig] and the child, as it is known, will apprehend the customs of her who nourishes him. For as long as she who raises him has evil habits or bad conditions, it is known that he will acquire those habits as a result of being breastfed by her and on account of her bad blood.<sup>56</sup>

Moreover, breast milk could not only transmit properties of the nurse, but also those of the man whose semen had impregnated her. The semen that the male released in the uterus was thought to shape the properties of the menses and, in turn, those of the foetus.<sup>57</sup> For this reason, Albert the Great wrote that a child could acquire the passions of his parents through milk and not only through the influence of the semen.<sup>58</sup>

The dangers implicit in changing the source of the milk are illustrated by Bernardino with an agricultural metaphor that had featured in arguments against wet nursing since antiquity. It is a metaphor that appears in Aristotle’s *Politics*,<sup>59</sup> Aulus Gellius’ (c.125-180) *Attic Nights*,<sup>60</sup> and Macrobius’ (370-430) *Saturnalia*,<sup>61</sup> manuscripts of which were being copied again in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The metaphor goes as follows. If one takes vines from the vineyards in Lombardy and plant them in Ferrara, the wine that results from them will be much heavier than the one produced in Lombardy, even though it is made from the same vine. Why does this happen? Because although you have moved the vine, you have not moved the soil, and the vine ‘has taken up the nature of the soil, where it has been fed’ (*egli ha preso la*

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<sup>56</sup> Bernardino of Siena, *Le prediche volgari*, vol. 2, 159: ‘Che con tutto che sia tuo figliuolo, e tu sia savio et acostumato e discreto et cetera, talvolta il darai a balia a una porca, là dove si conviene che ‘l fanciullo pigli di quelli costumi che ha chi il notrica. Avendo chi el governa gattivi costumi o pessime condizioni, si conviene che egli imprenda di quelli costumi per lo lattarsi del suo pessimo sangue.’

<sup>57</sup> Thomas de Cantimpré, *Liber de natura rerum*, lib. 1, 71, 72: ‘Et id quod generatum est ex sanguine, in quo adhuc virtus existit spermatis [...]’ See Shahar, *Childhood*, 53.

<sup>58</sup> Albert, *De animalibus*, vol. 2, lib. 22, tract. 1, cap. 3, 7, 1352.

<sup>59</sup> Aristotle, *Politica*, 322, ll. 3-4 (regarding pregnant women): ‘quae enim generantur videntur absumentia ab ea, quae habet, sicut nascentia a terra.’

<sup>60</sup> Aulus Gellius, *Noctes atticae*, vol. 2, ed. Leofranc Holford-Strevens (Oxford, 2021), lib. XII, cap. 1, 421.

<sup>61</sup> Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. Robert A. Kaster (London, 2011), book V, 11, 15-19.

*natura del terreno, dove elli è notricato*). Similarly, when a mother sends her child to be breastfed by another woman, ‘he takes the condition of her who nourishes him’ (*egli piglia della condizione di colei che ’l notrica*).<sup>62</sup> This concern with the moral qualities of a wet nurse must have been accentuated by the fact that most wet nurses were typically women of lower social rank than the mother and, not infrequently, slaves.<sup>63</sup>

Thus, it is because breast milk was believed to have a powerful effect on the child’s physical and mental qualities that delegating breastfeeding to another woman could be perceived as irresponsible. The Castilian noble Don Juan Manuel (1282-1348) recounts the story of a friend, Don Johan, whose mother, a countess, loved him so much that she did not allow any other woman to breastfeed him. Once, however, the child was breastfed by a nurse and from then on his mother often repeated that whenever he did wrong things it was because of the milk he had drank from that woman and whenever he did what was right it was on account of hers.<sup>64</sup> In the *Legenda aurea*, Jacobus of Voragine similarly recounts how St Bernard’s mother bore seven children and she did not allow them to be nursed by other women because ‘it was as though she wished, with her milk, somehow to infuse them with her own goodness.’<sup>65</sup>

### 2.2.2 The Ideal Wet Nurse

In spite of a strong advocacy for maternal breastfeeding and ample warnings concerning the dangers of wet nursing, most medical and didactic treatises contain long and detailed sets of instructions to help parents choose a wet nurse. Yet the same set of ideas of biological descent

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<sup>62</sup> Bernardino of Siena, *Le prediche volgari*, vol. 2, 160.

<sup>63</sup> Jacques Heers, *Esclaves et domestiques au Moyen Âge dans le monde méditerranéen* (Paris, 1981), 200-202; and Winer, “Conscripting the Breast.”

<sup>64</sup> Don Juan Manuel, *Libro de los estados*, ed. José María Castro Calvo (Barcelona, 1968), ch. LXVII, 105: ‘dizía su madre muchas veces, que si en él algún obiese, [...] era por la buena leche que obiera mamado. Et quando non fiziese lo que devía, que siempre tenía que era por quanto mamara otra leche que non era tan buena.’

<sup>65</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda aurea vulgo historia lombardica dicta*, ed. Theodor Graesse (Leipzig, 1850), 528: ‘alienis uberibus ipsos nutriri refugiebat, quasi cum lacte materno materni quodammodo boni infundens iis naturam.’ Translated in Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend. Readings on the Saints* (Princeton, 2012), 484.

that made wet nursing dangerous, namely the belief that milk (blood) produced physical and moral resemblances, made the task of choosing a wet nurse a complex matter.

Paolo da Certaldo (1320-1370), a middle-ranking Italian merchant, advised his children to choose a woman ‘prudent, well-mannered, honest, not a drinker or a drunkard, because very often children draw from and resemble the nature of the milk they suck; and therefore be careful the wet nurses of your children aren’t proud and don’t have other evil traits.’<sup>66</sup> In Ramon Llull’s (1232-1316) thirteenth-century novel *Blanquerna*, the author recounts how the eponymous hero of the story was given to a wet nurse who was not only healthy of body and with good milk, but who was also honest and worthy of life, ‘for in suckling children it is greatly to be avoided that the nurse should be sickly or sinful or given to vice, or of evil humour, corrupt of body or in any other wise unhealthy.’<sup>67</sup> In his *Reggimento e costumi di donna*, Francesco da Barberino (1264-1348) specifies a large number of physical qualities that are desirable in a wet nurse, including the size of breasts and the quality and quantity of milk. He also recommends that the nurse should be ‘as much like the mother as possible,’ and warns against the proud and wrathful and gloomy and against the fearful, foolish, and coarse.<sup>68</sup> Perhaps by suggesting a similarity between the wet nurse and the mother medieval didactic writers performed an unconscious attempt to reconcile the ideal of maternal care with the reality of wet nursing.

Social rank could also be regarded as an important quality. Don Juan Manuel advised that the wet nurses chosen for the children of kings should be ‘of the best and highest, and most beautiful blood that could be found’ (*que sean de la mejor sangre, et más alta, et más linda que*

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<sup>66</sup> Paolo da Certaldo, *Il libro di buoni costumi*, ed. Salomone Morpurgo (Florence, 1921), 368, clx.

<sup>67</sup> Ramon Lull, *Blanquerna: A Thirteenth-Century Romance*, trans. Allison Peers (London, 1926), chapter 2.3, 38.

<sup>68</sup> Francesco da Barberino, *Reggimento e costumi di donna*, ed. Giuseppe E. Sansoni (Turin, 1957), 183-6, 191-2. See also Arnau de Villanova, *De regimine sanitatis*, in *Opera omnia* (Basel, 1585), col. 666.

*puerorum aver*) because except for the father and the mother there is no other person to which children resemble more in appearances, in will, and in actions than their wet nurses.<sup>69</sup>

The market of wet nurses in Tuscany in the fourteenth century became so large that by 1344 in Florence the wages and contractual obligations of wet nurses came to be regulated by the communal government.<sup>70</sup> Yet good wet nurses were rare and always in high demand. Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472) complained that a healthy and morally upright nurse was the sort of woman that ‘always seems to be unavailable just when you need her most.’<sup>71</sup> And Margherita, the wife of the merchant of Prato Francesco Datini, wrote about this scarcity in her letters to her husband who occasionally asked for her advice to find a wet nurse for the children of his friends.<sup>72</sup>

### 2.2.3 Why Were Wet Nurses Hired?

One would have expected that the sense that mothers had a moral obligation to breastfeed their offspring, an increasing concern with blood, and the belief that breastmilk produced moral resemblances would have diminished the recourse to wet nurses. However, throughout the fourteenth century, wet nursing enjoyed increasing popularity. Even the advantages promised by the better physical characteristics of maternal milk were often ignored. But why? One might be tempted to take wet nursing as a sign of a lack of interest on the part of parents towards their children, particularly since it often involved their estrangement.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, in Florence, the majority of nurslings were sent to the countryside to live with their wet nurse’s family.<sup>74</sup> Perhaps wet nursing was one of those emotional barriers that, as Philippe Ariès suggested, pre-modern parents erected in order to better cope with high rates of infant

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<sup>69</sup> Don Juan Manuel, *Libro de los estados*, ch. LXVI, 104.

<sup>70</sup> Richard C. Trexler, “Infanticide in Florence: New Sources and First Results,” *History of Childhood Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1973): 100.

<sup>71</sup> Leon Battista Alberti, *The Family in Renaissance Florence*, trans. Renée N. Watkins (Columbia, 1969), 51.

<sup>72</sup> Iris Origo, *The Merchant of Prato: Francesco di Marco Datini* (London, 1957), 200.

<sup>73</sup> In some cases, parents hired a woman as a live-in wet nurse. This afforded greater control over her diet, her sexual behavior, and her care for the infant. But it was too expensive for most couples. See Shahar, *Childhood*, 60-61.

<sup>74</sup> Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans and their Families*, 147.

mortality.<sup>75</sup> Yet this alone does not explain why this practice became so common in the period 1250-1400.

First of all, some circumstances compelled the recourse to wet nursing. These could be biological conditions such as illness, death during childbirth, or inability to produce milk. San Bernardino accepts that at times there might be legitimate reasons to employ a wet nurse; for example, if the mother is too weak or does not have enough milk.<sup>76</sup> In Ramon Lull's *Blanquerna*, the protagonist is given to a wet nurse because his parents conceive him in old age.<sup>77</sup> For this very reason, St John the Baptist was often thought to have been nourished by a woman other than his mother. An early fourteenth-century poem written in Florence praises the Baptist as having been breastfed by none other than the Virgin Mary herself.<sup>78</sup> Likewise, in the fifteenth century, when Ghirlandaio undertook the painting of the frescoes in the Tornabuoni chapel of Santa Maria Novella, his depiction of the Baptist's birth (Fig. 2) portrays the infant being breastfed by a wet nurse who is ostensibly younger than Elisabeth who, instead, peacefully remains in bed.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, wet nursing upon delivery could be justified on medical grounds. Some doctors and physicians maintained that right after birth maternal milk was very unclean and that, if possible, the child should be breastfed by another woman for the first two or three days.<sup>80</sup> Finally, wet nursing was a necessity for the thousands of children who in cities like Florence were abandoned by their parents.

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<sup>75</sup> Philippe Ariès, *L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime* (Paris, 1960).

<sup>76</sup> Bernardino of Siena, *Le prediche volgari*, vol. 2, sermon 21, 158.

<sup>77</sup> Ramon Lull, *Blanquerna*, 36-38.

<sup>78</sup> One of the lines of this poem composed by the Company of Santo Spirito, one of the twelve laudesi companies of Florence, reads: 'nutrice tua sancta Maria.' See, *The Florence Laudario: An Edition of Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Banco Rari 18*, ed. and trans. Blake McDowell Wilson and Nello Barbieri (Madison, WI., 1995), lxxv.

<sup>79</sup> See Patricia Simons, "The Social and Religious Context of Iconographic Oddity: Breastfeeding in Ghirlandaio's *Birth of the Baptist*," in *Medieval and Renaissance Lactations*.

<sup>80</sup> See Bernard de Gordon, *De conservatione vitae humanae*, caput I, 12; and Albert, *De animalibus*, vol. 2, lib. 18, tract. 2, cap. 7, 85, 1235; and *ibid.*, vol. 1, lib. 3, tract. 2, cap. 9, 169, 351. This belief was probably drawn from Soranus, *Gynecology*, book II, 88-89: 'for twenty days the maternal milk is in most cases unwholesome, being thick, too caseous, and therefore hard to digest [...] For all these reasons, it is absurd to prescribe the maternal milk until the body enjoys stable health.'

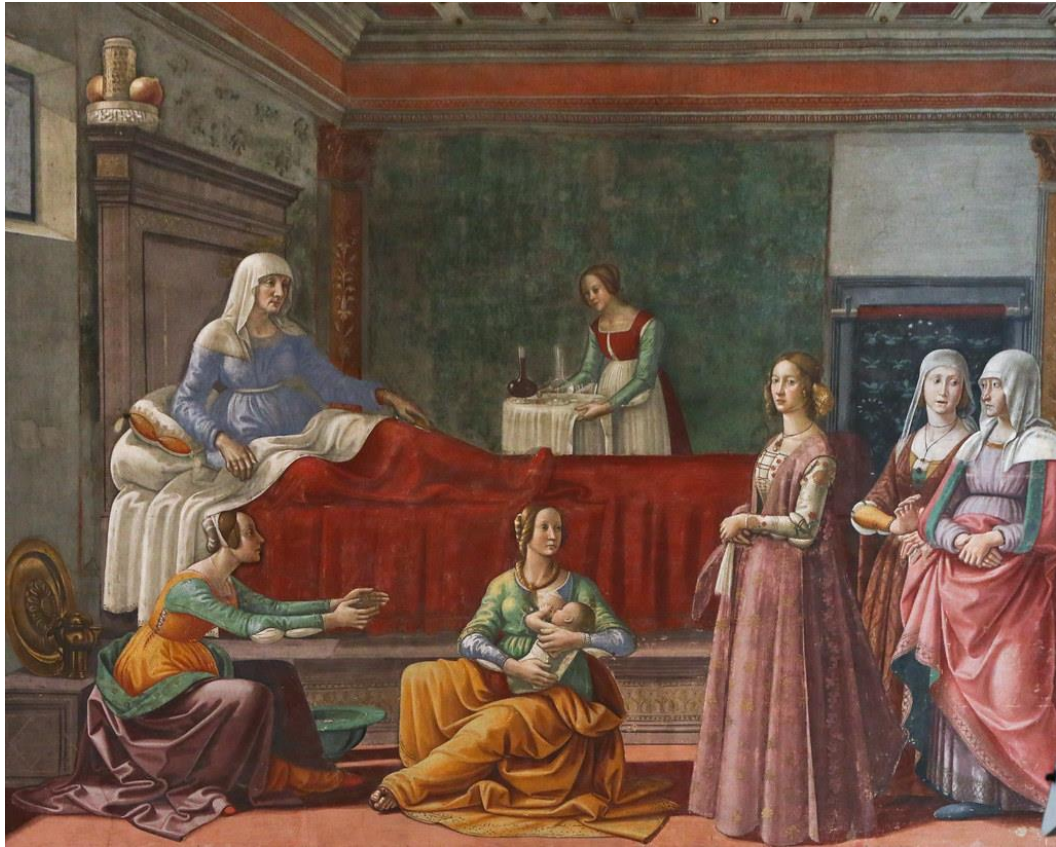


Figure 2

It was this set of circumstances that prevented preachers from entirely condemning the practice of wet nursing and explains why didactic authors spent considerable efforts discussing the choice of a wet nurse in their writings. Nevertheless, it is evident that there were other circumstances that made wet nursing not only necessary but attractive. These were more susceptible to criticism.

On some occasions, economic necessity pushed women to work as wet nurses. And unless they had lost their own child, they had to find a cheaper wet nurse to feed their infant.<sup>81</sup> There were also demographic considerations. High rates of infant mortality encouraged couples to have a large number of children. However, in order to conceive, and for semen to be effective, it was believed that a minimum amount of menstrual blood in the womb was

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<sup>81</sup> Tomoko Takahashi, "I Bambini e i genitori "espositori" dello Spedale di Santa Maria degli Innocenti di Firenze nel XV secolo," *Annuario dell'Istituto Giapponese di Cultura* 25 (1992): 45, 54.

necessary. Accordingly, breastfeeding was seen as an impediment to reproduction because while a woman breastfed her child all her blood was used up for that purpose.<sup>82</sup> Thus, in order to increase the chances of getting pregnant, some women gave up breastfeeding their newborn babies.<sup>83</sup> In addition, because intercourse was thought to damage the milk, which would hurt the child, maternal breastfeeding required of spouses to interrupt sexual relationships until after the child had been weaned. This could be difficult and was thought to increase the risk of infidelity and adultery.<sup>84</sup> Yet all this, once again, still seems insufficient to explain wet nursing's increasing popularity.

Perhaps counter-intuitively, the rationale that made wet nursing widely accepted can be found within the same set of ideas of biological descent that in principle promoted maternal nursing. According to late medieval theories of embryology the father's contribution to generation was thought to be more active and influential than the mother's, which was regarded as essentially passive. The pre-eminence of the father's seed and blood diminished the importance of maternal milk and of female descent more generally. This explains why, as some scholars have noted, most of the eugenics advice in this period, in contrast to our own day, was addressed to fathers: it was up to them to ensure the healthy material and spiritual development of their seed.<sup>85</sup> It was also the responsibility of fathers to hire a suitable wet nurse for his children and, due to the financial and legal dimensions of the arrangement, to draw the contract with the nurse, sometimes in the presence of the latter's husband.<sup>86</sup> The same concern

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<sup>82</sup> See Biller, *The Measure of Multitude*, 155; and Averroes, *Colliget*, lib. 2, cap. 10, fol. 23vb: 'sunt aliquae mulieres que non possunt impregnari dum lactant.'

<sup>83</sup> Winer, "Conscripting the Breast," 177.

<sup>84</sup> On the medieval insistence of marital sex as a remedy for adultery, see Georges Duby, *Medieval Marriage: Two Models from Twelfth-Century France* (Baltimore, 1991), 16, 20.

<sup>85</sup> Charles de Miramon and Maaike Van der Lugt, "Sang, hérédité et parenté au Moyen Âge: Modèle biologique et modèle social. Albert le Grand et Balde," *Annales de Démographie Historique* 137, no. 1 (2019): 40.

<sup>86</sup> Klapisch-Zuber, "Parents de sang, parents de lait," 58. However, mothers were not completely indifferent and could sometimes exert some control over the choice of wet nurses, see Rebecca Lynn Winer, "The Mother and the *Dida* [Nanny]: Female Employers and Wet Nurses in Fourteenth-Century Barcelona," in *Medieval and Renaissance Lactations*, 57, 64-67.

with male blood and male descent may also explain why parents invested more resources in the nursing of their sons than of their daughters.<sup>87</sup>

As Christiane Klapisch-Zuber has argued, the Tuscan patrilineage and the values associated with it seem to have imposed themselves upon any concerns over non-maternal milk. Children born of a couple belonged to their father's kin. Male children inherited the family property and perpetuated the family name. Women, on the other hand, were side-lined from the family because they transferred to their husbands lineage upon marriage. Thus, it was the male line that determined collective and individual identities.<sup>88</sup> As a result, the practice of wet nursing itself proclaimed the superiority of the father's blood. Female blood and milk were more susceptible of being overlooked. Overlooked, but not completely ignored. The ideal remained that of Mary, the mother who nursed her infant. But reality does not usually live up to the ideal.

### 2.3 Non-Biological Children

A different set of scenarios where children were not biologically related to one or both of their parents can set in relief even better the significance of biological ties within the late medieval family: supposition, paternity fraud, and misattributed paternity. Supposition is the fraudulent attribution of a child to a woman who has not given birth. This practice was intended to pass a child off as a genuine heir – often, but not always, without the knowledge of the father – and it had been condemned ever since Roman times.<sup>89</sup> Paternity fraud occurs when a man is deliberately misidentified by his wife as the biological father of a child born to her. When a

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<sup>87</sup> Klapisch-Zuber, “Parents de sang, parents de lait,” 39-40. Yet one cannot fail to note that girls generally precede boys in teeth eruption. This seems to be why the Aragonese doctor Arnau de Villanova, who defined the time of weaning as the moment of teething (*quando omnes dentes creverunt*) affirmed that ‘it is said, that boys take longer to be weaned than girls (*quod masculus tardius est remouendus a lacte quam foemina*).’ See Arnau de Villanova, *De regimine sanitate*, cols. 667-668.

<sup>88</sup> Klapisch-Zuber, “Parents de sang, parents de lait,” 61.

<sup>89</sup> Thus, in Roman law, the substitution of children was discussed mainly in relation to inheritance disputes and wills, see *Dig.* 3. 2. 15, 67; 25. 4. 1. 13, 368; 48. 10. 19. 1, 856; and 48. 10. 30. 1, 857.

man is wrongly identified as the biological father of a child but this is not done deliberately, we should speak of misattributed paternity instead.

The sources we have available to examine late medieval reactions to these scenarios are of two kinds. On the one hand, we have literary stories whose primary goal was not to discuss the significance of biological ties. Yet the internal logic of the stories themselves and the reaction of their characters betray contemporary attitudes to biological descent. On the other hand, we have didactic sources intended to provide solutions to these, often conflictive, situations. Both can help answer the following questions: what happened when children turned out not to be the biological offspring of their parents? What rights did the law accord to these children? And how was the impact that such a discovery had on the emotional dimension of the parent-child relationship?

### 2.3.1 Non-Biological Children in Literature

A brief account of the life of Judas Iscariot offers an instructive introduction to this set of questions and to the role that biological relatedness played in parent-child relationships.<sup>90</sup> The *Golden Legend* is a collection of stories for preachers compiled by Jacobus of Voragine (c.1230-1298), bishop of Genoa, in the late thirteenth century. It was one of the most popular religious works of the late Middle Ages.<sup>91</sup> It contains numerous lives of saints with all sorts of anecdotes, many of them of an apocryphal or fictitious nature. We should not take these stories at face value, but as they were widely read and used for preaching, they can bring us closer to the mentalities of the age and to the way in which late medieval men and women behaved and felt in certain scenarios or, at least, to the way in which society expected them to behave and to feel. In the *Legend*, no chapter is devoted to the life of Judas. However, Jacobus recounts his

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<sup>90</sup> On this story and its sources, see Paull Franklin Baum, "The Mediaeval Legend of Judas Iscariot," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 31, no. 3 (1916).

<sup>91</sup> On the *Legend* and its popularity, see Giovanni Paolo Maggioni, *Ricerche sulla composizione e sulla trasmissione della "Legenda aurea"* (Spoleto, 1995).

life when he writes of Matthias, the man who was given Judas' place within the company of the apostles.<sup>92</sup>

According to the *Legend*, there lived in Jerusalem a man named Ruben married to a woman named Cyborea. One night, after lying together, Cyborea had a dream in which she foresaw the birth of a son that would bring ruin upon the Jewish people. Terrified, she told everything to her husband. Months later a son was born to them and, filled with dread but not wanting to kill the child, they decided to put him in a basket and set it afloat in the sea. The basket arrived at the island of Iscariot, whereupon the child took later that name. The queen of that island, who was childless, found the basket as she was walking along the beach and concealing the baby, she pretended to be pregnant. When the appropriate time came, she took Judas as her son. No one, not even the king, knew about it. However, not long afterwards, the queen conceived by the king and gave birth to a son.

It is at this moment in the story, when a natural and legitimate child is confronted with a non-biological one, that Jacobus tells us something about the significance of biological relatedness. It happened that as the two boys grew up, they used to play together, and Judas frequently mistreated his stepbrother and made him cry. The queen witnessed this and knowing that Judas was not her son (*Judam ad se non pertinere sciens*), she often chastised him. Things did not improve, and eventually the truth came out; namely, 'that he was not the queen's child but a foundling' (*Judas non verus reginae filius, sed inventus aperitur*). We do not know how this happened, but since the queen was the only one that knew the truth about Judas, a reader may assume that not wanting to have her natural child mistreated at the hands of one who was not her true son, she decided to disclose Judas' real identity. The moment Judas learned about it, he felt 'bitterly ashamed' (*vehementer erubuit*) and, in secret, killed the king's son

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<sup>92</sup> For what follows, see Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda aurea*, 183-85.

‘who had been thought to be his own brother’ (*fratrem suum putativum*).<sup>93</sup> The rest of the story has an oedipal character. It relates Judas’ flight to Jerusalem, his work at the service of Pilate, his biological father’s murder and marriage to his mother, the discovery of their incestuous relationship, his penance and discipleship with Christ, betrayal, and death.

Several things can be learned from this account. The narrative conveys the primacy of blood ties. A natural son should be treated more favourably than a non-biological child. The queen, despite having raised Judas, knows that he ‘does not belong to her.’ Moreover, once the truth about his identity is disclosed, Judas feels angry and ashamed (*erubuit*, lit. blushed for shame). The discovery of his true origin and low status prompts an awareness or anticipation of dishonour and disgrace.<sup>94</sup> Judas immediately stops thinking of his brother as his real brother and kills him. Any emotional connection seems to fade away when the characters are confronted with an absence of biological ties. It is instructive to note that in the early versions of Judas’ story, which in Latin dates to the twelfth century, there is no mention of the incident of the foster-brother and the concomitant fratricide.<sup>95</sup> This confirms, alongside Sara McDougall’s recent work, that illegitimacy was not as problematic before the thirteenth century as scholars have been prone to assume.<sup>96</sup> Jacobus’ *Legend*, on the other hand, places a strong emphasis on the dangers associated with illegitimacy and, in particular, with raising a child who is not one’s biological offspring.

Obviously, in medieval times as well as in our own day, it was less likely for a woman rather than a man not to know whether a child was hers. But that does not mean that this could not be believed to happen. Interventions of a supernatural nature could produce such a

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<sup>93</sup> In several ways this story looks like a reversal of the literary motif of the hero cast away in infancy. See Donald B. Redford, “The Literary Motif of the Exposed Child (Cf. Ex. ii 1-10),” *Numen* 14, no. 3 (1967).

<sup>94</sup> On the connection of personal self-perception, public status, honour, and shame, see Donald Ward, “Honor and Shame in the Middle Ages: An Open Letter to Lutz Röhrich,” *Jahrbuch für Volksliedforschung* 27 (1982); and Mary C. Flannery, “The Concept of Shame in Late-Medieval English Literature,” *Literature Compass* 9, no. 2 (2012): 167, who describes shame as ‘an intensely personal emotion that involves a new awareness of one’s self, [...] arising from actual or potential exposure to others through various kinds of showing and telling.’

<sup>95</sup> Baum, “The Mediaeval Legend of Judas,” 492.

<sup>96</sup> Sara McDougall, *Royal Bastards: The Birth of Illegitimacy, 800-1230* (Oxford, 2016).

situation in which neither parent was aware of the true identity of their child. This is the case of the famous changeling motif of medieval literature in which a child is replaced by a human-like creature.<sup>97</sup> One of the most famous versions of this motif involves the stealing of children from couples by the devil. John Boswell has argued that changeling stories encouraged the belief that the devil might replace a good child with a bad one, excusing parents from feeling responsibility towards troublesome children.<sup>98</sup> For our present purposes, changeling stories are interesting because they present a situation in which biological ties are clearly absent and this affords us an opportunity to observe how medieval society reacted to this circumstance.

One such story is the life of St Laurentius as it features in the *Deeds of the Romans*, a thirteenth-century collection of Latin tales used for preaching.<sup>99</sup> The story relates how the pagan king and queen of *Hispania* could not conceive any children. However, after deciding to follow the advice of a Christian hermit, the queen conceived and gave birth to a most beautiful child. As a result, the royal couple decided to be baptised and many others in the kingdom followed their example. The devil, seeing that because of Laurentius' birth many souls were being lost to him, decided to transform himself into a child and send Laurentius to a forest nearby Rome where he hung him from a tree in a basket.<sup>100</sup> Laurentius was found and adopted by Pope Sixtus who raised him as a Christian and treated him as a son (*in filium impetravit*). At the same time, the devil, posing as the royal child, behaved so badly that the king and queen apostatised and started to persecute Christians.

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<sup>97</sup> Rose Alice Sawyer, "Child Substitution: A New Approach to the Changeling Motif in Medieval European Culture" (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 2018).

<sup>98</sup> See Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers*, 378-81. See also Shahar, *Childhood*, 132-4; and Richard Firth Green, *Elf Queens and Holy Friars: Fairy Beliefs and the Medieval Church* (Philadelphia, 2016), 110-146. Also relevant is the famous case study by Jean-Claude Schmitt, *The Holy Greyhound: Guinefort, Healer of Children since the Thirteenth Century*, trans. Martin Thom (Cambridge, 1983).

<sup>99</sup> The story can be found in *Gesta Romanorum*, ed. Hermann Oesterley (Berlin, 1872), 612-14. Of uncertain origin, this collection of Latin tales was highly influential in the work of many late medieval authors like Chaucer, Hartmann von Aue, and Boccaccio. See Albrecht Classen, "Transculturality and the Gesta Romanorum in Light of Hartmann von Aue's Gregorius and Heinrich Kaufringer's Verse Narratives," *The Comparatist* 41 (2017).

<sup>100</sup> The custom of leaving abandoned children hanging on a tree – usually upside-down by the legs – was intended to protect the child from wild animals and to attract attention. See Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers*, 272, 393, 417.

It so happened that when Laurentius went to school, the rest of the students laughed at him saying that he ‘did not proceed from true seed’ (*de vero semine non provenisti*) and that he was not legitimately conceived (*tu non es de legitimo thoro procreatus*). Because he had been abandoned as an infant, everyone assumed that he was an illegitimate child. This made Laurentius very sad and he decided to search for his parents. One day, while he was conducting his search in the forest, he spent the night on the top of a tree so as to avoid the attacks of wild animals. Suddenly, he heard voices below. A group of devils were meeting and boasting about their achievements. Laurentius heard one of the devils saying that he had taken the place of the son of the king and queen of *Hispania* and had left the child hanging in the forest. After hearing this, Laurentius went to *Hispania* to look for his father the king. He encountered instead some of his soldiers who wanted to kill him because he was a Christian. But just as they were about to do so, the queen appeared and ‘seeing the child of her own blood, and feeling maternal love for him, she did not allow them to execute him’ (*sed regina cum videbat puerum sanguis naturalis et maternalis dileccio in tantum eam cogebat quod non permisit eum occidere*). Instead, Laurentius was taken to the presence of the king who ‘immediately after laying his eyes on him as he entered the palace started to love him with paternal love’ (*cum pallacium intraret et videret juvenem, ille cito incepit eum diligere amore paterno*). The devil’s imposture was revealed and the king and queen, together with many of their subjects, returned to the Christian faith.

Although we might safely assume that the primary goal of the story was not to discuss the significance of biological ties and descent, the encounters of Laurentius with the king and queen betray contemporary sensibilities towards them. Laurentius’ mother recognises ‘the child of her own blood,’ without the need of any words or a divine intervention. Blood reveals to her the truth about the child’s identity.<sup>101</sup> Laurentius’ meeting with his father, on the other

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<sup>101</sup> On the medieval idea of blood as ‘a locus of inalienable authenticity’ or as a witness of truth, see Bettina Bildhauer, “Medieval European Conceptions of Blood: Truth and Human Integrity,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 19 (2013): 60-62.

hand, suggests that feelings of love naturally emerge between individuals related to each other by blood. As we will see in the fifth chapter of this dissertation, medieval scholars denoted this affective inclination ‘natural love’ and thought that it was an effect of genealogical relatedness. Finally, Laurentius was taunted at school because of his uncertain origin and birth. This uncertainty was bad not only because of his presumed illegitimacy but also because of the doubtful quality of the seed out of which he had been conceived.

In late medieval society, accusations of illegitimate birth could be particularly damning, especially when the identity of the father was called into question.<sup>102</sup> Richard F. Green has argued that in late medieval France, the words ‘changeling’ and ‘bastard’ were not just insults but taboo. They were rarely committed to writing because in patrilineal societies doubts as to one’s paternity was a serious matter and a major threat to social standing.<sup>103</sup> He provides an instructive example from an Italian source, namely that of Francesco Ordelauffi as it features in Anonimo Romano’s mid-fourteenth-century *Life of Cola di Rienzo*. The story recounts how Francesco’s son Lodovico encouraged his father to make peace with the Church, and how Francesco became angry at this and exclaimed: ‘You are a bastard (*biscione*), or else you were changed on me at the font (*mi fusti scagnato alli fonti*).’ Immediately thereafter, he stabbed his son in the back and killed him.<sup>104</sup> The insult suggests that Lodovico’s behaviour and political inclinations were so different from his father’s that he could not possibly be his biological son. Whether Francesco really believed that or not, we cannot know. But the author of the chronicle saw a clear relationship between Francesco’s doubts regarding his biological paternity and the murder of his son.

Insults, even playful ones, also illustrate the seriousness of accusations of illegitimate birth in Tuscany. Dante’s sonnet *Bicci novel* was one of a series of insulting poems exchanged

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<sup>102</sup> See McDougall, *Royal Bastards*, 58, 186-187; and Kuehn, *Illegitimacy in Renaissance Florence*, 90-91.

<sup>103</sup> Green, *Elf Queens and Holy Friars*, 119.

<sup>104</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 119-20.

with his friend Forese Donati in their youth. In the first two lines of this poem, Dante says: ‘Young Bicci, son of I don’t know who, unless I were to ask monna Tessa.’<sup>105</sup> While the first line calls into question Forese’s paternity, the second was meant to attack his mother’s honour.

### 2.3.2 Non-Biological Children in Confession Manuals

Medieval handbooks for confessors can help illustrate the feelings and reactions provoked by cases of supposition and paternity fraud. These manuals, which became increasingly popular after the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), were intended to help priests determine penances for sins in confession. Although they do not provide concrete historical examples, they describe the sort of situations that a priest was likely to hear in the confessional.

One of these manuals, the *Livre des cas*, was written around 1265 by Chiaro of Florence (c.1210-c.1270). Chiaro is a character whose life remains more or less obscure. We know that he studied law in Bologna and that after entering the Franciscan Order, he spent some time as chaplain and auditor at the papal curia. He is also remembered as a preacher in Salimbene de Adam’s chronicle.<sup>106</sup> His manual is a wonderful source because many of its questions concern the practicalities of the day-to-day life of the inhabitants of Italian city-states. Chiaro not only analyses each case according to canon and moral law, but also offers practical advice regarding the workarounds of restitution, negotiation, and conflict resolution. His writing has a flavour of personal, or at least first-hand, experience.<sup>107</sup>

In his work, Chiaro raises the case of the substitution of a child at birth (*de partu supposito*), that is, when an illegitimate child is disguised as a legitimate one.<sup>108</sup> However, the subsequent discussion makes it clear that he is referring more specifically to a case of adultery

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<sup>105</sup> Dante, *Rime*, trans. Patrick S. Diehl (Princeton, NJ., 1979), 156: ‘Bicci novel, figliuol di non so cui, s’i’ non ne domandasse monna Tessa.’

<sup>106</sup> Michele Franceschini, “Chiaro da Firenze,” in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 24 (1980), [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/chiaro-da-firenze\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/chiaro-da-firenze_(Dizionario-Biografico)/).

<sup>107</sup> For Chiaro and his work, see the introduction to Chiaro of Florence, *Le Livre des cas* & Manfredo of Tortona, *Traité des restitutions et de la diversité des contrats*, ed. and trans. Alain Boureau (Paris, 2017).

<sup>108</sup> Chiaro of Florence, *Livre des cas*, q. 32, 62.

on behalf of the woman. Chiaro suggests that this is quite a common case or, at least, that it is widely discussed by others (*multa super hoc dicta sunt a multis*). According to him, an adulterous wife should try to convince her husband to send the boy or girl to enter religious life for she should avoid her lie having negative consequences for those to whom the husband's inheritance rightfully pertains. If necessary, she must use her dowry as restitution. The most important thing is to avoid the paternal inheritance being transferred to a foreign heir (*quin hereditas transeat ad heredem extraneum*).

Chiaro's contemporary, Manfredo of Tortona, also discusses *suppositio* in a short treatise entitled *On Restitutions*.<sup>109</sup> He says it is the action whereby a woman passes off a foreign or spurious child as a legitimate one, damaging both her husband and his legitimate heirs.<sup>110</sup> Manfredo defines this case as grave matter, that is serious enough to constitute mortal sin. Yet his discussion focuses once again on the question of inheritance. He advises the mother to do anything in her power to stop the child from inheriting anything from him 'who is believed to be his father' (*quod puer non assequatur hereditatem illius qui creditur pater*). He also assumes that it might be difficult for the woman to set things right. If she is unable to stop her child from inheriting, it is her responsibility to employ her dowry to compensate the legitimate heirs.<sup>111</sup> The work of Raymond of Penyafort (c.1180-1275), who Manfredo points as his source, provides a clue to interpreting these authors' focus on inheritance matters or why they seem far more concerned with the financial and legal repercussions of supposition and paternity fraud than with their moral and religious dimensions.

Raymond's *Summa de poenitentia* was the most popular handbook for confessors in the late Middle Ages and is likely also a source for Chiaro's work. Raymond presents the following case scenario: a woman who is not able to conceive from her husband, decides to conceive by

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<sup>109</sup> Manfredo of Tortona, *Traité des restitutions*, 292, 294.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 292: 'quando mulier supponit sibi alienum partum in dampnum mariti vel legitimorum heredum vel quando habet spurium privatim [privatum] ex alio homine quem maritus credit proprium.'

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

another man and to pretend that the child is her husband's legitimate offspring depriving the lawful heirs, namely the male relatives of her husband, from their inheritance.<sup>112</sup> Raymond says that the woman must do anything to avoid that the legitimate heirs will suffer from her deceitful behaviour (*vt legitimi haeredes non fraudentur haereditate paterna*). The easiest course of action, we may think, would be to reveal the truth to her husband. However, he advises against this as it might lead to war, homicide, adultery, and many other dangers.<sup>113</sup> Instead, he encourages the woman to reveal her mischief to her parish priest in confession and, with this one's licence, to the bishop. These should then inquire whether the spurious child is a God-fearing man. If he is, in the presence of the woman, they may reveal the whole truth to him and advise him to enter religious life or to move to a far-away region so as to not receive anything from the goods of him whom he thought to be his father.<sup>114</sup> If, while believing to be the legitimate son of that man, he had consumed some of the aforementioned goods, he should restore them and ask for forgiveness from his putative father (*petat remissionem a viro mulieris*) or, if this has died, from his legitimate heirs. However, if it is too dangerous to reveal the truth to the child, then the woman should do penance and try to restore the goods by any means at her disposal using her dowry and whatever gifts her husband leaves her after his death.<sup>115</sup>

Raymond discusses this case within a section titled 'On plunderers, thieves, and arsonists' (*De raptoribus, praedonibus, et incendiarijs*). Thus, from the perspective of authors of confession manuals, paternity fraud was considered first and foremost an offence perpetrated

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<sup>112</sup> Raymond of Penyafort, *Summa de poenitentia, et matrimonio cum glossis Ioannis de Friburgo* (Rome, 1503, repr. Farnborough, 1967), lib. 2, 10, 175-177, 175a: 'Item quid de muliere, quae cum non posset impregnari a viro supposuit se adultero, a quo grauidata est; vel supposuit sibi alienum partum, & ita legitimi heredes priuantur haereditate propter spurium, vel suppositum, qui creditur filius, & haeres?'

<sup>113</sup> As Sara McDougall has recently shown, contrary to modern imaginings, 'women involved in extramarital sex were more had far more to fear outside the courtroom than within.' See McDougall, 'Judging Sexy Women in Late Medieval France,' *postmedieval* (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41280-022-00227-1>.

<sup>114</sup> Raymond of Penyafort, *Summa de poenitentia, et matrimonio*, 176b: 'ambo simul inquirant diligenter, & caute, si ille spurium, vel suppositus sit homo spiritualis, & timens Deum; quo inuento, vocent eum secrete, & coram muliere, & si videbitur expedire, recepto prius sacramento ab ipsa, quod calumniose non procedat, & etiam ab illo, quod factum sacretum teneat, poterunt reuelare sibi, & inde consulere, vt ingrediatur religionem, vel transferat se ad longinquam regionem, vt sic nihil percipiat de bonis illius, quem credebat esse patrem suum [...]'

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 177a-177b.

against a man's property. Hence the focus on inheritance matters. The sexual sin of adultery and the lie regarding the true origin of a child were dealt separately under different rubrics.

Yet their insistence on the need to ensure that the man's property will not be alienated from the rightful heirs, that is his biological sons and male relatives, underscores the relationship between inheritance and descent. Likewise, the fact that these authors were mainly concerned with the bastard sons of mothers demonstrates that inheritance strategies also informed the significance of biological ties. Girls were not exempted from the danger of being alienated from their families, but since daughters could not inherit, their illegitimacy does not seem to have posed such a threat to the paternal estate. And bastard children of fathers, whether boys or girls, did not pose a problem because they were entitled to their fathers' inheritance by reason of their blood.

Indeed, although illegitimacy often brought dishonour and shame to a child, the widespread practice of legitimation in late medieval Tuscany suggests that many fathers were happy to leave property to their illegitimate children, irrespectively of their wives' opinion who were in little position to complain.<sup>116</sup> Hence, the problem was not illegitimate children *per se*, but rather spurious children who were suspected of not being the biological offspring of their fathers. As Bernard of Parma (d. 1266) explains in his commentary on the *Decretals*, a *nothus* – a child born out of female adultery – is like a *nota febris*, a fever which resembles a quartan fever but is not. Such a child might look like a 'real son' (*verus filius*) but he is not and should be set apart from every honour.<sup>117</sup>

The importance of male biological descent to establishing family identity was further underscored by Florentine legislation. The Florentine *Statute of the Podestà* of 1325 asserts that

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<sup>116</sup> Kuehn, *Illegitimacy in Renaissance Florence*, 87-104 on the relationship between honour and illegitimacy, and 140-141, 173 on the decision to raise bastards and legitimate them as an exclusively male prerogative.

<sup>117</sup> *Decretales D. Gregorii Papae IX* (Rome, 1582), lib. I, tit. IX, cap. 10, col. 236: 'Nothus de adulterio natus. Sic dicitur nota febris, quae affligit sicut quartana, & tamen non est vera quartana. Sic nothus quia videtur verus filius, sed non est. Et omnes tales illegitimi ab honoribus repelluntur.'

the members of a *consorteria*, that is the patrilineal clan, are all those who can trace their descent through the male line.<sup>118</sup> And the statutes of 1415 defined the *consorteria* as all those consanguineous relatives who can traced their descent through the male line, including spurious children, presumably when these were biologically related to their father.<sup>119</sup> This strong identification of biological, social, and legal paternity explains why the authors of these manuals always emphasise that in cases of adultery the wife's husband is not the real father of her son (*illius qui creditur pater, quem credebat essem patrem suum, a viro mulieris*). Although in practice some fathers might have felt differently about such children, it is implicitly assumed that even after many years of cohabitation, and despite any intimate relationship that might have developed between them, if the man were to find out that a child was not his biological offspring, he would had him immediately rejected as heir.

Reading medieval handbooks for confessors, cases of misattributed paternity look like an exclusively female-generated problem, presumably because a woman can conceal the identity of her children to her husband in ways that are impossible to replicate for a man. Yet in his treatise, Chiaro raises another, more intricate, case. A man is married to a sterile woman who cannot conceive, and he has 'disagreeable and vexing brothers' (*fratres carnales inodiosos et infestos*). He does not want his brothers to inherit his goods and agrees with his wife to pretend that they are expecting a child and when the appropriate time comes, to take a child from another woman and pretend is their own so as to bequeath him all his goods. The man asks whether this course of action would be sinful.<sup>120</sup> Chiaro's answer is divided in two parts. First,

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<sup>118</sup> *Statuto del podestà dell'anno 1325*, in *Statuti della repubblica fiorentina*, ed. Romolo Caggese, vol. 2 (Florence, 1999), 152: 'qui sint de eadem stirpe per lineam masculinam.'

<sup>119</sup> *Statuta populi et communis Florentiae: publica auctoritate, collecta, castigata et praeposita anno salutis MCCCCXV* (Fribourg, 1778-83), vol. 1, lib. II, rub. 66, 162: 'consanguineos [et] coniunctos, seu consortes, qui consortes sint de eadem stirpe per lineam masculinam, etiam spurios, usque in infinitum.' As Thomas Kuehn has noted not all *spurii* were not the biological offspring of their fathers, though when a child was not biologically related to his father, he was invariably considered *spurius*. *Spurii* could be those (1) whose father was uncertain, (2) whose father was not proper, e.g., a priest, and (3) children of a slave. See Kuehn, *Illegitimacy in Renaissance Florence*, 36, 40-46.

<sup>120</sup> Chiaro of Florence, *Livre des cas*, q. 131, 216, 218. For a discussion of casuistry in these and similar cases, see Emily Corran, *Lying and Perjury in Medieval Practical Thought: A Study in the History of Casuistry* (Oxford, 2018), 94-117.

he answers according to civil law (*iura civilia*) and says that if the brothers are able to prove that there has been a substitution, they would without any doubt recover the inheritance from his brother. But according to divine law (*ius divinum*), Chiaro says that unless the man is moved by hatred, in which case he would be sinning, he will be acting right because every man should be free to establish whomever he wants as his heir and to leave to whomever he wants his goods (*quia licet unicuique, quemcumque gratificat, sibi heredem instituere et ei bona qua relinquere*).

In this second case, husband and wife work together to deceive the rest of their family. Chiaro suggests a conflict between two normative systems: civil law, that establishes inheritance rights on biological facts, and divine law, according to which a man is not compelled to leave his inheritance to his kin. Yet it is important to remark that this is only as long as the man has no children, his brothers are disagreeable and vexing, he knows that the child is not his, and he is willing to leave him all his goods. An altogether different picture emerges when the man does not know, or cannot be told, that the child is not his biological son. In these cases, as we have seen, authors of confession manuals assume that every mean should be employed to ensure that the child is alienated from the man's estate.

With regards to this final case, we might ask: why did the couple not simply adopt a child? In the next part, I hope to answer this question and show how medieval forms of adoption did not diminish, but rather further underscored, the significance of biological ties and descent within the late medieval family.

## 2.4 Natural and Adoptive Children

Roman law recognised two types of legal adoption: *adoptio* and *adrogatio*. To explain what each of these two legal devices did, it is first important to understand the structure and nature of the Roman family. In Roman times, *familia* referred to the group of persons who were subject to the authority of the *pater familias*, the head of household. Thus, Ulpian (d. 228) defined the

family as those persons who by nature or by law are subject to the *patria potestas*.<sup>121</sup> This included individuals, such as slaves, that we would not conceive of as members of the medieval family.<sup>122</sup> Children were under the *patria potestas* of their father until this died or, in the case of daughters, until marriage.<sup>123</sup> Sons and other agnate descendants could only be freed from paternal authority through emancipation, but this effectively disinherited them and removed them from the *familia*. Although intertwined with biological realities, therefore, the Roman family was a legal institution, its composition structured by legal rules and, in particular, by the authority of the *pater familias*.

The *adoptio* inserted an individual who was already under the *patria potestas* of one man into the family of another. As a result, the adoptee took on his new *pater's* name and became a lawful heir *ab intestate*, that is, he could claim the inheritance of his *pater* if this one died without testamentary dispositions. On the other hand, the *adrogatio* placed an individual who was not under the *patria potestas* of any man under a new *pater*. But in all other respects it had the same effects. Both, at any rate, created a relation of filiation where there was none, imposing a legal fiction to supply the deficiencies of reality. In Rome, the rights of an adoptive son could not be challenged because adoption was not only a legal act, but an act inscribed in law, publicly recognised and sanctioned.<sup>124</sup> Usually, the purpose of adoption was the production of an heir. However, in some cases, individuals were adopted – or actively sought to be so – in order to share the ancestry of another man. This was especially expedient in the political realm and was done by several emperors to associate themselves with former ruling dynasties.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> *Dig.* 50. 16. 195, 917: 'iure proprio familiam dicimus plures personas quae sub unius potestate aut natura aut iure subiectae.'

<sup>122</sup> David Herlihy, "The Making of the Medieval Family: Symmetry, Structure, and Sentiment," *Journal of Family History* 8, no. 2 (1983), 117-19.

<sup>123</sup> *Inst.* 1. 9. 3, 4.

<sup>124</sup> See Hugh Lindsay, *Adoption in the Roman World* (Cambridge, 2009).

<sup>125</sup> Mireille Corbier, "Divorce and Adoption as Roman Familial Strategies," in *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome*, ed. Beryl Rawson (Oxford, 1991).

Most modern scholarship agrees that adoption vanished around the sixth century with the disappearance of Roman law and Roman administrative structures.<sup>126</sup> Nonetheless, the term itself survived in various contexts. In theological writings, ‘adoption’ was employed to designate the relationship between man and God, for St Paul (*Galatians* 4:4-5) had affirmed that by virtue of Christ’s redemption men had become adoptive children of God (*ut adoptionem filiorum reciperemus*). Moreover, when the Church started to institutionalise the use of christening godparents in baptism it termed their sponsorship as an adoption (*adoptare in baptismo*). As biological parents had engendered the child according to nature, the Church saw itself as a mother, begetting her children into a new, spiritual, family. Godparents collaborated in this spiritual rebirth and were responsible for nurturing the child in the faith. Godparenthood helped establish valuable and long-lasting social and political relationships which some scholars have aptly called ‘spiritual kinship.’<sup>127</sup>

What is surprising is that despite the reintroduction of Roman law in Western Europe in the twelfth century, the Roman practice of adoption was only recovered much later. Mireille Corbier has denominated this phenomenon a ‘*rupture médiévale*.’<sup>128</sup> Thus, in the fifteenth century, Leon Battista Alberti lamented the fall into disuse of adoption, no doubt influenced by the fact that he was an illegitimate son and had been alienated from his father’s property.<sup>129</sup> For many this is perplexing. Adoption is one of the most effective means to solve a problem that high rates of infant mortality inflicted upon pre-modern societies, namely the lack or loss of an

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<sup>126</sup> See, for example, Robert Bartlett, *Blood Royal: Dynastic Politics in Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 2020), 78-79. From the fifth century, it was already common to place abandoned children in monasteries. Oblation became an alternative to adoption for many children who would have been otherwise abandoned. However, by the thirteenth century, canon law had condemned irrevocable forms of oblation. There was a growing awareness of the inappropriateness of parents making lifetime decisions on behalf of minors who had not yet reached the age of reason and consent. See Nora Berend, “La subversion invisible: la disparition de l’oblation irrévocable des enfants dans le droit canon,” *Médiévales* 26 (1994).

<sup>127</sup> See Joseph H. Lynch, *Godparents and Kinship in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton, 1986); and Bernhard Jussen, *Spiritual Kinship as Social Practice: Godparenthood and Adoption in the Early Middle Ages* (London, 2000).

<sup>128</sup> Mireille Corbier, “Adoptés et nourris,” in *Adoption et fosterage*, ed. Mireille Corbier (Paris, 1999), 7.

<sup>129</sup> Leon Battista Alberti, *I libri della famiglia*, ed. Ruggiero Romano and Alberto Tenenti (Turin, 1969), 151: ‘E pare a me questa utilissima, licita consuetudine, adottarsi degli altri già nati figliuolo, ove a te quegli nascere non possano.’ See Thomas Kuehn, “Reading between the Patriline: Leon Battista Alberti’s *Della Famiglia* in Light of His Illegitimacy,” in *Law, Family, and Women: Toward a Legal Anthropology of Renaissance Italy* (Chicago, 1991).

heir.<sup>130</sup> A problem which was even more accentuated in societies with patterns of vertical inheritance like Tuscany.<sup>131</sup> Why was adoption not employed?

To answer this question, and to shed some more light on the significance of biological ties and descent within the late medieval Florentine family, I will examine the lives of children abandoned in Florentine hospitals. What was the fate of these boys and girls? Could they be integrated into another family? If so, what was the status that the law accorded to them? And were they regarded on a par with biological offspring?

#### 2.4.1 The Children of San Gallo

The Ospedale di Santa Maria a San Gallo was one of the many institutions of social care that emerged in late medieval Florence. Its origin dates back to 1218, the year in which Guidalotto di Volto dall'Orco erected several buildings outside the city walls of Florence and donated them to the Roman Church with the explicit request that they would be used to assist the poor and pilgrims.<sup>132</sup> Since its inception, San Gallo was ruled by friars who by order of pope Alexander IV, in 1256, were incorporated into the Order of the Regular Canons.<sup>133</sup> It became an important Florentine institution not only for its charitable work but also because of the many indulgences that popes bestowed upon it, its benefactors, and visitors. Throughout the fourteenth century, it was customary for many Florentines to visit San Gallo on the first Sunday of every month.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> A well-known case is that of Francesco Datini, the wealthy merchant of Prato. Because his wife could not conceive, he lacked a legitimate heir and left most of his fortune to a charitable foundation established in his name. See Origo, *The Merchant of Prato*, 366.

<sup>131</sup> See Jack Goody, "Adoption in Cross-Cultural Perspective," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 11, no. 1 (1969): 76-77.

<sup>132</sup> Luigi Passerini, *Storia degli stabilimenti di beneficenza e di istruzione elementare gratuita della città di Firenze* (Florence, 1853), 659-674; Gaetano Bruscoli, *Lo spedale di Santa Maria degli Innocenti di Firenze dalla sua fondazione ai giorni nostri* (Florence, 1900), 3-17.

<sup>133</sup> These friars, therefore, followed the rule of St Augustine. See Passerini, *Storia degli stabilimenti*, 663.

<sup>134</sup> Franco Sacchetti, *Il Trecentonovelle*, ed. Emilio Faccioli (Turin, 1970), novella 75, 193: 'Chi è uso a Firenze, sa che ogni prima domenica di mese si va a San Gallo.' And Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Vittore Branca (Turin, 1980), giornata IV, novella 7, 549: 'La Simona disse che le piaceva, e dato a vedere al padre, una domenica dopo mangiare, che andar voleva alla perdonanza a San Gallo.'

For most of its history, San Gallo was not exclusively devoted to the care of children. It did function as an orphanage, but it also assisted the ill, the poor, and pilgrims.<sup>135</sup> In 1462, the Guidalotti family became extinct. The commune took control of San Gallo and transferred it to the silk guild of Florence (*Arte di Por Santa Maria*).<sup>136</sup> However, due to dire financial problems, a year later it was absorbed within the Hospital of the Innocents, a new orphanage for the care of abandoned children founded in 1445 by the said guild thanks to a generous donation given by Francesco Datini, the famous merchant of Prato.<sup>137</sup>

Part of San Gallo's documentary records have been preserved within the archive of The Innocents. They show that children arrived at San Gallo for a wide variety of reasons. About a third were abandoned because of their illegitimacy, particularly if their parents were of very disparate social status.<sup>138</sup> In many cases they were the offspring of household slaves.<sup>139</sup> A few children were abandoned because they were the sons or daughters of religious men and women. Many others were left in San Gallo because of the poverty or death of their parents. In many of these last cases, leaving a child in San Gallo could be a temporary measure and not intended as a permanent arrangement.

Some children were left underneath the front porch, while others were brought by someone. When children were laid at the door, their parents often left a paper note or *scrittolina* in between their clothes with a few pieces of information: whether they had been baptised,

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<sup>135</sup> The first document that attests to San Gallo's care of orphaned children is from 1294. See ASF, Provvisioni 4, f. 8r (May 19, 1294).

<sup>136</sup> Passerini, *Storia degli stabilimenti*, 670-1.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 685-694; Bruscoli, *Lo spedale di Santa Maria degli Innocenti*, 15-17.

<sup>138</sup> Tomoko Takahashi, "I bambini abbandonati presso lo spedale di Santa Maria a San Gallo di Firenze nel tardo medioevo (1395-1463)," *Annuario dell'Istituto Giapponese di Cultura* 24 (1991): 78-9; Lucia Sandri, "Modalità dell'abbandono dei fanciulli in area urbana: gli esposti dell'ospedale di San Gallo di Firenze nella prima metà del XV secolo," in *Enfance abandonnée et société en Europe. XIVe-XXe siècle* (Rome, 1991); and Richard C. Trexler, "The Foundlings of Florence," *History of Childhood Quarterly* 1, no. 2 (1973), 270 and table 4. On the relationship between disparate social status and abandonment, see Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers*, 419-420.

<sup>139</sup> For the phenomenon of female slaves in late medieval Tuscan households, see Iris Origo, "The Domestic Enemy: The Eastern Slaves in Tuscany in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," *Speculum* 30, no. 3 (1955); and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, "Women Servants in Florence during the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," in *Women and Work in Preindustrial Europe*, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt (Bloomington, IN., 1986).

their name if they had one, and the reason for their abandonment (Fig. 3). If they were not baptised, children usually carried a small bag of salt hung around their necks and were administered the sacrament.<sup>140</sup> They were then sent to be wet nursed with a family in Florence or in the Tuscan countryside, although some remained in San Gallo with an in-house nurse.

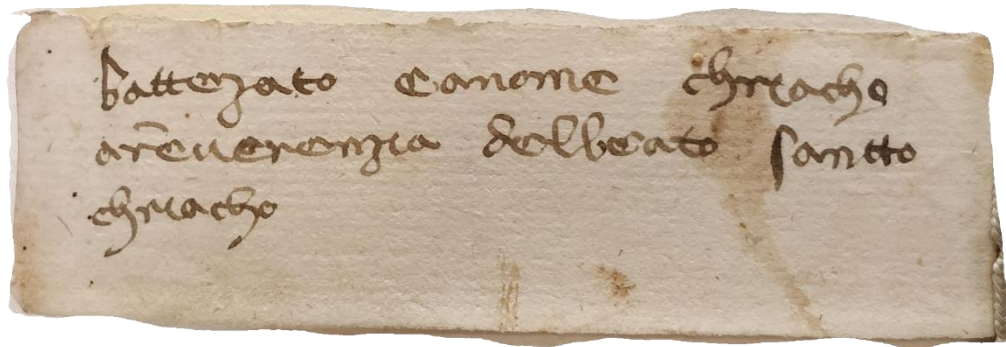


Fig. 3 – Scrittolina in AOIF, 11048, inter fols. 21v-22r

Many children died soon after their arrival at San Gallo. But those who survived infancy were likely to face one of three different outcomes. Some were placed within a family as foster children. If they were boys, they undertook an apprenticeship, while girls usually worked as household servants. In both cases the child was promised sustenance and education and, at the appropriate time, money to get married. Other children were given in adoption. And others were eventually reclaimed by their parents or relatives. A comparison of these three different scenarios can shed light on the status and treatment of natural and non-natural children as well as the significance of biological ties.

#### 2.4.2 Foster, Adoptive, and Biological Parents

On Sunday the fourth of October 1401, a child of about a year of age was left under the front porch of San Gallo. The priors baptised him and gave him the name Domenicho. Domenicho spent the next few years away from the hospital, being wet nursed by three different women and living with their families. The last payment recorded by the hospital to a wet nurse,

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<sup>140</sup> Trexler, "The Foundlings of Florence," 269; and Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers*, 205-6.

Benedetta, dates from 1405. This suggests that Domenicho stayed with her family even after weaning. Presumably not long afterwards, the child returned to San Gallo and remained there until in the year 1409 he was sent to Bernaba di Niccholo, a wool worker of the popolo of San Romeo of Florence, to be his apprentice. A short note in Domenico's file summarises the terms of the contract drawn between Bernaba and the priors (Fig. 4). Bernaba promised to take care of the child, to nourish and dress him, and to teach him his or another profession. On the left margin of the same page, written in a different hand, we read that 'the said child returned to the hospital on the 8 of January 1413 and that he [Bernaba] does not have him anymore.'<sup>141</sup>

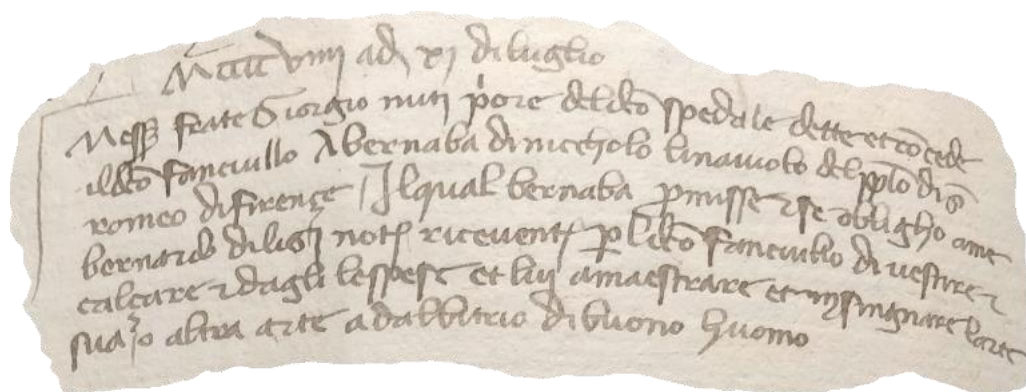


Fig. 4 – Marginal Note in AOIF, 11048, fol. 65v

It is instructive to compare Domenicho's case with that of a girl who arrived at San Gallo a year before.<sup>142</sup> On Friday the 12 of March 1400, a one-month-old baby was left underneath the front porch of San Gallo. She was found the next morning swaddled in cloths, was taken in, baptised, and given the name Ghirigora. Ghirigora stayed in San Gallo until the end of March. On April 2, she was given to Riccha of Pagolo da Norcia, a wet nurse who lived in Piazza Santa Croce. Riccha received a series of cloths, diapers, and other items for the child's care that she had to restore to San Gallo once the child was weaned. In addition, she was

<sup>141</sup> AOIF, 11048, fol. 85v. Similar apprenticeship contracts can be found in 11047, fol. 215v, and 224v.

<sup>142</sup> AOIF, 11048, fols. 34v-36r.

promised a monthly salary of 40 *soldi piccioli*. Her first payment dates from the 8th of April while the last one was made on the 23 of June 1403. Batista di Ser Franciescho, *camarlingho* of San Gallo, recorded that at the time of this last payment the couple did not keep Ghirigora any longer in their house ‘on a salary’ (*a salario*). The child did not immediately make her way back to San Gallo. Instead, she remained with her wet nurse and her husband who said that they were happy to keep her for longer, ‘because of the great love they had for her’ (*per lo grande amore che le portauano*).

Sometime in between December 1404 and May 1407 Ghirigora returned to San Gallo. On the first of June 1407, now a girl of seven years of age, she was adopted by Manetto di Pucci of the popolo of San Piero of Florence. A copy of the contract of her adoption was added to the girl’s records. It is written in a different hand, probably that of Bernardo di Ligi, the notary who redacted it (Fig. 5). The document has the characteristics of a notarial act with a list of witnesses at the end. It says that the prior, Giorgio Nuti, gave Ghirigora as his adoptive daughter (*in sua figliuola adottiuā*) to Manetto. Manetto promised to nourish, dress, and teach her good customs and ‘to raise her as if she were her natural and legitimate daughter’ (*et facesse amaestrare sicome fosse sua figliuola legittama et naturale*). In addition, he promised to provide her with a dowry of 70 lire when she reached the age to marry. For his part, the prior warned Manetto not to send her away. And indeed, since this contract constitutes the last appearance of the girl in the records of San Gallo, we can assume that she spent the rest of her life as his daughter.

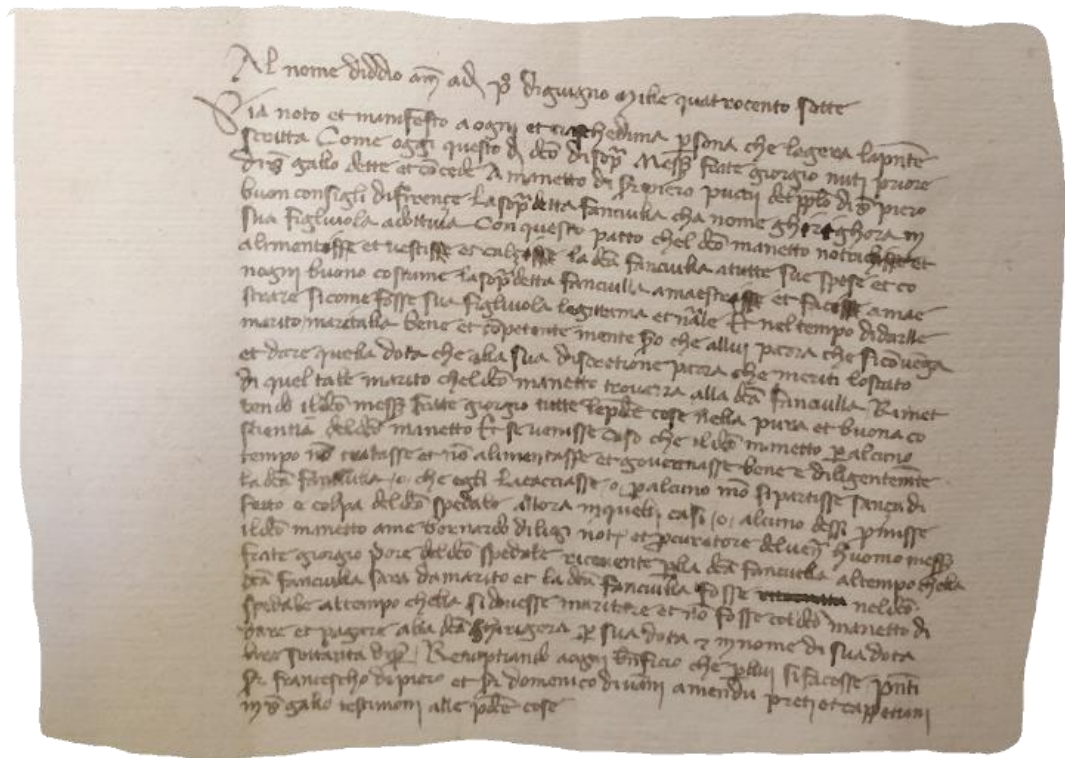


Fig. 6 – Contract of Adoption in AOIF, 11048, fol. 36r

Ghirigora’s story raises a number of interesting questions. First of all, why does the contract specify that Manetto should treat the girl ‘as if she were her natural and legitimate daughter’? The expression ‘as if’ (*sicome*) seems to suggest that an adoptive child was analogous to, but different from, a natural child, that is, one’s biological offspring. If so, in which ways were adopted children different? In order to answer this question, it is useful to consider Manetto’s intentions: why did he want to adopt a child and, in particular, a girl? If adoption was a means to find an heir, given the inheritance strategies of late medieval Florentines, would it not have been better to adopt one of the many boys that San Gallo cared for?

In 1991, Tomoko Takahashi acknowledged the existence of adoptions among San Gallo’s records.<sup>143</sup> However, subsequent scholars have argued that although the word ‘adoptive’ (*adottivo*) appears in the documentation, these were not proper adoptions; at least

<sup>143</sup> Takahashi, “I bambini abbandonati,” 65. The same has been found in France, see Roger Aubenas, “L’adoption en Provence au Moyen Âge (XIVe-XVIe siècles),” *Revue historique de droit français et étranger*, 4 series, 13 (1934).

not in their classical Roman sense. In a 2015 article, Lucia Sandri called them ‘private contractual adoptions.’ She argues that they were something closer to the Roman device of the *adoptio minus plena* or the modern affiliation. They did not have a public character, were not legally sanctioned by the government, and did not entitle the adoptee to inherit *ab intestate*. As a result, they were not intended to provide an heir but rather to make a de facto arrangement to satisfy the desire of paternity of an individual.<sup>144</sup>

Thus, although the relationships between adoptive parents and children were regularly mapped onto biological ones, the law maintained a distinction between natural and non-natural offspring. In many respects, the latter were expected to be treated as the former, but they did not enjoy the same status. Parents could leave some property to their adoptive children via testamentary dispositions or with a donation *inter-vivos*, but they would not have been able to alienate all their property from their biological kin. As a result, it would have made little difference for Manetto whether the child was a boy or a girl.

Likewise, the fact that these forms of adoption were not intended to produce an heir helps explain why some children were adopted by women. A child named Pasquino was left in San Gallo in 1402 and a few months later he was given to a certain lady called Gismonda degli Aciuioli, from a well-known and respectable family. Orlando Cavalcanti, of another noble Florentine family, came to the hospital to formalise the contract promising on her behalf that she would treat the child as her son (*e disse chella detta Madonna Gismonda tratterebbe il detto fanciullo chome figliuolo*). On the same day, Gismonda’s lady-in-waiting, Antonia, arrived to pick up the boy.<sup>145</sup> Another interesting case is that of a woman of lower social status, Nencia, one of the many wet nurses employed by San Gallo. Having lost her own children, Nencia

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<sup>144</sup> Lucia Sandri, “Forms and Contracts of Adoption in Florence’s Hospital of the Innocents between the Late Middle Ages and the Modern Era,” in *Adoption and Fosterage Practices in the Late Medieval and Modern Age*, ed. Maria Clara Rossi and Marina Garbellotti (Rome, 2015), 160.

<sup>145</sup> AOIF, 11048, fols. 103v-104r.

approached the priors crying (*faccendo grande pianto*) and saying that she wanted to keep as her own the boy she had been given to nurse. The priors agreed and let her keep him.<sup>146</sup>

Often, adoption records contain expressions that served to emphasise that adoptive children were not only different from, but were also not expected to be treated exactly as, natural ones. A three-year-old boy named Giouanni was given to a certain Romolo di Giouanni dalla Camera who promised to ‘keep him and treat him as his spiritual son’ (*tenere e tractare per suo figliuolo spirituale*).<sup>147</sup> Although similar expressions were used for godparents, ‘spiritual’ in this context seems to denote simply the lack of biological relation between Romolo and his adoptive son. Another child left in Santa Maria della Scala – a Florentine institution which also welcomed abandoned children – was given to Meo di Matteo da San Miniato who wanted to keep him ‘as his dear son’ (*chome suo caro figliuolo*) and to make him ‘his adoptive son’ (*il uole fare suo figliuolo adottino*).<sup>148</sup> Whether the words ‘spiritual’ and ‘adoptive’ had been actually uttered by Romolo and Meo or chosen by the priors themselves we cannot know.

What we know is that not every abandoned child was adopted or sent away as an apprentice. Sometimes, children were returned to their families. This second set of cases also helps illustrate the significance of biological ties because the priors had a very different set of attitudes to adoptive and biological parents.

First of all, biological parents and other blood relatives could recover their abandoned children without too much trouble and without the need of any formal proceedings. A girl by the name of Nastasia, who was left in San Gallo on the fourth of May 1399, was given back to a lady (*rendemmola a una donna*) a week later because she said that she was her mother (*pero che disse essere sua madre*).<sup>149</sup> Another child, Filippo, was left in San Gallo on the 18 of February of

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<sup>146</sup> AOIF, 11050, fol. 59v.

<sup>147</sup> AOIF, 11048, fol. 88v.

<sup>148</sup> AOIF, 11086, fol. 25v.

<sup>149</sup> AOIF, 11048, fol. 14v.

1399 and on May 1404 he was given back to Pagolo di Franciescho da Chasteldimonte because they ‘found out that he was his father’ (*il quale secondo che trouammo era suo padre*).<sup>150</sup> Mattheo was given back to his father Antoniello because it was revealed that he was his son (*pero che si fecie chiarezza essere suo figliuolo*).<sup>151</sup> On the 10 of May 1400, a one-year-old girl was left in San Gallo. She had a paper note that said that she was called Papera and that she was the daughter of a slave called Lucia. Two years later, on May 16, 1402, the officials of San Gallo were approached by a widow, Thomasa, who said that Papera was the daughter of her deceased son Michele. With the consent of the prior, Papera was given back to her grandmother ‘because she said the girl was the daughter of her son’ (*pero che disse essere stata figliuola del figliuolo suo*).<sup>152</sup>

The pre-eminence of biological ties was such that in some cases children were recovered by their families even after they had been given in adoption. Domenicho was left on the 4 March 1396 in San Gallo. About four years later, on March 2, 1400, the prior, at the request of ser Viviano, notary of the *Riformagioni* of Florence, gave the child to messer Bernardino Giambechari, a Doctor of Law from Bologna, and his wife Margherita. They promised to treat him ‘as their own son’ (*come loro propio figliuolo*). However, six days later, Domenicho was taken away from the couple by some men who claimed to be his relatives.<sup>153</sup> Having heard this, the priors returned the child to San Gallo, presumably to formally inquire into these claims. Two weeks later they gave messer Bernardino and his wife another child who was returned a year later to the hospital because he was dumb.<sup>154</sup>

Yet even if the priors were willing to give children back to their families, they were not willing to give children away to anyone who claimed them as theirs. They had to be convinced that they truly were their kin. In one of the entries, we read about a child named Benedecto

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<sup>150</sup> AOIF, 11048, fol. 5v.

<sup>151</sup> AOIF, 11048, fol. 137v.

<sup>152</sup> AOIF, 11048, fol. 40v.

<sup>153</sup> AOIF, 11047, fol. 143v.

<sup>154</sup> AOIF, 11047, fol. 172v.

who was given back to his father Jacopino di Guadagno because he had been able to show that it was his son (*et questo facemmo per chegli a dette chiareza esse suo figliuolo*).<sup>155</sup> Another case illustrates how this identification process might have worked in practice. Antonio was left as a new-born baby in San Gallo on 17 January 1404. The following day, he was sent to Montefuscoli to be wet nursed by Barthola di Sanctino. He spent three months there before being returned to San Gallo on May 3. That same day he was sent to another wet nurse, Mea di Marcho di Simonemo of the popolo of Saint Martino. Soon afterwards, a certain Stefano e Andrea, son of messer Piero de Falataste of Orbinieto, arrived at the hospital and claimed that the child was the son of his brother Giouanni. Stefano identified himself as a blood-relative of the child's father (*fratello charnale*) and was questioned by the priors. He was able to provide enough evidence to prove that Antonio really was his nephew. In particular, he was able to provide information regarding the arrival of the child at San Gallo (*ci fecie fede quando il fanciullo fu posto a San Gallo*) and 'of all the signs written above' (*e dette tutti e segni soprascritti*).<sup>156</sup> These 'signs' were the cloths, tokens, and messages with which children had been found when they were left under the front porch. Their role in helping identify a child's relatives explains why the priors recorded them with great care.<sup>157</sup>

At times, however, there was no need to proceed with such caution because the parents themselves brought their children to San Gallo. In 1407, a woman called Margherita left Caterina, a six-month old girl, in San Gallo. Sometime later Margherita returned and the prior gave the child back to her.<sup>158</sup> Peraccino e Sancti, a new-born baby, was left in San Gallo by a certain Cece Cozzone who said that the child was his son. The boy was sent to Chiara di Franciescho of San Miniato al Monte to be wet nursed. About four years later, in April 1408,

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<sup>155</sup> AOIF, 11048, fol. 161v.

<sup>156</sup> AOIF, 11048, fol. 148v: 'E di questo ci fecie fede quando il fanciullo fu posto a San Gallo. E dette tutti e segni soprascritti. E similmente ce ne fecie fede don Marcho che teneua affitto la badia di Fiesole.'

<sup>157</sup> In some cases, parents left paper notes with the specific request to record information so as to facilitate identifying the child later on. See AOIF, 11049, fol. 165r, and 11050, fol. 164r.

<sup>158</sup> AOIF, 11048, fol. 217rv.

Giorgio Nuti, prior of San Gallo, gave him back to Teglia, brother of the said Cece Cozzone.<sup>159</sup> Many of these parents left their children in San Gallo because they could not take care of them as a result of poverty, death of a spouse, or war. In 1396, Franciescha, a five-month-old girl, was left in San Gallo because her father had died and her mother was so poor that she could not feed her.<sup>160</sup> On 13 September 1397, two brothers were left by their father Nanni di Lorenzone because of the war and his poverty (*per pouerta e per la guerra*). About a month later, he returned to San Gallo and claimed his children back.<sup>161</sup> The case of Piero is also interesting. His father left him in San Gallo because he was very poor (*per grande pouerta et bisongno*). He had four other children and was struggling to feed them. A year later, the father came back to reclaim his son and the prior gave the child back to him ‘without payment’ (*gli rende senza niuno premio*).<sup>162</sup>

Indeed, except in cases of extreme poverty, the priors expected parents and relatives to pay for the expenses that children had incurred while they cared for them. After all, as we have seen, supporting a child’s material needs was regarded as the natural responsibility of any parent.<sup>163</sup> For example, on the 14 of October 1397, the prior Giorgio Nuti gave back a five-year old girl to Antonio di Morello da Prato, who had been canon of the Florentine Badia, because he said that the said girl was his daughter (*che disse il detto Antonio la predetta fanciulla era sua figliuola*). Since the girl had been wet nursed and nourished (*balita et alimentata*) in San Gallo up until that day, Antonio promised to give the hospital a corresponding amount of money to

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<sup>159</sup> AOIF, 11048, fol. 152v.

<sup>160</sup> AOIF, 11047, fol. 126r: ‘essere in tanta pouerta che non poteua alimentare la decta fanciulla.’

<sup>161</sup> AOIF, 11047, fol. 163v. The war was probably the second Florentine-Milanese war (1397-98). Similar examples are that of a girl left by her mother because her husband was in prison and she needed to work as a wet nurse (11050, fol. 170r), that of a widow woman who also left her child to work as a wet nurse (11050, fol. 150r), and that of a boy left by his father who was sick and had been abandoned by his wife (11050, fol. 22r).

<sup>162</sup> AOIF, 11047, fol. 104v.

<sup>163</sup> These payments were recorded on a different notebook and cross-referenced with the entries in a child’s record. See, for example, AOIF 11056, fol. 36v, and 47r. As Boswell noted, there were precedents for this in Roman times. One of the laws in Quintilian’s *Institutio oratoria* established that ‘anyone who can identify an abandoned child may reclaim him if he repays the cost of his rearing (*expositum qui agnouerit, solutis alimentis recipiat*).’ Quoted in *The Kindness of Strangers*, 61-62.

help raise other abandoned children.<sup>164</sup> However, it is important to note that even if parents were expected to pay, nothing in the documentation of San Gallo suggests that the priors ever felt authorised to deny children to their kin.<sup>165</sup> On the third of August 1430, an infant boy was left in San Gallo. He was left with a paper note that said that he had been born on July 30 of a Venetian slave, that he was baptised, and that his name was Spinello e Domenicho. Sometime later – we do not know exactly when – Spinello was given back to ser Riccho degli Spinelli and his brother who promised to pay all the expenses incurred by the child. Yet the prior made a note in the child’s records, saying: ‘I am certain they won’t do it.’<sup>166</sup>

### 2.4.3 Illegitimacy, Male Blood, and Abandonment

Many of the children abandoned at San Gallo were illegitimate. Often, the reason they were abandoned was shame. For example, on September 29, 1418, a certain Amadore di Domenico di Bartolo of San Prognano, in the Mugello, left a new-born baby boy in San Gallo saying that it was the child of his sister who had not yet gone to live with her husband and wanted to leave the child out of shame (*uerghonia*).<sup>167</sup> Most likely, the boy was the fruit of an adulterous relationship. On May 28, 1437, another baby boy was left in San Gallo with a note written by his father saying that he was sending the child not because he was poor or could not feed him, but chiefly because of fear of scandal (*ma e maggiormente timore di schandalo*).<sup>168</sup> In some cases shame or fear of scandal are implicit in the circumstances of a child’s abandonment, for instance when the child is identified as the offspring of religious men and women.<sup>169</sup> There were also many abandoned children who were the offspring of household slaves. Since the

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<sup>164</sup> AOIF, 11047, fol. 225r: ‘El predetto Antonio promise sopra a la sua fede dare al decto spedale quella quantita di denari che allui fusse possibile per aiutare a leuare uno de fanciulli che sono gitati al detto spedale, et questo promise per che allui fu renduta la detta fanciulla alimentata nel detto spedale cinque anni o circha.’ Similar cases can be found in AOIF, 11047, fol. 22r, and 11049, fol. 185v.

<sup>165</sup> Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers*, 127-128, 223 explains that this right had been considerably abridged in the later Roman Empire and denied completely in the Early Middle Ages.

<sup>166</sup> AOIF, 11050, fol. 72v: ‘Spinello il decto fanciullo per che si fe fede chera della casa degli Spinelli si rende a ser Riccho e al suo fratello e promissono di restituire ogni spesa, sono certo che nollo faranno.’

<sup>167</sup> AOIF, 11049, fol. 43v.

<sup>168</sup> AOIF, 11050, fol. 221v.

<sup>169</sup> AOIF, 11050, fol. 82v (daughter of a monk); and fol. 28r (the daughter of a nun brought by an old man who ‘did not want to reveal his name’ (*uno uecchio che non uolse dire il suo nome*)).

name of their fathers, who were often members of well-established Florentine families, was not usually concealed, it seems that practical considerations rather than shame were the reason for their abandonment.<sup>170</sup> Some of these children were probably sent to San Gallo so as to keep their slave mothers as in-house wet nurses. In such cases, the priors expected the fathers to pay for the costs incurred by their children. Thus, when the son of a slave of Domenico d'Antonio Allegri was left in San Gallo, the said Domenico promised that he would pay out of his own pocket the cost of a wet nurse.<sup>171</sup>

Illegitimate children could also be abandoned for financial reasons. Inasmuch as legitimation was meant to produce an heir, abandoning an illegitimate child was a way of removing a potential heir from the family environment. This was more frequently the case if the father thought that the child was not his. Indeed, both men and women could abandon their illegitimate offspring. But while women had to put up with the bastard children of their husbands if these decided to keep them, men could always abandon any child who they knew or suspected not to be theirs. The son of Agnola, wife of Stefano di Domenico, was left in San Gallo because her husband said that the boy was not his son (*diceva il detto fanciullo non essere suo figliuolo*).<sup>172</sup> On February 10, 1420, two siblings, a boy and a girl, were left in San Gallo because their mother's husband did not want them. He said that they were not his children (*il marito suo non gli uolse per che diceua non essere suoi figliuoli*).<sup>173</sup>

Were all these children illegitimate? Not always. Sometimes, children were abandoned because their father had died, and their mother had remarried. On March 20, 1432, a certain Antonia left in San Gallo a girl who was the fruit of her previous marriage with Mone di Mugello. Her new husband, Andrea, the girl's stepfather, did not even want to see the child (*el*

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<sup>170</sup> AOIF, 11050, fol. 38r (a girl from the slave of Filippo Piaceti whose father was Andrea Capponi); and fol. 29r (a boy from the slave of Giovanni di Bicci de Medici).

<sup>171</sup> AOIF, 11050, fol. 146r.

<sup>172</sup> AOIF, 11048, fol. 120v.

<sup>173</sup> AOIF, 11049, fol. 87v.

*patrigno nolla uoleua uedere*).<sup>174</sup> In many other cases, the unwillingness of husbands to raise the children of their wives' previous marriages is not explicitly stated, but it is implicit when the reason given for a child's abandonment is simply the fact that the woman had remarried.<sup>175</sup> Once again, this suggests that for Florentines the problem was not so much that of raising an illegitimate child, but of raising a child who was not related to them, that is the fathers, by blood.

The same set of attitudes might have made Florentine fathers more reluctant to raise an illegitimate daughter. On February 18, 1425, Antonia of Arezzo left a new-born baby girl in San Gallo. She said that the child was her daughter and that the father was Pazzino di messer Palla Novello degli Strozzi. Since the latter is not introduced as her husband, we may assume that they were not married. According to Antonia, Pazzino did not want the child not because he thought she was not his but simply 'because she was a girl' (*el padre nolla uoleua perche era femina*).<sup>176</sup>

The life of Giovanni Morelli – with which I opened this chapter – similarly reminds us of the importance of the male line. Giovanni attributed his sufferings and difficulties growing up to his father's premature death. Yet, in practice, his precarious situation was not caused so much by his father's death as by his father's orphanhood. The Spini would have not considered him part of their family because he was not the child of their son, Giovanni's stepfather. And his maternal grandparents would have not considered him part of their lineage, because he was

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<sup>174</sup> AOIF, 11050, fol. 130v. Another more intricate case is that of a girl who was abandoned because the husband had left her wife and he did not want to receive the girl as his own. But we do not know if the said girl was her daughter or whether he suspected her to be someone else's. See AOIF, 11049, fol. 56v.

<sup>175</sup> AOIF, 11050, fol. 101r: 'la madre se rimaritata,' and 11050, fol. 119r: 'per che non n'aveua diche uiuire ne chi la gouernasse, ella madre sera rimaritata.' Similar cases appear in Philip Gavitt, "'Perché non avea che la ghovernasse.'" Cultural Values, Family Resources and Abandonment in the Florence of Lorenzo de' Medici, 1467-85," in *Poor Women and Children in the European Past*, ed. John Henderson and Richard Wall (London, 1994), 76-78, 87.

<sup>176</sup> AOIF, 11050, fol. 15v.

related to them through their daughter. In medieval Florence, worse than a father's death was to lack agnatic kin.

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Throughout this chapter, we have seen how in late medieval Florence family identity was informed by ideas of biological descent. Didactic and religious literature emphasised the naturalness of parent-child relationships as well as the belief that neither nurture nor education, but generation and blood were the defining features of parenthood. Attitudes to wet nursing, for their part, demonstrate that late medieval Florentines cared about their children's blood, but more so about their fathers' than their mothers'.

Cases of supposition, paternity fraud, and misattributed paternity have illustrated the significance of biological ties within the family and, in particular, the reactions of contemporaries to their absence. When children turned out not to be who their parents thought they were, that is their biological offspring, legal and affective relationships were seriously affected and even severed. Here too, ideas of male blood and descent can be seen to reinforce patrilineal values and structures. The need to ensure that only biological sons would inherit from their fathers underscores the strong identification of generation and inheritance, that is the biological and the social perpetuation of the lineage.

Nowhere can this identification be appreciated more clearly and with more nuance than among the records of abandoned children in Florentine hospitals. If adoption in its classical form resisted to re-emerge in late medieval Florence it was not because the Church discouraged its practice to facilitate the transfer of family property into ecclesiastical hands,<sup>177</sup> or to downplay natural kinship in favour of spiritual ties that it could better control,<sup>178</sup> but

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<sup>177</sup> Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge, 1983), 48-82.

<sup>178</sup> Anita Guerreau-Jalabert, "Nutritus/oblatu: parenté et circulation d'enfants au Moyen Âge," in *Adoption et fosterage*.

rather because the family was regarded primarily as a natural institution, one which the law could only at best imitate, never replace. This is why adoption could not make an adoptive child an heir *ab intestate*. Or why adoptive parents could not acquire the *patria potestas* over their children.<sup>179</sup> Or why the right of kin to reclaim a child was unquestioned. Or why Florentine husbands were reluctant to raise a child they knew or suspected not to be theirs.

Medieval forms of adoption remind us that while late medieval society recovered Roman law, it also developed new attitudes towards it that were alien to the Roman world. As the work of Yan Thomas has demonstrated, medieval jurists assumed that law must follow nature (*ars imitatum naturam*): anything that went against the natural order could not be regarded as either good or licit and, therefore, could not be made into law.<sup>180</sup> Hence, a bastard could be legitimated because he was related by blood to his father. A slave could be emancipated, that is made free, because slavery was a legal not a natural condition.<sup>181</sup> But it was impossible for the law ‘to rewrite the facts of birth and blood.’<sup>182</sup> Thus, as Franck Roumy has shown, medieval jurists, both civil and canon, made efforts to degrade adoptive filiation in relation to natural filiation which was founded on marriage and procreation. In so doing, they contributed to establishing the superiority of blood ties over legal ones. A *filius adoptivus* was never regarded as on a par with a natural son and adoption, due to its fictive character, was rejected.<sup>183</sup>

Indeed, as Christiane Klapisch-Zuber has noted, legitimation was always preferred to adoption. It was better to legitimate a bastard child than to make an heir out of a stranger: the

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<sup>179</sup> And not, as some scholars have insinuated, because it was retained by the priors. See Philip Gavitt, *Charity and Children in Renaissance Florence: The Ospedale degli Innocenti, 1410-1536* (Ann Arbor, 1990), 243.

<sup>180</sup> Yan Thomas, “Les artifices de la vérité en droit commun médiéval,” *L’Homme* 175-176 (2005). See also, Marta Madero, “Penser la tradition juridique occidentale. Une lecture de Yan Thomas,” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 67, no. 1 (2012).

<sup>181</sup> *Inst.* 1. 3. 2, 2: ‘Servitus autem est constitution iuris gentium, qua quis dominio alieno contra naturam subicitur.’

<sup>182</sup> Thomas Kuehn, Lada Hordynsky-Caillat, and Odile Redon, “L’adoption à Florence à la fin du Moyen Âge,” *Médiévales* 35 (1998), 81.

<sup>183</sup> Roumy, *L’adoption dans le droit savant du XIIe au XVIe siècle*. This development fits the thesis advanced by Richard W. Southern in *Medieval Humanism and Other Studies* (Oxford, 1970), namely that late medieval humanism recovered nature as an ordering principle of society.

belief in the transmission of hereditary characteristics made it more advisable.<sup>184</sup> This is why when Alberti wrote about adoption, he affirmed that one should ensure that the child is ‘of good blood’ (*di buon sangue*).<sup>185</sup> And when Petrarch (1304-1374) discussed adoption in his *Remedies for Fortunes*, he warned of the danger implicit in the choice of an adoptive child, a danger which could be turned into an advantage if one knew how to choose well.<sup>186</sup>

In the next chapter, I will explore what such a choice could entail by examining the ways in which late medieval society thought about descent in relation to class and character, that is, in relation to noble and ignoble bodies.

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<sup>184</sup> Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, “L’adoption impossible dans l’Italie de la fin du Moyen Âge,” in *Adoption et fosterage*, 332: ‘Le sang et la transmission des vertus héritées restreignent la marge d’inconnu et le risque que porte avec lui l’extraneus.’

<sup>185</sup> Alberti, *I libri della famiglia*, 152.

<sup>186</sup> Petrarch, *De’ rimedii dell’una e dell’altra fortuna. Libro I*, ed. Giovanni Dassaminiato (Bologna, 1867), 304-306: ‘se il figlio adottivo è cattivo non hai cagione di ritorcere alcuna colpa di ciò contro alla moglie tua nè contra la fortuna, ma contra te medesimo, d’aver male saputo conoscere chi tu pigliavi per figliuolo.’

## Nobles Bodies and Natural Nobility

In the previous chapter, I have shown how blood and descent were important to establishing family identity and relationships in late medieval Tuscany. In this chapter, I will take the late medieval nobility as a case-study to show how biological descent could also constitute an important component of social identities.

Modern scholarly research on the idea of nobility has traditionally been structured around two conceptual axes: birth and virtue. These two ways of thinking about nobility can be traced back to classical antiquity. Nobility of birth (*nobilitas generis*) denoted the dignity and status of individuals who belonged to aristocratic – or in Rome, patrician and senatorial – families.<sup>1</sup> Nobles by birth not only enjoyed power, wealth, privileges, and titles but also the social prestige accorded to families with ancient origins, illustrious ancestors, and a distinguished record of political officeholding. Nobility of virtue (*nobilitas animi*), on the other hand, was equated with moral excellence and personal merit, and it was always attractive to *novi homines*, that is upwardly mobile individuals whose families could boast neither a long history nor a renowned ancestry.

As elsewhere in Europe, before the thirteenth century the Tuscan aristocracy – the feudal lords in the countryside and the upper ranks of urban citizens who had formed the first consular governments – was a rather loosely united group.<sup>2</sup> It is in relation to their performance of certain political and military functions and the holding of landed property that the

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Beck, “Republican Elites: Patricians, Nobles, Senators, and Equestrians,” in *A Companion to the Political Culture of the Roman Republic*, ed. Valentina Arena and Jonathan Prag (Hoboken, NJ., 2022), 352-356.

<sup>2</sup> See Chris Wickham, *Sleepwalking into a New World: The Emergence of Italian City Communes in the Twelfth Century* (Princeton, 2015), 11-14. For Florence, see Enrico Faini, “Il gruppo dirigente fiorentino dell’età consolare,” *Archivio Storico Italiano* 162, no. 2 (2004).

historiography has grouped its members together.<sup>3</sup> By the late twelfth and during the first half of the thirteenth century, however, rapid economic growth and deep political and social transformations saw the members of this aristocracy coalescing around a new social identity: the nobility. The term ‘noble’ (*nobilis*) which was previously employed mainly as an adjective, began to be used more and more as a noun, and our sources start to refer to the ‘nobility’ (*nobiles*) as a group.<sup>4</sup>

It is in this context that the debate about the true nature of the nobility was revitalised in the Latin West, for nobility began to constitute a criterion for membership into a new class. The question was, apparently, a simple one: which of the two, birth or virtue, was more important? However, from the mid-thirteenth century, new ways of thinking about nobility underpinned by ideas of biological descent emerged. A new form of nobility, namely ‘natural nobility’ (*nobilitas naturalis*), began to be predicated of individuals on the belief that bodies could be noble too.

Noble bodies blurred some of the distinctions between birth and virtue. On the one hand, a noble body was considered to facilitate the acquisition of virtues and, therefore, to constitute some sort of moral advantage. On the other hand, because the physiological characteristics of noble bodies were judged to be hereditary, nobility of virtue was subsumed

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<sup>3</sup> On the importance of landownership and seigneurial rights in the early communal aristocracy, see Philip Jones, “Economia e società nell’Italia medievale. La leggenda della borghesia,” *Storia d’Italia. Annali* 1 (Turin, 1978). On the particularities of civic elites, see Paolo Grillo, “Aristocrazia urbana, aristocrazia rurale e origini del comune nell’Italia nord-occidentale,” *Storica* 19 (2001); and Maria Elena Cortese, “Aristocrazia signorile e città nell’Italia centro-settentrionale (XI–XII sec.),” in *I comuni di Jean-Claude Maire Vigueur: percorsi storiografici*, ed. Maria Teresa Caciorgna, Sandro Carocci, and Andrea Zorzi (Rome, 2014). On the central role of the collectivity of mounted knights in the government of the Italian communes, see Jean-Claude Maire Vigueur, *Cavaliers et citoyens: Guerre, conflits et société dans l’Italie communale, XIIe-XIIIe siècles* (Paris, 2003), 217-9, 337-362.

<sup>4</sup> David Crouch, *The Image of Aristocracy in Britain, 1000-1300* (London, 1992), 2-4; Georges Duby, *The Chivalrous Society*, trans. Cynthia Postan (Berkeley, 1980), 183: ‘from now on the aristocracy saw itself as the nobility – as a caste closed to all who could not claim good breeding.’ Keen, *Chivalry*, 144 speaks of ‘a shared consciousness of noble descent’ [substituting knighthood] as glue of the aristocracy in the thirteenth century. And Constance B. Bouchard, *Strong of Body, Brave and Noble: Chivalry and Society in Medieval France* (Ithaca, NY., 1998), 2-3, affirms that the ‘nobility did not in the eleventh and twelfth centuries constitute a distinct or even clearly definable group... Nothing like modern consciousness of social class existed before the fourteenth century.’ See also Martin Aurell, *La noblesse en occident (Ve-XVe siècle)* (Paris, 1996), 5; and Joseph Morsel, “Inventing a Social Category: The Sociogenesis of the Nobility at the End of the Middle Ages,” in *Ordering Medieval Society. Perspective on Intellectual and Practical Modes of Shaping Social Relations*, ed. Bernhard Jussen and trans. Pamela Selwyn (Philadelphia, 2001).

within the more general category of *nobilitas generis*, that is nobility of lineage or descent. As a result, the idea of the noble body transformed the debate over the true nature of nobility and made it evolve from the opposition between two concepts into a more nuanced discussion about how each of them two, birth and virtue, contributed in different but complementary ways to making someone noble.

I have three goals in this chapter. First, I want to show how the concept of natural nobility – determined by bodily complexion and descent – shaped scholastic and literary discussions on the true nature of nobility in the period 1250-1400. Secondly, I want to argue that the idea of natural nobility informed not only the identity of noble individuals but also the that of the nobility as a group of descent. Finally, I will explore how the concept of natural nobility mapped onto the social perception of the Florentine nobles as a class.

### 3.1 The True Nature of Nobility

Towards the end of the fourteenth century, the Florentine Lapo da Castiglionchio (1316-1381) wrote a long letter to his son Bernardo. In this letter, Lapo explains to his son what he believes to be noble is, whether it is better to be born so, and the origin and history of their family. In a series of short passages, he outlines the composition and social distinctions of an Italian city-state. He says that when the term '*comune*' is employed, it is to refer to the citizen population as a whole, that is, noble and ignoble individuals alike. The term '*popolo*' instead comprises only those he calls plebeians, that is those who are not noble. Finally, he affirms that in some parts 'those whom we have called nobles, are also called *magnati*, as in Florence.'<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Lapo da Castiglionchio, *Epistola o sia ragionamento di messer Lapo da Castiglionchio* (Bologna, 1753), 11: 'questo nome plebe che noi diciamo popolo, contiene ogni persona eccetto li nobili.' Ibid., 25: 'è vero che in questa città d'Italia diciamo comune, e popolo; e quando diciamo comune, si comprendono tutti li nobili e ignobili; quando si dice popolo, si comprendono li plebei e ignobili solamente.' Ibid., 29: 'In alcune parti i predetti i quali di sopra ho detto nobili, si chiamano Magnati, come a Firenze; in altro luogo s'appellano Maggiori, come a Vinegia.'

Although apparently private in character, Lapo's letter was responding to a long-standing debate on the true nature of nobility that since the mid-thirteenth century had been occupying Italian, and more generally, European scholars.<sup>6</sup> As noted, this debate focused on the opposition of the concepts of birth and virtue.<sup>7</sup> The vast majority of medieval scholars concurred that *true* nobility was ultimately determined by an individual's virtuous behaviour, and not by any goods, dignities, or privileges derived from birth. They were well aware that the status and privileges enjoyed by rich and powerful lineages did not always correspond to moral worthiness. Thus, writing about the true nature of nobility became a form of expressing social criticism, discontent with social hierarchies as well as with the behaviour of the aristocracy. It questioned whether the dignity and prerogatives associated with the noble status could justly be considered a birth right or, instead, something that any individual could merit. Objections were raised, for instance, to the legitimacy of establishing nobility of birth as a requirement to access certain institutions or positions within them.<sup>8</sup> This criticism of the aristocratic elite became all the more compelling in the rapidly growing and commercially successful city states of central and northern Italy where an upwardly mobile, prosperous, and ambitious class of merchants, lawyers, and humanist scholars had become politically more assertive. The conflict between this new class and the old aristocratic elite meant that in cities like Florence, the debate over the true nature of the nobility was at the heart of a highly politically charged situation.

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<sup>6</sup> See Alessandro Valori, "Tra orgoglio aristocratico e identità comunale: Lapo da Castiglionchio sulla "vera nobiltà,"" *Archivio Storico Italiano* 154, no. 3 (1996).

<sup>7</sup> There is a long summary of this tradition in medieval Italy in Guido Castelnuovo, "Revisiter un classique: Noblesse, hérédité et vertu d'Aristote à Dante et à Bartole (Italie communale, début XIIIe-milieu XIVe siècle)," in *L'hérédité entre Moyen Âge et époque moderne*. See also Castelnuovo, *Être noble dans la cité: les noblesses italiennes en quête d'identité (XIIIe-XVe siècle)* (Paris, 2014); Andrea Robiglio, "The Thinker as a Noble Man (*bene natus*) and Preliminary Remarks on the Medieval Concepts of Nobility," *Vivarium* 44, no. 2 (2006); and Claudio Donati, *L'idea di nobiltà in Italia. Secoli XIV-XVIII* (Rome, 1988). For Tuscany, see Lansing, *The Florentine Magnates*, 212-228.

<sup>8</sup> On nobility of birth as a requirement to access military orders, see Murray, *Reason and Society*, 320-1. For his part, Jean Gerson (1363-1429) wrote his *De nobilitate* to defend the policy that high positions within the Church's ecclesiastical hierarchy should be reserved for those of noble birth. See Jean Gerson, *Tractatus de nobilitate*, in *Ouvres complètes*, ed. Palémon Glorieux, vol. 9 (Paris, 1973).

Debating the true nature of nobility was not a medieval invention. There was a long tradition in classical moral thought and stoic philosophy concerned with similar questions. Authors like Cicero, Boethius, Seneca, Juvenal, and Sallust had been suspicious of noble birth, and in their work late medieval scholars found the idea that virtue and personal merit, and not lofty birth, determined *true* nobility.<sup>9</sup> Following this tradition, the French Dominican William Perault (c.1190-1271) forcefully derided noble birth in his *Summa de vitiis* (c.1236-47).<sup>10</sup> In a chapter devoted to the vice of pride, he establishes an opposition between nobility of flesh (*nobilitas carnis*) and nobility of mind (*nobilitas mentis*) and provides ten reasons to despise the former. He says that all human beings are descended from Adam and Eve and that the physical matter we inherit from our ancestors (*materia quam a parentibus contrahit*) is but an ‘unclean and reprehensible thing,’ a ‘sack full of garbage.’ Nothing, in other words, one should be proud of. He claims that nobility of flesh among men is externally less visible than among dogs, and that the turpitude of the body is the only heirloom from our ancestors. All nobility, he concludes, resides in the soul of man (*vera nobilitas animi est*).<sup>11</sup> In another of his works, the *De eruditione principum* (c.1265), Perault affirms that it is a mistake to think that someone is noble because of someone else’s nobility, that is his parents or ancestors.<sup>12</sup>

Early Florentine humanists such as Brunetto Latini (1220-1294) and poets like Dante (1265-1321) similarly claimed that *true* nobility resided in virtue and rebuked those who prided themselves in the noble condition of their birth: those who thought they were nobles because they were from an ancient stirps, or because of their family’s powerful connections, marriage

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<sup>9</sup> See, for instance, Boethius in *De consolazione philosophiae*, ed. Claudio Moreschini (Munich, 2000), 3, 6,7, 72: ‘Iam vero quam sit inane, quam futile nobilitatis nomen, quis non videat? quae si ad claritudinem refertur, aliena est; videtur namque esse nobilitas quaedam de meritis veniens laus parentum.’ See also David W. T. C. Vessey, “The Stoics and Nobility: A Philosophical Theme,” *Latomus* 32, no. 2 (1973); and Marvin L. Colker, ““De Nobilitate Animi,”” *Mediaeval Studies* 23 (1961): 47-49.

<sup>10</sup> Irene Zavattono, “La vera nobiltà secondo Guglielmo Peraldo,” in *La nobiltà nel pensiero medievale*, ed. Andrea Colli, Francesca Bonini, and Alessandro Palazzo (Fribourg, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> William Perault, *Summae virtutum ac vitiorum*, vol. 2, ed. Rodolphe Cluyt (Paris, 1648), 291a-b.

<sup>12</sup> William Perault, *De eruditione principum*, in Thomas Aquinas, *Opera omnia*, vol. 27, ed. Stanislas Édouard Fretté (Paris, 1875), I, 4, 395a.

alliances, great buildings, possessions, and lordships.<sup>13</sup> In light of all this, we may ask: how would Lapo's association of the *magnati* with the nobility have struck his contemporaries?

Throughout medieval Europe, the term 'magnate' (*magnas*) was used to denote the highest strata of the landed aristocracy. But in the last decades of the thirteenth century in Florence, it acquired a more precise meaning. A series of legislative measures initiated in the 1280s and culminating in the Ordinances of Justice of the years 1293-1295 singled out the *magnati* as a group of powerful, violent, and proud individuals. They were excluded from certain key political offices and subjected to various forms of legal and economic sanctions.<sup>14</sup> The *magnati* displayed what the government of the commune saw as a dangerous and threatening behaviour. They oppressed the *popolani*, the middle class of merchants, shopkeepers, craftsmen, and artisans. They abused church property. Their continuous involvement in private and public forms of violence gave rise to political instability and factional strife. As a result, the *magnati* were primarily perceived as the enemies of the common people and a threat to the common good.<sup>15</sup>

If Florentines had believed that nobility had anything to do with virtue, the *magnati* would have been far from deserving the title of nobles. And yet, they were often referred to as 'nobles and powerful' (*nobiles vel potentes*) individuals. The chronicler Dino Compagni (1246-1324) is perhaps one of the best spokesmen of the *popolani*'s scorn and resentment towards the magnate class. In his chronicle of Florence, Compagni expresses his condemnation for the

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<sup>13</sup> Brunetto Latini, *Li livres dou tresor*, ed. Spurgeon Baldwin and Paul Barrette (Tempe, Arizona, 2003), II, 54, 208: 'Et cis hom est apelés nobles par les nobles euvres de vertu, & de ce nasqui primierement la noblece des jentils jens, non pas [de lor] ancestre; quar a estre de chetif [cuer] & de aute lignee est ausi come de pout de terre qui est covert de fin or por dehors;' and Dante, *Convivio. A Dual-Language Critical Edition*, ed. and trans. Andrew Frisardi (Cambridge, 2018), IV, 8.9. Similar views were being expressed elsewhere in Europe, see Charity C. Willard, "The Concept of True Nobility at the Burgundian Court," *Studies in the Renaissance* 14 (1967).

<sup>14</sup> See Gina Fasoli, "Ricerche sulla legislazione antimagnitizia nei comuni dell'alta e media Italia," *Rivista di storia del diritto italiano* 12 (1939).

<sup>15</sup> On the magnates' violent and abusing behaviour and their conflicts with the common people, see Lansing, *The Florentine Magnates*, 164-191; John M. Najemy, *A History of Florence, 1200-1575* (Oxford, 2006), 57-95; and J. K. Hyde, "Contemporary Views on Faction and Civil Strife in Thirteenth- and Fourteenth-Century Italy," in *Violence and Civil Disorder in Italian Cities, 1200-1500*, ed. Lauro Martines (Berkeley, 1972).

*magnati* and their disruption of the city's peace. In particular, he denounces messer Corso Donati, the leader of the Black Guelphs and the ultimate example of a magnate. In a famous passage of the second book of his chronicle, Compagni compares him with Catiline, the great Roman conspirator, drawing attention to Corso's own status as the greatest enemy of the Florentine republic, 'the most beautiful and famous daughter of Rome.'<sup>16</sup> But on the other hand, he does not shy away from acknowledging Corso's impressive figure and nobility:

A knight in the mould of Catiline the Roman, but more cruel; noble of blood (*gentile sangue*), handsome of body (*bello del corpo*), a charming speaker (*piacevole parlatore*), adorned with good breeding (*belli costumi*), subtle of intellect (*sottile d'ingegno*), with his mind always set on evildoing (*coll'animo sempre intento a mal fare*); one who gathered many armed men and kept a great entourage, who ordered many arsons and robberies and did great damage to the Cerchi [the leaders of the White faction] and their friends, who gained many possessions and rose to great heights: such was messer Corso Donati, who because of his pride was called the Baron. When he passed through the city many cried "long live the Baron," and the city seemed to belong to him. He was led by vanity and bestowed many favours.<sup>17</sup>

As we can see, Compagni seems to disregard any formal connection between nobility of birth and virtue. It looks as if, although they could both converge in one individual, they were theoretically independent from each other. To a large extent, that is how many modern scholars still think about them. However, modern scholarship has often overlooked the fact that when late medieval authors said that *true* nobility was determined by an individual's moral character this was not the same as saying that *true* nobility had nothing to do with one's birth. Indeed, the discourse was more nuanced, and birth and virtue were not necessarily two diametrically opposed ways of thinking about nobility.

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<sup>16</sup> Dante, *Convivio*, I, 3.4: 'della bellissima e famosissima figlia di Roma.' Erik Schoonhoven, "A Literary Invention: The Etruscan Myth in Early Renaissance Florence," *Renaissance Studies* 24, no. 4 (2010).

<sup>17</sup> Dino Compagni, *Cronaca fiorentina*, ed. Atto Vannucci (Florence, 1847), book II, 95, translated in Dino Compagni, *Chronicle of Florence*, trans. Daniel E. Bornstein (Philadelphia, 1986), 48-49.

### 3.1.1 Two Meanings of Noble Birth

Medieval scholars often disapproved of those who claimed to be noble simply because they were born of noble parents. Yet, their writings also suggest that noble birth could help attain virtue. As Alexander Murray has argued, medieval scholars thought that nobles had more responsibility to behave virtuously because they were equipped with extrinsic principles that facilitated an upright moral behaviour: wealth, education, the example of ancestors, a culture of honour and shame, political interests, ecclesiastical doctrine and instruction, and military vocation.<sup>18</sup> Hence, Brunetto Latini could claim that ‘nobility of birth and lordship and wealth greatly help men to be magnanimous.’<sup>19</sup> The same idea appears in the writings of Aquinas,<sup>20</sup> and lies at the heart of the strong criticism addressed against nobles who were not virtuous: they were not just ignoble, but the vilest of men.<sup>21</sup>

There is another important way, however, in which noble birth could be presented as advantageous, not by reason of extrinsic but rather of intrinsic principles. In addition to denoting an individual’s social condition, evoking someone’s noble birth could indicate his possession of a noble body. Our sources do not always make an explicit distinction between noble birth and the possession of a noble body. Yet these two dimensions can often be told apart, such as in Compagni’s description of Corso. On the one hand, Compagni enumerates certain qualities deriving from Corso’s noble birth: his charming speech and good breeding, wealth, and powerful friends. But in addition, he notes his noble blood, his handsome body,

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<sup>18</sup> Murray, *Reason and Society*, 331-349.

<sup>19</sup> Latini, *Li livres dou tresor*, II, 23, 171: ‘nobleices de naissance & seignorie & richesse aident mult a l’ome a estre magnanimes.’

<sup>20</sup> Aquinas, *Sententia Ethic.*, lib. 4 l. 9 n. 7: ‘Dicit ergo primo quod omnia exteriora bona fortunae videntur aliquid conferre ad magnanimitatem, in quantum scilicet propter ea aliqui reputantur digni honore, puta nobiles et potentes, vel divites. Omnia enim ista consistunt in quadam superexcellencia, prout scilicet nobiles excedunt ignobiles, et sic de aliis.’

<sup>21</sup> Guillelmus de Aragonia, *De nobilitate animi*, ed. and trans. William D. Paden and Mario Trovato (Cambridge, MA., 2012), pars 1, caput 4.13: ‘si filii nobilium non assimilentur parentibus in nobilitate, non solum erunt viles sed vilitatis principium et corruptores nobilitatis.’ See also, Engelbert of Admont, *Speculum virtutum*, in *Die Schriften des Alexander von Roes und des Engelbert von Admont*, vol. 2, ed. Karl Ubl (Hannover, 2004), secunda pars, cap. XIV, 142: ‘Degeneres vero sunt, qui a virtute clari generis defecerunt; qui, licet sint de claro sanguine, tamen honor debitus nobilitati propter virtutem ab ipsis indebite arrogatur et ipsis indigne persolvitur.’

and the subtlety of his intellect. None of this second group of qualities made Corso a virtuous individual and, therefore, from the perspective of medieval scholars, truly noble. But from the perspective of Compagni, they were part and parcel of Corso's noble identity.

In the remainder of this first part, I will explore the idea of a noble body, how it was conceptualised, how, according to late medieval thinkers, noble bodies could facilitate the acquisition of virtue, and how they were thought to be hereditary. This will be the first step to understand how ideas of biological descent underpinned the identity of the nobility as a class.

### 3.1.2 Noble Bodies and Nobility as Excellence

What was a noble body? A noble body was first of all a body more excellent or perfect than others. The term nobility had a wide-ranging variety of connotations and associated meanings but at its most basic level nobility meant excellence or perfection.<sup>22</sup> Virtually every treatise that discusses the true nature of nobility refers to this more fundamental sense of the term noble. For example, in the *Convivio* Dante says that nobility means in all things the perfection of their true nature.<sup>23</sup> Thus, Dante affirms that 'the baseness of each thing is inferred from its imperfection, and likewise nobility from its perfection; so that the more perfect a thing is, the nobler is its nature; and the more imperfect, the baser.'<sup>24</sup> Jean Gerson (1363-1429) defines nobility as 'the excellence of an individual among its kind.'<sup>25</sup> Similarly, an early fifteenth-century

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<sup>22</sup> Salvador Cuenca Almenar, "Ambigua nobleza: *ingenuitas*, *nobilitas* y *generositas* en la traducción de la *Ética nicomáquea* de Aristóteles de Carlos de Aragón," *eHumanista* 50 (2022): 292-294.

<sup>23</sup> Dante, *Convivio*, IV, 16.5: 'Dico adunque che, se volemo riguardo avere alla comune consuetudine di parlare, per questo vocabulo "nobilitate" s'intende "perfezione di propria natura in ciascuna cosa.'" Also, *ibid.*, 16.8: 'che generalmente questo vocabulo, cioè "nobilitate," dice in tutte cose perfezione di loro natura.'

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.2: 'E a manifestare ciò che dire s'intende, è da sapere che la viltade di ciascuna cosa dalla imperfezione di quella si prende, e così la nobilitate dalla perfezione: onde tanto quanto la cosa è perfetta, tanto è in sua natura nobile; quanto imperfetta, tanto vile.'

<sup>25</sup> Jean Gerson, *Tractatus de nobilitate*, 476: 'Nobilitas est eminentia quaedam vel principalitas vel excellentia inter alias res sui generis, habens facultatem aliquam in illas, praesertim propinquas, influendi. [...] in omni genere dominatur aliquod unum quod in illo genere primum est et nobilissimum, tam in animatis quam in anima carentibus.'

dialogic treatise on the true nature of nobility affirms that nobility ‘is nothing but a certain [type of] excellence.’<sup>26</sup>

Thinking about nobility as excellence or perfection helps us understand best what medieval people thought when they used the term ‘noble’ or ‘nobility’ because in our sources not only men, but animals,<sup>27</sup> cities,<sup>28</sup> objects,<sup>29</sup> and even sciences with respect to their subject matter can be noble,<sup>30</sup> or nobler than others.<sup>31</sup> In scholastic philosophy, different species of creatures were considered more or less noble insofar as they were more or less perfect, where perfection was sometimes understood as their proximity to God.<sup>32</sup> Angels were considered to be nobler than human beings in the order of creatures,<sup>33</sup> human beings the noblest of animals,<sup>34</sup> and the soul nobler than the body.<sup>35</sup> And because the perfection of the soul was achieved through the exercise of the virtues, true nobility was measured in terms of moral and intellectual excellence.

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<sup>26</sup> Buonaccorso da Montemagno, *De nobilitate*, in *Prose e rime de’ due Buonaccorsi da Montemagno*, ed. Guiseppa Manni (Florence, 1718), 40: ‘Nihil enim aliud est nobilitas, nisi excellentia quaedam.’

<sup>27</sup> Charles de Miramon, “Noble Dogs, Noble Blood: The Invention of the Concept of Race in the Late Middle Ages,” in *The Origins of Racism in the West*.

<sup>28</sup> See Paul Oldfield, *Urban Panegyric and the Transformation of the Medieval City, 1100-1300* (Oxford, 2019), 7, 24, 143, 162-3, and 176.

<sup>29</sup> Florentines praised the nobility of their city’s currency, the Florin, because it was made of the best gold, it was decorated with the image of John the Baptist – of whom it was said by Christ (Matt. 11:11) that *non surrexit inter natos mulierum maior* – and it was accepted throughout the world. See Charles T. Davis, “An Early Florentine Political Theorist: Fra Remigio de’ Girolami,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 104, no. 6 (1960): 667-668.

<sup>30</sup> Bruno Tremblay, “Albert on Metaphysics as First and Most Certain Philosophy,” in *A Companion to Albert the Great. Theology, Philosophy, and the Sciences*, ed. Irven M. Resnick (Leiden, 2013), 572-575.

<sup>31</sup> Dante, *Convivio*, IV, 16.5: ‘Onde non pur dell’uomo è predicata, ma eziandio di tutte cose: ché l’uomo chiama nobile pietra, nobile pianta, nobile cavallo, nobile falcone, [e così] qualunque [cosa] in sua natura si vede essere perfetta.’

<sup>32</sup> Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* vol. 1, lib. 1, cap. 70, n. 2: ‘Gradus nobilitatis et vilitatis in omnibus entibus attenditur secundum propinquitatem et distantiam a Deo, qui est in fine nobilitatis.’

<sup>33</sup> Henry of Rimini, *Tractatus de septem vitiiis capitalibus*, in Hilary Anne Siddons, “Virtues, Vices, and Venice: Studies on Henry of Rimini O.P.,” PhD diss., (University College London, 2000), 74: ‘omnes res que sunt eiusdem specie equalem nobilitatem [habent] ex sua specie; que autem differunt gradu specifico, maiorem uel minorem habent, secundum quod sunt in superiori uel inferiori gradu, sicut angelus es nobilior homine.’

<sup>34</sup> Peter of Tarentaise, *In II librum Sententiarum commentaria*, vol. 2 (Toulouse, 1649, repr. Ridgewood, NJ., 1964), lib. II, dist. XXX, divisio textus, q. I. a. I, 256b: ‘Homo nobilior est caeteris creaturis corporalibus.’ See also Albert, *Quaestiones de animalibus*, lib. VI, q. 24-26, 169: ‘quia deus dedit complexionem nobiliores homini.’

<sup>35</sup> Albert, *De animalibus*, vol. 2, lib. 16, tract. 1, cap. 1, 2, 1059: ‘satis scitum est animam esse nobiliores corpore: propter quod etiam animatum nobilior est inanimato propter animam quam participat.’

Accordingly, a body could be considered noble in a twofold manner. First of all, a body was noble if it was physically more beautiful, stronger, and proportionate than others. Although not all members of the nobility could claim to possess perfect bodies, chivalric and didactic literature often presented aristocratic men with ideal bodies.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the belief that nobles were physically distinct was a long-established topos in medieval literature. Bede (d. 735), for instance, recounts how one of King Æthelred's companions who had been made a prisoner was trying to pass himself off as a poor peasant (*pauper rusticus*) yet he was immediately recognised as a nobleman (*de nobilibus*) by his captors because of 'his face, appearance, and manner of speaking' (*ex vultu et habitu et sermonibus eius*).<sup>37</sup> Thus, conversely, peasants or rustics, were often portrayed as grotesque, deformed, boorish, and with a physical constitution fitter for toil than for love.<sup>38</sup>

These idealised and fanciful physical descriptions have to be understood alongside the rise of physiognomic science which claimed that external bodily traits were indicative of an individual's inner character and soul.<sup>39</sup> Accordingly, writers and artists not only had to portray bodies; they were also meant to expose with their work the subject's soul, his moral qualities.<sup>40</sup> The so-called *Letter of Lentulus* is a good case in point. Christ must have had the best bodily complexion because he was the perfect man.<sup>41</sup> Notably, however, the Bible had nowhere given

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<sup>36</sup> On the physical attributes associated with the nobleman, see Danielle Westerhof, *Death and the Noble Body in Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2008), 33-56. Timothy Reuter, "Nobles and Others: The Social and Cultural Expression of Power Relations in the Middle Ages," in *Nobles and Nobility in Medieval Europe: Concepts, Origins, Transformations*, ed. Anne Duggan (Woodbridge, 2000), 89-90, has suggested that the effects of diet and other social practices such as the custom of turning away individuals with physical disabilities might have helped reinforce the impression that nobles were physically superior.

<sup>37</sup> Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Bertram Colgrave and Roger A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), 402.

<sup>38</sup> See Paul Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant* (Stanford, 1999), 157-173.

<sup>39</sup> Jole Agrimi, *Ingeniosa scientia nature: studi sulla fisiognomica medievale* (Florence, 2002), 129-130; and Joseph Ziegler, "Text and Context: On the Rise of Physiognomic Thought in the Later Middle Ages," in *De Sion exiit lex et verbum domini de Hierusalem: Essays on Medieval Law, Liturgy, and Literature in Honour of Amnon Linder*, ed. Yitzhak Hen (Turnhout, 2001).

<sup>40</sup> Not surprisingly, therefore, the art of portraiture occupied physiognomic writers. See Stephen Perkinson, "Rethinking the Origins of Portraiture," *Gesta* 46, no. 2 (2007); and Johannes Thomann, "Pietro d'Abano on Giotto," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 54 (1991): 240-41.

<sup>41</sup> Irvn M. Resnick, *Mark of Distinction: Christian Perceptions of Jews in the High Middle Ages* (Washington, D.C., 2012), 31-33; and Van der Lugt, *Le ver, le démon et la Vierge*, 468-469.

an account of his physical appearance. And yet, this apocryphal text claimed to provide an accurate description of Christ's perfect body and enjoyed widespread popularity and circulation in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.<sup>42</sup>

In addition to physical perfections, as we have seen in the first chapter, bodies were thought to be endowed with innate dispositions or inclinations. These could facilitate or hinder the acquisition of intellectual and moral virtues. From this perspective, therefore, a body was noble if its complexion contributed to the perfection or excellence of the soul, that is, to attain virtuous behaviour.<sup>43</sup>

### 3.1.3 Natural Nobility and Complexion

Late medieval scholars resorted to bodily complexion in order to explain differences among individuals, particularly with regards to intellectual and moral traits. In a similar way, they explained the different degrees of nobility among souls by reference to the relative perfection of human bodies. Not surprisingly, therefore, some of the earliest sources which set nobility in relation to complexion are commentaries on the question that Peter Lombard posed concerning the equality of souls in the *Sentences*.

Peter of Tarentaise (c.1225-1276), provides one of the earliest examples of how the nobility of the body could be invoked to explain how some souls surpass others and, in particular, how some individuals excel others in intellectual ability. Peter says that souls must be created equal because any formal difference amongst souls would imply that human beings

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<sup>42</sup> Cora E. Lutz, "The Letter of Lentulus describing Christ," *The Yale University Library Gazette* 50, no. 2 (1975).

<sup>43</sup> Conversely, it is not difficult to find in medieval literature examples of rustics or peasants being described as mentally incapable and prone to vice. See, for example, the description of two rustic ambassadors from the Casentino region in one of the tales by Sacchetti, *Il Trecentonovelle*, novella 31, 77-82; and Michel Plaisance, "The Relationship between City and Country in the Short Stories of Sacchetti, Sercambi and Sermini," in *Florence in the Time of the Medici: Public Celebrations, Politics, and Literature in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, trans. Nicole Carew-Reid (Toronto, 2008), 196. Such negative descriptions of peasants were a recurrent motif in late medieval Italian poetry. See Domenico Merlini, *Saggio di ricerche sulla satira contro il villano* (Turin, 1894); and Paul Meyer, "Dit sur les vilains par Matazone de Calignano," *Romania* 12, no. 45 (1883).

belong to different species.<sup>44</sup> Nonetheless, Peter points out that some men have better intellects than others (*in quibusdam hominibus melior est intellectus quam in aliis*) and that this diversity has to proceed from the soul because the intellect is an operation of the soul.<sup>45</sup> To this conundrum he presents two solutions. Some argue that the soul has matter and that the inequality in intellectual ability lies in the degree of subtlety (*subtilitas*) of that matter. Yet others, who believe that souls have no matter of their own, argue that the diversity of souls originates in the diversity of bodies because ‘that which is nobler in its capacity to be perfected is always infused with nobler perfection’ (*nobiliori perfectibili semper nobilior perfectio infunditur*).<sup>46</sup> Accordingly, the nobler a body is, the more perfect the faculties of the soul united to it.

As we have seen in the first chapter, the opinion of this second group of scholars came under attack in 1277. Article 124 of the condemnations by bishop Tempier established that the soul of Christ had to be nobler (*nobilior*) than that of Judas.<sup>47</sup> Tempier’s condemnation, however, demonstrates an awareness of the growing number of scholars who thought that – as article 124 itself put it – ‘it was inconvenient to propose that some intellects are nobler than others [...] for this would imply that noble and ignoble souls would belong to different species.’<sup>48</sup> And indeed, throughout the course of the thirteenth century, many scholastic thinkers came to the conclusion that the different degrees of nobility among souls had to originate in the body.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Peter of Tarentaise, *In II librum Sententiarum commentaria*, lib. II, dist. XXXII, q. II, a. IV, 280a: ‘Videtur quod animae sint aequales ex creatione. Quia differentia formalis diuersificat speciem: sed omnes homines sunt indifferentes specie: ergo non differunt in forma: ergo non differunt ex parte animarum.’

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.: ‘cum ergo intellectus insit animae secundum se, non in quantum est actus corporis; in animabus est diuersitas secundum se.’

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., resp., 280b: ‘Et hi dicunt quod secundum diuersitatem corporum, prouenit a Deo diuersitas animarum: quia nobiliori perfectibili semper nobilior perfectio infunditur.’

<sup>47</sup> CUP, 550, no. 124: ‘Error, quia sic anima Christi non esset nobilior anima Jude.’

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.: ‘Quod inconueniens est ponere aliquos intellectus nobiliores aliis; quia cum ista diuersitas non possit essere a parte corporum, oportet quod sit a parte intelligentiarum; et sic anime nobiles et ignobiles essent necessario diuersarum specierum, sicut intelligentie.’

<sup>49</sup> Pasquale Porro, ‘Ci sono anime più nobili della altre? Tommaso d’Aquino, Enrico di Gand, Egidio Romano e la condanna del 1277,’ in *La nobiltà nel pensiero medievale*.

In his *De homine*, Albert the Great had affirmed that ‘the mind’s best disposition will be found in a more noble complexion.’<sup>50</sup> Thomas Aquinas held on to this opinion. In his commentary on Aristotle’s *Politics*, Aquinas established that nobility and ignobility are determined by mental virtue (*virtute mentis*).<sup>51</sup> Yet, as Antonia Fitzpatrick has put it, Aquinas believed ‘that the sophistication of the powers of an individual soul follows the sophistication of the individual body’s physical structure and complexion.’<sup>52</sup> Thus, Aquinas could affirm that nature has ‘an inclination [...] arising from the good bodily complexion (*ex bona corporis complexionem*) that disposes more or less to virtue or vice, so that some are naturally predisposed to anger, some to gentleness.’<sup>53</sup> In his commentary on Aristotle’s *On the Soul*, Aquinas is even more straightforward: ‘Out of the good complexion of the body follows the nobility of the soul: because every form is proportionate to its matter.’<sup>54</sup> Likewise, the Dominican Robert Kilwardby (1215-1279) defined nobility in relation to bodily complexion. In his commentary on the second book of the *Sentences*, he affirmed that the nobility of body and soul are both due to the nobility of the complexion (*nobilitati corporis et animae debetur nobilitas complexionis*).<sup>55</sup>

The best elaboration of this doctrine, however, can be found in Giles of Rome’s work. Giles affirms that human souls are equal: species differ from each other according to their substantial form, but every difference between individuals of the same species is due to the

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<sup>50</sup> Albert the Great, *De homine*, ed. Henryk Anzulewicz and Joachim R. Söder (Monasterii Westfolorum, 2008), 255, lines 16-23: ‘et in nobili complexionem melior est dispositio mentis.’

<sup>51</sup> Aquinas, *In Politicorum*, lib. I, cap. 4, n. 11, a92: ‘nobilitas et ignobilitas determinantur virtute mentis.’

<sup>52</sup> Fitzpatrick, *Thomas Aquinas on Bodily Identity*, 113.

<sup>53</sup> Aquinas, *In Politicorum*, lib. I, cap. 4, n. 12, a93: ‘Et verum est quod natura habet inclinationem ad hoc faciendum. Provenit enim ex bona corporis complexionem et natura quod aliqui inclinatur magis vel minus ad opera virtutum et vitiorum, sicut aliqui naturaliter sunt iracundi et aliqui mansueti.’

<sup>54</sup> Aquinas, *Sententia libri De anima*, lib. 2, cap. 19, q. 1, 149: ‘Ad bonam autem complexionem corporis sequitur nobilitas animae: quia omnis forma est proportionata suae materiae.’ Fitzpatrick, *Thomas Aquinas on Bodily Identity*, 113, has argued that according to Aquinas God creates different souls for different bodies. However, this goes against Aquinas’ thesis of the equality of souls. See *Summa theologiae*, Ia, q. 117, a. 1, where Aquinas insists that intellectual ability is the same in all men according to [the soul’s] nature, previous to their union with the body (*quia omnes humani intellectus sunt unius gradus in ordine naturae*). Fitzpatrick quotes the following passage from Aquinas as part of her argument: ‘ut quanto corpus melius complexionatum fuerit, nobiliorem animam sortiatur’ (*In sententias*, lib. 2, d. 32, q. 2, a. 3, co.). Yet, the most likely interpretation of the term *sortiatur* in this passage (and others like *Summa theologiae*, Ia, q. 85, a. 7, co.) is that souls are randomly assigned to bodies of better or worse complexion and, as a result, they are endowed with different degrees of nobility. See *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis*, vol. 7, ed. du Cange et al. (Niort, 1886), col. 534c.

<sup>55</sup> Kilwardby, *Quaestiones in librum secundum Sententiarum*, q. 84, 236.

matter which individualises their substantial form.<sup>56</sup> While the soul acquires a certain natural dignity (*aliquam dignitatem naturalem*) once it is infused in the body, nobility is not in the soul because souls do not differ from one another. Neither natural nobility (*nobilitatis naturalis*), nor any good aptitude, inclination, or anything like that (*neque bona aptitudo, neque bona dispositio, nec aliquid tale*) can be found in the soul, for the soul only acquires these in the process of individuation. It is in bodies that we find different degrees of nobility (*ex majori nobilitate corporum*), for only the body can be more or less noble (*solum corpus nobilius*).<sup>57</sup>

The connection between nobility and complexion that features in these philosophical writings laid the groundwork for thinking about the nobility of the body. Authors of literary and didactic works followed suit, displaying an awareness of this relationship, and demonstrating that scholastic discourses had the potential for reaching a wide audience.

#### 3.1.4 Nobility of Body in Literary and Didactic Treatises

In his *On the Seven Capital Vices*, the Dominican Henry of Rimini (fl. c.1300) also recognises that bodily complexion can account for differences in nobility. In this work of practical theology, which fits into the broad category of preaching aids, Henry discusses nobility in the context of the vice of pride just as William Perault had done before him. Like Perault, he strongly advises against taking pride in one's lofty birth because all men have bodies that come from the same earth, have rational souls which are created equal, are called to the same goal, and have the same father God. However, unlike Perault, Henry acknowledges that sometimes one soul might exceed others in nobility because 'of the nobler condition and better

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<sup>56</sup> Giles of Rome, *Quodlibet II*, in *Quodlibeta* (Louvain, 1646), q. 18, 97ab: 'in his quae pertinent ad speciem, materia diversificatur propter formam, in his autem, quae ad individuum, forma propter materiam. [...] animae secundum speciem sunt aequales. Ex suo autem modo individuationis habent inaequalitatem.'

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 97a.

complexion of its body' (*nobiliorem conditionem uel complexionem corporis*), for the soul performs its operations through it.<sup>58</sup>

A late thirteenth-century treatise on the true nature of nobility by Guillelmus de Aragonia articulates a similar understanding of the relationship between nobility and bodily complexion. Guillelmus worked at the court of king Alfonso III of Aragon in the late thirteenth century and appears to have been both a practical physician and a speculative philosopher well-versed in the recently reinvigorated Aristotelian tradition.<sup>59</sup> In one of the manuscripts of his work, Guillelmus is described as a 'master of medicine.'<sup>60</sup> Hence, it is likely that he would have pursued his medical training at the University of Montpellier which at the time was under the control of the crown of Aragon and boasted a renowned faculty of medicine.<sup>61</sup> There, he must have had the opportunity to become familiar with Aristotle's works on natural philosophy.<sup>62</sup>

Guillelmus was writing in the 1280s, during the king's constitutional struggle with the Aragonese nobles and before the conflict subsided and peace was made in 1287. He might have intended his work as a source of advice for the king because, to some extent, his *De nobilitate animi* can be read as a veiled critique of the Aragonese nobles who were revolting against the king's authority.<sup>63</sup> Some scholars have gone as far as to claim that this treatise

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<sup>58</sup> Henry of Rimini, *Tractatus de septem uitiis capitalibus*, 74: 'Si enim aliqua nobilitas uel excellentia est in anima unius plus quam in anima alterius, hec est propter nobiliorem conditionem uel complexionem corporis, quod est subiectum anime susceptiuum, et quo mediante exercet operationes suas.'

<sup>59</sup> Guillelmus' writing contains frequent references to Aristotelian works, to pseudo-Aristotelian treatises such as the *Physiognomica* and the *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum*, and to the works of Algazi, Haly, and Galen. Marcel Thomas, "Guillaume d'Aragon, auteur du *Liber de nobilitate animi*," *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes* 106 (1946): 75, suggests that Guillelmus must have had access to several of the Latin translations of Aristotle completed by Moerbeke in the 1260s.

<sup>60</sup> Guillelmus de Aragonia, *De nobilitate animi*, 112: 'His est Wille[ll]mus medicine sorte magister, Regis Aragonie de ditione fuit.' According to Thomas, "Guillaume d'Aragon," 76-78, two other manuscripts with pseudo-Aristotelian physiognomic treatises written by 1310 and a commentary on Ptolemy's *Centiloquium* are attributed to a certain 'Guillelmi Hispani' who could well be the author of *De nobilitate animi*.

<sup>61</sup> See Vern L. Bullough, "The Development of the Medical University at Montpellier to the End of the Fourteenth Century," in *Universities, Medicine and Science in the Medieval West* (Aldershot, 2004).

<sup>62</sup> Ángel Escobar Chico, "El aristotelismo de Guillermo de Aragón: en torno al autor de la *Summa supra phisionomiam* (c.1300)," *eHumanista* 50 (2022): 316-17.

<sup>63</sup> Guillelmus de Aragonia, *De nobilitate animi*, introduction, 15-16.

constitutes an explicit rejection of nobility of birth.<sup>64</sup> However, contrary to what its title may suggest, Guillelmus does not just discuss the nobility of soul but three different types of nobility – of soul, body, and fortune – and how they relate to each other.

At the outset of his treatise, Guillelmus defines nobility as the performing of good acts, that is virtue. Yet he also recognises that nobility can be defined as a ‘habit or intrinsic potential’ that disposes one to perform such good acts.<sup>65</sup> In another passage, he says that this potential is what makes someone have good natural dispositions to develop virtuous habits (*bonas dispositiones naturales ad suscipiendum habitus virtuosos*) so that ‘if someone uses that disposition well [...], then he is called noble both in nature and character (*natura et moribus*).’<sup>66</sup> By introducing a distinction between the natural and the moral dimensions of nobility, Guillelmus can affirm that some have nobility but do not use it as they should.<sup>67</sup> However, since this natural potential cannot be appreciated except through action (*non cognoscitur nisi per operationem*), Guillelmus concludes that we cannot determine that someone is noble ‘unless he acts notably and well’ (*nisi quia notabiliter et bene agit*).<sup>68</sup>

The relationship between nobility and the body is more fully developed in the second section of the first part of Guillelmus’ treatise where he presents counterarguments to certain objections. He says that since nobility is determined by goodness of action and the principle of action is the soul, some argue that there is no nobility of the body because ‘the body cannot serve the actions of the soul except organically.’<sup>69</sup> To this he says that although the soul is the

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<sup>64</sup> Castelnuovo, “Revisiter un classique,” 129-130; Castelnuovo, *Être noble dans la cité*, 170-178; and Thomas, “Guillaume d’Aragon,” 70: ‘Ce court ouvrage, qui s’efforce sous une forme assez scolastique de définir la noblesse et lui attribue comme origine les qualités individuelles de l’esprit et du cœur et non pas une transmission héréditaire.’

<sup>65</sup> Guillelmus de Aragonia, *De nobilitate animi*, prologus, 4: ‘nobilitas nichil aliud videtur esse quam operatio bona, vel saltem habitus vel potentia intrinseca que principium est bone operationis sine qua nullus ad bene operandum movetur.’

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, caput 1.5.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, prologus, 8: ‘alii sunt qui eam habent et cognoscunt, non tamen ipsa utuntur ut deberent.’

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, prologus, 6.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, caput 9.3: ‘videtur quod nulla sit nobilitas corporis, cum operationibus anime non possit nisi solum organice deservire.’

formal principle of all things and its nobility the most important, the body constitutes ‘the material and instrumental principle of many actions’ and, as a result, ‘actions are inclined toward good or bad according to the body’s good or bad disposition, so that the soul proceeds to act reprehensibly or nobly.’<sup>70</sup> Another question that Guillelmus addresses is whether all men are noble by nature (*utrum omnes homines sint nobiles per naturam*). He says that they all are because they all have a soul. But he remarks that ‘even though things that have the same species have the same material form, it is not necessary that they have action of the same nobility or wickedness.’<sup>71</sup> It happens that such things ‘may be well or badly directed in their actions because of the good or bad disposition in matter.’<sup>72</sup> Like Henry of Rimini, Guillelmus affirms that the soul has a natural inclination to the body and uses it to act as an organ or necessary object. For this reason, the soul acts according to the aptitude of the body.<sup>73</sup>

A contemporary vernacular work, Dante’s *Convivio* (c.1304-7), also demonstrates that it was perfectly compatible to criticise nobles by birth and recognise that a good bodily complexion contributed to the perfection of the soul. In the fourth chapter of *Convivio*, Dante explains what true nobility is to an audience of nobles.<sup>74</sup> It is a chapter with a strong didactic character which includes several attacks on the value of noble birth. Dante says that ‘no one, simply by being able to say, “I am of such-and-such a family line (*schiatte*),” ought to think of himself as noble if he is lacking in these fruits [virtues].’<sup>75</sup> And he names two aristocratic Italian

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., caput 9.7-8: ‘verumptamen corpus materiale et instrumentale [principium] plurium operationum consistit. Unde secundum bonam vel malam ipsius dispositionem operationes in bonitate vel malicia disponuntur, unde anima viliter et nobiliter in operando procedit.’

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., caput 11.12: ‘dico quod ea que sunt eiusdem speciei, si habent formam in materia, non oportet quod habeant operationem eiusdem nobilitatis vel malitie.’

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., caput 11.13: ‘Contingit enim talibus quod ex bona vel mala dispositione in materia, sint bene vel male in suis operationibus expedita.’

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., caput 11.22: ‘Anima igitur, que naturalem habet inclinationem ad corpus et ipso in suis operationibus utitur tamquam organo vel obiecto necessario, inducitur ad agendum per ipsum secundum aptitudinem corporis ipsius.’

<sup>74</sup> Richard Lansing, “Dante’s Intended Audience in the “Convivio,”” *Dante Studies* 110 (1992). Dante’s ideas on nobility have been the subject of numerous studies. A good starting point are Maria Corti, *La felicità mentale: nuove prospettive per Cavalcanti e Dante* (Turin, 1983); Umberto Carpi, *La nobiltà di Dante* (Florence, 2004); and Gianfranco Fioravanti, “La prima trattazione “sottile” della nobiltà: “Convivio,” trattato quarto,” *Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica* 105, no. 1 (2013).

<sup>75</sup> Dante, *Convivio*, IV, 20.3.

families, the Uberti of Florence and the Visconti of Milan, as examples of such a haughty attitude.<sup>76</sup> More generally, Dante criticises those who, ‘simply because they are from famous old stock and descended from outstanding fathers (*di famose e antiche generazioni*), believe that they themselves are noble, despite not having true nobility within.’<sup>77</sup>

Thus, for Dante nobility has a lot to do with virtue. Yet it is not simply measured in terms of an individual’s virtuous conduct. Instead, he claims that nobility is a special grace from God which enables someone to develop the intellectual and moral virtues, and that virtues ‘derive from nobility the way an effect does from its cause.’<sup>78</sup> However, God grants the grace of nobility only to the soul that is well disposed to receive it because as Aristotle affirms ‘things have to be well disposed to their agents if they are to receive their acts.’<sup>79</sup> Accordingly, virtues can be said to be the fruits of nobility that God instils in the well-disposed soul which is but ‘the soul whose body is perfectly disposed throughout.’<sup>80</sup> The disposition of the soul – which in turn relies on the disposition of the body – is the material cause of nobility for it enables the subject to receive God’s special grace.<sup>81</sup> A well-disposed body is necessary because our soul executes many of its operations through the corporal organs of the body.<sup>82</sup> As a result, in the noble individual, the good pre-dispositions conferred by nature (*le buone disposizioni da natura date*) and the physical perfections of the body (*le corporali bontadi*) such as beauty, strength, and lasting health shine as much as virtue.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 20.5.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 29.1.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 18.2.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 20.7. On Dante’s use of this principle of the *Liber de causis*, see Irène Rosier-Catach, “Du vulgaire illustre, le “plus noble de tous,” à la noblesse du 4<sup>e</sup> livre du Convivio,” in *Il Convivio di Dante*, ed. Johannes Bartuschat and Andrea Aldo Robiglio (Ravenna, 1966), 122-123.

<sup>80</sup> Dante, *Convivio*, IV, 20.9: ‘le vertudi sono frutto di nobilitade, e che Dio questa metta nell’anima che ben siede, [...] che nobilitade umana non sia altro che “seme di felicitade,” messo da Dio nell’anima ben posta, cioè lo cui corpo è d’ogni parte disposto perfettamente.’ See also *ibid.*, 2.7: ‘E così la nostra mente, in quanto ella è fondata sopra la complessione del corpo.’

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 20.10: ‘materiale in quanto dice: “nell’anima ben posta,” che è materia e subietto di nobilitade.’

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 25.11: ‘ché la nostra anima conviene grande parte delle sue operazioni operare con organo corporale, e allora opera bene che ’l corpo è bene per le sue parti ordinato e disposto.’

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 19.5-6.

Because nobility of the soul is so dependent on the bodily dispositions, Dante sees it necessary to offer an account of the formation of the body and of the development of the human soul.<sup>84</sup> Here, as elsewhere in his work, he displays a remarkable awareness of contemporary embryological knowledge.<sup>85</sup>

By and large, Dante's account of the origin of the soul resembles Albert the Great's theory of gradual development.<sup>86</sup> Three powers help the seed form the foetus in the womb:<sup>87</sup> the power of the generative soul (*la virtù dell'anima generativa*), the power of heaven (*la virtù del cielo*), and the power of the combined elements (*la virtù delli elementi legati*), that is, the complexion (*complexione*). These three powers prepare (*matura*) and organise (*dispone*) the matter of the foetus to the action of the formative virtue (*la virtù formativa*) which proceeds from the soul of the father (*l'anima del generante*). This formative virtue, in turn, prepares the organs to receive the celestial power (*virtù celestiale*) which, from the potentiality of the seed (*potenza del seme*) actualises the living soul. Here Dante diverges from Albert the Great and follows Aquinas: the rational soul (*intelletto possibile*) is not developed out of the sensitive soul of the foetus but is instead infused by God. Because the three powers that form the seed in the womb can be of greater or lesser quality, the sensitive soul can also be of greater or lesser purity (*più pura e men pura anima si produce*), and it is in proportion to this purity that the power of the possible intellect descends into the soul of an individual. If the sensitive soul is 'quite free and distant from every physical shadow' (*bene astratta e assoluta da ogni ombra corporea*), the divine virtue increases in it, as in a substance suited to receive it (*secondo che ricevere puote*). Alternatively,

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<sup>84</sup> See *ibid.*, 21.2, where Dante refers to the different opinions regarding the equality of souls.

<sup>85</sup> See Ziegler, "The Scientific Context"; and Alessandro Raffi, "Dante e l'embriologia aristotelica: il problema dell'origine dell'anima dal *Convivio* alla *Commedia*," *Campi immaginabili* 46-47 (2012).

<sup>86</sup> See Bruno Nardi, "L'origine dell'anima umana secondo Dante," in *Studi di Filosofia Medievale* (Rome, 1960); and Manuele Gragnolati, *Experiencing the Afterlife: Soul and Body in Dante and Medieval Culture* (Notre Dame, IN., 2005), 53-87 and 66-77.

<sup>87</sup> For what follows, see Dante, *Convivio*, IV, 21.4-8.

by reason of timing or because of a deficiency in one's complexion one can be ill-disposed to be noble, that is, to receive the divine grace of nobility.<sup>88</sup>

As we can see, although virtue determines *true* nobility for Dante, the body remains central to his analysis. Naturally, Dante's remarks on nobility have to be understood in relation to the diverse contexts – literary, civic, institutional juridical, and imperial – of his writing.<sup>89</sup> Yet as Umberto Carpi has noted, it seems arbitrary to keep insisting on the opposition between a negative view of nobility of blood and a positive view of nobility of soul in Dante's work.<sup>90</sup> The fourth book of the *Convivio* has to be read side-to-side with his remarks elsewhere like in the chapter of *Monarchia* devoted to the ancestral nobility of the Roman people where Dante affirms that 'men are ennobled by the merits of their own virtue or by those of their ancestors,' and that nobility was transferred to Aeneas from his ancestors 'by hereditary right.'<sup>91</sup> As Marco Santagata has affirmed, in the *Convivio* Dante refrains from saying that true nobility is inherited, but 'he opens the way to a new evaluation of hereditary nobility,' suggesting that the gift of nobility is concentrated 'for the most part' in those of good lineage.<sup>92</sup> This would explain why Dante evokes with such affection the spirit of his ancestor Cacciaguida in the *Divine Comedy*. In *Paradiso* 16, 'where no appetite is perverted,' he too takes pride in his noble lineage.<sup>93</sup>

The texts I have just examined in the last two sections demonstrate that nobility of body and nobility of soul became intimately related concepts in late medieval thought. The

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 20.8: 'Puote adunque l'anima stare non bene nella persona per manco di complessione, o forse per manco di temporale: ed in questa cotala questo raggio divino mai non risplende.' Nobody is certain of what exactly is meant here by "timing." Some have proposed that Dante means premature birth or related birth defects. Others think it means bad timing with regard to the hour of birth and, therefore, of astrological aspects. See Dante, *Convivio*, Notes to IV.xx.8, 576.

<sup>89</sup> Roberto Bizzocchi, "La nobiltà in Dante, la nobiltà di Dante: Cultura nobiliare, memoria storica e genealogia fra Medio Evo e Rinascimento," *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 4 (1991): 203.

<sup>90</sup> Carpi, *La nobiltà di Dante*, 21-24, 57. As in, for example, Donati, *L'idea di nobiltà in Italia*, 3-4, 19.

<sup>91</sup> Dante, *Monarchia*, ed. and trans. Richard Kay (Toronto, 1998), 2.3, 3, 102; and *ibid.*, 7, 104, 106.

<sup>92</sup> Marco Santagata, *Dante: The Story of His Life*, trans. Richard Dixon (Cambridge, MA., 2016), 176-8, 180-1. Elsewhere (*ibid.*, 273) Santagata affirms: 'Dante would never simply accept that true nobility is that acquired by birth and lineage – for him, the principle of personal virtue would always prevail – and yet, since *virtus* is a prerogative subordinate to *nobilitas*, blood comes to represent a special condition for the attainment of full nobility, provided that individual worth exists.'

<sup>93</sup> Dante, *Par.* 16.1-6, 174.

body was important because its complexion and dispositions could facilitate or hinder the development and acquisition of virtue. Having a noble body was not enough to be *truly* noble because an individual's natural nobility (*nobilitas naturalis*) or lack thereof did not entirely determine one's behaviour. Yet being *naturally* noble represented some sort of moral advantage. In the next two sections, I will show how natural nobility was also perceived to be hereditary and how, as a result, it was understood to be determined by one's birth.

### 3.1.5 Natural Nobility and Descent in Scholastic Treatises

In his treatise, Guillelmus de Aragonia affirmed that the body can be considered noble in a twofold manner: in terms of its own beauty and appearance or with respect to the parents and ancestors. With regard to the second, he said that it can be further considered in two ways, according to the truth or to mere popular opinion. For a body to be noble according to the truth 'the son must be similar to the father' and 'retain his father's form.'<sup>94</sup> A second important aspect of the late medieval conception of natural nobility was, therefore, its hereditary character.

In his commentary on Aristotle's *Politics*, Aquinas had established that the inclination to virtue which makes one noble arises from the bodily complexion of an individual. This disposition or inclination, he went on to explain, is nothing else than the nature of the body (*natura corporalis*) which, like other bodily characteristics such as beauty and strength, are inherited from the father.<sup>95</sup> Aquinas acknowledged that this virtuous disposition is not always passed down from parents to children (*sed propter aliquod impedimentum, quandoque deficit; propter aliquod impedimentum non potest natura semper hoc facere*) and that from time-to-time children badly disposed are born from parents well-disposed to virtue (*quandoque ex parentibus bene dispositis ad*

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<sup>94</sup> Guillelmus de Aragonia, *De nobilitate animi*, pars 1, caput 4.7: 'est necessarium quod filius sit similis patri et tunc sine mendacio potest dici quod est nobilis ad patris relacionem, retinet enim formam eius.'

<sup>95</sup> Aquinas, *In Politicorum*, lib. I, cap. 4, n. 12, a93: 'et haec quidem, scilicet natura corporalis, a patre derivatur ad posteros, ut in pluribus, sicut et aliae dispositiones corporales, puta pulchritudo, fortitudo et alia huiusmodi.'

*virtutem oriuntur filii male dispositi*).<sup>96</sup> Moreover, children can diverge from their parents' behaviour by the use of reason, for reason enables them not to follow their inborn natural inclinations.<sup>97</sup> In other words, ancestry does not have the last word and as Carol Lansing has noted, what ultimately determines true nobility for Aquinas is virtue.<sup>98</sup> Yet one cannot overlook the fact that Aquinas believed that some men were naturally nobler than others insofar they had inherited bodies which made them more predisposed to acquire the virtues that makes one truly noble.

One of Aquinas' disciples, Peter of Auvergne (1240-1304) also believed that natural nobility was hereditary. Aristotle had famously asserted that nobility was 'virtue and ancient wealth' (*ingenuitas enim est virtus et divitiae antiquae*).<sup>99</sup> In his continuation of Aquinas' commentary on the *Politics*, written sometime in the 1270s, Peter introduces a subtle distinction as he paraphrases Aristotle's dictum. He affirms that 'nobility is virtue, that is an inclination to virtue, and ancient wealth.'<sup>100</sup> According to Peter, nobility is not just virtuous behaviour but rather an inclination to virtuous behaviour (*inclinatio ad virtutem*) which, he adds, 'is passed on from parents to children, and to the parents from their parents and so on.'<sup>101</sup> Moreover, Peter suggests that by 'ancient wealth' Aristotle had referred not to riches but rather to this inclination which can always be traced back to one's ancestors. Riches facilitate the development of virtues, yet Peter does not think that wealth is necessary to be noble. Thus, he

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., n. 13: 'filii diversificantur a parentibus in bonitate vel malitia non solum propter dispositionem naturalem corporis, sed etiam propter rationem quae non ex necessitate sequitur naturalem inclinationem.' And yet, it is important to note that the didactic literature of the late Middle Ages reflects an increasing awareness of the importance of the body and its physiological conditions for the education of children. See Ben Parsons, *Punishment and Medieval Education* (Cambridge, 2018), 107: 'although the body of the student notionally provides raw material for both education and discipline, it is also regarded as a set of determinants in his own right, rather than a passive resource on which the ends of instruction can be impressed.'

<sup>98</sup> Lansing, *The Florentine Magnates*, 214-215.

<sup>99</sup> Aristotle, *Politica*, 409, ll. 11-12.

<sup>100</sup> Peter of Auvergne, *In Politicorum continuatio*, ed. Raimondo Spiazzi (Turin, 1951), lib. 4, l. 7, n. 3: 'nobilitas est virtus, idest inclinatio ad virtutem, et divitiae antiquae.'

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., n. 9: 'Nobilitas enim est virtus generis, hoc est inclinatio ad virtutem descendens a parentibus in filios, et in parentes ab aliis prioribus.'

remarks that ‘one can be born poor and yet inherit an inclination to virtue from his parents.’<sup>102</sup> Perhaps Peter had in mind those aristocratic families who throughout the thirteenth century had lost their wealth. Or perhaps he was thinking of those upstarts whose recent economic success had enabled them to purchase noble titles. Be that as it may, Peter’s interpretation of Aristotle conveys that nobility was, as Danielle Westerhof has put it elsewhere, ‘something which was first of all *interior* and *innate* to the members of the aristocratic elite, rather than something which could be acquired as easily as money or political influence.’<sup>103</sup> As I will show in the third part of this chapter, the fact that natural nobility was not easily commodified increased the importance of blood and descent to the noble identity at a time when greater wealth made everything money could buy available to more and more Florentines.

The hereditary dimension of natural nobility is explored in some more detail by the scholastic thinker Henry of Ghent (c.1217-1293). In one of his disputed questions, Henry asks whether ignoble parents can ever give birth to noble children.<sup>104</sup> He affirms that virtue is what ultimately determines nobility using words that hint at his reading of Aquinas.<sup>105</sup> But he adds that in discussing an individual’s [natural] nobility we should not consider the virtuous habits that one acquires throughout life (*habitus generatos*) but rather those natural dispositions (*naturales dispositiones*) which men inherit from their ancestors (*tracta ab antiquis progenitoribus nobilibus*). In this sense, therefore, in order to be noble, one has to be born of noble parents (*sic dico quod nobilitas semper procedit a nobili*).<sup>106</sup> When noble parents procreate, their soul imprints in the foetus of the child their own noble natural dispositions by means of the imaginative faculty

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.: ‘Similiter nobilitas est divitiae antiquae: non quod divitiae sint de ratione nobilitatis: possibile enim est quod in pauperibus sit inclinatio ad virtutem orta ex parentibus, et secundum quamdam antiquitatem: sed pro tanto dicitur nobilitas divitiae antiquae, quia sunt necessariae ad virtutem.’ In his commentary on Aristotle’s *Politics*, Nicolas Oresme similarly remarked that the inheritance of physical and moral characteristics was ‘le cause et commencement don’t vient premierement noblesse de lignage ou gentillesse.’ See Nicole Oresme, *Livre de Politiques*, in Albert Douglas Menut, ‘Maistre Nicole Oresme: Le livre des politiques d’Aristote,’ *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, new series 60, no. 6 (1970): 56.

<sup>103</sup> Westerhof, *Death and the Noble Body*, 34.

<sup>104</sup> Henry of Ghent, *Quodlibet IX*, in *Opera Omnia*, vol. 13, ed. Raymond Macken (Leuven 1983), q. 18, 288-292: ‘Utrum nobilitas generis ab initio processerit ab ignobili.’

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 289: ‘Nihil aliud quam virtus et malitia determinant servum et liberum, et nobiles et ignobiles.’

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

(*virtutem imaginativam*) and the natural heat prepared by the generative force (*virtutem generativam*). These bodily dispositions will later on incline the soul of the child to acquire the same noble conduct of his parents.<sup>107</sup> In this way, nature strives to make children similar to their parents, not only in bodily dispositions but also in those of the soul.<sup>108</sup> Like Aquinas, Henry acknowledges that by reason of some impediment this is not always achieved (*licet in hoc frequenter propter occurrens impedimentum deficit*). However, he says that this is beyond the intention of nature (*praeter naturae intentionem*) and should be considered rare: it is the equivalent of a child being born with a physical deformity.<sup>109</sup>

### 3.1.6 Nobility and Descent in Literary Texts

Like the relationship between natural nobility and bodily complexion, the hereditary dimension of natural nobility also features outside of scholastic treatises. For scholastic thinkers, establishing a relationship between natural nobility and descent required applying complex philosophical and medical concepts to explain how the inclination to virtuous behaviour was passed on from parents to children. Yet a different set of texts presents the relationship between nobility and descent in simpler terms using a rhetorical language that was more likely to appeal to a non-learned audience.

For example, a letter sent by Pietro della Vigna (1190-1249) on behalf of Frederick II praises the Roman senators saying that they are ‘strong and noble men, in whose members and minds the pleasing nobility of ancestors is propagated.’<sup>110</sup> Similar rhetorical statements can be

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 290: ‘imprimit secundum conditionem imaginationis dispositionem ad procreandum fetum secundum naturalem dispositionem respondentem nobilitati generantium [...] Anima, forma nobilis virtutis et probitatis affecta, per virtutem generativam in calore naturali, ut per instrumentum, similem aut respondentem dispositionem corporalem imprimit nato, cuius dispositione habetur et inclinatur anima ad consimilem acquirendam.’

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 291: ‘Nititur enim natura proles assimilare parentibus, non solum in dispositiones corporis, sed etiam animae, ut pulchri generent pulchros, turpes generent turpes, et iracundi iracundos, mansueti mansuetos.’

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.: ‘Sicut ergo extra naturalem regulam naturae raro evenit ut de formosa nascatur deformis, sic extra regulam naturae raro procedit ut dissimilis nascatur filius parentibus.’

<sup>110</sup> Pietro della Vigna, *Petri de Vineis Judicis Aulicis et Cancellarii Friderici II Imperatoris Epistularum Libri VI*, vol. 1, ed. Joh. Rudolphus Iselius (Basel, 1740), lib. III, cap. xxvii, 432: ‘Vos igitur uiri fortes et nobiles, in quos uires et animos grata proauorum generositas propagauit.’

found in dialogic treatises on the true nature of nobility like the early fifteenth-century *De nobilitate* written by the Renaissance humanist and poet Buonaccorso da Montemagno (1391-1429).

Buonaccorso was born in Pistoia of an old magnate family. In 1421, he became a judge in the Santa Croce quarter of Florence and was appointed *magister* in the *Studio fiorentino*.<sup>111</sup> The *De nobilitate* is structured as a debate between two fictional characters in ancient Rome. A noble girl by the name of Lucretia is being courted by two Roman youths called Publius Cornelius and Gaius Flaminius. Lucretia tells her father that she will marry the noblest of them. This question is posed in front of the Roman Senate where each one of the youths makes a speech in which they try to define nobility so as to demonstrate that he is the noblest and, therefore, the one the girl has chosen to marry. Flaminius praises virtue, while Cornelius' speech is a defence of nobility of birth and wealth, that is, the Aristotelian conception of nobility.

Admittedly, the story is inconclusive, and we do not know who Lucretia chose to marry. In fact, the text finishes with an invitation to the reader to pass judgement.<sup>112</sup> Many have assumed that Flaminius would have won the girl's hand and that the whole point of the dialogue is to exalt nobility of virtue.<sup>113</sup> However, it seems that Buonaccorso considered that birth too was an important source of nobility. After all, he dedicated his work to the famous *condottiero* Carlo I Malatesta lord of Rimini and member of one of the most powerful families of Italy. And in the dedication of his work, Buonaccorso praises Carlo's ancestry as much as he praises his power, wealth, and virtuous deeds: 'if we speak of the splendour of descent, who other prince in Italy can claim a blood more notorious than yours with regards to the antiquity

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<sup>111</sup> On the family, life, and work of Buonaccorso, see David Herlihy, *Medieval and Renaissance Pistoia: The Social History of an Italian Town, 1200-1430* (New Haven, 1967), 260-262.

<sup>112</sup> Buonaccorso da Montemagno, *De nobilitate*, 96: 'Utra earum nobilior sit, in vestra nunc sententia derelinquitur.'

<sup>113</sup> For example, Herlihy in *Medieval and Renaissance Pistoia*, 261 claims that Gaius Flaminius' public service 'proved his superiority as a man, and of course he was given Lucretia's hand,' but there is no evidence for this in the text. Similarly, see Maurice H. Keen, *Some Late Medieval Views on Nobility. The Creighton Trust Lecture* (London, 1985), 1: 'No judgement is given, but it is made clear that Flaminius is to win the day.'

of his ancestors and the glory of his fathers?<sup>114</sup> Thus, Buonaccorso's dialogue can be read as an attempt to reframe the question of nobility in similar terms to those of scholastic thinkers: it is not merely a question of birth versus virtue but rather of how both birth and virtue contribute to an individual's nobility.

Cornelius begins his speech reminding his audience of his distinguished blood and ancestry. He claims that nobility is inherited and passed on from parents to children, so that the greater the ancestors, the greater one's nobility. Then, he argues that children are part of their parents' body (*ex sanguine, membris, ossibus, atque visceribus*) and that parents should be praised in their children, as if they were part of them. Moreover, children are not only made up out of their parents' bodies, but they also resemble them. They have their parents' figure (*imagines*) inscribed in their faces, their bodies often resemble theirs, their behaviour (*mores*) is similar to theirs, and one can even affirm that the same intelligence (*ingenia*) is present in them.<sup>115</sup> If the republic is willing to pay honours and respects to the statues of his forebears, they should pay even more honours and respect to their children who are their living and breathing images (*in iis autem natura veras parentum imagines ostendit*).<sup>116</sup> Finally, Cornelius claims that nobility has been given to him as a hereditary right because in his own person the image of his ancestors has been reincarnated: he has the same character, the same face, the same blood, the same members, and the same form of the body. Of them he has been born, by them he has been raised and educated, and by nature he has the same innate nobility (*insitam nobilitatem*).<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Buonaccorso da Montemagno, *De nobilitate*, 4: 'Nam si de generis felicitate agimus, quis est hodie princeps inter facies Italiae, qui vel vetustate maiorum, vel parentum gloria, tuo sanguine clarior videri possit?'

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 12, 14, 16.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 28, 30: 'Est igitur mihi propria nobilitatis possessio relicta, quod a maioribus meis quasi haereditarie sunt ingenitae illorum imagines. Hos illi gestabant habitus, haec facies in eorum vultibus lucebat. Ego illorum sanguinem, illorum membra, atque illorum formas in hac compagine corporis refero, ego ab illis ortus, et in eorum diu laribus educatus, atque adultus, moribus, ac natura insitam eorum habeo nobilitatem.'

Sometimes, the relationship between nobility and biological descent features in episodes of illegitimacy in medieval literature. In his *Liber ad honorem Augusti*, dedicated to Henry VI, King of Sicily, Peter of Eboli (1170-1220) recounts the downfall of Tancred, from whose hands Henry had taken the kingdom. Peter exploits Tancred's illegitimacy to ridicule him and in speaking of his conception, he says that:

In Tancred's case, both parents did not sow seed; or if they seeded, their seed did not combine well, since the duke [Roger III, Tancred's father] on the one hand came of ducal seed, the royal shoot, and the other, the woman [Tancred's mother], was sprung of modest stock. Nature fled nature; the forge-hardened gem abhorred the weak liquid nor did the earth combined with nobility (*nec humus nobilitate coit*). The vile container cast forth so virile a fluid, and so a man was conceived solely from the mother's seed. The impoverished material from the mother did all it could and gave form to a modest work. Let us believe that this man has a father in name, not in fact; the half-man derives this condition from his mother.<sup>118</sup>

Peter suggests something unusual, namely that Tancred was conceived out of his mother's seed alone because his father's seed was so much nobler that it refused to mix with her mother's menses. Of course, this passage has to be read not as an expert's medical opinion but rather as an inventive way of insulting Tancred and pleasing Henry by questioning the identity his father. Yet for the insult to be effective, it had to appeal to its contemporaries. The main assumption is clear: nobility is not just a socio-legal status, it is also a hereditary trait transmitted biologically in conception.

The story of Tancred's illegitimacy raises an interesting question. If nobility was understood as a type of excellence that was biologically transmitted from parents to children, was a child nobler if both his parents were noble? In his aforementioned *quaestio*, Henry of Ghent affirmed that if one of the parents was noble and the other was not, a child will retain something from both, behaving sometimes like one and sometimes like the other. As a result, children produced of such unions will be less noble than if both their parents were noble (*minus*

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<sup>118</sup> Peter of Eboli, *Book in Honor of Augustus (Liber ad honorem Augusti)*, ed. and trans. Gwenyth Hood (Tempe, AZ., 2012), section 8, lines 218-229, 112-113. I would like to thank Sara McDougall for pointing out this text to me.

*nobiles sunt quam si ambo [parentes] nobiles essent et boni*).<sup>119</sup> This idea also features in literary works, such as the *Legenda aurea*, which suggest that nobility was transmitted from both parents to their children.

According to the *Legenda*, Pontius Pilate was the son of a king and a miller's daughter and he had a stepbrother born of the queen, the king's wife. When they were children, Pilate and his brother spent a lot of time competing with each other at various sports. However, Jacobus says that 'the king's legitimate son, just as he was of nobler descent (*ut genere erat nobilior*), showed himself more vigorous and skilful in every sort of contest.' Pilate, consumed with jealousy, killed him in secret.<sup>120</sup> Unlike Peter, Jacobus does not suggest that the seeds of Pilate's parents did not mix. Yet his story indicates that natural nobility was thought to be transmitted from both parents to their children so that the child who had only one noble parent would be less noble than a child whose parents were both noble.

Medieval society always displayed a certain anxiety towards marriages of persons of disparate social status.<sup>121</sup> However, this type of union was, to some extent, unavoidable. The progressive enforcement of consanguinity prohibitions since the eleventh century had reduced the pool of eligible candidates that a noble had at his or her disposal.<sup>122</sup> In addition, in the cities of central and northern Italy, successful merchant families hoped to marry their children into prestigious lineages and used their wealth as a means of social advancement. In Tuscany, nobles were often willing to marry their offspring to individuals of lower social extraction if this presented financial advantages, such as a large dowry, that could contribute to maintaining or increasing their family power and status.<sup>123</sup> Henry's question and Peter's and Jacobus' stories makes one wonder whether the belief that the disparate social status of parents could be

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<sup>119</sup> Henry of Ghent, *Quodlibet IX*, q. 18, 292.

<sup>120</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, *Legenda aurea*, 232, translated in *The Golden Legend*, 211.

<sup>121</sup> McDougall, *Royal Bastards*, 24.

<sup>122</sup> Constance B. Bouchard, "Consanguinity and Noble Marriages in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries," *Speculum* 56, no. 2 (1981).

<sup>123</sup> See Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber, *Tuscans and their Families*, 125-142.

detrimental to a child's nobility exacerbated the concerns, especially among the nobility, over such marriages.

### 3.1.7 Gendered Dimensions of Natural Nobility

Notably, in Peter of Eboli's and Jacobus' stories the fathers of Tancred and Pilate are noble while their mothers are not. As we have seen, embryological ideas and the patrilineal structure of late medieval society contributed to emphasising the importance of male blood. Yet if children born of disparate unions were presented as less noble, it is because nobility was believed to be transmitted from both parents to their children. However, this does not mean that the natural nobility of women was considered to be on a par with that of men. Indeed, from a physiological perspective, men were considered naturally nobler than women and this raises interesting questions regarding the significance of male and female descent in late medieval understandings of natural nobility.

Rather than two sexes, most medieval scholars believed in a single-sex continuum which regarded women as imperfect men.<sup>124</sup> Late medieval medical theory established that the differences between the sexes were founded on three features: complexion, shape, and dispositions.<sup>125</sup> Males were thought to be biologically superior to females, with subtler intellects, more acute senses, stronger bodies, and less prone to vice.<sup>126</sup> And because nobility was fundamentally a question of perfection or excellence, authors like Guillelmus de Aragonia

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<sup>124</sup> On women as imperfect men, see Resnick, *Mark of Distinction*, 22-29. On the ways in which Galenic medicine imagined women as "reversed" men, see Thomas W. Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA., 1992), 25-9. On the limitations of a binary construct of feminine and masculine types, see Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, 201-209; Jo Ann McNamara, "An Unresolved Syllogism: The Search for a Christian Gender System," in *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities: Men in the Medieval West*, ed. Jacqueline Murray (New York, London, 1999); and Leah DeVun, *The Shape of Sex: Nonbinary Gender from Genesis to the Renaissance* (New York, 2021) who shows that medieval thinkers did often discuss nonbinary sex.

<sup>125</sup> Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, 170-177, and 183-188.

<sup>126</sup> The superior physical strength of men was well established. It was noted, for example, by Isidore of Seville. See *Etymologiae*, vol. 2, lib. XI.ii, 17: 'Vir nuncupatus, quia maior in eo vis est quam in feminis.' Interestingly, some of the characteristics of the female physique, such as a colder complexion and menstruation, were thought to help women live longer than men. See Vern L. Bullough and Cameron Campbell, "Female Longevity and Diet in the Middle Ages," *Speculum* 55 (1980). On the ways in which negative images of women and misogyny were articulated in medieval intellectual discourse, see Caroline W. Bynum, "'...And Woman His Humanity': Female Imagery in the Religious Writing of the Later Middle Ages," in *Fragmentation and Redemption*.

could affirm that ‘in nature, everything that is more perfect is nobler; and since the man is more perfect than the woman, then he is nobler too.’<sup>127</sup>

Moreover, by the thirteenth century, Aristotelian biology had introduced to the Latin West the idea that the father’s seed determined the shape or form of the child while the female contribution to generation was an inert and passive matter, only fit to be fashioned by the male seed. Even when authors ventured to contest Aristotle and posited the existence of female seed, they tended to regard the role of male sperm as far more influential.<sup>128</sup> Thus, it is not surprising to find a stronger emphasis on male rather than female descent in late medieval discourses on nobility.

This emphasis is often implicit in the terminology employed by the authors we have surveyed. Guillelmus himself says that for a body to be noble according to the truth ‘the son must be similar to the father (*necessarium quod filius sit similis patri*) [...] and retain his form.’<sup>129</sup> When Aquinas speaks of the inclinations that determine the body’s natural nobility, he says that these are part and parcel of the human nature which is inherited from the father (*a patre*) and passed on to his descendants.<sup>130</sup> None of this means however that nobility was a quality restricted to male bodies or that scholars completely disregarded the influence of the female seed in the reproductive process. But, as Henry of Ghent put it, children tend to resemble more their fathers than their mothers, and this is why ‘nobles tend consider the nobility of the father more than that of the mother’ (*nobiles plus reputant nobilitatem generis paterni quam materni*).<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Guillelmus de Aragonia, *De nobilitate animi*, pars 1, caput 12.3: ‘Hoc idem probatur aliter, quia in natura omne perfectius est nobilior; sed vir est muliere perfectior, ergo nobilior.’

<sup>128</sup> Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference*, 121-127. See also, Van der Lugt, *Le ver, le démon et la Vierge*, 70-79.

<sup>129</sup> Guillelmus de Aragonia, *De nobilitate animi*, pars 1, caput 4.7.

<sup>130</sup> Aquinas, *In Politicorum*, lib. I, cap. 4, n. 12, a93: ‘et haec quidem, scilicet natura corporalis, a patre derivatur ad posteros.’

<sup>131</sup> Henry of Ghent, *Quodlibet IX*, q. 18, 292.

This might also explain why, as I noted in the second chapter, late medieval scholars addressed most of their advice on eugenics to elite male audiences.<sup>132</sup>

The legal rules that determined the transmission of status and dignities similarly illustrate this gendered dimension and the importance of male descent. According to Roman law, children inherited their father's legal status. However, illegitimate children inherited the legal status of their mothers. If the mother was free, they were free, if she was a slave, they were slaves, no matter who the father was.<sup>133</sup> This was also the case in late medieval Florence where, with respect to citizenship and other legal rights, legitimate children took after their fathers and illegitimate after their mothers.<sup>134</sup> Yet Florentine families were structured around principles of patrilineal descent that placed daughters in a marginal position within the lineage: sons inherited from their fathers' property while girls had to be contented with a dowry. Thus, the need to preserve and increase the pool of potential male heirs who could ensure the continuity of the lineage meant that fathers actively sought, and often succeed, to legitimate their illegitimate sons.<sup>135</sup>

However, not every illegitimate child was treated equally. Medieval jurists like Bartolus de Saxoferrato were willing to legitimate and accord certain rights to *naturales* because they had a 'certain father,' but very little to those *spurii* who were considered 'unnatural' or of 'uncertain father.'<sup>136</sup> Despite the fact that bastardy always carried a stain of some sort, *naturales* were often treated on a par with legitimate offspring: their parents supported them, raised them in their

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<sup>132</sup> Miramon and Van der Lugt, "Sang, hérédité et parenté," 40. One such example is the treatise dedicated to the first born son of King James II of Aragon. See Gianfranco Fioravanti, "Un trattato medievale di eugenetica: il *Libellus de ingenio bone nativitatit*," *Mediaevalia* 21 (2002).

<sup>133</sup> Susan Treggiari, *Roman Marriage: iusti coniuges from the Time of Cicero to the Time of Ulpian* (Oxford, 1991), 44-45, 53, 317. See also Osvaldo Cavallar and Julius Kirshner, *Jurists and Jurisprudence in Medieval Italy: Texts and Contexts* (Toronto, 2020), 469, 486-7.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 485.

<sup>135</sup> For this reason, as Thomas Kuehn has noted, illegitimacy was in Florence a matter of paternity rather than maternity. Kuehn, *Illegitimacy in Renaissance Florence*, 8. See also Kuehn, "As if Conceived within a Legitimate Marriage: A Dispute concerning Legitimation in Quattrocento Florence," *American Journal of Legal History* 29, no. 4 (1985).

<sup>136</sup> Kuehn, *Illegitimacy in Renaissance Florence*, 36-37, 42-43.

house, they could inherit property and dignities from their fathers, and they were permitted to use the family name, insignia, and coat of arms.<sup>137</sup> As the jurist Benedictus de Barzis put it in his treatise on *Children Born Illegitimately* (1456), a natural child is capable of attaining both honour and dignities, including that of nobility. But a spurious child, on the other hand, should not be admitted to dignities.<sup>138</sup>

Thus, in late medieval Italy, the law established that the ability to receive the dignity of nobility was dependent on the certainty of a child's biological relation with his father. Notably, there was another case in which some jurists argued that illegitimate children should not be able to receive the dignity of nobility, namely if they were born of a non-consensual relationship or rape. According to Baldus de Ubaldis (1327-1400) the reason for this is that such children were born of a 'putrefied blood.'<sup>139</sup> Although it is unclear whether this 'blood' refers to the mother's menses or to the father's seed, this passage suggests that there is a close relationship between the legal transmission of nobility and biological descent.

In the thirteenth century, the belief that nobility was transmitted primarily through the male line also appears in a book on French law, demonstrating that this gendered dimension was not peculiar to medieval Italy. The *Contumes of Beauvaisis* by Philippe de Beaumanoir (c.1247-1296) affirm that 'not all free persons are gentlemen,' and that while freedom is determined by the mother, 'gentle blood comes down through the fathers, and not through

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<sup>137</sup> For a summary of the relationships and legal capacities of illegitimate children, see Cavallar and Kirshner, *Jurists and Jurisprudence*, 628. See also Kuehn, *Illegitimacy in Renaissance Florence*, 42-44; and Anna T. Sheedy, *Bartolus on Social Conditions in the Fourteenth Century* (New York, 1942), 115.

<sup>138</sup> Cavallar and Kirshner, *Jurists and Jurisprudence*, 639-643.

<sup>139</sup> Baldus de Ubaldis, *In decretalium volume commentaria* (Venice, 1595), to c. Innotuit, C. De electione (X. 1.6.20), fol. 71rb: 'Nobilitas filios degeneres non potest nobilitarent si mulier fuerit deflorata virginitate sua per vim, vel per dolum. Per hoc patet, quod bastardus non sunt nobiles, nec de domo nobilium, quia non decidunt ab aliquo fonte, qui sit nobilis, sed a sanguine putrefacto.'

the mothers,' so that 'no one, however gentle he is through his mother, can be a knight if he is not gentle through his father.'<sup>140</sup>

### 3.2 Natural Nobility and the Nobility as a Class

In this second part, I will explore how the belief that nobility was transmitted by blood shaped the perception of the nobles as a class. First, I will show how origin myths presented the nobles as forming a distinct group of descent. Then, I will demonstrate that there were attempts to explain how their bodies had progressively been differentiating from others since Adam and Eve. And finally, I will show how the perceived physical and moral superiority of the nobles was employed to justify their right to rule.

#### 3.2.1 Origin Myths and the Nobles' Illustrious Ancestors

Origin myths became a popular literary genre in late medieval Italy and will be further explored in the next chapter. Most of these myths were concerned with the foundation of cities, but some also provided an account of the origins of the nobility. These legends emerged at a time and in places when the power of the aristocracy was being eroded or was under threat and one of their main goals was to legitimate their authority.

One of these myths, dating from the second half of the fourteenth century, provides an account of the origins of the Pisan nobility at a time when the city was engulfed in conflicts between nobles and the *popolo*.<sup>141</sup> After rehearsing the ancient history of Pisa and its foundation by Pelops, the chronicle of Ranieri Sardo (1354-1399) recounts the arrival of Otto I in the year 962. During the emperor's visit to the city, seven of his barons were so taken by it that they

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<sup>140</sup> Philippe de Beaumanoir, *The "Contumes de Beauvaisis" of Philippe de Beaumanoir*, trans. F. R. P. Akehurst and ed. Ruth Mazo Karras (Philadelphia, 1992), 517-518. As scholars have noted, from the tenth to the late twelfth century, knights were not necessarily nobles. By the thirteenth century, in contrast, knighting or dubbing ceremonies became the prerogative of noble lineages. See Keen, *Chivalry*, 143-47; and Bouchard, *Strong of Body, Brave and Noble*, 3, 120.

<sup>141</sup> See Emilio Cristiani, *Nobiltà e popolo nel comune di Pisa dalle origini del podestariato alla signoria dei Donoratico* (Napoli, 1962).

decided to remain there. From these seven lords, the story goes on, are descended the seven noble Pisan households (*delli quali disciese i sette chasati*).<sup>142</sup> Claiming that the Pisan nobility was descended from the barons of the first Holy Roman Emperor would have resonated with the Ghibelline, pro-imperial, affiliation of the commune and its political elite. It also served to exalt the status of the Pisan nobility and legitimise their rights and privileges by tracing them back to an imperial grant (*i quali tutti privilegìo e ebbono di molti doni dallo imperadore*).<sup>143</sup> Most importantly, however, it suggested that the Pisan nobles formed a distinct group of descent.<sup>144</sup>

In Florence, the late medieval chronicles of the city all stressed its foundation by Roman nobles. The *Chronica de origine civitatis Florentiae* (c.1205) affirms that the Roman Senate sent the best among the nobles to build the city.<sup>145</sup> The founding role of the Roman nobility was also invoked by Florentine chroniclers like Sanzanome in his *Gesta Florentinorum* (1230s) and Giovanni Villani (c.1280-1348) in his *Nuova cronica*.<sup>146</sup> Admittedly, as we will see in the next chapter, this story could lend itself to interpretation as an account of the origin of the Florentine people, and not just of its aristocracy. Such interpretation shows a preference to obliterate distinctions within the polity by emphasising the belief in the collective nobility of its citizenry. However, another important episode in the history of Florence strongly suggested a continuity between the city's noble Roman founders and its late medieval aristocracy.

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<sup>142</sup> Ranieri Sardo, *Cronaca di Pisa*, ed. Ottavio Banti (Roma, 1963), 11: 'negli anni domini novecento sessantadue, et venne a Pisa Octo inperadore tedesco, et piacendoli lo stare in Pisa rimaseno dei suoi sette baroni delli quali disciese i sette chasati ciò è di Chasamatti e gli Orlandi et que' di Librafacta et Ghaetani, et Duodi hora Griffi, et Bischonti e <Ghusmani> et Verchionesi.'

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> In the early fourteenth century, Cologne also had a foundation myth according to which its nobles were descended from fifteen senatorial families whom the emperor Trajan had supposedly sent to the city. See Liddy, "Family, Lineage and Dynasty," 660.

<sup>145</sup> *Chronica de origine civitatis Florentiae*, ed. Riccardo Chellini (Roma, 2009), 41-42.

<sup>146</sup> Sanzanome, *Gesta Florentinorum*, in *Quellen und Forschungen zur ältesten Geschichte der Stadt Florenz*, vol. 1, ed. Otto Hartwig (Marburg, 1875), 2: 'dicta Florentia quasi Florensia idest in ense florens, vel quia ab excellentioribus urbis fuit hedicata.' *Libro fiisolano (Codex ASLuc, Orsucci 40, written in between 1290-1339)*, in *ibid.*, 56: 'E maggiormente vollono cavesse il detto nome però chera habitata dal fiore de Romani.' Giovanni Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, ed. G. Porta (Parma, 1991), vol. I, book 2, ch. 1, 47, also claims that Florence 'was populated by the best people of Rome' (*fu popolata della migliore gente di Roma*).

According to the chronicles, after the destruction of Florence by Totila in the sixth century the city had been abandoned. When Charlemagne arrived in Italy, Villani says that certain nobles from the countryside who ‘were descended from the ancient noble citizens of the first Florence’ (*stratti degli antichi nobili cittadini della prima Firenze*), sent ambassadors to the emperor who agreed to help rebuild the city.<sup>147</sup> Likewise, Leonardo Bruni affirms that after the destruction of Florence, Charlemagne rebuilt the city and recalled the nobility who, fearful because of the lack of defences, had taken refuge in their fortifications in the countryside.<sup>148</sup> By linking the descendants of the Roman nobility with the nobles who settled back in Florence in Charlemagne’s time, the chronicles established a connection between the Roman and the Florentine nobility and, at once, between the rural and the urban aristocracy. It is not difficult to imagine that reading these stories, the Florentine nobles would have thought of themselves as the true descendants of their city’s noble founders. The belief that the old consular aristocracy was the offspring of the Roman nobility would also explain why Florentines were usually satisfied with tracing their origin of their family back to the eleventh or twelfth century and pointing out that some of their ancestors had then hold office in the city’s government.<sup>149</sup>

Legends of the origins of the nobility were not unique to communal Italy. Paul Freedman has examined some of them in his study of the medieval peasantry because in many cases the myths explained the origin of serfdom as much as that of the nobility: they exalt the character of the aristocracy and represent the peasant as naturally lowly to justify his relative

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<sup>147</sup> Villani, *Nuova cronica*, vol. I, book 4, ch. 1, 112-114. Lapo da Castiglionchio recounts this story to his son, *Epistola*, 67-68: ‘certi gentili, e nobili del contado di Firenze, che si dice che caporali furono i figliuoli Giovanni, i figliuoli Ghineldi, i figliuoli Ridolfi stratti degli antichi nobiliti cittadini di Firenze...’

<sup>148</sup> Leonardo Bruni, *History of the Florentine People*, ed. and trans. James Hankins (Cambridge, MA., 2001), book I, 77, 96: ‘Quare moenia potius a Carolo restituta et nobilitatem, quae diffisa munitionibus urbis frequentia in praediis suis castella munierat, intra urbem revocatam; urbem denique ipsam varie disiectam in formam urbis redactam, sed reparatam magis quam rursus conditam existimo.’

<sup>149</sup> Bizzocchi, “La nobiltà in Dante, la nobiltà di Dante,” 204-206; and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, “In Search of Ancestors: The Family Genealogists of Florence (Fourteenth-Fifteenth Century),” in *Mythical Ancestry in World Cultures, 1400-1800*, ed. Sara Trevisan (Turnhout, 2018).

lack of freedom and oppression.<sup>150</sup> In Catalonia the origin of social divisions was traced back to the beginning of the Reconquista. The ancestors of the Catalan nobles were those men who at the behest of King Louis the Pious rebelled and expelled the Muslim invaders while the ancestors of the peasants were portrayed as those who were afraid to fight.<sup>151</sup> As Freedman noted, this story explains ‘the privilege status of the nobles and the subjugation of the peasantry as a result of contrasting moral characters demonstrated at the Catalan foundation.’<sup>152</sup> In Hungary, the serfs were portrayed as the descendants of those men who had failed to attend the annual military muster of the nation.<sup>153</sup> And in France, some chronicles suggested that the serfs were descended from the conquered Gauls and the nobles from the Frank conquerors.<sup>154</sup> Freedman has argued that these legends of origin emerged at a time when ‘nothing so elaborate as modern pseudo biological theories of inferiority existed.’<sup>155</sup> In the next section, I hope to show that, in fact, such theories did exist.

### 3.2.2 The Biogenesis of the Nobility

The idea that nobles were a distinct group of descent presented an obvious difficulty for medieval thinkers. If all human beings were descended from Adam and Eve, how could one explain that some men were naturally nobler than others? Indeed, in medieval times monogenesis was often employed to reject the idea that nobility was confined to a specific group of individuals. For example, Dante says that if one defines nobility by birth one of two fallacies must be accepted. If we are all descended from one father, then we are all either noble

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<sup>150</sup> Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant*, 105-130. These stories were often modelled after the well-known legend of The Curse of Ham. See *ibid.*, 86-104. More generally, see David M. Goldenberg, *Black and Slave: The Origins and History of the Curse of Ham* (Berlin, 2017).

<sup>151</sup> See Miquel Coll i Alentorn, “La llegenda d’Otger Cataló i els nou barons,” *Estudis Romanics* 1 (1947-48); Paul Freedman, “Catalan Lawyers and the Origins of Serfdom,” *Mediaeval Studies* 48 (1986); and Freedman, “Cowardice, Heroism, and the Legendary Origins of Catalonia,” *Past & Present* 121, no. 1 (1988).

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>153</sup> Richard C. Hoffmann, “Outsiders by Birth and Blood,” *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 6 (1983): 14-21; and Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant*, 118-126. A similar story of the origin of serfdom can be found in Philippe de Beaumanoir, *The “Coutumes de Beauvaisis,”* 519.

<sup>154</sup> However, as noted by Susan Reynolds, “Medieval origins gentium and the Community of the Realm,” *History* 68 (1983): 380, the myths of Frankish nobles and Gaulish peasants was not widespread until the sixteenth century.

<sup>155</sup> Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant*, 2.

or base and there is no nobility at all. Or, alternatively, one must accept that the human race is not descended from a single man alone, a position that was contrary to the Church's teaching and untenable for anyone at the time.<sup>156</sup> Yet, as I will show, the belief that some individuals were naturally nobler than others encouraged late medieval thinkers to find ways of explaining Adam's heterogeneous offspring.

Medieval thinkers believed that God had endowed Adam with natural nobility and a perfectly balanced complexion. As Robert Kilwardby put it, in relation to body and soul Adam was most noble (*tam secundum corpus quam secundum animam fuit nobilissime factus*) and, as a result, he enjoyed a perfect relationship of proportion (*aequalitas*) between his body and soul which, among other things, made him able not to die.<sup>157</sup> True, the Fall was interpreted as a natural falling away from that perfect complexion.<sup>158</sup> Yet that alone did not explain why the Fall seemed to have affected some more than others. As we have seen, scholars were generally willing to admit that although one's bodily complexion tended to resemble that of his parents and ancestors, in practice this did not always happen. However, this was not the same as to say that anyone could be born with a noble body. In order to give an account of the biogenesis of the nobility, it was necessary to explain how some of Adam's descendants had inherited a nobler complexion and passed it on to their children.

An early thirteenth-century *reportatio* presents an attempt to precisely do that. It is an account of a scholarly dispute on the true nature of nobility dating from the 1230s and titled *Contentio de nobilitate generis et probitate animi*. Scholarly disputations were normative cultural

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<sup>156</sup> Dante, *Convivio*, IV, 15.2-5. A similar argument against nobility of birth had been put forward by Hostiensis (1200-1271), *In tertium decretalium librum commentaria* (Venice, 1581), ad X, lib. 3, tit. 5, cap. 37, f. 29r: 'Nam omnes sumus de eodem patre et eadem nature quo ad carnem et quicumque si de hoc re iactans et certans de eodem invenies te et illum, quem ex hoc despicias, si vero computare sciveris sursum versum.'

<sup>157</sup> Kilwardby, *Quaestiones in librum secundum Sententiarum*, q. 84, 236-237. For the question of Adam's complexion before and after the Fall, see Ziegler, "Medicine and Immortality in Terrestrial Paradise."

<sup>158</sup> After the Fall, only those untainted by sin, that is Christ and Mary, were thought to possess perfect bodily complexions. See Irven M. Resnick, "Ps. Albert the Great on the Physiognomy of Jesus and Mary," *Mediaeval Studies* 64 (2002). Interestingly, women's and men's bodies were thought to have been differently affected by the Fall, see Charles T. Wood, "The Doctors' Dilemma: Sin, Salvation, and the Menstrual Cycle in Medieval Thought," *Speculum* 56 (1981).

practices in medieval Europe and they thrived in the context of the medieval university.<sup>159</sup> Although they were usually intended for a learned and scholarly audience, the summary of this particular disputation was sent to two important men within Frederick II's circle of trusted advisers: Pietro della Vigna, who was chancellor and secretary to the Emperor, and Taddeo da Suessa, who had been appointed by Frederick as Great Justiciar of the Kingdom of Sicily. The account has been preserved in three fourteenth-century manuscripts. A fourth manuscript, which had been kept at the library of the university of Wroclaw, was destroyed during World War II but it could be dated to the late thirteenth century, and it most probably originated in Tuscany.<sup>160</sup> The anonymous author mentions that the disputation took place in '*in scolis nostris*,' which could be a reference to the university or *Studium* that Frederick II had founded in 1224 in Naples. Frederick II has gone down in history as a man deeply interested in intellectual and cultural matters.<sup>161</sup> So deep and wide was his intellectual openness, that it brought him all kinds of charges of heresy, particularly for his ideas on the soul and body.<sup>162</sup> Thus, it would not be surprising that he too would have been interested in the question of the true nature of nobility.

The *reportatio* shows not only that some ventured to claim that nobles enjoyed their status because they were born with better bodies but also that the life and behaviour of their ancestors had determined the quality of their complexion. Each of the two debaters, whose identity remains obscure, gave a speech. One of them claims that nobility is chiefly a matter of virtue and denies any connection between nobility and birth or bodily condition. The second sustains that nobility is not just determined by birth, but that it is literally a matter of blood.

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<sup>159</sup> See Alex J. Novikoff, *The Medieval Culture of Disputation: Pedagogy, Practice, and Performance* (Philadelphia, 2013).

<sup>160</sup> See Fulvio Delle Donne, "Una disputa sulla nobiltà alla corte di Federico II di Svevia," *Medioevo Romanzo* 23 (1999): 15. See also Maria del Giudice, "La Contentio de nobilitate generis et animi probitate secondo il codice di Fitalia," *Centro di Studi Filologici e Linguistici Siciliani: Bollettino* 14 (1980); and Castelnuovo, "Revisiter un Classique," 130-133.

<sup>161</sup> On culture at the court of Frederick II, see David Abulafia, *Frederick II: A Medieval Emperor* (London, Oxford, 1988), 251-289; and Michael McVaugh and Véronique Pasche, eds., *Sciences at the Court of Frederick II* (Turnhout, 1994).

<sup>162</sup> Dante places Frederick together with some Ghibelline leaders, such as Farinata degli Uberti, in the circle of heresy in hell (*Inf.* 10.119, 106). Ghibellines' association with heresy was not unconnected from Frederick's own charges. See Hyde, "Contemporary Views on Faction and Civil Strife," 294.

This one argues that after the Fall, some men worked towards the overcoming of vice, and some did not. Some, through great deeds, desired to repair in themselves the defect produced by sin and rose to the glory of the first nobility. However, others, namely the rustics, reproduced like wild beasts, turned to the lowest occupations, and for this reason they did not in the least deserve the title of nobility.<sup>163</sup> These respective courses of action or behaviour improved nature in some, and caused it to deteriorate in others so that, as a result, qualitatively different natures were passed down to their respective progeny (*sed primus ille a sue creationis nobilitate degenerans corruptionis viciū secundum magis et minus transfundit ad posteros*).<sup>164</sup> These changes were inherited via the reproductive act and each improvement in behaviour corresponded to an improvement of the body and the humours and, consequently, in the seed and the fashioning of the child (*ex nobilium sanguine candidiores fetus procreantur tanquam ex delicato humore et ex purioribus elementis*).<sup>165</sup>

At a first glance, this speech seems to suggest that there are important biological differences that set nobles entirely apart from the rest of society. However, in practice it does something very different. By suggesting that parents can improve or worsen through their behaviour the bodily dispositions that they pass on to their children, it blurs even more the distinction between nobility of birth and virtue.

To better understand how these bodily changes from parents to children were supposed to take place, we can turn once again to Henry of Ghent. According to Henry, a child's natural nobility can differ from that of his parents because their conduct (*mores*) informs the imaginative faculty by means of which they impress dispositions on their children in

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<sup>163</sup> *Contentio de nobilitate generis et probitate animi*, ed. Fulvio Delle Donne, in "Una disputa sulla nobiltà alla corte di Federico II di Svevia," 17: 'Fuerunt enim quidam qui cupierunt in se primum reparare defectum et ad gloriam prime nobilitatis redire, nisi actus magnificos exercere et laudes meritis comparare. Alii vero, in hac parte remissi utpote rustica pars hominum, vitam sibi propagabant ferinam, qui conversi sunt ad infima studia, scilicet movere glebas, vellere fructices, defendere sentibus agros, colere glandes minime nobilitatis titulum meruerunt.'

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

conception. On account of their evil behaviour and bad discipline, nobles by birth can develop evil customs that cause them to ignore the natural disposition imprinted in them by their parents (*dispositionem impressam a parentibus*) so that they, in turn, might afterwards generate children who are less noble than themselves in their bodily dispositions (*minus nobiles secundum dispositiones corporales*).<sup>166</sup> The opposite can happen too, namely that those born of noble parents and behaving nobly, pass on to their children even more nobility than the one they were born with. According to Henry, these children will be nobler than their parents, and so much more noble the greater the number of their noble ancestors.<sup>167</sup>

Thus, both Henry and the second speaker of the *Contentio de nobilitate* believed that moral behaviour could affect an individual's body as much as bodily complexion could influence one's moral dispositions.<sup>168</sup> To some extent, this idea was not new. In the twelfth century, scholars had begun to adopt Galenic medicine to explain the corrupting influence that original sin must have had on Adam's body, and how the resulting humoral imbalance was transmitted to his offspring.<sup>169</sup> But now scholars were employing the same set of principles in reverse, that is to explain how some individuals had inherited an improved bodily complexion from their ancestors. In so doing, they implicitly suggested that if someone was noble by birth, his ancestors must have been noble both of body *and* virtuous. In the next section, I will show how this physical and moral superiority was employed as a justification of the privileges enjoyed by the nobles and, in particular, of their right to rule.

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<sup>166</sup> Henry of Ghent, *Quodlibet IX*, q. 18, 291.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, 291-292: 'Sicut e converso, cum sequuntur in usu nobilitatem quam acceperunt a parentibus, transfundunt in posteros et maiorem quam habebant in se ipsis [...] Ut ex hoc filii nobilium semper sunt nobiliores parentibus, nisi degenerent, et tanto nobiliores quanto magis recedunt a primis radicibus, si tamen semper ambo generantes sint nobiles.'

<sup>168</sup> This should not be confused with the physiognomic belief that the qualities of the soul could be "read" in the body. Physiognomic authors did not ever affirm that behaviour could change the natural complexion. See Joseph Ziegler, "Philosophers and Physicians on the Scientific Validity of Latin Physiognomy, 1200-1500," *Early Science and Medicine* 12, no. 3 (2007): 295-6, 302-3.

<sup>169</sup> Irven M. Resnick, "Humoralism and Adam's Body: Twelfth-Century Debates and Petrus Alfonsi's *Dialogus contra Judaeos*," *Viator* 36 (2005).

### 3.2.3 Noble Bodies, Noble Descent, and the Right to Rule

All the ways of thinking about the nobility as a group of descent I have just outlined had very real political implications. Since the time of Augustine, medieval Western thinkers believed that human government had been instituted as a remedy for sin.<sup>170</sup> Nevertheless, Augustine regarded government as a necessary evil and he extended this negative characterisation to those who held the power to rule.<sup>171</sup> Several hundreds of years later, it was still not uncommon to regard the power wielded by the aristocracy with suspicion and contempt. During the Investiture Controversy, in a letter written in 1081 to bishop Hermann of Metz, pope Gregory VII affirmed that kings and dukes derive their power and origin from men who, ignorant of God's commands and under the stimulus of the devil, with presumption and greed had established themselves over other men who were equal to them by means of rapine, murder, and all sorts of crimes.<sup>172</sup>

However, by the thirteenth century human government started to be regarded in a more positive light.<sup>173</sup> Medieval scholars developed a hierarchical conception of human society that was rapidly employed to justify social distinctions. Building on the work by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (5th-6th AD), they established natural, social, and political hierarchies by reference to the celestial hierarchy of heaven.<sup>174</sup> As a result, it became more acceptable to think that after the Fall the nobles had enjoyed power and authority to rule not because they had violently usurped that right, but because they were fitter to rule; that is better than, and not equal to, the rest of men.

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<sup>170</sup> See Philippe Buc, *L'ambiguïté du livre. Prince, pouvoir et peuple dans les commentaires de la Bible au Moyen Âge* (Paris, 1994), 71-72, 94-95, and Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1978), 50.

<sup>171</sup> Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, ed. and trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford, 1995), book I, 23.23, 32.

<sup>172</sup> *Das Register Gregors VII*, ed. Erich Caspar (Berlin, 1920-23), vol. 2, viii. 21, 547-63, 552.

<sup>173</sup> Cary J. Nederman, "Nature, Sin and the Origins of Society: The Ciceronian Tradition in Medieval Political Thought," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 49, no. 1 (1988).

<sup>174</sup> For the philosophical underpinnings, see John Marenbon and David E. Luscombe, "Two Medieval Ideas: Eternity and Hierarchy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Philosophy*, 60-69; and Lucy K. Pick, "Michael Scot in Toledo: "Natura naturans" and the Hierarchy of Being," *Traditio* 53 (1998): 108-109. Also, Dana Vasiliu, "The Medieval Social Hierarchy: From Congregatio fidelium to societas humana," *British and American Studies* 14 (2008).

Thus, Henry of Ghent could affirm that it is by reason of their natural nobility (*naturalem nobilitatem*) that nobles have deserved to be put in command of the people and their heirs to inherit such a right (*meruerunt praefici populis, et post heredes sui iure hereditario*). At the beginning, ‘those who started to rule and govern the people did so on account of their excellent uprightness, for an equal should have no rule over another equal.’<sup>175</sup> Likewise, the author of the *Coutumes de Beauvaisis* affirmed that in the beginning all men were free (*franc*) ‘and with the same freedom (*meisme francise*), for everyone knows we are all descended from one father and one mother.’ However, afterwards, the people ‘sought among themselves those who were the most beautiful (*plus bel*), the strongest (*plus fort*), and the wisest (*plus sage*), and gave them lordship (*seignorie*) to help them remain in peace [...] And, from these people have descended those who are called gentlemen (*gentix homes*), and from the others those who are called free but not gentle (*francs sans le gentillece*).’<sup>176</sup>

The reception of Aristotelian works like the *Politics* contributed to reinforcing the belief that some men were born to rule and others to be subjected. Guillelmus de Aragonia claimed that in some men ‘their nature is always directed to doing good and to knowing good, and such people are noble in themselves, and are leaders and teachers.’<sup>177</sup> These have a well-disposed (*bene dispositum*), well formed (*bene formatum*), and temperate (*temperatum*) body and, as a result, they possess an unencumbered soul (*animam expeditam*). Not being distorted by a wicked complexion (*malicia complexionis*), they naturally tend towards things of reason and intellect insofar they are inclined to proper action. These men are those whom Aristotle in the *Politics* calls ‘good in themselves’ and ‘lords by nature.’<sup>178</sup> Like Guillelmus, Dante also draws on the

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<sup>175</sup> Henry of Ghent, *Quodlibet IX*, q. 18, 289-290: ‘Nullus enim ab initio incipit dominari aut imperare populo, nisi propter aliquam probitatem qua praefertur eis: par enim in parem nullum debet habere imperium.’

<sup>176</sup> Philippe de Beaumanoir, *Coutumes de Beauvaisis*, vol. 2, ed. Amédée Salmon (Paris, 1900), 234, translated in *The “Coutumes de Beauvaisis,”* 518-519.

<sup>177</sup> Guillelmus de Aragonia, *De nobilitate animi*, pars 1, caput 14.8: ‘quidam sunt boni per se, ita quod eorum natura semper directa est ad bene agere et ad bene scire; et tales sunt nobiles per seipsos, et sunt rectores et magistri.’

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, caput 11.26-27.

*Politics* to argue that there are whole nations born apt for rule and others for subjection.<sup>179</sup> And even throughout the *Convivio*, where the discourse on nobility focuses mainly on the noble qualities of individuals, some of his remarks seem to imply that communities or groups, like the Latins, can collectively claim lordship because of the good disposition of their bodies.<sup>180</sup>

### 3.3 Natural Nobility and Florentine Society

In this final part, I want to explore how the concept of natural nobility and the belief that the nobles formed a distinct group of descent mapped onto the social perception of the Florentine nobles as a class. The late medieval concept of natural nobility demonstrates that birth and virtue could relate to each other in complex ways. A noble body facilitated *true* nobility, yet one could lack ancient origins, wealth, and power and be virtuous. On the other hand, one could belong to an illustrious, wealthy, and powerful family, and be considered noble irrespectively of moral character. The Florentine *magnati* are a good case in point.

The *magnati* were not a homogeneous group. Some were members of feudal lineages well established in the *contado*. Many others could trace their origin back to the families of the ancient consular aristocracy. Others belonged to families of relatively more recent extraction who had enriched themselves by commerce or banking in the thirteenth century.<sup>181</sup> Yet all of them were considered nobles, in spite of their various origins and their violent, oppressive, and unruly behaviour. This raises the following question: what was it, if anything, that defined all these individuals as nobles?

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<sup>179</sup> Dante, *Monarchia*, 2.6, 7, 142, 144: 'Propter quod videmus quod quidam non solum singulares homines, quin etiam populi, apti nati sunt ad principari, quidam alii ad subici atque ministrare, ut Philosophus astruit in hiis que *De politicis*: et talibus, ut ipse dicit, non solum regi est expediens, sed etiam iustum, etiamsi ad hoc cogantur.'

<sup>180</sup> Dante, *Convivio*, IV, 4.10-11: 'E però che più dolce natura in signoreggiando, e più forte in sostenendo, e più sottile in acquistando né fu né fia che quella della gente latina [...] e massimamente di quello popolo santo nel quale l'alto sangue troiano era mischiato, cioè Roma, Dio quello elesse a quello officio [that is, the empire]. Però che, con ciò sia cosa che a quello ottenere non sanza grandissima vertude venire si potesse, [...] questo era quello popolo che a ciò più era disposto.'

<sup>181</sup> See Sergio Raveggi et al., *Ghibellini, guelfi e popolo grasso. I detentori del potere politico a Firenze nella seconda metà del Duecento* (Florence, 1978), 311-321.

Throughout the late medieval period in Florence there was no institution that regulated membership into the nobility and, for the most part, there were no documents to prove the noble condition of individuals; two things that would appear only throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Nonetheless, some scholars have seen in the creation of the *magnati* the establishment of the nobility as a legally defined class.<sup>182</sup> The writings of some medieval jurists like Bartolus de Saxoferrato (1313-1357) seem to lend support to this thesis. In his *Tractatus de dignitatibus*, Bartolus argued that in civil society the only condition required of someone to be noble is to be recognised as such by the *princeps*, that is, the legitimate political authority. In other words, Bartolus claimed that the only nobility that civil society formally recognises is the political or civil nobility (*politica seu civilis*), a dignity conferred upon an individual by law, that is, by the will of the sovereign authority which in the case of Florence was the city government.<sup>183</sup>

Bartolus was thinking of groups like the Florentine *magnati*. Significantly, however, the *magnati* represented only a subset of the Florentine nobility, a group of families whose noble status was sanctioned, and negatively privileged, by law.<sup>184</sup> Some families were considered noble and yet were not *magnati*. These were sometimes referred to as ‘*grandi popolani*’ or ‘*nobiles populares*.’ Moreover, from the 1340s, many of the *magnati*, no longer considered a threat to the commune or because of services rendered to it, were able to remove their name from the lists which beginning with the Ordinances of Justice of 1293-5 had been created to stigmatise them.<sup>185</sup> Some of these were families whose power and numbers had sharply declined and after

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<sup>182</sup> Nicolai Rubinstein, *Studies in Italian History in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, vol. 1, Political Thought and the Language of Politics*, ed. Giovanni Ciappelli (Rome, 2004), 167: ‘While in thirteenth century Florence the family [...] was clearly recognizable social unit, the nobility was not. It was only at the end of the thirteenth century [...] that a legal definition of nobility was introduced. Neither were there, before the end of the thirteenth century, legal attributes which distinguished the nobility from the *popolo*.’

<sup>183</sup> See Federico del Tredici, ‘Natura, politica e nobiltà nelle città italiane del tardo medioevo. Il *Tractatus de dignitatibus* di Bartolo da Sassoferrato e le sue eccezioni,’ *Reti Medievali Rivista* 21, no. 1 (2020).

<sup>184</sup> Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, ‘Nobles or Pariahs? The Exclusion of Florentine Magnates from the Thirteenth to the Fifteenth Centuries,’ *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 39, no. 2 (1997).

<sup>185</sup> A total of 72 families were initially classified as magnates, see Gaetano Salvemini, *Magnati e popolani in Firenze dal 1280 al 1295* (Florence, 1899), 376-377. On the loss of magnate status, see Klapisch-Zuber, ‘Nobles or Pariahs,’ 220-222; and Klapisch-Zuber, *Retour à la cité: les magnats de Florence, 1340-1440* (Paris, 2006), 453-457.

recovering full legal rights became quickly assimilated within the ranks of the *popolani*.<sup>186</sup> Yet they maintained a noble identity and with the emergence of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany they sought to be reinstated within the legal nobility, when this was no longer disadvantageous.<sup>187</sup>

Thus, although the law could be instrumental to denote social status, in Florence legal recognition was not a requirement to be socially noble. Lapo was well aware of this and in his letter, he affirmed that even if there were no statute whatsoever, and therefore no legal nobility, there would still be nobles ‘according to common understanding’ (*secondo ragione comune*).<sup>188</sup> Indeed, his own family could boast a noble ancestry – the Castiglionchio were descended from the lords of Cuona and were related to the Ghibelline *magnati* of the da Volognano – and yet enjoyed full legal rights. For this reason, his son could claim that according to the statute he was *popolano*, but otherwise noble with a nobility that no law could take away from him.<sup>189</sup>

If the nobles were not a legal class, then how did people decide who was or was not noble, and deserved to be called and treated as such? To answer this question, some scholars have adopted Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of the *habitus*.<sup>190</sup> According to Bourdieu, individual and group identity is often perceived in relation to embodied behaviour: ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions which are socio-culturally produced.<sup>191</sup> Thus, the underlying assumption of some recent scholarship has been that the identity and social dominance of the nobility rested upon a series of distinctive traits and their public display. These, of course, could vary from place to place. In Tuscany, the nobles were often knights and fought on horseback. They had wealth, land, and power. They had important social connections and established marriage

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<sup>186</sup> On how the conflicts with the *popolo* transformed some of the attitudes, assumptions, and behaviours of the Florentine elite, see Najemy, “The Dialogue of Power in Florentine Politics.”

<sup>187</sup> On the rehabilitation of noble families in the sixteenth century, see Roberto Bizzocchi, “La culture généalogique dans l’Italie du seizième siècle,” *Annales. Economies, sociétés, civilisations* 4 (1991).

<sup>188</sup> Lapo da Castiglionchio, *Epistola*, 61.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 165: ‘E come per lo statuto che fa alcuni grandi e nobili, non si coglie la nobiltà, che di ragione comune avevano coloro che rimasero popolani, e per questo conobbi me essere del numero de’ popolani, e nientedimeno se per le cose dette nella prima quistione era nobile, non essere a me tolta essa nobiltà.’

<sup>190</sup> For example, see David Crouch, *The Birth of Nobility: Constructing Aristocracy in England and France 900-1300* (Harlow, 2005).

<sup>191</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, 1977), 171-87.

alliances with other noble families. They lived in palaces and towers. They were often sent as ambassadors to other communes, kings, emperors, and popes. Their dress was rich, and they had coats of arms which they proudly displayed in their houses and in the private chapels where they were buried. Each of these elements helped create a world in which nobles were unmistakably different, immediately recognisable. They expressed and actualised a noble identity and culture.<sup>192</sup>

Explaining Florentine noble identity in terms of Pierre Bourdieu's acquisition of cultural, social, and symbolic capital can be useful. However, as a result of the political, social, and economic dynamics of late medieval cities, the urban elite was constantly being replenished with individuals of low social origins who became wealthy enough not only to be attractive matches for the offspring of nobles, but also to acquire the external goods that helped display noble status.<sup>193</sup> These upstarts were often criticised for their presumption but, more importantly, for their evident lack of illustrious ancestors and noble blood.

The Florentine Cerchi constitute a good example. This rich and successful merchant family rose to prominence in the second half of the thirteenth century and used their wealth to imitate the *habitus* of the nobles. Compagni recounts how the Cerchi dressed well, had many servants and horses, and cultivated a pleasant appearance. In their desire to be assimilated to the nobility, they went as far as to buy the palace of the Counts Guidi that was next to the houses of distinguished Florentine families like the Pazzi and the Donati. The Cerchi became the leaders of the Whites, and as a result of their participation in elite factional strife, they were condemned as *magnati*. Nonetheless, Compagni remarks that the Cerchi were 'men of low status' (*uomini di basso stato*) and that although the Pazzi and the Donati were not as wealthy, they were 'of more ancient blood' (*più antichi di sangue*).<sup>194</sup> Giovanni Villani describes the Cerchi

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<sup>192</sup> Reuter, "Nobles and Others," 85-98.

<sup>193</sup> John F. Padgett, "Open Elite? Social Mobility, Marriage, and Family in Florence, 1282-1494," *Renaissance Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (2010); and Molho, *Marriage Alliance*, 233-297.

<sup>194</sup> Compagni, *Cronaca fiorentina*, book I, 59.

as extremely wealthy merchants yet weak (*morbidi*), harmless (*innocenti*), uncultured (*salvatichi*), and ungracious (*ingrati*): ‘like people who had within a very short time risen to great estate and power.’ By contrast, in the same passage he described the Donati as ‘noble and warlike men’ (*gentili uomini e guerrieri*).<sup>195</sup> In other words, although it is true that medieval people could judge someone noble from his bearing and external appearance, it does not necessarily follow that Florentines believed that external displays of status made one noble.

A story by Franco Sacchetti (1335-1400) illustrates even better the importance of descent and the scorn provoked by rising and presumptuous individuals who wanted to appear noble.<sup>196</sup> A rich Florentine artisan (*grossolano artefice*) went to the famous painter Giotto and asked him to paint him a coat of arms. Giotto gives the job to one of his assistants who makes a ludicrous design. When the merchant sees the commission, he refuses to pay. Giotto says that he would have done something better if he had belonged to the Bardi (*se tu fussi stato de’ Bardi*), a great noble Florentine family. And he proceeds to reproach him, saying: who are you? Whose are you? Who were your ancestors? Sacchetti concludes saying that in this way the merchant, ‘who had not measured himself, was measured by others; for [nowadays] any miserable man wants arms and nobility of birth, when their fathers are men who could had been found [abandoned] at the hospital.’<sup>197</sup>

None of this is to say that external displays of status were not important in late medieval Florence. But these expressions of contempt for the *novi homines* suggest that the increasing commercialisation of late medieval society had made every sign of status commonly associated with the nobility available to a relatively large number of wealthy individuals so that, as a group of scholars has noted, the emphasis shifted to lineage as a form of exclusivity

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<sup>195</sup> Villani, *Nuova cronica*, vol. II, book 9, ch. 39, 567: ‘uomini erano morbidi e innocenti, salvatichi e ingrati, siccome genti venuti di piccolo tempo in grande stato e potere.’

<sup>196</sup> Sacchetti, *Il Trecentonovelle*, novella 63, 158-160.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

because ancestry ‘was not so readily commodified.’<sup>198</sup> Certainly, this did not stop upwardly mobile individuals from trying to achieve the dignities and privileges of the nobility. They could always adduce personal merit, marry someone from a more prestigious family, or simply fabricate for themselves an illustrious ancestry.

Howard Kaminsky’s study on the transformation of the noble class around the thirteenth century shows that whenever an individual produced claims to nobility in order to obtain tax exemptions, claimants ‘routinely alleged the nobility of their parents.’ Thus, Kaminsky notes, ‘noble blood could be and no doubt often was taken seriously’ even if at times it constituted a mere imputation, a rhetorical device whereby upstarts ‘were legitimated in public opinion.’<sup>199</sup> Similar examples can be found in Florence but none perhaps more famous than Boccaccio’s mythical construction of a noble past for Dante.<sup>200</sup> In his *Trattatello in laude di Dante*, Boccaccio claims that Dante’s ancestry can be traced back to Eliseo: ‘a most noble’ (*nobilissimo*) young man from the Roman patrician family of the Frangiapani sent by Charlemagne to Florence when the emperor helped rebuild the city.<sup>201</sup>

Incidentally, the scholastic and literary treatises we have previously examined seem to confirm that ancestry was perceived by many as the most important component of noble identity. Their authors frequently set their definitions of nobility in contrast to what the common people supposedly understood by it. And what the common people apparently understood was that nobility was chiefly a matter of birth, that is who one’s parents were.

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<sup>198</sup> Frederik Buylaert, Wim de Clercq, and Jan Dumolyn, “Sumptuary Legislation, Material Culture and the Semiotics of ‘*vivre noblement*’ in the County of Flanders (14th-16th Centuries),” *Social History* 36, no. 4 (2011): 417. David Nirenberg has advanced a similar argument with regards to the emergence of genealogical mentalities in late medieval Iberia. He has argued that when mass conversion produced a violent destabilisation of traditional categories of religious identity, lineage became a newly meaningful way of thinking through them. See David Nirenberg, “Mass Conversion and Genealogical Mentalities: Jews and Christians in Fifteenth-Century Spain,” *Past & Present* 174 (2002).

<sup>199</sup> Howard Kaminsky, “Estate, Nobility, and the Exhibition of Estate in the Later Middle Ages,” *Speculum* 68, no. 3 (1993).

<sup>200</sup> Giuseppe Billanovich, “La leggenda dantesca del Boccaccio,” *Studi Danteschi* 28 (1949).

<sup>201</sup> Giovanni Boccaccio, *Trattatello in laude di Dante*, ed. G. P. Ricci, in Giovanni Boccaccio, *Tutte le Opere*, vol. 3, ed. Vittore Branca (Milan, 1974), 440-441. On Dante’s claims to noble descent and their reception by later authors, see Bizzocchi, “La nobiltà in Dante, la nobiltà di Dante.”

Perault claimed that his work was addressed against ‘the many who believe themselves and others to be noble because of the nobility of their body.’<sup>202</sup> In Buonaccorso’s dialogue, Cornelius addresses the Roman senate with the following words: ‘whom does the common people (*vulgus*) call nobles but those born of most noble parents?’<sup>203</sup> Henry of Ghent says that if one speaks of the nobility according to which the nobles are usually so called by the common people (*secundum quam vulgo solent appellari nobiles*), then nobility requires antiquity (*sic nobilitas includit antiquitatem*) and a noble has to be born of noble parents.<sup>204</sup> In a late thirteenth-century treatise, Guillelmus de Aragonia says that in popular use (*in populari usu*), nobility means three things: goodness of action, a notable family, and eminence of birth.<sup>205</sup> In yet another passage he says that although no one should say that a vicious man is noble just because he is born of noble parents, many still hold to this opinion (*quamvis in hac falsa opinione vivant quamplures*).<sup>206</sup> In the *canzone* that precedes the fourth book of the *Convivio*, Dante complains of those who contest that wealth is the source of true nobility and the many who call others noble simply because they are the sons or grandsons of nobles.<sup>207</sup> Hence, from the perspective of the common people, in the words of Maurice Keen, ‘nobility boasted no right of initiation beyond the childbirth pangs of a noblewoman’<sup>208</sup> or, rather, as this chapter has shown, the blood of a nobleman.

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<sup>202</sup> William Perault, *De eruditione principum*, I, 4, 395a: ‘Unus error circa nobilitatem est quod multi credunt se, vel alios esse nobiles, propter nobilitatem corporis, licet habeant ignobilitatem mentis, et sint servi vitiorum et Diaboli.’

<sup>203</sup> Buonaccorso da Montemagno, *De nobilitate*, 22: ‘Quos enim alios nobiles appellat vulgus, nisi quod nobilissimi parentes genuere?’

<sup>204</sup> Henry of Ghent, *Quodlibet IX*, quaestio 18, 289.

<sup>205</sup> Guillelmus de Aragonia, *De nobilitate animi*, pars 1, caput 1.7-8.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, caput 4.16.

<sup>207</sup> Dante, *Convivio*, book IV, ‘Le dolci rime,’ lines 15-17: ‘riprovando ’l giudicio falso e vile di quei che voglion che di gentilezza sia principio ricchezza,’ and lines 34-36: ‘che l’uom chiama colui omo gentil, che può dicere: “Io fui nepote,” o “figlio di cotal valente.”’

<sup>208</sup> Keen, *Chivalry*, 146.

From the late twelfth century the European aristocracy began to coalesce around a new social identity: the nobility. Together with deep social, economic, and political transformations, the emergence of the nobility as a class revitalised the debate over the true nature of nobility, that is whether nobility was determined by birth or virtue. Yet from the mid-thirteenth century, medieval thinkers posited the existence of a natural nobility (*nobilitas naturalis*, *nobilitas generis*) determined by an individual's bodily complexion at birth. Some bodies were nobler than others because they were endowed with physical perfections and good dispositions that facilitated intellectual activity and moral behaviour. Such dispositions, moreover, were thought to be hereditary. Thus, by establishing a mutual relationship between the physiology of the body and the development of intellectual and moral virtues, they created a connection between nobility and descent; even as they kept insisting that true nobility was never wholly determined by one's birth.

There was nothing new in the medieval idea that the true foundation of nobility was to be sought in personal virtue more than birth, wealth, or lineage. Classical authors had already insisted on the need for virtuous behaviour.<sup>209</sup> Ultimately, the idea that some bodies were nobler than others and that a noble complexion could facilitate the acquisition of virtue constituted the biggest contribution of late medieval thinkers to the discourse on nobility. This idea was a corollary of a greater project undertaken by late medieval thinkers, namely, that of integrating natural and moral philosophy. For many, this consisted in reconciling the authorities of Galen and Aristotle and combining medical and biological knowledge in their moral writings; an exercise which the development of the concept of natural nobility vividly illustrates.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> See once again Vessey, "The Stoics and Nobility"; and Roger Crisp, "Nobility in the Nicomachean Ethics," *Phronesis* 59, no. 3 (2014).

<sup>210</sup> For other examples, see Ziegler, "The Biology of the Virtues"; Ziegler, "Phisonomia est lex nature: On the Nature of Character and Behaviour in Late Medieval Physiognomy," in *La nature comme source de la morale au Moyen Âge*, ed. Maaïke Van der Lugt (Florence, 2014); and Matthew Klemm, "Les complexions vertueuses: La physiologie des vertus dans l'anthropologie médicale de Pietro d'Abano," *Médiévales* 63 (2012).

By the late thirteenth century, although nobles were not always closely related to each other, they could regard themselves as forming a distinct group of descent, with noble bodies and an innate disposition to virtuous behaviour. This distinctiveness was traced back to a remote past, and sometimes to the very beginning of human society, emphasising not only the physical but also the moral excellence of their ancestors. Even in cities like Florence, where social mobility had caused the composition of the nobility to be very diverse, ideas of blood and descent informed the social perception of the nobility as a class.

## Political Communities and Biological Descent

As Patrick Geary has put it, in classical historiography there were two models of peoplehood, two distinct ways of imagining and thinking about political communities. According to the first one, which can be called the *populus* model, political communities were formed through constitutional and historical processes in which membership was acquired through allegiance and voluntary adherence to a common law. The second, which can be called the *gens* model, envisioned political communities as natural groups formed by descent, custom, language, and geography. In this second type, membership was immutable and defined by birth following geographical and descent criteria, that is, natural law.<sup>1</sup> Rome was the paradigmatic example of a *populus*. On the other hand, the descriptions of barbarian peoples by Roman authors like Pliny, Ammianus Marcellinus, and Procopius correspond to the *gens* model.

However, *populi* and *gentes* were not mutually exclusive categories. As Geary himself pointed out, in biblical antiquity the Jewish people was portrayed as a *populus*, insofar it was seen to be formed by voluntary adherence to God's covenant. Yet the books of Esdras and Nehemiah stressed the biological membership in the 'am' (אִם)<sup>2</sup> and, in medieval times, it was not uncommon to regard Jews as biologically distinct from their Christian neighbours.<sup>3</sup> As a people, Christians could also fit into both models. For Augustine and other Latin fathers, the Church was the perfect *populus* – the people of God – based on a new law and covenant, transcending ethnic and racial distinctions, and bringing all nations together 'united in

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<sup>1</sup> Geary, *The Myth of Nations*, 41-42, 49-62.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 52-53.

<sup>3</sup> On the Jews as a group of descent in medieval times, see Nirenberg, "Was There Race Before Modernity?" 232-64; and Peter Biller, "Views of Jews from Paris Around 1300: Christian or "Scientific"?" *Studies in Church History* 29 (1992).

fellowship by common agreement about the objects of its love.<sup>4</sup> Yet Christians sometimes employed ethnic reasoning to position themselves as members of a people (an *ethnos* or *gens*) distinct from the Jews, Romans, and Greeks.<sup>5</sup> Even the Roman people, the *populus* par excellence, could sometimes be regarded as a *gens*, both in classical times and in the Middle Ages.<sup>6</sup>

In the seventh century, the distinction between *gens* and *populus* was recalled by Isidore of Seville in his *Etymologies*,<sup>7</sup> and this dichotomous vision of the social world was inherited by late medieval Florentine authors. The rediscovery of Roman law – which revolutionised the political structures and practices of the medieval commune – and a renewed emphasis on the work of authors like Cicero brought to the fore the contractual and consensual nature of the political community, the *civitas* as a voluntary association of men united together to live under the same laws.<sup>8</sup> Brunetto Latini (1220-1294), the father of Florentine humanism, affirmed that the city is ‘an ensemble of people to live in one place and under one law.’<sup>9</sup> Yet according to Latini this civic community was also a *gens*. In this chapter, therefore, I want to answer the following question: in which ways did Florentines envision themselves as a group of common descent?

To do so, I will first turn to a series of political treatises to illustrate how common descent could be perceived as an important component of communal identities. In the midst of intense political debates that called into question universal forms of government, medieval

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<sup>4</sup> Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, ed. Bernhard Dombart and Alfons Kalb, vol. 2 (Stuttgart, 1981), lib. XIX, cap. 24, 400: ‘Populus est coetus multitudinis rationalis rerum quas diligit concordie communionem sociatus.’ See Jeremy DuQuesnay Adams, *The Populus of Augustine and Jerome: A Study in the Patristic Sense of Community* (New Haven, 1971), 19, 110.

<sup>5</sup> Denise K. Buell, *Why this New Race? Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Walter Pohl, ‘Early Medieval Romanness - A Multiple Identity,’ in *Transformations of Romanness: Early Medieval Regions and Identities*, ed. Walter Pohl et al. (Berlin, 2018), 26-33.

<sup>7</sup> Isidore, *Etymologiae*, vol. 1, lib. IX.ii, 1, and *ibid.*, lib. IX.iv, 4-5: ‘Genus aut a gignendo et prognerando dictum, aut a definitione certorum prognatorum, ut nationes, quae propriis cognationibus terminatae gentes appellantur. Populus est humanae multitudinis, iuris consensus et concordie communionem sociatus.’

<sup>8</sup> Cicero, *De officiis*, ed. Michael Winterbottom (Oxford, 1994), I, XVI, 21-22; *De republica*, ed. and trans. Clinton W. Keyes (Cambridge, MA., 2000), I, XXXII, 77. See also Nederman, ‘Nature, Sin and the Origins of Society.’

<sup>9</sup> Latini, *Li livres dou tresor*, III, 73, 363: ‘cités est uns asenblement de jens a abiter en un luec & vivre a une loy.’

scholars suggested that a plurality of independent states best corresponded to the nature of man and of temporal power. To demonstrate this, they pointed to the markedly different character of peoples presenting them as naturally distinct from one another and ascribing their differences to historical and natural causes such as bodily complexion and the hereditary influence of climate. In this way, scholars rendered ancestry a potential source of collective political identity. I will then proceed to analyse some historical narratives and other literary sources produced in Florence in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. I will show how the early origin myths of the commune quickly developed into myths of descent which claimed for its citizens genealogical continuity with its ancient Roman founders. Florentines sought to portray their political community as an extended family, a kinship group, with common ancestors, sharing the same blood, and a distinct set of inherited traits. Finally, I will return to the distinction between *populus* and *gens* to examine it from a legal perspective. The arrival of immigrants to Florence in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries reveals how claims of common descent could be negotiated with the practical realities of labour and economic development as well as an expanding political and territorial influence. The way in which the Florentine republic received immigrants into its midst and the constraints it set on them illustrate the extent to which ideas of common biological descent had come to shape the Florentines' identity.

#### **4.1 Human Diversity and Natural Peoples**

In the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, the decline in power of the Holy Roman Empire, the frequent conflicts between the papacy, emperors, and kings, and the emergence of strong independent states in Europe led medieval scholars to reconsider some of their core political ideas and beliefs. This period witnessed the production of an unprecedented number of political treatises which in addition to challenging the hierocratic model – the papacy's

claims to supremacy – questioned imperial claims to universal sovereignty and jurisdiction.<sup>10</sup> In other words, they contested the idea that political power was vested in one man alone, the emperor, who enjoyed supreme authority to rule, legislate, and govern all human beings in all temporal matters, just as the pope had supreme authority in spiritual ones. Instead, they proposed that supreme temporal authority was vested in neither pope nor emperor but in territorially limited and autonomous states, be they kingdoms or city-states, and their rulers.<sup>11</sup>

Imperial claims to universal rule had been progressively eroded since the late twelfth century, when Canonists began to state as a legal fact the independence of national kingdoms making the important distinction that kings were subjected to emperor only *de iure* while *de facto* they were independent.<sup>12</sup> But in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, political thinkers took this process a step further raising objections to the viability, desirability, and legitimacy of universal forms of temporal government and pointing to human diversity – the presence of peoples with diverse customs, laws, and languages – to justify a plurality of independent states. In addition, they also emphasised the need for governments, systems of law, and peoples to conform to one another.<sup>13</sup> Finally, they suggested that the differences among peoples were not

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<sup>10</sup> On these debates, see Brett Edward Whalen, *The Two Powers: The Papacy, the Empire, and the Struggle for Sovereignty in the Thirteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 2019); and Michael Wilks, *The Problem of Sovereignty in the Later Middle Ages: The Papal Monarchy with Augustinus Triumphus and the Publicists* (Cambridge, 1963).

<sup>11</sup> On the emergence of territorial sovereignty in late medieval law, see Joseph P. Canning, “Law, Sovereignty, and Corporation Theory, 1300-1450,” in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c.1350-c.1450*, ed. James H. Burns (Cambridge, 2008), 464-476. Bartolus de Saxoferrato was the first to define the *territorium* as the object of the exercise of law, the object and scope of jurisdiction, paving the way to modern understandings of territorial sovereignty. See Francesco Maiolo, *Medieval Sovereignty: Marsilius of Padua and Bartolus of Saxoferrato* (Delft, 2007), 234. On Bartolus recognition that some cities do not acknowledge a higher authority, see Magnus Ryan, “Bartolus of Saxoferrato and Free Cities. The Alexander Prize Lecture,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 10 (2000).

<sup>12</sup> See Brian Tierney, “The Canonists and the Mediaeval State,” *The Review of Politics* 15, no. 3 (1953); and Sergio Mochi Onori, *Fonti canonistiche dell’idea moderna dello stato: imperium spirituale, iurisdictio divisa, sovranità* (Milan, 1951).

<sup>13</sup> Although medieval scholars had long debated what was the best form of government, it was only after the reception of Aristotle’s *Politics* (IV.X) that they were routinely confronted with the question of what the best form of government for certain peoples is. See, for instance, Tolomeo of Lucca, *De regimine principum*, in Thomas Aquinas, *Opuscula philosophica*, ed. Raimondo M. Spiazzi (Turin, 1954), lib. 2. cap. 8, 285, and lib. 3. cap. 11, 312.

just historical or the result of convention but to some extent natural, arising from the diverse conditions of men, their bodily complexion, and the hereditary influence of climate.<sup>14</sup>

As Claire Weeda has shown, the naturalisation of political groups in the Middle Ages began to gather strength in the eleventh and twelfth centuries when Western European monks and schoolmen imagined ethnic groups as ‘moral-natural communities dwelling in domesticated spaces.’<sup>15</sup> Graeco-Arabic environmental and ancient Hippocratic climate theories were employed to explain the mental and physical character traits of peoples in physiological grounds and ethnic stereotypes were constructed to assert moral and cultural ascendance over others and to justify property claims and military conquests. In the period 1250-1400, political thinkers developed these ideas in their writings, incorporating concepts from the recently reinvigorated Aristotelian tradition.<sup>16</sup>

This strategy of naturalisation is best exemplified in John of Paris’ *Tractatus de potestate regia et papali*, completed sometime in late 1302 or early 1303 in the midst of the conflict between Philip the Fair and pope Boniface VIII. Written perhaps as a response to Giles of Rome’s *De ecclesiastica potestate*, John’s arguments in favour of the independence of secular authority have long been regarded as foreshadowing the emergence of the territorial nation-state.<sup>17</sup> My interest in John’s work, however, lies in the use he makes of human anthropology to argue that secular authority, unlike the Church’s, cannot be universal in character. Throughout *De potestate*, John makes several arguments which are eminently practical. For example, John argues that in regard to temporalities one man alone would not be enough to

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<sup>14</sup> Naturally peoples were also central to another argument developed against the universal authority of the empire. John of St Victor and the Neapolitan lawyers Marinus da Caramanico and Andreas de Isernia regarded the existence of separate kingdoms in pre-Roman times as part of the *ius gentium*, that is as evidence that peoples were the natural and primitive forms of political community. See Mireille Chazan, *L’Empire et l’histoire universelle: de Sigebert de Gembloux à Jean de Saint-Victor (XIIe-XIVe siècle)* (Paris, 1999), 654-658, 656.

<sup>15</sup> Weeda, *Ethnicity in Medieval Europe*, 5. See also, Biller, “Proto-Racial Thought in Medieval Science,” 157-80.

<sup>16</sup> In particular, the *Politics* and the *Ethics*. For the reception of the former, see Jean Dunbabin, “The Reception and Interpretation of Aristotle’s *Politics*,” in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*. For the latter, see above, p. 60, fn. 17.

<sup>17</sup> For a short introduction to John of Paris’ work, see Walter Ullmann, *Medieval Foundations of Renaissance Humanism* (London, 1977), 120-122.

govern the whole world because unlike spiritual power, temporal power is difficult to exercise at a distance.<sup>18</sup> However, in chapter three one of his arguments relies on the apparently simple fact of human diversity.

Halfway through chapter three, John says that it is convenient for all the faithful to be united in one faith and to have someone who is above everyone else in spiritual matters in order to solve any controversy that might arise. This unity is not necessary, he says, in political matters because ‘according to the diversity of climates, and languages, and conditions of men there are diverse ways of living and diverse polities.’<sup>19</sup> For John, men are divided in natural groups which differ from one another to such an extent that no one way of living will suit them all. Hence the necessity of diverse polities. However, where does the diversity among peoples originate from? The answer to this question is located at the beginning of the same chapter, where John affirms that there is more diversity in secular than in spiritual authority because in human beings there is diversity in bodies – ‘according to the diversity of climates and complexions’ – and, crucially, not in souls, because all souls are essentially the same for the sake of the unity of the human species.<sup>20</sup>

To understand what John means when he says that diversity is found in the body and not in the soul, we have to look closely at his anthropological thought. In particular, we need to examine John’s commentary on the *Sentences* and the answer he provides to the Lombard’s question regarding the equality of souls. John was writing after the Paris condemnations of 1277, which had censured the proposition that all souls were equal. Yet as a faithful disciple

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<sup>18</sup> John of Paris, *Tractatus de potestate regia et papali*, in Jean Leclercq, *Jean De Paris et L’ecclésiologie du XIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1942), 181.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.: ‘Non sic autem fideles necesse est convenire in aliqua politia communi. Sed possunt secundum diversitatem climatum et linguarum et conditionum hominum esse diversi modi vivendi et diverse politie [...]’

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 180: ‘Primo quidem quia sicut in hominibus est diversitas ex parte corporum non autem ex parte animarum que omnes sunt in eodem gradu essentiali constitute propter unitatem speciei humane, ita secularis potestas plus habet diversitatis secundum climatum et complexionum diversitatem quam spiritualis que minus in talibus variatur. Unde non oportet tantam diversitatem esse in una sicut in alia.’

of Aquinas, he adopted fine distinctions in order to comply with the condemnation while maintaining the role of the body in individuation.

In his analysis, John affirms that there are three ways in which souls can be spoken of: (1) in relation to their essence (*quantum ad essentiam*), (2) in relation to what is essential (*quantum ad essentialia*), and (3) in relation to what is natural (*quantum ad naturalia*). Insofar as their participation in the divine essence and in the mind of God (1) all souls are equal. In relation to what is essential, there are potencies which flow from the essence of the soul that can be spoken of in two senses. Those which are affixed in the soul as their subject (2), like intellectual ability, are all equal – and in this sense too article 124 holds true. But potencies which emanate from the soul and are affixed in the union of body and soul as their subject (3) are not equal in everyone because they follow the disposition of the body (*sequuntur dispositionem corporis*). This is how souls are spoken of in relation to what is natural, and in this sense article 124 does not hold.<sup>21</sup> By rendering the term ‘natural’ in article 124 as the soul ‘spoken of in terms of its union with the body’ John is able to simultaneously comply with Tempier’s condemnation while retaining the role of bodily dispositions in the production of inequalities and diversity of aptitudes.

What John argues in *De potestate*, therefore, is that it is in the body that one finds diversity among both individuals and peoples. But how does one account for the bodily diversity of peoples? Many scholars have assumed that in John’s view environmental factors alone explain this bodily diversity.<sup>22</sup> And many have taken his reference to the diverse ‘conditions of men’ (*conditionum hominum*) to merely mean social status, lifestyle, or customs.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> John of Paris, *Commentaire sur les sentences: reportation, livre II*, ed. Jean-Pierre Muller (Rome, 1964), book II, q. 83 (Dist. 32, q. 2), 204-205.

<sup>22</sup> Weeda, *Ethnicity in Medieval Europe*, 156, 229.

<sup>23</sup> Walter Ullmann, “The Development of the Medieval Idea of Sovereignty,” *The English Historical Review* 64, no. 250 (1949), 17: ‘He [John] flatly denied the possibility of a universal empire [...] because of the necessity of adjusting the government to the exigencies and peculiarities of various nations, essentially and fundamentally different on account of diversities of *climate, geographical position and peculiar social conditions*.’ Similarly, Bettina Koch

In so doing, they have tended to leave unexplored the full implications of his argument, failing to recognise the role that anthropological and medical knowledge plays in John's support of a people's right to independent political rule. I would like to argue that for John, human diversity is not just a question of situational but also of organic and corporeal identity, and that not enough attention has been paid to his mention of complexions *in addition to* climates.

A short treatise on complexions that in medieval times was often attributed to John himself can shed light on this.<sup>24</sup> It affirms that there are three factors which influence an individual's complexion: constellations, geography or climate, and particular causes, that is, parental inheritance and nutrition. The complexion of a child tends to be similar to that of his father, and even more so if the mother's complexion is similar to that of her husband.<sup>25</sup> Thus a sanguine man produces a sanguine child, a noble one a noble child, a commoner a commoner, and so on unless the constellations effect a change in the child's nature.<sup>26</sup> The natural complexion acquired at birth (*complexio naturalis*) is, therefore, largely determined by paternal, and to a lesser extent maternal inheritance. This complexion is the internal cause of external manifestations,<sup>27</sup> and it is connected to intellectual or moral traits.<sup>28</sup>

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in "Against Empire? John of Paris's Defence of Territorial Secular Power Considered in the Context of Dante's and Marsilius of Padua's Political Theories," in *John of Paris: Beyond Royal and Papal Power*, ed. Chris Jones (Turnhout, 2015), 56 refers to John arguing that peoples 'differ with respect to *geography, language, and lifestyle*,' and that (ibid., 57) 'this ability to choose leads to the existence of diverse communities that differ in *climate, language, and customs*.' Chris Jones in "Historical Understanding and the Nature of Temporal Power in the Thought of John of Paris," in *John of Paris: Beyond Royal and Papal Power*, 79 also remarks on John's use of diversity but ignores his mention of complexions. Similarly, Chazan in *L'Empire et l'histoire universelle*, 655, when she refers to John's reasons to dismiss the idea of a universal secular authority. Again, the same in Andrew A. K. Theng, "Why Did John of Paris Write *De potestate regia et papali*? A Reconsideration," in *John of Paris: Beyond Royal and Papal Power*, 169.

<sup>24</sup> On this treatise, see Lynn Thorndike, "De Complexionibus," *Isis* 49, no. 4 (1958).

<sup>25</sup> *Liber complexionum*, in Werner Seyfert, "Ein Komplexionentext einer Leipziger Inkunabel (angeblich eines Johann von Neuhaus) und seine handschriftliche Herleitung aus der Zeit nach 1300," *Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin* 20, no. 3 (1928): 286-287: 'Item est manifestum ex causis particularibus, ut ex viro phlegmatico generatur phlegmaticus et ex viro cholericus generatur cholericus et maxime si masculus et femella sunt eiusdem complexionis, generantur pueri eiusdem complexionis, nisi sit variatio mammae et alimenti et loci, quia ista permutant complexionem in genito virtute naturali.'

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 297: 'Sequitur de generatione complexionum a similibus, ut quod sanguineus generat sanguineum et nobilis nobilem et ignobilis ignobilem, nisi constellatio transmutet naturam.'

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 288: 'extrinseca dispositio rei superficietenus apparens, signans causas intrinsecas similiter se habere [...]'

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 289: 'Et tales pulchros pueros producunt et nobiles et scientes, et sunt plurimum bene nati.'

Thus, when at the beginning of chapter three John says that there is diversity in bodies ‘according to the diversity of climates and complexions’ it is because these two determine the complexion of individuals and peoples, for one’s complexion is determined by the complexion of his parents and ancestors as much as by climate or the stars. What John is arguing, therefore, is that civic collectivities inherit certain (general) temperaments from their ancestors just as the individuals in them might inherit (specific) characteristics from their parents. Moreover, when halfway through chapter three John claims that the diversity among peoples is expressed in a variety of ‘climates, languages, and conditions of men,’ the latter has to be understood as something akin to complexion rather than social status, way of life, or customs, because immediately thereafter John adds that what can be deemed virtuous among one people is not so among others ‘just as it happens among individuals as Aristotle says in the second book of the *Ethics*.<sup>29</sup> In this book, Aristotle speaks of two men who by virtue of their physiological differences require different amounts of food, for which reason their virtuous consumption of food differs from each other too.<sup>30</sup>

It is by reason of these physiological differences that there is a need for a plurality of states and forms of governments. John juxtaposes this diversity of bodies and of the political sphere to the equality of souls and the universality of the Church whose task is to rule over them so that, as Walter Ullmann put it, in John’s work an ‘abstract ecclesiological uniformity was replaced by concrete human multiformity.’<sup>31</sup> In so doing, John also exploits an image that was well known to his readers. In the Middle Ages, the state was symbolically identified with the natural – biological – body and entrusted with the care of its subjects’ corporeal needs. By contrast, the Church was identified with the soul and its role was seen as restricted to spiritual

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<sup>29</sup> John of Paris, *Tractatus de potestate regia et papali*, 181: ‘et quod virtuosum est in una gente non est virtuosum in alia, sicut etiam de singularibus personis dicit Philosophus II Ethicorum quod aliqui est uni parum quod alii est nimium, sicut quod est minimum magistro gymnasiorum scilicet comedere decem minas seu uncias esset parum Milloni Crotoniensi qui uno ictu de pugno taurum victimam faciebat, ut dicit Commentator.’

<sup>30</sup> Aristotle, *Ethica*, lib. II, cap. V, 402.

<sup>31</sup> Ullmann, *Medieval Foundations of Renaissance Humanism*, 122. See also Otto Gierke, *Political Theories of the Middle Age*, trans. Frederic William Maitland (Cambridge, 1900), 20, fn. 61.

matters and the sanctification of the faithful.<sup>32</sup> Of course, this distinction did not necessarily imply the autonomy of the political sphere. From a Christian perspective, the soul was posited above the body and scholars like Giles of Rome (1247-1316) or James of Viterbo (1255-1307) employed this body-soul analogy to argue that secular rule should ultimately be subjected to the spiritual authority, that is, the Church.<sup>33</sup> However, by the late thirteenth century, scholars like John began to rely on the body-soul analogy to argue that temporal and spiritual rule were of a markedly different character and to suggest that the principles that applied to temporal government should be qualitatively different from those which applied to Church government.

Many of John's contemporaries drew upon similar ideas to argue that the diversity of peoples made it not only exceedingly difficult but unreasonable to have a single universal ruler.<sup>34</sup> In his treatise *De recuperatione terre sancte* (1306), Pierre Dubois (c.1250-c.1320) says that no one 'of sane mind' could think it likely that 'in this world of secular affairs there should be one single monarch of the whole world, who would direct all temporal matters and whom all would obey just like a superior being.'<sup>35</sup> If that were the case, countless divisions, insurrections, and wars would arise, because man is naturally prone to disagree, and no one would be able to settle them.<sup>36</sup> Thus, when Dubois discusses whether law can be universal, he recalls the Arab peoples who, according to Averroes, 'have suffered a lot because they believed that their laws should be observed everywhere and in no case should they be bent.' And he adds that 'hardly

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<sup>32</sup> John A. Watt, "Spiritual and Temporal Powers," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c.350–c.1450*, 368-382.

<sup>33</sup> Giles of Rome, *On Ecclesiastical Power. A Medieval Theory of World Government*, ed. and trans. Robert W. Dyson (New York, 2004), part I, ch. VII, 40-43; and James of Viterbo, *De regimine christiano: A Critical Edition and Translation*, ed. and trans. Robert W. Dyson (Leiden, 2009), part II, ch. VI, 198-206.

<sup>34</sup> Conversely, some could recognise the presence of different peoples and, simultaneously, the need for an overarching authority. In his *De ortu, progressu et fine Romani imperii*, written during the reign of Emperor Henry VII, Engelbert of Admont (c.1250-1331) also affirmed that 'the world's kingdoms differ from one another according to the diversity of their various fatherlands and tongues, customs and laws.' But he thought that this diversity was just 'a cause and occasion for hostility and discord' which made necessary the establishment of a superior power with authority and capacity to harmonise them all and preserve the peace. See Engelbert of Admont, *On the Rise and End of the Roman Empire*, in *Three Tracts on Empire*, ed. and trans. Thomas M. Izbicki and Cary J. Nederman (Bristol, 2000), 66-67.

<sup>35</sup> Pierre Dubois, *De recuperatione terre sancte*, ed. Charles V. Langlois (Paris, 1891), 54.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

anything can be found in this world, which is good and useful in all places, at all times and for all persons. Therefore, the laws and decrees of men vary according to the diversity of places, times, and persons (*varietatem personarum*).<sup>37</sup> For Dubois the establishment of any universal form of government would be an artificial and dangerous political experiment which should be abandoned in favour of a diversity of political communities, systems of law, and forms of government.

A similar concern for human diversity is displayed by Dante. Although he was in favour of the establishment of a universal empire, Dante nonetheless recognised that uniformity could not be achieved and that the presence of differences among peoples required some sort of compromise between universal and local principles of government. In other words, although Dante believed that the emperor was sovereign, and his authority was needed to combat the dangers of greed (*cupiditas*), there was room for autonomy within his idea of empire.<sup>38</sup> And to justify this autonomy he referred to the diversity of human communities. Thus, in chapter XIV of *Monarchia*, Dante says that his proposal ‘ought not to be taken to mean that minor judicial decisions can be made directly for every municipality by that one ruler.’ And he goes on to remark:

no doubt such decisions must be made by someone, since municipal laws are sometimes deficient and need interpretation, as is evident from the fact that, in the fifth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the Philosopher recommends equity. For peoples, kingdoms, and cities have intrinsic characteristics (*proprietates*) that differ from one another, and these peculiarities need to be regulated by different laws.<sup>39</sup>

Marsilius of Padua (1275-1342) also pays attention to the diversity among peoples and suggests that governments should conform to the various natural propensities of men. In his *Defensor*

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 39. Aquinas also affirmed that human laws might vary according to the diverse conditions of men. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, q. 97, a. 1, co.: ‘Ex parte vero hominum, quorum actus lege regulantur, lex recte mutari potest propter mutationem conditionum hominum, quibus secundum diversas eorum conditiones diversa expediunt.’

<sup>38</sup> See Felice Battaglia, *Impero, Chiesa e stati particolari nel pensiero di Dante* (Bologna, 1944), 58-74, 91-97.

<sup>39</sup> Dante, *Monarchia*, 1.14, 2, 75-77. See Aristotle, *Ethica*, lib. V, cap. X, 473-475, where the philosopher addresses the difficulty of dictating human laws (positive laws) that can be just and reasonable everywhere.

*pacis*, he raises the question of whether it would be more advantageous to have one supreme civil government in the whole world or to have different governments in different regions of the world ‘for men who use different languages and who differ widely in morals and customs.’ Unfortunately, Marsilius cuts short the discussion by saying: ‘this question merits a reasoned study, but it is distinct from our present concern.’<sup>40</sup> However in another passage he recommends legislators and institutors of governments not to overlook ‘that different multitudes (*multitudo*) in different times and places are inclined (*disposita*) towards different forms of polity and government.’<sup>41</sup> To explain this, Marsilius refers to the third book of the *Politics* where Aristotle questions whether every polity should be constituted as a monarchy.<sup>42</sup> Aristotle had affirmed that the monarchies of the barbarians resemble tyrannies because they, being ‘more servile in their nature than the Greeks (*magis serviles moribus sunt natura barbari quidem Graecis*), and the Asiatics than the Europeans, endure despotic rule without any resentment.’<sup>43</sup>

And Marsilius paraphrases saying:

For just as not every man is inclined (*dispositus*) toward the best discipline or study, whereupon it is appropriate that he be directed toward the acquisition not of that discipline but of some other good one for which he is more fitted, so too a multitude in some time or place may perhaps not be inclined (*disposita*) to accept the best kind of government, and therefore recourse must first be had to that kind of temperate government which is more appropriate to it.<sup>44</sup>

Marsilius employs the terms *dispositus* and *disposita* to refer to the natural inclinations of both individuals and communities. As we have seen in the first chapter, in a scholastic context *dispositio* denoted a natural inclination arising out of the bodily complexion of an individual and transmitted from parents to children. Thus, when Marsilius refers to the *dispositio* of a people

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<sup>40</sup> Marsilius of Padua, *Defensor pacis*, ed. Richard Scholz, MGH (Hannover, 1933), discourse I, cap. 17, 10, 118, translated in Marsilius of Padua, *The Defender of Peace*, vol. 2, trans. Alan Gewirth (New York, 1956), 84-85. On the forms of legitimate government in Marsilius’ thought, see Cary J. Nederman, “From “Defensor pacis” to “Defensor minor”: The Problem of Empire in Marsiglio of Padua,” *History of Political Thought* 16, no. 3 (1995).

<sup>41</sup> Marsilius, *Defensor Pacis*, discourse I, cap. 9, 10, 46.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.: ‘Ut dicit Aristoteles 3 Politice, capitulo 9, que attendenda sunt a legum latoribus et principatum institutoribus.’

<sup>43</sup> Aristotle, *Politica*, p. 215, ll. 4-7: ‘quia enim magis serviles moribus sunt natura barbari quidem Graecis, qui autem circa Asiam hiis qui circa Europam, sufferunt despoticum principatum nihil contristati.’

<sup>44</sup> Marsilius of Padua, *Defensor Pacis*, discourse I, cap. 9, 10, 46, translated in *The Defender of Peace*, 33.

or multitude, he is probably referring to a set of character traits determined by descent as much as geography or climate. Incidentally, we have some evidence that late medieval readers connected these two passages of Marsilius' work with John of Paris' remarks on the bodily diversity of peoples. In a manuscript of the *Defensor pacis* dated to the year 1401, a scribe or reader made notes on the left margin re-directing the reader from these passages to *De potestate*.<sup>45</sup>

By the late fourteenth century, Nicole Oresme (c.1320-1382) combined the belief that human groups could be distinguished on the basis of natural affiliations with the Aristotelian preference for moderately sized states. In his commentary on Aristotle's *Politics*, Oresme connected the difficulty of governing a large state with the need for governments to conform to the natural character of peoples. A universal state would be so large that it would be difficult to sustain. It would be impossible for a prince to rule over such a large multitude unless he counts with special divine assistance.<sup>46</sup> For this reason, Oresme affirms that different peoples (*gent*) need different governments.<sup>47</sup> And he adds: 'For according to the diversity of places, complexions, inclinations, and customs of each people (*gens*) it is necessary that their positive laws and their governments would differ from each other.'<sup>48</sup> To the proposal that one government might rule different peoples according to different systems of law, Oresme concludes that 'it seems that neither God nor nature want such a monarchy.'<sup>49</sup>

#### 4.1.1 Individual Bodies and Bodies Politic

It is important to note that when writers like John and Marsilius wanted to illustrate how political communities differ from each other, they often invoked differences among individuals

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<sup>45</sup> See [Vat Lat 3974](#), fol. 8va, 21ra. These marginal glosses had been noted by Koch, "Against Empire?" 51.

<sup>46</sup> Oresme, *Livre de Politiques*, 291: 'Ce seroit impossible que un prince, ne par soy ne par autres commis par lui, peust ordener si grande multitude se il ne estoit Dieu.'

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.: 'et ce ne est pas possible que tous soient gouvernés par tres bonne policie, [...] mes une policie est espediente a une gent et autre a autre.'

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.: 'Car selon la diversité des regions, des complexions, des inclinations et des meurs des gens, il convient que leur droiz positifs et leur gouvernemens soient differens.'

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.: 'Il semble que Dieu et nature ne veulent pas tele monarchie.'

as examples. Implicitly in this lay the assumption that peoples, like human persons, have distinctive complexions, characters, and inclinations. Did scholars believe that every single member of a political community shared a common set of character traits? Or were they just presenting the state as a collectivised expression of the sum of its individual citizens? I would like to argue that in comparing political communities to individuals, scholars were also assuming a fundamental similarity between social and individual bodies.

Corporeal similes and metaphors of society are ubiquitous in late medieval writing, to the point that one could claim that in this period virtually every form of human association was ‘bodified.’<sup>50</sup> This realisation has long encouraged historians to explore the analogy between the individual and the body politic in medieval thought.<sup>51</sup> One of the most paradigmatic and influential examples of this organological view of society can be found in John of Salisbury’s *Policraticus*.<sup>52</sup> Yet it features in the writings of many other authors such as Thomas Aquinas, Dante, Giles of Rome, Remigio de’ Girolami, Marsilius of Padua, Nicole Oresme, and Christine de Pizan, to name just a few.<sup>53</sup>

One might instinctively assume that when medieval scholars spoke of societies as bodies they were doing so just metaphorically, that is for merely illustrative purposes. It is

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<sup>50</sup> See Pierre Michaud-Quantin, *Universitas: expressions du mouvement communautaire dans le Moyen-Âge latin* (Paris, 1970), 59-64. A long Christian tradition, emanating from the gospels and the writings of St Paul, which represented the Church as the body of Christ is likely to have helped transfer attributes from this *corpus mysticum* to the body politic. See de Lubac, *Corpus Mysticum*, 101-119; and Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*, 267. The thirteenth century also witnessed the creation of the juristic person or *persona ficta*, originating in the writings of the Italian jurist Sinibaldo Fieschi (1243-1254), better known as pope Innocent IV. However, the medieval theorists of the body social were reluctant to endow the state with legal personality and preferred instead to identify it with its members as an organic whole. See *Ibid.*, 270-271; Canning, “Law, Sovereignty, and Corporation Theory,” 475-476; and Gierke, *Political Theories of the Middle Age*, 68-71.

<sup>51</sup> Gierke, *Political Theories of the Middle Age*, 22-30; Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies*; Tilman Struve, *Die Entwicklung der organologischen Staatsauffassung im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart, 1978); and more recently, Nederman, “Body Politics: The Diversification of Organic Metaphors in the Later Middle Ages.”

<sup>52</sup> John of Salisbury, *Policratici sive de nugis curialium et vestigiis philosophorum libri VIII*, ed. Clemens C. I. Webb (Oxford, 1909), vol. 1, cap. V, and vol. 2, cap. VI.

<sup>53</sup> See, for instance, Hannah Skoda, “Differentiation or Destruction? The Effects of War on Human and Social Bodies in the Commedia,” in *War and Peace in Dante: Essays Literary, Historical and Theological*, ed. John C. Barnes and Daragh O’Connell (Dublin, 2015); and Stephen H. Rigby, “The Body Politic in the Social and Political Thought of Christine De Pizan. Part I: Reciprocity, Hierarchy and Political Authority,” *Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes* 24 (2012).

important to note, however, that there were serious attempts to assimilate the ways in which individual and collective bodies operated and so to affirm that social bodies were analogous to human bodies. In other words, medieval scholars often worked under the assumption that political communities could be conceived of not just as metaphorical bodies, but as bodies which resembled human bodies: both shared the same structure and were animated by the same organising principles.

Modern European languages do not have concepts in everyday use that capture the way of thinking just described. The words that come nearest to doing so, fractals and holons, are not part of current social science vocabulary, though perhaps they should be. Arthur Koestler's concept of the holon was first introduced in his work *The Ghost in the Machine* (1967) to explain how social organisations are, like living organisms, hierarchically ordered and structured.<sup>54</sup> Holons are constituent part-wholes of a hierarchy and as a result they are always a whole in and of itself, as well as part of a larger whole. An individual holon is a self-reliant unit: discrete, self-contained, and which demonstrates the quality of agency or self-directed behaviour. Yet individual holons are not entirely self-supporting, non-interacting entities. A social holon, on the other hand, is a collective made up of individual holons that possesses nexus agency, that is, although it moves as a unit (like a flock of geese) its collective activity has the potential for independent internal activity at any given moment. Within any given hierarchical system holons have rules – the system's canon – which determine its invariant properties, its structural configuration and functional pattern. For medieval scholars, individuals, families, tribes, and nations were conceived of as holons or, perhaps more accurately, as fractals. Fractals can be considered holons, structurally analogous systems nested within each other that display a pattern of 'self-similarity,' with smaller fractals bearing striking resemblance to the larger ones within which they reside.

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<sup>54</sup> Arthur Koestler, *The Ghost in the Machine* (London, 1967), 45-58, especially 50-55.

Whatever could be predicated of man and his body, therefore, was susceptible of being predicated of society as well because the two terms that were being compared were believed to enjoy a perfectly analytical similarity. As Marsilius affirms, ‘human arrangements appropriately imitate nature, for the state and its parts established according to reason are analogous to the animal and its parts perfectly formed according to nature.’<sup>55</sup> Or, as another author put it: there is the same reason in the whole as in the parts and hence, whatever applies to individuals applies also to a kingdom – a principle borrowed from Aristotle.<sup>56</sup> This is why medicine and natural philosophy played such an important role in medieval political theory.

Indeed, one of the consequences of this analogous relationship between collective and individual bodies is that medieval writers often drew insights about the organisation of society and government from their own store of medical and biological knowledge and, in so doing, they did not only make abstract ideas relevant to their listeners but they also carried meaning from one realm to another.<sup>57</sup> As Joseph Ziegler has pointed, the human body was conceived of not just as a corporeal structure, but as a ‘complex combination of abstract principles that hide moral, ethical, and religious truths’ and, therefore, ‘a person who possesses scientific knowledge of the body can more easily obtain this extra-scientific knowledge.’<sup>58</sup> The same rationale was applied with regards to political truths. Thus, for example, to explain what sort of tranquillity is the most appropriate for a state, Marsilius – who had studied medicine at

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<sup>55</sup> Marsilius of Padua, *Defensor Pacis*, discourse I, cap. 15, 5, 87, translated in *The Defender of Peace*, 63.

<sup>56</sup> Engelbert of Admont, *On the Rise and End of the Roman Empire*, 49. Tolomeo of Lucca in his *De regimine principum*, lib. 2, cap. 7, 284 similarly affirms that ‘regnum sive civitas sive castrum sive quodcumque collegium assimilatur humano corpori, sicut ipse Philosophus tradit, et hoc idem in Policratico scribitur.’

<sup>57</sup> For example, see Kaye, “Equalization in the Body and the Body Politic.” A similar realisation encouraged scholars to compare the use of corporeal metaphors across societies and time and to suggest that insofar as the medical knowledge which informed those metaphors was different, their understanding of society and government differed too. See Takashi Shogimen, “Treating the Body Politic: The Medical Metaphor of Political Rule in Late Medieval Europe and Tokugawa Japan,” *The Review of Politics* 70, no. 1 (2008).

<sup>58</sup> See Joseph Ziegler, “Medical Similes in Religious Discourse: The Case of Giovanni Di San Gimignano OP (Ca. 1260-Ca. 1333),” *Science in Context* 8, no. 1 (1995): 118-119. Ziegler makes a structurally similar argument to mine, but in a different context. He suggests (*ibid.*, 108) that in medieval religious preaching the belief that body and soul were perfectly analogous invited the use of medical language when speaking of the curing of souls.

Padua – relies on the definition of bodily health ‘as the most experienced physicists (*periciores physicorum*) describe it.’<sup>59</sup>

These ideas were not confined to the literary world of universities and intellectuals; there is evidence that they were adopted much more widely, shaping thought and, at times, calls for action. In that sense, it becomes clearer that medical similes could not have been merely metaphors but rather true analogies, enabling citizens not only to think but to plan. The *De proeliis Tusciae* of Raynerius de Grancis (d. after 1356) allows the reader to catch a glimpse of how such medical similes were being incorporated in the civic discourse of the Italian communes. After a military defeat which led to the loss of the town of Villa di Chiesa (Sardinia), in an assembly of the Pisan senate in the Cathedral, a citizen stood up and delivered the following speech:

That we are divided and in discord needs no proof. I want instead to remind that the commune is like a body with respect to its members. Its unity results from the connections and the perfect harmony between its parts. Now there are some members, that is from the city, which have been cut off by arms. Villa di Chiesa is lost and so is Terranova. Citizens! Let us defend at least the body that remains and the eye that has not been yet lost.<sup>60</sup>

Likewise, in a later assembly of the Pisan senate, another citizen compared the commune to a human body to argue the opposite; namely, that the city of Castrum should be surrendered to the enemy because ‘when a body part hurts and the medicines are ineffective, Avicenna advised the amputation of the limb in order to save the rest of the body.’<sup>61</sup>

To conclude, as Bettina Bildhauer has suggested, the social body was ‘by no means merely an analogy to the individual body [...] but held together by blood in the same way that

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<sup>59</sup> Marsilius of Padua, *Defensor Pacis*, discourse I, cap. 2, 3, 12, translated in *The Defender of Peace*, 9.

<sup>60</sup> Raynerius de Grancis, *De proeliis Tusciae*, ed. Celestino Meliconi (Bologna, 1922), 139-141 (lines 1396-1413): ‘Fractio nostrorum patet; hanc non credo referre: Cerno ego sic, cives, totum comune set esse corpus ut in membris; unum conpage resultat. Membra set a nobis sunt urbes scissa per arma; villatque capta manet; Novaurbs ablata rebellat. Corpus o nunc, cives, remanens oculumque relictum nosque tuamur.’

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 157-8 (lines 1610-12): ‘Nec medicina potest membro conferre, set obest, hoc Avicenna docet membrum precidere tali: corpus abiret’.

an individual body is.<sup>62</sup> If individual bodies were perceived as enclosed entities, social ones were also imagined as fragile containers of blood that had to be protected and, in the same way in which blood was thought to connect and unify different parts of an individual body, so too could blood – and consanguinity – be envisaged as connecting and uniting the members of a social body. It will come as no surprise, therefore, that attitudes towards communal descent were regularly mapped onto attitudes towards individual descent, and that societies, like individuals, could make claims of descent. This is the subject of my next part.

## 4.2 Origin Myths and Claims of Descent

Myths of origin are not a late medieval invention; they have a long history that predates the thirteenth century and continues until our own day.<sup>63</sup> Likewise, cities were not the only communities that adopted and developed founding myths: kingdoms, empires, noble and royal dynasties, and even monasteries had their own.<sup>64</sup> But from 1250-1400, in the city-states of central and northern Italy myths of origin were unusually numerous and, due to their social and political significance, contested.<sup>65</sup> These myths usually combined a mix of Germanic, biblical, and Trojan traditions, but one of their most distinctive characteristics is their classicising tendencies. Rome became the model to aspire to, compete with, or even to

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<sup>62</sup> Bildhauer, *Medieval Blood*, 133-134, 147.

<sup>63</sup> See Herwig Wolfram, “Le genre de l’origo gentis,” *Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire* 68, no. 4 (1990); Lindy Brady and Patrick J. Wadden, eds., *Origin Legends in Early Medieval Western Europe* (Leiden, 2022); and Roberto Bizzocchi, *Genealogie incredibili. Scritti di storia nell’Europa moderna* (Bologna, 1995).

<sup>64</sup> See, for instance, Elizabeth A. R. Brown, “The Trojan Origins of the French and the Brothers Jean Du Tillet,” in *After Rome’s Fall: Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History Essays Presented to Walter Goffart*, ed. Alexander C. Murray and Walter A. Goffart (Toronto, 1998); and Antonio Sennis, “Tradizione monastica e racconto delle origini in Italia centrale (secoli XI-XII),” *Mélanges de l’école française de Rome* 115, no. 1 (2003).

<sup>65</sup> See Charles T. Davis, “Il buon tempo antico,” in *Dante’s Italy and other Essays* (Philadelphia, 1984); Francesco Salvestrini, “The Construction of the Urban Identity in Late Medieval Italy the Case of Tuscany (Thirteenth to Fourteenth Century),” *Review of History and Political Science* 3 (2015); Lorenzo Tanzini, ““De origine civitatis.” The Building of Civic Identity in Italian Communal Chronicles (12th-14th century),” *Imago temporis: medium Aevum* 10 (2016); and Chris Wickham, “The Sense of the Past in Italian Communal Narratives,” in *The Perception of the Past in Twelfth-Century Europe*, ed. Paul Magdalino (London, 1992).

overcome; and so, the history of Rome and its founding myth became ‘a yardstick by which every medieval city judged itself and was judged by others.’<sup>66</sup>

Myths of origin have been said to fulfil a plethora of functions: they legitimised political realities,<sup>67</sup> upheld claims to power, authority, and self-government,<sup>68</sup> defined and created a sense of shared collective identity,<sup>69</sup> worked as strategies of distinction and markers of ethnicity,<sup>70</sup> explained social mobility,<sup>71</sup> and even helped conceal a city’s violent past.<sup>72</sup> The lack of such myths, on the other hand, was problematic and embarrassing.<sup>73</sup> In summary, myths of origin were stories that societies told themselves – and others – about themselves and which served both internal and external purposes.

There is one aspect of these myths that has been nonetheless neglected by modern scholarship, namely the way in which they convey claims and perceptions of collective biological descent. By their very nature, these myths often speak of founding fathers and primitive communities. But it is one thing to claim ancient origins, or to appropriate famous heroes as founders, and another thing to claim descent from them. The idea that late medieval urban communities could have claimed biological descent from those first founders and settlers has been either overlooked or dismissed as a fanciful notion not worthy of being

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<sup>66</sup> Carrie E. Benes, *Urban Legends: Civic Identity and the Classical Past in Northern Italy, 1250-1350* (Pennsylvania, 2011), 15-22, 35. This emphasis on Roman history was part of a larger movement towards classical literature and Roman cultural models or *romanitas*. See Giuseppe Scalia, ““Romanitas” Pisana tra XI e XII secolo: le iscrizioni romane del Duomo e la statua del console Rodolfo,” *Studi Medievali* 13, 3rd series (1972); and Frances Andrews, “Rome and *Romanitas*: Aspects of Transition,” in *Early Medieval Rome and the Christian West: Essays in Honour of Donald A. Bullough*, ed. Julia M. H. Smith (Leiden, 2000).

<sup>67</sup> Wolfram, “Le genre de l’*Origo gentis*,” 792-95.

<sup>68</sup> See Stefano U. Baldassarri, “Like Fathers Like Sons: Theories on the Origins of the City in Late Medieval Florence,” *MNL* 124, no. 1 (2009).

<sup>69</sup> Reynolds, “Medieval origins gentium;” Penny Eley, “The Myth of Trojan Descent and Perceptions of National Identity: The Case of Eneas and the Roman de Troie,” *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 35 (1991).

<sup>70</sup> Walter Pohl, “Telling the Difference - Signs of Ethnic Identity,” in *Strategies of Distinction: The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300-800*, ed. Walter Pohl and Helmut Reimitz (Leiden, 1998).

<sup>71</sup> Freedman, “Cowardice, Heroism and the Legendary Origins of Catalonia,” 28.

<sup>72</sup> Renaud Villard, “Le héros introuvable: les récits de fondation de cités en Italie: XIVe-XVIe siècle,” *Histoire, économie et société* 19 (2000). See also, René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (London, 2005), 94-126, 121.

<sup>73</sup> On the case of Siena, for instance, see Benes, *Urban Legends*, 97-99.

seriously explored. Nevertheless, this is precisely what these myths, implicitly or explicitly, often assume and proclaim.

One of the reasons claims of descent have been largely overlooked is that origin myths have been central to the creation of the concept of ethnogenesis which the Vienna School of History introduced to deconstruct the ethnicity of Germanic tribes.<sup>74</sup> Thus, modern scholars have highlighted the factual inaccuracy of these myths in order to emphasise that their stories and the identities of the communities that witnessed their production were both constructions.<sup>75</sup> Their eagerness to undermine their authenticity was shaped by post-World War II fears of nationalist movements and biological essentialisms, especially since nationalism has exploited medieval history to propound radical political views.<sup>76</sup> In particular, scholars have argued that origin myths never had any serious intention of claiming that there were essential biological differences among peoples – not to mention that they could actually reflect any racial differences – and that any such claims result from a modern nationalistic reading of the text.<sup>77</sup> Recent paleogenetic studies, however, suggest that there is a stronger relationship between genetic background and material culture than many have been willing to concede.<sup>78</sup>

Yet regardless of what future research might reveal, scholars at least agree that medieval myths of origin had to be credible to their audience to be effectively received. As Susan Reynolds has argued, the usefulness of origin myths relied on the common belief in the existence of naturally distinct peoples or nations with their own customs, laws, and cultures,

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<sup>74</sup> The groundlaying work was that of Reinhard Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung. Das Werden der frühmittelalterlichen gentes* (Köln, Graz, 1961). See also Walter Pohl, “Aux origines d’une Europe ethnique: transformations d’identités entre Antiquité et Moyen Âge,” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 60, no. 1 (2005). At the conceptual core of more recent studies lies the concept of socially constructed communities popularised by Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 2006).

<sup>75</sup> Herwig Wolfram, *History of the Goths* (Berkeley, 1988); and Helmut Reimitz, *History, Frankish Identity, and the Framing of Western Ethnicity, 550-850* (Cambridge, 2015).

<sup>76</sup> Geary, *The Myth of Nations*, 1-40.

<sup>77</sup> Most notably, Geary, *The Myth of Nations*.

<sup>78</sup> Carlos Eduardo G. Amorin et al., “Understanding 6th-Century Barbarian Social Organization and Migration through Paleogenomics,” *Nature Communications* 9, no. 3547 (2018).

and with an inherent right to separate government.<sup>79</sup> In other words, even if their collective claims of descent might seem far-fetched to us, they were not lies, and we have no reason to believe that they were thought of as lies even if, at times, contemporaries were aware of their inaccurate and contested character.

Medieval origin myths were developed and communicated through a variety of textual genres.<sup>80</sup> But it is primarily in chronicles that beliefs of collective biological descent are most clearly expressed. While the production of chronicles was often – but not always – the work of a single scribe, they informed and were informed by individual and collective memories, as well as by textual and oral traditions. Since they were copied, re-elaborated, and reused, they also present a unique opportunity to study the changes introduced in their multiple layers of additions. Thus, proceeding chronologically, I propose to revisit a series of historical accounts written in Florence in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Where instructive, I will consider comparative examples from other Italian communes which will help illustrate the nature of my arguments.

#### 4.2.1 Claims of Collective Descent in Florentine Chronicles

At the beginning of the thirteenth century, an anonymous author wrote the *Chronica de origine civitatis Florentiae* (c.1205), the first chronicle which contains a foundation story of Florence.<sup>81</sup> After a brief summary of history since creation, the chronicle recounts the founding of the ancient city of Fiesole by Atlas who, with the help of Apollo, established it in the best and healthiest place in all Europe on account of the winds and the stars. The chronicle then tells us about the descendants of Atlas, the Trojan War, the founding of Rome by Aeneas, and the incarnation of Christ, until it finally reaches its teleological climax, the founding of the city of

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<sup>79</sup> Susan Reynolds, “Our Forefathers? Tribes, Peoples, and Nations in the Historiography of the Age of Migration,” in *After Rome’s Fall*. See also Reynolds, “Medieval origins gentium,” 378-80; and Bartlett, “Medieval and Modern Concepts of Race and Ethnicity,” 51.

<sup>80</sup> See Stefan J. Schustereder, *Strategies of Identity Construction: The Writings of Gildas, Aneirin and Bede* (Göttingen, 2015), 28-44.

<sup>81</sup> For what follows, see *Chronica de origine civitatis Florentiae*, 32-45.

Florence. In the wake of their conspiracy against the Roman senate, Catiline and his companions found refuge in Fiesole and successfully defeated the Roman legions in a number of battles. Then, Caesar arrived and laid siege to the city for eight years until he reached an agreement with its inhabitants; namely, to destroy Fiesole and build a new city, Florence, in which Romans and Fiesolans would live together. The city was built by members of the Roman patriciate and was initially called 'Little Rome' (*parva Romula*). Hundreds of years later, the chronicle continues, Totila destroyed Florence and rebuilt Fiesole. After Totila's death, the Romans rebuilt Florence in the image of Rome. For over five hundred years both cities stood next to each other until, in 1125, the Florentines defeated the Fiesolans at war, Fiesole was destroyed, and its population emigrated to Florence once more.

By presenting Florence as the heir of Rome, this story of foundation was meant to provide the city with the noblest origins and to legitimise its status as a regional power in Tuscany at a time when the commune was extending its political, economic, and military influence throughout the region. As Colette Gros has argued, the *Chronica* does not necessarily bear witness to an existing oral tradition. It can be best described as a scholarly construction drawing its material from numerous classical sources.<sup>82</sup> However, it became the inspiration for all other Florentine authors who wrote about the city and its origins. Its early translation into the vernacular, adopting the name *Libro fiesolano*, is evidence of its diffusion and popularity.

In the course of the thirteenth century, similar origin myths were developed elsewhere in Tuscany. In Pisa, the first author who wrote about the origins of the city was the Dominican friar Bartolomeo da San Concordio (c.1262-1347).<sup>83</sup> In his *Liber de origine civitatis Pisanae*, Bartolomeo says that Pisa was founded by Pelops, a Greek hero believed to be the ancestor of

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<sup>82</sup> Colette Gros, "La plus ancienne version de "Il libro fiesolano" (la légende des origines)," *Letteratura Italiana Antica* 4 (2003): 13.

<sup>83</sup> Bartolomeo studied in Pisa, Bologna, and Paris and had a keen interest in ancient history and literature. See Cesare Segre, "Bartolomeo da San Concordio," in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 6, ed. Alberto M. Ghisalberti (Rome, 1964), 768-70.

Agamemnon and Menelaus and after whom the Peloponnese was named. With him, a multitude of Greeks came to inhabit the city (*cum multitudine Graecorum veniens aedificavit civitatem*). Bartolomeo also claims that Pisa was built ‘a long time before the city of Rome was founded’ (*longo tempore ante Urbem Romanam conditam*) and that the Pisans sent troops to help Aeneas in his conquests when he first arrived in Italy.<sup>84</sup> Like the *Chronica*, Bartolomeo’s work became a point of reference for later Pisan chroniclers.<sup>85</sup> In the fourteenth century, the story was well known outside of Tuscany: references to Pelops as its founder and to the Greek settlers can be found in the lists of civic origins compiled by Guglielmo da Pastrengo (1290-1362) and Benzo d’Alessandria (c.1250-1329).<sup>86</sup>

The *Chronica de origine civitatis Florentiae* and Bartolomeo da San Concordio’s *Liber de origine civitatis Pisanae* exhibit a desire to endow a city with ancient and noble origins and founders. But neither one ever claims that their contemporaries were descended from those first founders, be they Greeks or Romans. What distinguishes later chronicles is precisely the opposite, namely that those predecessors are explicitly cited as forebears.

When Sanzanome wrote his *Gesta Florentinorum* (1230s), his story of the origins of Florence closely follows the narrative outlined by the *Chronica*. Yet when he recounts the events leading up to the war against Fiesole in 1125, Sanzanome incorporates two fictional speeches delivered to rally the troops. In these speeches, the Florentines and Fiesolans recall the noble character of their city founders presenting them as an example of virtue and courage worthy of imitation. And in both of them, claims of biological descent are unambiguously made. The Florentines speak of themselves as sons (*filiis*) of their noble Roman fathers (*patrum*) from whom their

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<sup>84</sup> Bartolomeo da San Concordio, *De origine civitatis Pisanae: Breviarum Pisanae historiae*, in *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* 6, ed. Lodovico Muratori (Milan, 1725), cols. 163-5.

<sup>85</sup> See Ranieri Sardo, *Cronaca di Pisa*, 6; and *Cronica di Pisa: dal ms. Roncioni 338 dell’Archivio di Stato di Pisa*, ed. Cecilia Iannella (Rome, 2005), 3-4. See also Ottavio Banti, “Studio sulla genesi dei testi cronistici pisani del secolo XIV,” in *Bullettino dell’Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo* 75 (Rome, 1963): 263-264.

<sup>86</sup> Guglielmo da Pastrengo, *De viris illustribus et de originibus*, ed. Guglielmo Bottari (Padua, 1991), 306; and Benzo d’Alessandria, *Chronicon (capitula xci through cxvii)*, in Joseph R. Berrigan, “Benzo d’Alessandria and the Cities of Italy” (PhD diss., Tulane University, 1963), 116-119.

lineage originates (*de nobili Romanorum prosapia originem sumpsimus*). The Fiesolans, for their part, recall their descent from Ytalo, that is, Atlas (*ab Ytalo sumpsistis originem*).<sup>87</sup> Similarly, at the start of the third book his verse chronicle, written in the first half of the fourteenth century, Raynerius de Grancis affirms that his goal is that in contemplating the noble origins of their Greek fathers (*patres*), his fellow citizens will be moved to peace and concord.<sup>88</sup> It is likely that the use of expressions which evoke ancestry or descent in these passages fulfils a rhetorical function. The authors of these chronicles did not want to present just exemplary lives and deeds of men of the past to inspire their contemporaries, but lives and deeds of men they could call ‘fathers.’ The decision to present these ancient founders as forefathers was a conscious one, as were the deliberate linguistic choices employed to claim descent from them.

#### 4.2.2 Blood and Descent

The use of the term ‘blood’ is a case in point. As we have seen in the first chapter, blood was the material out of which the male seed and the human embryo were thought to be formed and, therefore, medieval writers used it to denote descent. Besides, blood was thought to shape not only the physical body of a child but also those bodily dispositions that helped reproduce in children the moral and intellectual virtues of their parents. Accordingly, the blood of ancestors could be invoked to explain a people’s character and behaviour.

As a matter of fact, blood and descent seem to have somewhat displaced previous models of ethnicity. In the seventh century, Isidore of Seville had affirmed that the physical and character traits of peoples were determined by climate, geography, and the stars; a belief which persisted well into the fourteenth century.<sup>89</sup> This model, which can be traced back to

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<sup>87</sup> Sanzanome, *Gesta Florentinorum*, 3-4.

<sup>88</sup> Raynerius de Grancis, *De proeliis Tusciae*, 101-6: ‘Nunc et, o Pisa, meum tibi carmen sit documentum. Aspice principium Grecorum, Pisa, tuorum, in quibus et virtus fuit et sapientia magna, Teste et Aristotile, Platone et Socrate magno, qualiter ipse Pelops tuus extitit hedificator. Hos habuisse patres, urbs nobilis, ipsa memento.’

<sup>89</sup> Isidore, *Etymologiae*, vol. 1, lib. IX.ii, 105: ‘Secundum diversitatem enim caeli et facies hominum et colores et corporum quantitates et animorum diversitates existunt. Inde Romanos graves, Graecos leves, Afros versipelles, Gallos natura feroces atque acriores ingenio pervidemus, quod natura climatum facit.’

Herodotus, suggests that peoples were more the result of geography than heredity.<sup>90</sup> From this perspective, ethnic groups were communities dwelling in bounded territories which determined their name, their relationship, and their characteristics.<sup>91</sup> Thus, the *Chronica de origine civitatis Florentiae* (c.1225) remarked on the position of Fiesole with respect to Mars in order to explain the ardour and strength of its inhabitants (*alacritatem et fortitudinem habitantibus*).<sup>92</sup> Brunetto Latini, writing in the 1260s, changed slightly the narrative of the *Chronica* when he affirmed that after the destruction of Fiesole, it was Florence that was built under the sign of Mars for which reason it is no surprise if the Florentines are always in war and in discord (*por ce n'est il mie merveilles se li Florentins sont tousjors en guerre et en descordes, car cellui planete reigné sor ians*).<sup>93</sup>

In the fourteenth century, however, Villani took a different approach and diminished the role of environmental influences in the formation of a people's character. He says that the ancients looked at the stars when they were going to establish a new city because they thought these would influence its fortune. On some occasions, he admits, it seems as if the influence of Mars over Florence is evident, because the city is always in turmoil and at war, sometimes being victorious and sometimes not. But, he argues,

it is our opinion that the discords and unrest of the Florentines are the result of what we said at the beginning of this account: that our city has been inhabited by two peoples diverse in every custom, as they were the noble, and fierce, and harsh Romans and Fiesolans; for which thing it is no wonder if our city is always at war, and in unrest, and discord, and disagreement.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> See Geary, *The Myth of Nations*, 45-46.

<sup>91</sup> See Weeda, *Ethnicity in Medieval Europe*, and her article "Characteristics of Bodies and Ethnicity, c.900-1200," *Medieval Worlds. Comparative and Interdisciplinary Studies* 5 (2017).

<sup>92</sup> *Chronica de origine civitatis Florentiae*, 32.

<sup>93</sup> Latini, *Li livres dou tresor*, I, 37, 27.

<sup>94</sup> Villani, *Nuova cronica*, vol. I, book 4, ch. 1, 113-4: 'Ma la nostra oppinione è che lle discordie e mutazioni de' Fiorentini sieno come dicemmo al cominciamento di questo trattato: la nostra città fue popolata da due diversi popoli in ogni costume, siccome furono i nobili, e crudi, e aspri Romani e Fiesolani; per la qual cosa nonn-è maraviglia se la nostra città è sempre in guerra, e mutazioni, e disensioni, e disimilazioni.'

To account for his fellow citizens' bellicose behaviour, Villani rejects a simple environmental-astrological explanation. Instead, he seems to affirm that the fierce and conflictive character of Romans and Fiesolans, and their everlasting enmity, have been passed on from generation to generation and that when two peoples with naturally different characters mix together it is with potentially dangerous effects. This logic resonates with that of Dante's complaint in *Paradiso* XVI when he says that 'the mingling of the populations has always led to evil in the city, even as food piled on food destroys the body's health.'<sup>95</sup>

Dante also takes advantage of this double source of origin to denounce the hostility that Florentines displayed towards Emperor Henry VII. In a letter addressed to his fellow citizens in 1311, he criticises their 'most prideful blood' (*superbissimi sanguinis*), accusing them of being descendants of the Fiesolans (*miserrima Fesulanorum propago*), presumably because these resisted Caesar and supported Catiline.<sup>96</sup> Similar statements can be found elsewhere. In the *Eulisteia* (1293), Perugia's historical epic, Boniface of Verona urged the Perugians 'to consider the boldness of their Roman blood' (*fert hos audacia Rome sanguis*).<sup>97</sup> And when Villani recounts how the Venetians betrayed the Florentines by making peace with Mastino II della Scala of Verona, he employs Venice's foundation legend to accuse its inhabitants of being treacherous, 'offspring of Anthenor's blood, traitor of his own fatherland' (*stratti del sangue d'Antenore traditore della sua patria*).<sup>98</sup>

It is likely that the climatic or environmental model of ethnicity posed challenges for our Italian chroniclers. Perhaps it had the disadvantage of not being sufficiently adequate to explain diversity among peoples within small geographical regions, given that all of them would have

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<sup>95</sup> Dante, *Par.* 16.67-69, 178: 'Sempre la confusion de le persone principio fu del mal de la cittade, come del vostro il cibo che s'appone.'

<sup>96</sup> Dante, 'Epistola VI. Ai Fiorentini (1311),' in *Epistole di Dante Alighieri*, ed. Alessandro Torri (Livorno, 1842), 38, 40.

<sup>97</sup> Boniface of Verona, *De rebus a Perusinis gestis*, ed. Francesco Bonaini et al., in "Cronache e storie inedite della città di Perugia da MCL dal MDLXIII (1150-1563)," *Archivio storico italiano* 16 (1850): 18.

<sup>98</sup> Villani, *Nuova cronica*, vol. III, book 12, ch. 90, 1344.

lived under similar geographical and climatic conditions. On the other hand, ancestry and heredity could better explain character differences among peoples living close to each other, as long as these were conceived of as somewhat cohesive groups of descent.

#### 4.2.3 Claims of Descent and Political Discourse

Florentine claims of Roman descent did not go uncontested. Towards the end of the fourteenth century, at the beginning of a war between Florence and Milan, the humanist and diplomat Antonio Loschi (c.1365-1441) wrote an *Invectiva in Florentinos* (1396), a disparaging and violent speech against the Florentines. Loschi had lived in Florence, working in the Florentine chancery alongside Coluccio Salutati (1331-1406). But by the end of the century, he had moved to Milan, become the head of the Visconti chancery, and a bitter political enemy of Florentine republicanism.<sup>99</sup> In his *Invectiva*, Loschi called into question the Florentine's Roman ancestry.<sup>100</sup> His criticism and the responses he provoked among Florentine humanists show that these claims of descent had become an important component of Florentine political identity.

Coluccio Salutati responded by writing an *Invectiva* against Loschi in which he says:

But how is it that it seems to me that you deny that Florentines are of Roman stock, tell me, I beg you, where have you found anything to the contrary? Why would you not agree to give us that which the whole of Italy, except yourself, gives us; for no one except yourself, horrible beast, has ever contradicted this thing that the city of Rome and the princes of the Romans have not ever denied; rather they consider and call us sons, flesh of their own flesh, bone from their bones, for the honour and singular glory of their own name?<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> On Loschi, see Paolo Viti, "Antonio Loschi," in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 66 (2006).

<sup>100</sup> Antonio Loschi, *Invectiva in Florentinos*, ed. Stefano U. Baldassarri, in "La "Invectiva in Florentinos" di Antonio Loschi," *Esperienze letterarie* 35, no. 1 (2010): 15: 'Hoc enim nomine superbire soletis et vos genus predicare romanum, quod quam imprudenter faciatis alio dicendum erit loco.'

<sup>101</sup> Coluccio Salutati, *Invettiva contro Antonio Loschi da Vicenza*, in *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento*, ed. Eugenio Garin (Milan, 1952), 17: 'Ma poiché mi sembra che tu neghi che i Fiorentini siano di stirpe romana, dimmi, ti prego, dove hai trovato il contrario? Perché non vuoi concederci quello che tutta l'Italia, te eccettuato, ci concede; che nessuno mai all'infuori di te, orribile belva, contrastò; che la città di Roma e i principi romani non negarono mai in nessun tempo, mentre considerano e chiamano noi figli, carne della loro carne, ossa delle loro ossa, a onore e gloria singolare del proprio nome?'

Similarly, the Florentine poet Cino Rinuccini (1350-1417) wrote another response to Loschi's

*Invectiva* in which he said:

Again you spill, oh very foolish, many windy words saying, we Florentines are not born of the noble progeny of the Romans; which every truthful history testifies to, and to these Romans the best our virtue belongs, as it is manifested in the following things, the examples of our illustrious men.<sup>102</sup>

Like Salutati, Rinuccini asserts the Florentines' Roman descent but, in addition, he points to their virtue as proof of it. Perhaps Rinuccini also shared the belief that virtue – or a disposition to it – could be passed on from parents to children. Moreover, since this belief was central to the concept of natural nobility, it might also explain why Florentine chroniclers often exalted the noble condition of their Roman founders.

Florentines themselves also employed similar ideas of descent to vilify the citizens of rival cities. The city of Pistoia offers a good example. Early Florentine chroniclers had all connected the foundation of Pistoia with Catiline's rebellion. In particular, using etymologies, many of the early chronicles affirmed that the city was built in the place where a plague (*pistolenzia*) erupted after the battle in which Catiline and most of his companions met their death.<sup>103</sup> Associating the origin of the city of Pistoia with an episode of pestilence was a pejorative way of portraying the past of a rival commune. However, a late fourteenth-century version of the *Libro fiesolano* – the vernacular version of the *Chronica* – offered an alternative story. It asserts that after the battle, Catiline actually survived, and with eleven of his companions they sought refuge on a site where they established a city. It was only later, after

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<sup>102</sup> Cino Rinuccini, *Risponsiva alla Invettiva di Messer Antonio Lusco*, in *Invectiva Lini Colucii Salutati in Antonium Luscbum*, ed. Domenico Moreni (Florence, 1826), 206: 'Ancora ispargi, o sciocchissimo, molte parole ventose dicendo, noi Fiorentini non essere nati della nobile progenie de' Romani; la qual cosa ogni verace istoria il testimonia, e a' quali Romani secondo quel ch'è il meglio la nostra virtù corrisponde, come si manifesta nelle cose seguenti, per li esempli de' nostri uomini illustri.' See also Ronald Witt, "Cino Rinuccini's Risponsiva alla Invettiva di Messer Antonio Lusco," *Renaissance Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (1970).

<sup>103</sup> *Chronica de origine civitatis Florentiae*, 42: 'ex ipsis vero qui evaserunt de prelio in quo mortuus fuit dictus Catellina in campo Piceno, facta est civitas Pistorii, quia tunc ibi fuit magna pestilentia ultra modum.' Thirteenth-century versions of the *Libro fiesolano* recount the same story, see *Libro fiesolano (Codex ASLuc, Orsucci 40)*, 50, 56. And Latini, *Li livres dou tresor*, I, 37, 27.

another battle where Catiline was killed, that a pestilence erupted, and because of this the city was named Pistoia.<sup>104</sup> Villani adopted this later version of the story and established a direct genealogical link that was absent in earlier accounts. He says that Catiline and his rebellious companions found refuge in the site where the city of Pistoia was built and asserts that it is no wonder if the Pistoiese are fierce men of war and cruel among themselves and others because they ‘are descended from Catiline’s blood and from that of his people’ (*essendo stratti del sangue di Catellina e del rimaso di sua così fatta gente*).<sup>105</sup>

The genealogical connection between Catiline’s men and the Pistoiese seems to be also evoked by Dante in the *Divine Comedy* when he reproachfully says to the city’s inhabitants: ‘Ah, Pistoia, Pistoia! why do you not decree to turn yourself to ashes and to last no longer, since you surpass your own seed (*seme*) in evil-doing?’<sup>106</sup> The word ‘*seme*’ was just another way of denoting descent, for sperm was nothing but concocted blood. As Isidore of Seville had put it: ‘A man’s seed (*semen viri*) is a froth of blood (*spuma sanguinis*) that looks like water dashed against cliffs and making a white froth, or like dark wine that makes a whitish foam when shaken in a cup.’<sup>107</sup> Dante uses variants of the same word to speak of descent elsewhere, most notably when in *Inferno* XV he speaks of the ‘sacred seed’ (*sementa santa*) of Florence’s Roman ancestors.<sup>108</sup> Likewise, a description of the city of Florence written in 1339, which conforms to the genre of panegyric, refers to its inhabitants as ‘begotten from the stock of the Romans’ (*de genere sunt Romanorum producti*) and describes the city as ‘the flower born under Mars,’ from

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<sup>104</sup> *Libro fiiesolano (Codex Marucellianus C300, written in 1382)*, in *Quellen und Forschungen zur ältesten Geschichte der Stadt Florenz*, vol. I, 50: ‘Catellina fue isconfitto con la sua gente, [...] Ma pure alla perfine Catellina rimase con undici,’ and 56-57: ‘E qui li tenne dietro il consolo con li Romani, e qui feciono una grande e crudelissima battaglia, e Catellina fue sconfitto e tutta la gente sua. Ma alquanti che camparono tornarono ivi presso, e feciono una città: la quale per la grande mortalità e pistolenza che vi fue sì le puosono nome Pistoja: ivi fue morto Catellina.’

<sup>105</sup> Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, vol. I, book 1, ch. 32, 39.

<sup>106</sup> Dante, *Inf.* 25.10-12, 258.

<sup>107</sup> Isidore, *Etymologiae*, vol. 1, lib. IX.vi, 4, translated in Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, ed. and trans. Stephen A. Barney et al. (Cambridge, 2006), 208.

<sup>108</sup> Dante, *Inf.* 15.76-78, 156.

the ‘noble dew,’ that is seed, ‘of the descendants of Romulus’ (*ex rore nobili descendentium Romuli*).<sup>109</sup>

### 4.3 The Community as *gens*: The Practice of Naturalisation

We have reasons to assume that the citizens of Italian communes like Florence knew these foundation stories and internalised their messages. Myths of origin were deployed in many media other than books: in statues, coins, inscriptions, frescoes, public monuments and ceremonies, and, critically, oral culture.<sup>110</sup> In the fifteenth canto of *Paradiso*, Dante paints for his audience an endearing scene of a twelfth-century Florentine household. A woman watches the cradle of her child and soothes the baby to sleep while, in the background, a few paces apart, another one spins and tells ‘tales of Trojans, and of Fiesole and Rome.’<sup>111</sup>

However, one may still wonder to what extent the claims of descent which origin myths presented were taken seriously. Was claiming collective biological descent anything more than a simple rhetorical device? Did the belief that the political community was also a community of common descent influence the way in which the commune defined rules for its membership? I would like to finish this chapter by briefly exploring this question. One of the ways to understand to what extent claims of descent had important practical effects on the configuration of group identities is to look at the status that communities conferred upon individuals who came to live in their midst and were not embedded in the local kinship networks. In other words, we examine naturalisation as a social practice analogous to adoption but at a communal level.

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<sup>109</sup> *Florentie urbis et reipublice descriptio* in *Die Loggia dei Lanzi*, ed. Carl Frey (Berlin, 1885), 122-123. Late medieval panegyrics often include information about the origins of a city. See, Oldfield, *Urban Panegyric*, 160-186.

<sup>110</sup> Benes, *Urban Legends*, 5-6.

<sup>111</sup> Dante, *Par.* 15.121-26, 170: ‘L’una vegghiava a studio de la culla, e, consolando, usava l’idioma che prima i padri e le madri trastulla; l’altra, traendo a la rocca la chioma, favoleggiava con la sua famiglia d’i Troiani, di Fiesole e di Roma.’

No city exists without strangers, and medieval cities were no exception.<sup>112</sup> During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries many immigrants arrived in Florence. At the beginning, the majority were from the countryside or *contado* surrounding the city but increasingly from faraway places.<sup>113</sup> By the fourteenth century, Roman law had reinforced the idea that the city was a legal ordering or entity which could award citizenship to foreigners under certain conditions it had the authority to determine.<sup>114</sup> Thus, immigrants could apply for citizenship as long as they fulfilled certain tax, property, and residency requirements. In exchange, they received many legal privileges and benefits.<sup>115</sup> The practice of naturalisation had benefits for both foreigners and governments. As Peter Riesenbergs has noted, in addition to legal protection, economic interests lay behind the involvement of both parties.<sup>116</sup>

However, historians have often been perplexed at the fact that the status of new citizens was never completely on a par with that of native citizens.<sup>117</sup> Even Bartolus de Saxoferrato, who strongly believed that every type of citizenship was ultimately granted by an act of civil law (*constitutio iuris civilis*),<sup>118</sup> admitted that the law recognised differences between original citizens (*cives originales*), those whose parents were citizens too, and naturalised

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<sup>112</sup> Miri Rubin, *Cities of Strangers: Making Lives in Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 2020).

<sup>113</sup> Johan Plesner, *L'emigrazione dalla campagna alla città libera di Firenze nel XIII secolo* (Florence, 1979). For a general introduction to the question of urban migration in this period, see Denis Menjot, "Les gens venus d'ailleurs dans les villes médiévales: quelques acquis de la recherche," in *"Arriver" en ville. Les migrants en milieu urbain au Moyen Âge*, ed. Cédric Quertier, Roxane Chilà, and Nicolas Pluchot (Paris, 2013).

<sup>114</sup> An important point of reference for any question on citizenship in the Italian communes is Dina Bizzarri, "Ricerche sul diritto di cittadinanza nella costituzione comunale," *Studi Senesi* 32 (1916), still the only synthesis on the topic for the medieval period. See also, Pierre Racine, "La citoyenneté en Italie au Moyen Âge," *Le Moyen Âge* 105, no. 1 (2009).

<sup>115</sup> See Laura de Angelis, "Immigrazione e concessioni di cittadinanza a Firenze e nei Comuni Italiani tra XIV e XV secolo," in *Città e vita cittadina nei paesi dell'area mediterranea. Secoli XI-XV*, ed. Biagio Saitta (Rome, 2006).

<sup>116</sup> Peter Riesenbergs, "Citizenship at Law in Late Medieval Italy," *Viator* 5 (1974).

<sup>117</sup> See Giuliana Albini, "'Civitas tunc quiescit et fulget cum pollentium numero decoratur': Le concessioni di cittadinanza tra età viscontea tra pratiche e linguaggi politici," in *The Languages of Political Society: Western Europe, 14th-17th Centuries*, ed. Andrea Gamberini, Jean Philippe Genet, and Andrea Zorzi (Rome, 2011), 99-100; and Sara Menzinger, "Fisco, giurisdizione e cittadinanza nel pensiero dei giuristi comunali italiani tra la fine del XII e l'inizio del XIII secolo," *Quellen und Forschungen* 85 (2005): 45.

<sup>118</sup> Julius Kirshner, "Civitas sibi faciat civem: Bartolus of Sassoferrato's Doctrine on the Making of a Citizen," *Speculum* 48 (1973).

individuals (*cives per statutum*).<sup>119</sup> In the second category he included, interestingly, adopted children and foreign-born wives of citizens.<sup>120</sup> Fourteenth-century jurists thus maintained a distinction between *cives civitatis* who had *civilitas originalis* and *civis de civitate* who had *civilitas acquisita*, although in some cases they actively worked to diminish the practical effects of this distinction.<sup>121</sup>

*Cives originales, veteres, antiqui, veri, or naturales* acquired citizenship by birth, that is by descent. Although one might instinctively associate the term ‘*origo*’ with ‘native land,’ in Roman law the *ius civitatis* derived from paternal descent rather than from the place of birth or domicile. Legitimate children acquired their father’s *origo*, whereas illegitimate children, their mother’s, presumably because such children could not be said to have a certain father.<sup>122</sup> Since the time of Accursius (11840-1263), the *ius loci* was compatible with the *ius sanguinis*, so that individuals became original citizens of the localities in which they were born as well as in their fathers’ *origo*.<sup>123</sup> Thus, according to Bartolus, the son of a *civis civitatis* inherited his father’s legal status, wherever he was born (*et sic natus ex cive, ubicumque nascatur, erit civis*).<sup>124</sup> In a legal context, therefore, the term *origo* had a meaning equivalent to the one that we find in the chronicles we

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<sup>119</sup> Bartolus, to C. 10. 39. 7, in *In tertiam Codicis partem commentaria*, in *Opera omnia* (Venice, 1595), vol. 8, fol. 21va: ‘Ita dico quod civis subdividitur in duas alias species, quia alius originarius [...] alius non originarius.’ For the progressive, but reluctant, erosion of distinctions between natural and naturalised citizens as a result of a dire need for immigration after the Black Death, see William M. Bowsky, “Medieval Citizenship: The Individual and the State in the Commune of Siena, 1287-1355,” *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 4 (1967).

<sup>120</sup> Kirshner, “*Civitas sibi faciat civem*,” 701.

<sup>121</sup> See Julius Kirshner, “Paolo Di Castro on ‘Cives Ex Privilegio’: A Controversy over the Legal Qualifications for Public Office in Early Fifteenth-Century Florence,” in *Renaissance: Studies in Honor of Hans Baron*, ed. Anthony Molho and John A. Tedeschi (Florence, 1971); and Kirshner, “*Ars imitatur naturam*. A Consilium of Baldus on Naturalization in Florence,” *Viator* 5 (1974).

<sup>122</sup> *Dig.* 50. 1. 6. 1, 893: ‘Filius civitatem, ex qua pater eius naturalem originem ducit, non domicilium sequitur.’ In his legal dictionary, Albericus de Rosciate (c.1290-1360) also says that one takes on his father’s *origo*. See Albericus de Rosciate, *Dictionarium* (Lyon, 1548), sub. O, fol. D, ii, vB: ‘Originem patris non matris sequimur,’ and ‘filius sequitur originem patris, et nepos avi, vel proavi, vel superioris.’ See also Kirshner, *Marriage, Dowry, and Citizenship*, 162.

<sup>123</sup> *Digestum novum, cum glossa Francisci Accursii, necnon cum summaris ex Bartolo de Saxoferrato et Paulo de Castro* (Venice, 15th), fol. 270r: ‘Nativitas propria vel paterna.’ Yet sometimes individuals who were born and raised in Florence were not officially considered citizens because their parents were not. See Kirshner, “*Ars imitatur naturam*,” 293, fn. 11.

<sup>124</sup> Bartolus, to D. 50. 1. 1, in *In secundam Digesti novi partem commentaria*, in *Opera omnia*, vol. 6 (Venice, 1585), fol. 217va: ‘et sic natus ex cive, vbiunq[ue] nascatur erit eius.’

have previously examined. When authors employed expressions such as ‘*originem sumpsimus*,’ they spoke of descent, not of place of birth.

*Origo*, like descent, was not subject to change. The immutability of an individual’s *origo* was a hallowed principle of Roman law (*origo non potest mutari*).<sup>125</sup> Albericus de Rosciate, commenting on the law on adoption in the *Digest*, established that one could not change his *origo* after birth and that, as a result, one could not acquire original citizenship *per accidens*.<sup>126</sup> However, in medieval times there was one exception to this rule. According to Roman law, when a woman married a citizen of another city, she changed her residence (*forum*) to that of her husband’s and was absorbed in her husband’s household but she retained the *origo* of her birth. In the thirteenth century, by contrast, the *Glossa ordinaria* of Accursius established that a woman who married to a foreigner would cease to be a citizen of the place she had been born and would acquire the citizenship of her husband’s *origo*. Medieval jurists justified this by reference to the ‘unipersonality of the married couple.’<sup>127</sup> As Baldus puts it in one of his *consilia*, ‘there is no greater union than the conjugal union by which husband and wife are made one flesh, even as it were, one substance in two persons.’<sup>128</sup> And as the couple joined each other in one flesh, so too were they joined in one citizenship.

In contrast to original citizens, foreigners acquired citizenship by statute and became *cives de iure, ex privilegio* or *de gratia*.<sup>129</sup> In general terms, these were considered full citizens with the same rights and obligations as the former. Yet certain distinctions remained. That their situation was problematic is evinced by the vast number of legal *consilia* dealing with questions

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<sup>125</sup> *Dig.* 50. 1. 6, 893.

<sup>126</sup> Albericus de Rosciate, *Super Digesto novo commentarium*, vol. 2 (Venice, 1586), fol. 233: ‘Cives quidam sunt origine propria, quidam paterna, propria est in loco in quo quis natus est [...] et ita istam non potest quis mutare per accidens et ille qui non habet eam non potest per accidens acquirere.’

<sup>127</sup> Julius Kirshner, “Women Married Elsewhere: Gender and Citizenship in Italy,” in *Time, Space, and Women’s Lives in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Anne Jacobson Schutte, Thomas Kuehn, and Silvana Seidel Menchi (Kirkville, MI., 2001), 120.

<sup>128</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, 125.

<sup>129</sup> For the various types of citizenship and the terms employed, see Pietro Costa, *Storia della cittadinanza in Europa. Dalla civiltà comunale al Settecento* (Rome, 1999), 15.

concerning the legitimacy and status of naturalised citizens.<sup>130</sup> The very statutes that granted citizenship highlighted the differences between natives and immigrants by establishing that new citizens should be treated ‘as if’ and ‘as though’ (*quasi, tanquam, velut*), they were true citizens, signifying that acquired citizenship was analogous to, but not the same as, original citizenship.<sup>131</sup> This evokes the documents of adoption we have studied in the second chapter in which adoptive children were regularly described ‘as if’ they were natural and legitimate sons and daughters. As it was the case with adoptive children, what set naturalised citizens apart was that they lacked ties of descent within the community they had come to live in. Thus, when the city of Viterbo decided to treat the residents of two nearby villages as if they were citizens, it established that they would be treated ‘as if they were born of the descent and stock of Viterbo’ (*sicut de progenie et stirpe Viterbiensi essent nati*).<sup>132</sup>

The differences between original citizens and naturalised individuals were significant. For example, one of the features of *civilitas acquisita* was its distinctive personal character. As Miri Rubin has pointed, in Siena the constitution of 1309 made clear that ‘one man’s accession to citizenship did not mean that his brothers in the *contado* were citizens too.’<sup>133</sup> Moreover, new

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<sup>130</sup> Diego Quaglioni, “The Legal Definition of Citizenship in the Late Middle Ages,” in *City States in Classical Antiquity and Medieval Italy: Athens and Rome, Florence and Venice*, ed. Anthony Molho, Kurt A. Raaflaub and Julia Emlen (Stuttgart, 1991), 164. See also Patrick Gilli, “Comment cesser d’être étranger: citoyens et non-citoyens dans la pensée juridique italienne de la fin du Moyen Âge,” in *L’étranger au Moyen Âge: XXXe Congrès de la S.H.M.E.S. (Göttingen, juin 1999)* (Paris, 2000).

<sup>131</sup> Bowsky, “Medieval Citizenship,” 201, n. 24 quotes a naturalisation grant from Siena that says: ‘et habeatur verus et legitimus civis civitatis sen. [Siena] ac si esset oriundus de dicta civitate.’ See also *Statuto di Viterbo del 1251*, in *Cronache e statuti della città di Viterbo*, ed. Ignazio Ciampi (Florence, 1872), 524: ‘Quicumque forensis in Viterbo domum emerit, vel alio modo acquisierit, et Viterbiensis civis esse voluerit, habeat beneficium [...] et consequatur plenarie beneficium sicut cives.’ As Robert Bonfil has shown, similar expressions (*sicut cives*) were applied to Jewish citizens in Italian cities from the late thirteenth century onwards. See Robert Bonfil, “Società cristiana e società ebraica nell’Italia medievale e rinascimentale: Riflessioni sul significato e sui limiti di una convergenza,” in *Ebrei e cristiani nell’Italia medievale e moderna: Conversioni, scambi, contrasti*, ed. Michele Luzzati, Michele Olivari, and Alessandra Veronese (Rome, 1988), 255-256. Osvaldo Cavallar and Julius Kirshner, for their part, have shown that even after acquiring citizenship, Jews were customarily referred to as *habitatores* in the same documents in which their fellow Christian citizens were identified as *cives*. See, Cavallar and Kirshner, “Jews as Citizens in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy: The Case of Isacco da Pisa,” *Jewish History* 25, no. 3/4 (2011): 273.

<sup>132</sup> *Statuto di Viterbo del 1251*, 518: ‘teneatur [...] et personas et res salvare sicut de progenie et stirpe Viterbiensi essent nati.’

<sup>133</sup> ‘[S]e saranno più fratelli carnali et alcuno di loro diventerà cittadino et ne la città di Siena continualmente abitarà, la sua abitazione et cittadinanza a’ fratelli e’ quali rimangono nel contado, no possa fare.’ Quoted in Rubin, *Cities of Strangers*, 16, 107.

citizens could be denaturalised if, in the judgement of the government, they did not comply with the terms of the statute granting them citizenship. And even when their request for citizenship was granted, they were usually barred from public office.<sup>134</sup>

Indeed, during the fourteenth century the Florentine government passed a series of laws that restricted access to public office to those who had been born within the city or its *contado* and who belonged to a family that had been settled there for at least three generations.<sup>135</sup> At the beginning of the fifteenth century, similar prohibitions were re-enacted. The civic statutes of 1415 established that no one considered a foreigner (*forense*) could have access or be elected to public office ‘even if they have the privilege of citizenship or the status of *popolano* (*etiam si privilegium civilitatis, seu popularitatis haberet*). Those whose grandfather and other ancestors on the male line (*quicumque avi sui paterni origine seu aliorum superiorum ab avo supra per lineam masculinam*) had been true Florentine citizens (*verus civis*) were exempted from this prohibition.<sup>136</sup> But apart from that exception, only those citizens who they themselves and their fathers, and other ancestors on the male line (*alius ascendens masculus, et per lineam masculinam*), were *originarii de civitate* were able to be elected to public office.<sup>137</sup>

The legal status of exiles presents a final useful contrast between original and naturalised citizens. Exiles were publicly condemned as political enemies of the state and lost access to certain rights and privileges yet were rarely stripped of their citizenship. In most cases, exiles were subjected to the *bando*, a procedural instrument aimed at removing them temporarily from the body politic, much like the ecclesiastical instrument of excommunication

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<sup>134</sup> Kirshner, “*Ars imitatur naturam*,” 299-303.

<sup>135</sup> For the year 1346, see ASF, Provvisioni, Registri, 34, fols. 93v-94v; and for the year 1379, see ASF, Provvisioni, Registri, 68, fol. 108r. See also, de Angelis, “Immigrazione e concessioni di cittadinanza,” 434.

<sup>136</sup> *Statuta populi et communis Florentiae anno MCCCCXV*, vol. 2, lib. V, tract. I, rub. 242, 741-746, 742, 744.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, rub. 243, 746-50, 746: ‘Quod non originarii de civitate et comitatu Florentiae propriae vel paterna, prohibeantur ab infrascriptis offitiis.’ For similar measures taken in Milan towards the end of the fourteenth century, see Albin, “Civitas tunc quiescit,” 107.

with which medieval jurists often compared this measure.<sup>138</sup> While they were physically away, the commune kept a watch on them and their activities to make sure that they were complying with the conditions of their banishment.<sup>139</sup> Florence, for instance, kept detailed records of those it had banished and their punishments in the so-called *Libro del chiodo*. Usually, after a period of estrangement from their city, exiles were granted amnesty to return. This happened even when their banishment was in theory irrevocable or *bando perpetuo*.<sup>140</sup> However, it is telling that in these cases the government of the commune made sure to specify that the amnesty applied only to certain categories of exiles.

On the 27 of August 1311, the Florentine government decided to repatriate many of its exiles. For all intents and purposes, the goal was to reinforce the city defences in view of Henry VII's impending Italian campaign and to minimise the risk that exiles would ally themselves with the emperor in order to orchestrate their return to Florence. Thus, the decree of amnesty (*de exbannitis rebandiendis*) asserts that its goal was to strengthen, reintegrate, reconcile, and pacify the commune of Florence and the Guelph party. Ghibellines were excluded for the simple reason that they were the political enemies of the government and, if allowed to return, they could have easily become a fifth column at the hands of Henry VII. But everyone else was allowed to make their way back as long as they were 'by nation and origin' (*natione seu origine*) 'of the city, county, or district of Florence' (*de ciuitate, comitatu, seu districtu florentie*).<sup>141</sup> If the commune saw the need to specify this, it is because some of the exiles were not original citizens. Exiles were the epitome of what an evil and wicked citizen was like,

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<sup>138</sup> Giuliano Milani, "Roveschi della cittadinanza. Appunti per una storia comparata di bandi e scomuniche nel medioevo," in *Cittadinanze medievali. Dinamiche di appartenenza a un corpo comunitario*, ed. Sara Menzinger (Rome, 2017), 178.

<sup>139</sup> Lauro Martines, "Political Conflict in the Italian City States," *Government and Opposition* 3, no. 1 (1968): 88-91; and Fabrizio Ricciardelli, "Le modalità dell'esclusione politica a Firenze nel tardo Medioevo," in *Escludere per governare. L'esilio politico fra Medioevo e Risorgimento*, ed. Fabio di Giannatale (Milan, 2011).

<sup>140</sup> Milani, "Roveschi della cittadinanza," 181-182, notes that jurists often compared temporary and permanent *bandi* with medicinal and mortal punishments respectively. See also Fabrizio Ricciardelli, "Notes on the Causes and Consequences of Political Exclusion in Late Medieval Italy," *Italian History and Culture* 8 (2002).

<sup>141</sup> ASF, Provvisioni, Registri, 14, fols. 107r-v (27 August 1311).

traitors whose actions were all the most despised because they had betrayed the natural bonds of trust, because they ‘had forgotten the love that nature forges.’<sup>142</sup> But perhaps precisely because of those natural bonds, the commune was willing to take them back.<sup>143</sup>

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The chronicles and other writings of Florence envisioned its citizenry as a natural community or *gens*; an extended family or kinship group with common ancestors, sharing the same blood, and a distinct set of inherited traits. This way of thinking was an essential part of Florentine political identity and, as I have demonstrated, it should be taken into consideration when we examine the political and social structures and practices of the late medieval commune.

Naturalisation, like adoption, was a legal fiction that brought into relief the tension between the dictates of natural law and the realities of civil life, the city as a normative experience and the city as a community of descent. Indeed, the differences between original and acquired citizenship reveal that Italian communes like Florence regarded naturalised citizens as individuals on the fringes of the body politic. From a legal perspective, immigrants were always at a disadvantage because even if they were granted citizenship, this was always qualified. With the exception of women married to Florentine citizens, foreigners could not become *originarii* because their *origo* was assumed and fixed at birth. Having *civilitas originalis*, on the other hand, implied sharing ties of descent with other citizens, that is being a member of the commune as *gens*. In the next chapter, I will explore some of the reasons why communal governments valued – and were sometimes anxious about – those biological ties.

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<sup>142</sup> Dante, *Inf.* 11.61-63, 112.

<sup>143</sup> Fabrizio Ricciardelli, “Exile as Evidence of Civic Identity in Florence in the Time of Dante: Some Examples,” *Reti Medievali Rivista* 5, no. 1 (2004), shows how the experience of exile often reinforced civic identity of those who had rebelled against the commune.

## Natural Love and Biological Descent

From the perspective of medieval moral theologians, charity was indispensable for the soul of the loving subject and its sanctification, for ‘no virtue is possible without charity.’<sup>1</sup> But this was not just about the individual: love was also considered necessary for men to live sociably with one another. Thus, medieval scholars painstakingly reminded their audience that love unites individuals, and that unity brings about peace and concord.<sup>2</sup> Medieval scholars also inherited sacred texts telling them to love their enemies,<sup>3</sup> to love their neighbour as themselves,<sup>4</sup> that ‘brother and mother’ need not be blood relatives,<sup>5</sup> that a stranger could be their neighbour,<sup>6</sup> and that they should therefore love strangers. Such ideas are far from being a cultural universal and, sociologically speaking, love of family (extended as well as nuclear) is probably far more common. Yet the demanding injunctions of Christ in the gospels seemingly endorse a type of love that is blind to material and biological realities. From an ethical point of view, therefore, this raised the question of the relation of love for one’s family and love of people more generally. Did medieval people think that blood relatives should be loved more and that, as the saying goes, charity should begin at home?

Early Christian theologians and medieval scholars recognised both the instinct to love one’s nearest and dearest and the need to love our neighbour. Accordingly, they raised a

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<sup>1</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, q. 23, a. 7, co.: ‘vera virtus sine caritate esse non potest.’ On charity and sanctification, see James W. Brodman, *Charity and Religion in Medieval Europe* (Washington, D.C., 2009), 222-244. On the charitable revolution of the late medieval period, see Adam J. Davis, “The Social and Religious Meaning of Charity in Medieval Europe,” *History Compass* 12 (2014).

<sup>2</sup> James of Viterbo, *De regimine christiano*, 50: ‘Nam unitas causa est pacis. Est enim pax effectus amoris, cuius est unire.’ On concord as political friendship, see Bénédicte Sère, *Penser l’amitié au Moyen Âge: Étude historique des commentaires sur les livres VIII et IX de l’Éthique à Nicomaque (XIIIe-XVe siècles)* (Turnhout, 2007), 240-246. See also Matthew S. Kempshall, “The Utility of Peace in Monarchia,” in *War and Peace in Dante*.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 5:44.

<sup>4</sup> Mark 12:31 and Matthew 22:39.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 12:48-50.

<sup>6</sup> Luke 10:25-37.

number of questions aimed at discerning the proper ‘order of love’ or *ordo caritatis*: should all men be equally loved? Should I love my enemy as much as my neighbour? Should my family be loved more than strangers? In the twelfth century, Peter Lombard (d. 1160) collected some of the most important opinions on the *ordo caritatis*.<sup>7</sup> Peter notes that although we know that we are to love God more than other men and that we are to love all men, scripture does not seem to indicate, among all men, whom to love first (*non est autem apertum utrum omnes homines pariter diligere debeamus*). He also shows that some Fathers of the Church like Origen and Jerome thought that the commandment to love all men did not imply that everyone should be equally loved. Others, like Augustine, had contended that our family, our neighbour, and our enemy should be loved as oneself and equally. Before the thirteenth century, however, there were seldom systematic attempts to explain the origins of the instinct to love one’s family, perhaps because it seemed self-evident.<sup>8</sup>

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. On the one hand, I will explore how late medieval society conceptualised the instinct that moves individuals to love their family first and foremost. I will argue that from the mid-thirteenth century the instinct to love relatives became more and more identified with the instinct to love one’s own blood. That is, consanguinity and descent came to be perceived as structural principles that could account for the human inclination to love one’s family. Beyond the household, members of more extended groups who could claim to have common descent were likewise thought to possess a natural inclination to love one another. On the other hand, throughout this chapter I will show how this love of one’s blood was integrated within the *ordo caritatis* and, in particular, how it was harmonised with the ethical command to love one’s neighbour. Thus, if the previous chapter has demonstrated that common descent was an important component of communal identity,

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<sup>7</sup> Peter Lombard, *Sentences*, vol. 2, lib. III, dist. 29, 171-177.

<sup>8</sup> However, from the twelfth century, Western thinkers had already begun to systematically reflect on the emotive nature of man and to integrate affects and passions into a new anthropological outlook. See Boquet and Nagy, *Medieval Sensibilities*, 130-148.

this chapter will show how ideas of biological descent informed the affective dimension of social relationships: they accounted for the love for one's family as much as for the need to love other citizens, be they familiar or strangers.

The question that medieval thinkers did eventually address is one still discussed by anthropologists today. The fact that we tend to care more for those more closely related to us deserves an explanation, and medieval answers to the 'why' question deserve explication. About thirty years ago, the anthropologist Robin Dunbar noted that human beings rarely establish relationships with groups larger than 150 individuals, a limit he connected to the capacity of our brain to handle complex social relationships.<sup>9</sup> Yet why our parents, siblings, and other members of our extended family feature so frequently and so prominently among those relationships is still much debated. Evolutionary biologists, cognitive psychologists, and even game theorists, have advanced different hypotheses as to why relatives are loved more than strangers. William D. Hamilton's theory of inclusive fitness, in particular, has inspired social psychologists to explore from an evolutionary perspective the significance of genealogical relatedness to human cooperation and altruism.<sup>10</sup> This is not to say that we are unable to love people who do not belong to our family, or that relatives always and invariably get along well. But, as one author has pointed out, 'that we sometimes care a lot about the welfare of some other people isn't to concede that we always care a lot about everybody.'<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Robin I. M. Dunbar, "Coevolution of neocortical size, group size and language in humans," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 16, no. 4 (1993).

<sup>10</sup> William D. Hamilton's 1964 two-part paper "The Genetical Evolution of Social Behavior," *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 7, no. 1 (1964): 1-16, 17-52, proposed that altruistic behaviour could be explained by the genetic relatedness of an individual to the recipient of the altruistic act, a behaviour he named "inclusive fitness." This theory was popularised by Richard Dawkins in *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford, 1976). For more recent studies, see Martin Daly, Catherine Salmon, and Margo Wilson, "Kinship: The Conceptual Hole in Psychological Studies of Social Cognition and Close Relationships," in *Evolutionary Social Psychology*, ed. Jeffrey A. Simpson and Douglas T. Kenrick (Mahwah, N.J., 1997); and Ken G. Binmore, "Kinship," in *Natural Justice* (Oxford, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

Some modern experimental studies seem to corroborate the medieval proverb that ‘blood is thicker than water.’<sup>12</sup>

It is not just that individuals care more for family members than strangers but also that among family members they tend to care more for those more closely related to them. In *The Abolition of Man* (1943), C. S. Lewis criticised those intellectuals who in his own day endorsed a morality organised around the principle of the preservation of the species. Only people educated in a particular way, he said, have ever had the idea of posterity before their minds at all. Instead, Lewis contended that:

what we have by nature is an impulse to preserve our own children and grandchildren; and impulse which grows progressively feebler as the imagination looks forward and finally dies out in the ‘deserts of vast futurity.’ No parents who were guided by this instinct would dream for a moment of setting up the claims of their hypothetical descendants against those of the baby actually crowing and kicking in the room.<sup>13</sup>

The evidence that we tend to love our relatives and to do so in proportion to our degree of relationship with them is as compelling as the evidence that suggests that we often feel little sympathy for the welfare of strangers. Daily experience, Lewis argues, shows us that ‘as we pass from mother love to rational planning for the future, we are passing away from the realm of instinct into that of choice and reflection.’<sup>14</sup>

Of course, one can question whether the instinct to love our relatives follows a natural pattern or is, instead, socially constructed.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the extent to which the instinct to care for family members is based on genealogical relatedness or simply on familiarity and intimacy

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<sup>12</sup> Elaine A. Madsen, Richard J. Tunney, George Fieldman, et al., “Kinship and Altruism: A Cross-Cultural Experimental Study,” *British Journal of Psychology* 98, no. 2 (2007).

<sup>13</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man: Or Reflections on Education with Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of Schools* (London, 1946), 29-30.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 30. On modern Ethics and long-term planning, see Peter Singer, *The Most Good You Can Do: How Effective Altruism Is Changing Ideas about Living Ethically* (New Haven, 2015).

<sup>15</sup> See above, p. 72, fn. 1.

is up for debate<sup>16</sup> and a distinction that, as we will see, did not evade medieval scholars. And yet, that such an instinct is pervasive, at least in the popular and cultural imagination of the Middle Ages and now, cannot be easily dismissed.

This chapter is divided into five parts. In the first, I present how Aristotle's *Ethics* helped medieval scholars establish a conceptual relationship between common descent and blood on the one hand and love on the other. I also explain how they came to regard this affection for one's blood as a natural inclination distinct but compatible with love as a rational choice. In the second part, I demonstrate that the belief that consanguinity predisposes relatives to love each other and to do so in proportion to their degree of relationship was not limited to one genre of scholastic writing. I show how this belief could be employed in political treatises and commentaries, in texts for religious instruction and sermons – which contributed to popularising it – and how it can be inferred from the documentary record produced by social practices like the adoption of children in Florentine orphanages. In the third, I show how the perception of a political community as a group of descent (*gens*) could also be fertile ground for the deployment of theories of natural love. Moreover, I want to argue that some institutional arrangements and practices of the Florentine commune can be better understood if we accept that Florentines believed – or at least accepted the proposition – that they had a natural love for each other by virtue of their purported genealogical relatedness. In the fourth, I explain how late medieval ideas on marriage and sexual consummation can account for the expansion of the theory of natural love to encompass in-laws. I also argue that natural love best explains the aim behind the Church's policy on consanguinity and affinity prohibitions as well as the widespread recourse to dynastic alliances to solve factional problems. In the fifth

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<sup>16</sup> Michael I. Norton, Jeana H. Frost, and Dan Ariely, "Less is More: The Lure of Ambiguity, or Why Familiarity Breeds Contempt," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 92, no. 1 (2007): 98, have argued, however, that 'although people are correct in intuiting the real-world positive relationship between familiarity and liking across their set of acquaintances, they mistakenly believe that learning more about any one individual will lead to greater linking.' Instead, they show how initial impressions are overly positive because of erroneous perceptions of similarity to ambiguous targets. With the acquisition of more information, ambiguity is resolved, and dissimilarity reveals itself, causing a decrease in linking.

and final part, I explore how common descent from Adam and Eve and appeals could be rhetorically employed device to call attention to the genealogical relatedness of all human beings and expand to even wider circles the theory of natural love. When a relationship was so distant that speaking of blood seemed futile, scholars reminded their audience that all human beings shared the same human nature inherited from our first parents. In so doing, they attempted to naturalise the command to love our neighbour and harmonise it with the inclination to love one's family.

## 5.1 Friendship and Common Descent in the Aristotelian Ethical Tradition

In the mid-twelfth century, Peter Lombard himself raised the question of whether relatives (*carne conjuncti*) should be loved more than 'those not united to us by flesh' (*qui nobis carne non sunt conjuncti*). In his view, spiritual union is better and holier than carnal union (*sanctior est enim copula cordium quam corporum*). And yet he states that 'this is a complicated question, nor can it be fully resolved by us.'<sup>17</sup> Part of the Lombard's hesitation derived from the command to honour our father and mother. Why would God demand such a thing unless parents are to be loved with greater love than strangers? Peter concludes that the equality of love which is spoken of by some authors 'should be referred not to the feeling but to the good which is desired for them' (*ut paritas non ad affectum referatur, sed ad bonum quod eis optatur*). It is not bad then, to love some with more affection (*secundum affectu charitatis*) than others.<sup>18</sup>

By the mid-thirteenth century, medieval scholars started to see the instinct to love one's family in a new light. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, fully translated into Latin by Robert

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<sup>17</sup> Peter Lombard, *Sentences*, vol. 2, lib. III, dist. 29, cap. 2, 10, 175-76.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 175, translated in *The Sentences*, vol. 2, 125. A similar contemporary discussion of the order of love can be found in Aelred of Rievaulx, *The Mirror of Charity*, trans. Elizabeth Connor (Kalamazoo, MI., 1990), book III, ch. 38, 104-105, 295: 'let those closer to us by kinship or human relationships be allotted the compartments closer to us on that deck,' and 'to the degree someone is closer to us by blood, or dearer by friendship, or better disposed by the generosity of kind deeds, let him be closer to the center in the abode of our heart.'

Grosseteste in c.1246-7, provided a novel paradigm of interpretation that established a connection between love and the concepts of similarity and identity.<sup>19</sup> According to Aristotle, friends love each other because they share something in common. The more similar two individuals are to one another, the greater their inclination to love each other and the stronger the bond of friendship that might result between them both.<sup>20</sup>

However, similarity can be manifold. For this reason, in book VIII of the *Ethics*, Aristotle made a fundamental distinction between friendship among relatives (*amicicia cognata*) and friendship with companions (*amicicia etayricam*). Every species of friendship among relatives, he says, depends on and draws its strength from common ancestry, that is, genealogical relatedness. It is the similarity resulting from the reproductive process that moves relatives to love each other. Friendship among companions, on the other hand, seems to reflect some sort of agreement. If two individuals have the same age (*coetaneous*), share the same character (*unius moris*), or have been brought up together (*connutritum*), these circumstances will contribute to strengthening their friendship. Because brothers tend to be of similar age and are brought up together, Aristotle explains, their friendship will often resemble that of companions (*fraterna etbayrike assimilatur*), but remains distinct from it.<sup>21</sup> Engelbert of Admont (c.1250-1331) referred to this distinction when he noted that the love of family is like the love of friends, yet different on account of their first cause because the love of family can originate out of nature alone or out of nature guided by reason.<sup>22</sup>

Because common descent is the source of the natural instinct to love one's family, Aristotle affirms that every friendship among relatives can be traced back to the friendship

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<sup>19</sup> Sère, *Penser l'amitié au Moyen Âge*, 227-246, 237.

<sup>20</sup> Medieval scholars adopted this paradigm to the extent that they applied it to their discussions on the operation of natural love between angels. See, for instance, James of Viterbo, *Disputatio tertia de quolibet*, ed. Eelcko Ypma (Würzburg, 1973), q. XVIII, 237-242, 237: 'Utrum angeli magis se diligant mutuo quam duo homines.'

<sup>21</sup> Aristotle, *Ethica*, lib. VIII, cap. VII, 537.

<sup>22</sup> Engelbert of Admont, *Speculum virtutum*, undecima pars, cap. XII, 388: 'Dilectio vero ad propinquos et coniunctos similis est amicicie [...], sed differt quantum ad primam causam motivam, quoniam dilectio, que est ad propinquos et cognatos, potest esse originaliter vel ex natura tantum vel ex natura inductu et conductu rationis instincta et promota.'

between parents and children. A parent, he says, is fond of his children because he regards them ‘as something of himself’ (*ut sui ipsorum aliquid existentes*). Children, on the other hand, love their parents because they regard themselves ‘as being from them’ (*ut ab illis aliquid existentes*).<sup>23</sup>

Late medieval scholars promptly embraced this way of thinking. In a passage of his *Questiones super libro de animalibus*, a commentary on the natural philosophical works of Aristotle, Peter of Spain (d. 1277) argues that parents love their children more than children love their parents. In his opinion, the causality embedded in biological reproduction can explain this:

And it can also be said that every love is either self-love or love of oneself in another. Thus, because the nature of the father and the mother is somehow present in the child and the contrary does not occur, for nothing in the parents is determined by the new-born, as it happens the other way around, thus parents love their children more than children love their parents.<sup>24</sup>

In begetting children, parents pass on part of their identity to them. As a result, parents more easily discover themselves in their children than children in their parents. In his commentary on the *Sentences*, Bonaventure (1221-1274) reaches a similar conclusion. He asks whether a man should love his parents or his children more. And he says that with regard to the love of free charity (*gratuitae dilectionis*), he should love his parents more because of the goods (*beneficia*) he has received from them. And yet, he affirms that natural love (*dilectione naturali*) inclines a man to love his children more (*magis inclinatur affectus hominis ad filios*) because it is in his children that he is perpetuated and nature desires to produce like from like (*natura appetit conservari in suo simili*).<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Aristotle, *Ethica*, lib. VIII, cap. VII, 537.

<sup>24</sup> Peter of Spain, *Questiones super libro ‘De Animalibus’*, book XVI, 376: ‘Ad aliud dicendum quod omnis dilectio aut est sui ipsius in se aut sui ipsius in alio. Quia igitur patris et matris de natura propria est aliquid in generatis et non e contrario, quia nihil deciditur a natis in parentibus, sicut e contrario accidit, ideo parentes plus diligunt natos quam nati parentes.’ Also, Aquinas, *Sententia libri Ethicorum*, lib. 8, l. 12, n. 5, 486.

<sup>25</sup> Bonaventure, *In tertium librum Sententiarum*, in *Opera omnia*, vol. 3 (Quaracchi, 1887), dist. 29, a. 1, q. 4, co., 646.

With regards to brotherly friendship, Aristotle had affirmed that brothers love each other because they are from the same parents and so that they can be said to come ‘from the same blood and stock’ (*idem sanguinem et radicem*). Brothers are ‘the same thing, in a way, even though in separate people’ (*sunt autem idem equaliter et in divisis*).<sup>26</sup> In his commentary on the *Ethics*, Albertus Magnus (c.1193-1280) affirmed that after parental love brotherly love is the greatest. Brothers love one another (*fratres igitur diligunt se ad invicem*) and do so more than strangers because those related by blood have more in common by nature and common nutrition (*vita enim communis et ex natura et ex nutritione magis est consanguineorum, quam alienorum*).<sup>27</sup> It is sharing in the same blood that unites them in a paternal brotherhood.<sup>28</sup>

Aristotle had also affirmed that cousins love one another because they are similar to each other by virtue of being related to brothers who are from the same parents. More generally, he said that relatives are more or less similar to one another insofar they are more or less distant from a common ancestor (*fiunt autem hii quidem proximiores, hii autem magis alieni, in prope vel longe producem esse*), that is, in proportion to their degree of relationship.<sup>29</sup> Commenting on this passage, Aquinas explains that the measure of love (*ratio dilectionis*) in every blood friendship (*amicitia cognata*) is due to the closeness (*propinquitas*) of one individual to another.<sup>30</sup> As a result, friendship among blood relatives is proportional to the love among brothers (*secundum proportionem amicitiae fraternae*) insofar blood relatives are descended from brothers and these from the same parents.<sup>31</sup>

As we can see, the definitions of friendship and the operation of love in the *Ethics* rest on a fundamental assumption: any individual naturally loves first and foremost his own person.

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<sup>26</sup> Aristotle, *Ethica*, lib. VIII, cap. XIV, 537.

<sup>27</sup> Albert the Great, *Liber VIII Ethicorum*, in *Opera omnia*, vol. 7, ed. Augustus Borgnet (Paris, 1891), tract. III, cap. VII, 549.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., caput VI, 548: ‘in utroque unus sanguis est parentalis fratrum.’

<sup>29</sup> Aristotle, *Ethica*, lib. VIII, cap. XIV, 537.

<sup>30</sup> Aquinas, *Sententia libri Ethicorum*, lib. 8, l. 12, n. 7, 486.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., n. 17, 488.

As Aquinas said commenting on the source of the love between parents and children: ‘the closest friendship is that of he who loves himself, out of which all other types of friendships are derived.’<sup>32</sup> Indeed, Aristotle had affirmed that the features of any friendship would seem to be derived from features of friendship towards oneself.<sup>33</sup> It is because of this ‘love of self’ that all of us tend to love those in which we discover ourselves, that is, those similar to us. Self-love was not necessarily alien to a Christian audience: it was implied by Christ’s command to love our neighbour as ourselves.<sup>34</sup>

### 5.1.2 Natural and Rational Love

It is important to remark that medieval scholars understood the instinct to love one’s family as a form of *natural*, as opposed to *rational*, love. Natural love is the spontaneous movement of a subject’s sensitive soul towards an object arising out of the sense of affinity or similarity between them both. The inclination towards an object and the realisation of its absence, in turn, generates desires, emotions, and passions. Medieval scholars variously referred to this relationship of affinity between subject and object as *similitudo*, *connaturalitas*, *coaptatio*, or *complacentia*.<sup>35</sup> By contrast, rational love belongs to the faculties of the intellect and will of the rational soul. Because the movement of the soul is hierarchical, the rational soul can accept or reject the movement of the senses.<sup>36</sup> Medieval scholars were thus able to explain both the spontaneity of emotions and the freedom of the will.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., n. 5: ‘Unde haec amicitia propinquissima est dilectioni qua quis amat seipsum, a qua omnis amicitia derivatur.’

<sup>33</sup> Aristotle, *Ethica*, lib. IX, cap. IV, 548: ‘Amicabilia autem *qua* ad amicos et *quidem* amicicie determinantur videntur ex his que ad se ipsum venisse.’

<sup>34</sup> This pre-eminence of the love of self is also reflected in the idea that one has to secure his own salvation before securing that of others: ‘For what doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul? Or what exchange shall a man give for his soul?’ (Matt 16:26). See Aelred of Rievaulx, *The Mirror of Charity*, book III, ch. 37, 290-294.

<sup>35</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, q. 26, a. 1, co., and a. 2, co.: ‘In unoquoque autem horum appetituum, amor dicitur illud quod est principium motus tendentis in finem amatum. In appetitu autem naturali, principium huiusmodi motus est connaturalitas appetentis ad id in quod tendit, quae dici potest amor naturalis.’ Also, *ibid.*, q. 30, a. 2. See also Gerald Morgan, ‘Natural and Rational Love in Medieval Literature,’ *The Yearbook of English Studies* 7 (1977): 44-48.

<sup>36</sup> On the vegetative, sensitive, and rational souls, see Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia, q. 76, a. 3, co.

In the *Ethics*, common descent was identified as the source of affinity or similarity between blood relatives. According to Aristotle, therefore, consanguinity moves family members to love each other. Using his free will and with the help of his intellect, however, a person can decide whether to follow or not the desires of the sensitive soul. It is only then that love becomes a rational choice and we can speak of it being morally good or bad.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, natural love is always necessary and good because it answers to the purposiveness which God in creating the world has instilled in nature.<sup>38</sup> In other words, it is not so much irrational as pre-rational. The distinction between natural and rational love was summed up by Dante in canto 17 of *Purgatorio* where he affirmed that ‘the natural is always without error, but mental love may choose an evil object or err through too much or too little vigour.’<sup>39</sup>

As I will go on to explain in the end of this chapter, the fact that the love arising from common descent was regarded as a natural inclination distinct from, but compatible with, love as a rational choice is crucial to understand how medieval society dealt with the potential tension between love of family and love of neighbour.

## 5.2 Family Love, Descent, and Consanguinity in Medieval Thought and Society

For Aristotle and his medieval commentators, instinctual family love was the effect of common descent and consanguinity. Blood was at the centre of late medieval theories of reproduction: a child was shaped by his father’s blood (concocted as semen) out of his mother’s blood (the menses) and nurtured by blood as an infant (breast milk).<sup>40</sup> Blood was the substance that

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<sup>37</sup> On the morality of the passions, see Rosenwein, *Generations of Feeling*, 162-67.

<sup>38</sup> Aristotle, *Physica*, ed. Fernand Bossier and Jozef Brams (Leiden, 1990), lib. II, 5, 196b20-21, 68.

<sup>39</sup> Dante, *Purg.* 17.94-96, 184: ‘Lo naturale è sempre senza errore, ma l’altro puote errar per malo obietto o per troppo o per poco di vigore.’

<sup>40</sup> Aquinas, *In sententias*, lib. 4, d. 40, q. 1, a. 1, ad 4: ‘illud quod proxime convertitur in semen, est sanguis, ut probatur in 15 de animalibus; et propter hoc, vinculum quod ex propagatione carnali contrahitur, convenientius dicitur consanguinitas quam carnalitas; et quod aliquando unus consanguineus dicitur esse caro alterius, hoc est in quantum sanguis qui in semen viri aut menstruum convertitur, est potentia caro et os.’

determined whether children would resemble their parents and the extent to which relatives were similar to one another. If loving other individuals was an exercise in self-love, then loving one's family was loving one's own blood. As I will attempt to demonstrate in this part, the connection between family love, descent, and consanguinity was confined neither to commentaries on Aristotle's *Ethics* nor to commentaries on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard and his discussion of the *ordo caritatis*.

Similarity, consanguinity, and family love also feature in political writing in this period. This is not surprising, given that many political thinkers had been trained in natural philosophy and were familiar with Aristotle's ethical writings. In his commentary on the third book of the *Politics*, Peter of Auvergne discusses the advantages and disadvantages of hereditary succession to political rule. He says that it is hard to believe that a father will pass the government of the kingdom to someone other than his son. This would be very difficult and beyond every expectation. Peter argues that a father must

leave the government to whomever he loves more (*magis dilecto*), and what is closer by nature is by nature loved more (*et magis dilectum secundum naturam est propinquius secundum naturam*). Now the son is like another father, and for this reason, just as a father loves himself more than he loves anyone else whatever, so, after himself, he has a greater natural love for his natural son than for anyone else whatever (*naturaliter plus diligit naturalem filium quam quemlibet alium*). As a result, he will sooner leave the kingship to him than to anyone else.<sup>41</sup>

An additional advantage of this way of doing things, Peter argues, is that the father will take better care of the kingdom if he knows that his son will succeed him and rule after him. Although Peter does not explain whether it is trust or affection which motivates the father to behave thus, the preceding discussion of natural love seems to suggest that it is the latter.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Peter of Auvergne, *In Politicorum continuatio*, lib. 3, l. 14, n. 16, translated in "Peter of Auvergne Commentary and Questions on Book III of Aristotle's Politics (Selections)," in *The Cambridge Translations of Medieval Philosophical Texts, vol. 2: Ethics and Political Philosophy*, ed. Arthur S. McGrade, John Kilcullen, and Matthew Kempshall (Cambridge, 2012), 247.

<sup>42</sup> For examples of how fathers ensured the succession of their sons to the throne, see Bartlett, *Blood Royal*, 89-106.

In Florence, the Dominican, lector at Santa Maria Novella, and preacher Remigio de' Girolami was also well aware of the dynamics of natural love. Remigio had attended the faculty of arts in Paris in the late 1260s and joined the Dominican convent of Saint Jacques during the second regency of Aquinas. He has often been put forward by scholars as an example of how academic scholasticism could serve wider pastoral concerns in society. His writing, teaching, and preaching, moreover, reveal how a much wider audience was able to access the learning of the Paris schools.<sup>43</sup>

In his political treatise *De bono communi*, written in 1302 or 1303, Remigio attempted to demonstrate that the good of the *patria*, that is the city-state or commune, should be pursued even to the detriment of the personal or individual good. The operation of natural love plays a central role in his analysis. He raises the following question: what moves men to love other men naturally (*que movent homines ad amandum alios homines naturaliter*)? And he says that there are four causes: bodily virtue, delectation, usefulness, and similarity. With regard to the last one, he says

Every man insofar it corresponds to his nature loves more that to which he is more united, thinks about himself more than about his neighbour (*proximo*), and among his neighbours more about those related by blood (*consanguineum*) than those not belonging to his family (*extraneum*), and among those related by blood more about his son than about his brother and so on insofar as they are more distant from a common ancestor (*et quanto magis ad remotiores proceditur*).<sup>44</sup>

According to Remigio, biological proximity arising from common descent explains why individuals tend to naturally love their relatives more than those not related to them by blood. It also accounts for the fact that those who are closer to a common ancestor would love one another more than those more distantly related. It is important to remark that Remigio does

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<sup>43</sup> C. T. Davis, "Remigio de' Girolami O.P. Lector of S. Maria Novella in Florence," in *Le scuole degli ordini mendicanti (secoli XIII-XIV), 11-14 ottobre 1976. Convegni del Centro di studi sulla spiritualità medievale*, vol. 17 (Todi, 1978); and Daniel R. Lesnick, *Preaching in Medieval Florence: The Social World of Franciscan and Dominican Spirituality* (Athens, GA., 1989), 96-118.

<sup>44</sup> Remigio de' Girolami, *De bono communi*, in Maria Consiglia De Matteis, *La "teologia politica comunale" di Remigio de' Girolami* (Bologna, 1977), 21.

not suggest that one should love one's family and neglect his neighbour. In fact, this passage on the *ordo caritatis* is part of a much longer discussion of the common good which Matthew Kempshall has studied in depth.<sup>45</sup> To put simply a very complicated question, Remigio argues that the individual *qua* individual loves in the way he describes here. However, he argues that 'it is natural for more love to be shown towards something which is more beautiful.' And since 'the beauty of a part derives from its congruence with its whole,' an individual should love the common good – of the city, kingdom, or Church of which he is a member – more than himself or his relatives.<sup>46</sup>

Remigio was writing *De bono communi* in 1302 or 1303. In the second half of the thirteenth century, factional wars between Guelfs and Ghibellines had devastated the city of Florence. More recently, in 1301, the struggles between White and Black Guelfs had sent thousands into political exile (most famously, Dante). It is not surprising therefore that two years later Remigio was writing a treatise on the common good and that Giordano da Rivalto (c.1255-1311), a fellow Dominican who also lived and worked at Santa Maria Novella, was preaching on the need to love one's neighbour.<sup>47</sup>

In a sermon delivered in Florence in the year 1303, Giordano addresses the same set of ideas regarding natural love and descent.<sup>48</sup> The *thema* or topic of the sermon is 'love your neighbour as yourself.' Giordano reminds his audience that our neighbour is 'all men and women' and that it is a great thing to try to love everyone around us. However, although everyone deserves to be loved, he says:

We do not suggest that everyone [should be loved] equally, for some are closer (*prossimo*) than others, those related by blood and relatives (*consanguinei e' parenti*) are the closest ones, and so should be loved more: the father, the mother, the

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<sup>45</sup> Matthew S. Kempshall, *The Common Good in Late Medieval Political Thought* (Oxford, 1999), 293-315.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.

<sup>47</sup> On Giordano, see Carlo Delcorno, *Giordano da Pisa e l'antica predicazione volgare* (Florence, 1975).

<sup>48</sup> Giordano da Rivalto, *Prediche inedite del B. Giordano da Rivalto dell'ordine de' predicatori recitate in Firenze dal 1302-1305*, ed. Enrico Narducci (Bologna, 1867), 79-87.

siblings, the wife, and the children. Because there are more united (*congiunti*), they should be loved more.<sup>49</sup>

Both Remigio and Giordano are trying to convince their fellow citizens to reach peace and concord, that is, to love one another. In so doing they both draw upon the belief that natural love arises from consanguinity. Where Remigio employs this idea for his political analysis, Giordano uses it rhetorically to engage his audience. Thus, scholastic discussions on the *ordo caritatis* provided ways for Tuscan thinkers and preachers to articulate contemporary concerns about the conflictive and politically divided cities where they lived.

Preaching and religious instruction can explain how the association of natural love with descent might have spread to a wider public. After the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), Church authorities promoted and encouraged the production of didactic religious literature that could help parish priests teach the faith to the flock entrusted to their care. Although the council did not specify exactly what the laity should be instructed in, the Ten Commandments, along with the Creed and the Our Father, featured prominently in the diocesan legislation which attempted to put into practice the principles of the council.<sup>50</sup> The Decalogue was the basis of Christian moral teaching, and its late medieval commentaries must have reached a secular audience via the preaching of the secular clergy and the friars.<sup>51</sup> The ten commandments were regarded as a key to Christian charity: the first three spoke of love of God, and the other seven of love of neighbour. References to natural love and consanguinity were commonplace in commentaries on the fourth commandment because the command to honour thy father and mother, as we have seen in Peter Lombard's work, raised the question of whether parents, and relatives more generally, should be loved more than strangers.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>50</sup> See Lesley Smith, *The Ten Commandments. Interpreting the Bible in the Medieval World* (Leiden, 2014).

<sup>51</sup> On preaching as mass communication in the Middle Ages, see David L. d'Avray, *Medieval Marriage: Symbolism and Society* (Oxford, 2005), 19-58.

With regard to the fourth commandment, the bishop of Lincoln Robert Grosseteste (1175-1253) reminded his readers that because the father and the mother are ‘the closest ones (*proximiores*) to their offspring, their children ought to perform works of mercy and answer to their needs more readily and with more affection than to others.’<sup>52</sup> Proximity, in this context, is always a proxy for closeness in the degree of relationship, that is, consanguinity. In his *Collationes de decem praeceptis*, Bonaventure affirms that friendliness characterises the relationship with the father who is to be honoured because of the relationship of origin, that is, because he begets the son. And then, he adds that because of closeness (*rationem proximitatis*) ‘we owe greater love to family than to strangers’ and because of likeness (*rationem similitudinis*) to some more than others.<sup>53</sup>

One Italian versified exposition on the ten commandments conveys the connection between love and blood even more explicitly. It is attributed to a certain Colo or Nicolo da Perosa whom scholars believe was from Piemonte or perhaps from Perugia. The poem survives in three manuscripts and dates to the mid- or late thirteenth century. It is likely that it was employed to help teach the commandments to the lay faithful. Sometime in the early fourteenth century, it was translated into the Tuscan dialect.<sup>54</sup> In the section devoted to the fourth commandment, we read:

The fourth commandment you should observe, if you have father and mother, you must obey them, do them honour and reverence as much as you can, for they have given you the flesh and their blood (*perché li t'è dati la caren e l' so sange*). Our fathers who have begotten us (*inzenerati*), and our mothers who in their body have carried us (*in corpo n'è portati*), in bad and good days they have given us their love, and from their blood (*e del so sange olì*) they have fed us.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Robert Grosseteste, *De decem mandatis*, ed. Richard C. Dales and Edward B. King (Oxford, 1987), 39: ‘Et quia pater et mater omnibus aliis sunt proli proximiores, debet proles parentibus opera misericordie et indigenciarum suplecionis cicius quam aliis, affectuosius etiam et efficacius exhibere.’ See also James McEvoy, “Robert Grosseteste on the Ten Commandments,” *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 58 (1991).

<sup>53</sup> Bonaventure, *Collationes de decem praeceptis*, in *Opera omnia*, vol. 5 (Quaracchi, 1891), 524.

<sup>54</sup> Vincenzo de Bartholomaeis, “La leggenda dei dieci comandamenti di Colo da Perosa,” *Studi di filologia romanza* 8 (1901).

<sup>55</sup> Colo da Perosa, *Parafraasi versaggiata del Decalogo*, in *Crestomazzia italiana dei primi secoli con prospetto grammaticale e glossario*, ed. Ernesto Monaci (Rome, Naples, 1955), 421-22.

In this short passage it is possible to appreciate the confluence of late medieval medical and religious ideas in a poetical composition that had a clear didactic purpose. The father is portrayed as an active principle of generation and the mother as the passive recipient. In the last few words, we have a reference to the widespread belief that breast milk was purified blood. The author not only deals at some length with the process of biological generation but suggests that the biological connection between parents and children is the first reason adduced to love one's parents.<sup>56</sup>

The same idea features in a sermon of San Bernardino delivered in the Piazza del Campo in Siena in the year 1427. Bernardino discusses the seven types of love that human beings have. The first one he calls natural love (*amore naturale*) and the example he chooses to illustrate it is the love that parents have towards their children (*l'amore dei tui figliuoli propri*). Parents should naturally feel love for their children, for no other reason than they are their children and that is precisely how nature operates.<sup>57</sup>

Sometimes, references to natural family love could present a gendered dimension. One such example can be found in *The Book of Sydrac*, a popular encyclopaedia dating from the second half of the thirteenth century. It is a work written in dialogue form and set in a fictional encounter in the distant past between Boctus, a king of the East, and Sydrac, a philosopher. Originally written in Occitan, it was quickly translated into Italian and many other vernacular languages. The king asks whether a man should love the children of his brother or those of his sister more. Sydrac answers that according to God (*secondo Idio*) and in accordance with their works (*secondo le loro opere*), a man should love them all equally. However, in accordance with the world (*secondo lo mondo*), he says that a man '[should love] the child of his brother than that of his sister more, because the child is more of the man than of the woman (*la criatura è più*

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<sup>56</sup> A similar statement can be found in Dante, *Convivio*, IV, 26.10.

<sup>57</sup> Bernardino of Siena, *Le prediche volgari*, vol. 2, sermon 18, 62-63: 'O, se tu padre e madre non hai cura de'tuoi figliuoli, chi credi che n'abbi cura? [...] Hai figli? Fa' che tu gli amaestri con questo amore cordiale, che tutti diventino buoni, acostumati, riverenti in amor di Dio e in timore, e così vivarai molto consolato di tali figli.'

dell'uomo che della femina).’ Although the first man, Adam, was not born but made out of the earth by God, the lineage (*schiatta*) in human beings comes from the man to the womb of the woman. The father, Sydrac says, is like a plant or a tree and the mother is like the ground that guards and feeds the child. The child cannot be made without the cooperation of them both, but it is more reliant on the tree, whence he originates (*onde egli è stato*) than on the ground.<sup>58</sup>

This image and its rationale have to be understood in light of late medieval Aristotelian theories of embryology. As we have seen, according to Aristotle the seed of man determines the shape of the child whereas the woman can only influence the form of the new-born insofar as the matter she contributes to generation is more or less responsive to the action of the male seed.<sup>59</sup> As a result, a child would always be more similar to his father than to his mother. Thus, Sydrac affirms that the child ‘belongs more to the man, from whom he is descended (*più appartiene all'uomo, ond'egli esciè*), than to the woman’ because, properly speaking the father is the one who generates. Accordingly, the child of a man’s brother would be more similar to him than the child of his sister who, instead, will resemble more his brother-in-law. Because similarity accounts for natural love, therefore, a man should love the child of his brother more than that of his sister.

Interestingly, Aquinas had raised a very similar question in the *Summa theologiae*. He asked whether a person should love his father or mother more. And he answered that although both should be loved, strictly speaking, the father is to be loved more [than the mother] because he is the active principle of generation.<sup>60</sup> This *quaestio* reminds us once again that the same concerns about the *ordo caritatis* and the same ways of thinking about natural love and

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<sup>58</sup> *Il libro di Sidrach. Testo inedito del secolo XIV*, ed. Adolfo Bartoli (Bologna, 1868), cap. 254, 287.

<sup>59</sup> For instance, Giles, *De formatione*, cap. 8, 121: ‘Filius carnalis [quia] habet materiam a matre, formam a patre, totam suam substantiam dicitur habere a patre et matre. Et quia forma magis est substantia quam materia, secundum hunc modum loquendi, ut dicebamus, filius magis habet substantiam a patre quam a matre.’

<sup>60</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, q. 26, a. 10, co.: ‘pater magis est amandus quam mater. Amantur enim pater et mater ut principia quaedam naturalis originis. Pater autem habet excellentiorem rationem principii quam mater, quia pater est principium per modum agentis, mater autem magis per modum patientis et materiae. Et ideo, per se loquendo, pater est magis diligendus.’

descent were being communicated in a variety of discursive styles: by scholars like Aquinas, by authors of popular encyclopaedias written in the vernacular, in vernacular poetry for religious instruction, and in sermons delivered in the public squares of late medieval Tuscany.

So far, I have shown how the belief that family love arises from common descent was pervasive, rationally explicated on an elite intellectual level, and potentially accessible to a wide audience. But is there any evidence that this way of thinking was widespread outside intellectual circles? Among the registers of the Florentine orphanages that I have examined in the second chapter of this thesis, some deeds of adoption seem to suggest so.

A comparison of these deeds with apprenticeship contracts suggests that the love of parents to their biological children was regarded as the ultimate, best kind of love, which could at best be imitated. As we have seen in the second chapter, parents always expressed their desire to treat their adoptive children ‘as if’ (*chome, siccome*) they were their own (*suo, proprio*) sons or daughters. For example, on the 17 of February 1398, a boy of San Gallo named Lazero was given in adoption to Vicarello d’Antonio da Sanseverino who promised the prior to keep the child and to have him and treat him ‘as if he were his own son’ (*tenere e tractare chome suo proprio figliuolo*).<sup>61</sup> Likewise, in 1406 Meo di Matteo of San Miniato had promised to treat Marco ‘as his son’ (*chome suo figliuolo*) and to raise him and educate him ‘as his dear son’ (*chome suo caro figliuolo*).<sup>62</sup> This analogising from the biological to the adoptive family was sometimes reinforced with the words ‘natural’ and ‘legitimate.’ Thus, Ghirigora had been given to Manetto di Pucci who promised ‘to raise her as if she were her natural and legitimate daughter’ (*et facesse amaestrare siccome fosse sua figliuola legittama et naturale*).<sup>63</sup> And, in 1419, a boy from Santa Maria della Scala, Giovanni, was given as an adoptive son to Pagolo di Morello de Morelli who promised the

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<sup>61</sup> AOIF, 11047, fol. 153r.

<sup>62</sup> AOIF, 11086, fol. 25v.

<sup>63</sup> AOIF, 11048, fol. 36r.

priors to treat the child ‘as if he were his natural and legitimate son’ (*chome suo figliuolo legitimo et naturale*).<sup>64</sup>

By contrast, in contracts of apprenticeship no mention was ever made of treating these children ‘as if’ they were sons and daughters. Whoever received them simply made promises regarding the practicalities of nourishing and caring for a child. For example, we read that on the 27 of June of 1395, the prior of San Gallo Giorgio Nuti placed (*puose a stare*) a six-year-old called Piero with a shoemaker, Luca di Giunta, of the popolo of San Lorenzo in Florence. The placement was to last four years after which time the child was to return to San Gallo. During that period, Luca promised to instruct the child in his profession, and to feed and clothe him, cover his expenses, and to treat him well (*e lui ben tractare*).<sup>65</sup>

One deed of adoption shows even more clearly how behind the insistence on treating children as if they were natural sons and daughters lay the belief that the affection of parents towards their children arises out of consanguinity. On the 5 of October 1407, a child by the name of Lucha at the hospital of Santa Maria della Scala in Florence was given in adoption to Ser Manno, a Florentine notary. The prior of the hospital, Cecco d’Aghostino, recorded how the said Manno wanted to take the child as his adoptive son (*farselo suo figliuolo adottivo*) and that he would strive (*sforzassi*) to raise him, as much as he could (*che allui fosse possibile*), as if the child was born of his own flesh and blood (*chome se fosse nato di sua charne e sanghne*).<sup>66</sup>

In a different set of circumstances, the same belief could be employed to raise serious objections to social practices that entailed either the creation of a fictive blood relationship or the displacement of natural kinship ties. In a sermon given in the year 1427, San Bernardino discouraged widows from remarrying after the death of their husbands, particularly if they have children from a previous marriage. For if she takes her children to her new home the stepfather

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<sup>64</sup> AOIF, 11086, fol. 32r.

<sup>65</sup> AOIF, 11047, fol. 224v.

<sup>66</sup> AOIF, 11086, fol. 26v.

will be envious of the love she feels for them, and he will complain that she loves the bones of her dead husband more than him. If her new husband has children of his own, on the other hand, the widow will not have as much love for them as she has for her own children, and he will feel envious too. If, on the contrary, she does not show greater love for her own children, the husband will think ill of her, for it is unnatural not to have love for one's own children and he would not be able to expect her to love his. If, on the other hand, she does not have children, but he does, she will always be in trouble with her stepsons because 'this is a general rule, that stepmothers and stepchildren never love each other.'<sup>67</sup>

### 5.3 Social Love and Consanguinity

In the sermon above, Giordano da Rivalto had affirmed that among all men, those related by blood should love one another more because they are more united (*congiunti*) to each other.<sup>68</sup> Then, he added: 'And so too a holy man should be loved more than a sinner. And a fellow citizen (*cittadino*) more than a foreigner (*forestiere*), and so it is required by order and nature.'<sup>69</sup> The proposition that we should love a holy man more than a sinner evokes Peter Lombard's remark in distinction 29 of the second book of the *Sentences* where he says that one of the things that should be loved in man is virtue and that vice and sin are to be hated.<sup>70</sup> In many ways, therefore, this was not a new idea. This normative expectation – namely that good should be loved and evil hated – already appeared in the Bible (*Amos* 5:15) and was often referred to

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<sup>67</sup> Bernardino of Siena, *Le prediche volgari*, vol. 2, sermon 22, 199-200.

<sup>68</sup> Engelbert of Admont and Guittone d'Arezzo use the same term (*congiunti*) to speak of relatives. Instead, Peter Lombard and Aquinas use the expression *carne conjuncti* which derives from its use to denote the union of man and woman in marriage.

<sup>69</sup> Giordano da Rivalto, *Prediche inedite*, 84.

<sup>70</sup> Peter Lombard, *Sentences*, vol. 2, lib. III, dist. 29, cap. 2, 12, 176: 'est duo essere diligenda in homine: naturam et virtutem; vitium vero et peccatum odiendum.' This, in turn, was inspired by Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, book I, 27.28, 38: 'Omnis peccator, in quantum peccator est, non est diligendus, et omnis homo, in quantum homo est, diligendus est propter Deum, Deus vero propter seipsum.' Likewise, Aquinas affirmed that all men should be loved according to their nature (*secundum naturam suam*), but according to their guilt (*secundum culpa*) whereby they oppose God, sinners are to be hated, even one's father, and mother, and relatives (*etiam pater et mater et propinqui*). See *Summa theologiae*, IIa-IIae, q. 25, a. 6, co.

by Augustine.<sup>71</sup> It was a principle that established what should be loved yet not necessarily what should be loved first. But, what about the citizen? Why should a citizen be loved more than a foreigner?

It is very likely that Giordano was thinking of what Aristotle and Aquinas called political friendship. By virtue of being members of the same political community, citizens share in a fellowship that makes them similar to one another.<sup>72</sup> However, in the previous chapter I have shown how Florentines could also conceive of themselves as a community of descent, something not at all dissimilar from an extended family. Could it be that Giordano also thought that fellow citizens would always be more closely related by blood to one another than foreigners? Is it possible that he thought that citizens feel natural love for each other because they are, to some extent, consanguineous?

As we have seen, Florentine society was reluctant to accept newcomers as fully fledged citizens. The presence of immigrants posed challenges to Florentine society and produced anxiety about social instability; a fact recalled by Dante.<sup>73</sup> In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the majority of the immigrants originated from the *contado* or municipal district of Florence and, a century later, many of them still held property there.<sup>74</sup> As Jacques Heers noted, in this period there was a transfer of population and family clans from the rural areas to the city so that, at least as regards the aristocracy, immigrants from the *contado* would have

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<sup>71</sup> Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, vol. 2, lib. XIV, cap. 6: 'Quapropter homo, qui secundum Deum, non secundum hominem vivit, oportet ut sit amator boni; unde fit consequens ut malum oderit.'

<sup>72</sup> Aquinas, *In sententias*, lib. 3, d. 29, q. 1, a. 6, co.: 'Haec autem similitudo attenditur secundum quod cum eis communicamus: unde et secundum diversas communicationes, diversas amicitias philosophus distinguit. Est enim communicatio alia quidem naturalis [...] Alia vero communicatio est politica, secundum quam homines ad concives suos communicant.'

<sup>73</sup> Dante, *Inf.* 16.73-75, 166: 'La gente nuova e i sùbiti guadagni orgoglio e dismisura han generata, Fiorenza, in te, sì che tu già ten piagni.' See also Nicolai Rubinstein, "The Beginnings of Political Thought in Florence. A Study in Mediaeval Historiography," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 5 (1942): 220-224. For the demographic growth of Florence in this period and the reactions of contemporaries, see Biller, *The Measure of Multitude*, 385-417.

<sup>74</sup> See Chris Wickham, "Rural Economy and Society," in *Italy in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Cristina La Rocca (Oxford, 2002), 125-128.

frequently been related to people in the city.<sup>75</sup> In the fourteenth century, by contrast, there were large numbers of immigrants who arrived from other Italian towns and distant regions and, therefore, it is unlikely that they were related by blood to Florentine citizens.

One thing that characterised the status of these new citizens was that their access to political offices was restricted in the statutes that granted them citizenship. By the mid-fourteenth century, the ruling class or aristocracy decided to enshrine these restrictions in law.

Villani recounts the episode in his chronicle:

In the said year [1346], on the 18 of October, it was ordained and decreed in Florence that no foreigner made citizens (*neuno forestiere fatto cittadino*) whose father and grandfather were not born in Florence or in the contado could have any office, not even if he were to be elected or elected by lot (*insaccato*), under a heavy penalty.<sup>76</sup>

Socio-economic and political interests can go a long way towards explaining why the government took such measures. But it is interesting to look at the decree itself and see how the government justified its actions. The decree forbids naturalised citizens, those who are publicly known not to be Florentines or who cannot demonstrate that their father and grandfather were Florentine citizens, to hold public office. It also remarks that the restrictions do not apply to anyone whose father and grandfather were true Florentine citizens (*verus civis*), even if they do not fulfil residency requirements.<sup>77</sup> Most importantly, the decree affirms that many of these newcomers are being elected as if they were true citizens (*tanquam veri cives*) and that, even though most of them come from places which are friendly to Florence, they do not naturally have [lit. carry] innate love towards the city (*amorem naturaliter insitum ad ipsam civitatem*

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<sup>75</sup> Heers, *Family Clans in the Middle Ages*, 35-45.

<sup>76</sup> Villani, *Nuova cronica*, vol. III, book 13, ch. 72, 1560: 'Nel detto anno (1346), a dì 18 d'Ottofre, si fece ordine e dicreto in Firenze che neuno forestiere fatto cittadino, il quale il padre e l'avolo ed egli non fossono nati in Firenze o nel contado, non potesse avere alcuno uficio, non ostante che fusse eletto o insaccato, sotto certa grande pena.'

<sup>77</sup> ASF, Provisioni, Registri 34, fols. 93v-94v (18 October 1346): 'Hoc in predictis modificato, quod quicunque avi sui paterni origine seu aliorum superiorum ab avo supra lineam masculinam fuerit verus civis seu comitatus Florentie per predicta non intelligatur excludi.'

*Florentie non gerunt*). As a result of this, they neglect and delay the business of the commune, incur in many scandals, and this causes much indignation among the citizens.<sup>78</sup>

The way in which the Florentine government justified this measure reflects a rationality which is remarkably similar to the one that Aquinas adopts in his analysis of one *quaestio* in the *Summa theologiae*. Aquinas reflects on how the Jews dealt with foreigners (*extranei*) who came to live among them and ‘wished to be admitted entirely to their fellowship and mode of worship.’<sup>79</sup> First, he remarks that those newcomers (*advenae*) were never at once admitted to citizenship (*non enim statim recipiebantur quasi cives*). Instead, no one was deemed a citizen except after two or three generations (*nisi qui ex avo, vel abavo, cives existerent*). Aquinas insists that this was also common practice among other non-Jewish peoples. As an example, he refers to the third book of the *Politics*, where Aristotle had asserted that citizenship is limited to the child of citizens on both sides, a requirement that is usually carried back to the second or third preceding generation.<sup>80</sup> Then, Aquinas affirms that the reason behind this way of doing things is that before two or three generations have passed, foreigners, ‘not yet having a firm love for the common good’ (*non habentes adhuc amorem firmatum ad bonum publicum*), might attempt something hurtful to the people.<sup>81</sup>

To put it simply, the requirement to wait two or three generations was enforced because the expectation was that after the said period immigrants would have been integrated

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.: ‘Quoniam multi forenses, maxime origine incogniti, nec sufficientia aut legalitate probati reperiuntur, et sunt in civitate et comitatu Florentie, qui sub pretextu et ficto colore civilitatis seu comitatus Florentie, multis cautelis, suggestionibus ac rogaminibus ambiunt et ambitiose querunt et conantur promoveri, admitti et recipi ad officia et honores in dicta civitate Florentie tanquam veri cives et comitatus civitatis Florentie, ipsius civitatis onera facere et substinere in opportuno tempore recusantes, quod si contingat eos eadem officia seu honores assequi, de reipublice Florentie sollicita gubernatione non curant, cum plerumque sint de longinquis partibus et locis benivolis communi Florentie et per consequens amorem naturaliter institutum ad ipsam civitatem Florentie non gerunt, propter que dicti communis negotia negligunt et postergant et multa schandala incurrere possunt et indignationes insurgere et insurgunt in dicta civitate Florentie et inter eius cives et comitatus.’

<sup>79</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, q. 105, a. 3, co. I would like to thank Melody Grubaugh for this reference.

<sup>80</sup> Aristotle, *Politica*, 155, ll. 9-12, 156, l. 1.

<sup>81</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, q. 105, a. 3, co.: ‘Et hoc ideo quia, si statim extranei advenientes reciperentur ad tractandum ea quae sunt populi, possent multa pericula contingere; dum extranei, non habentes adhuc amorem firmatum ad bonum publicum, aliqua contra populum attentarent.’

in society and forged kinship ties with the local population through marriage.<sup>82</sup> This is why Aquinas adds that the Jews were more able to accept Egyptians and Edomites amongst themselves. The Jews, having dwelt in Egypt, had been born and educated among the Egyptians. The Edomites, as chapter 23 of *Deuteronomy* affirmed, were related to the Jews by blood, for they were ‘the children of Esau, Jacob’s brother.’<sup>83</sup> According to Aquinas these two circumstances had established relations of affinity (*affinitatem*) between the Jews and the Egyptians and Edomites. Following the model proposed by Aristotle in the *Ethics*, the first would have been an *amicicia etayrica* based on common nutrition and education and the second an *amicicia cognata* based on consanguinity. It is the similarity resulting from cohabitation and intermarriage that predisposes the Egyptians and Edomites to love more easily the Jews, enabling them to be integrated in a short period of time into the Jewish nation if they so desired. These conditions, however, were notoriously absent with regards to other nations such as the Amalekites with whom the Jews, according to Aquinas, had ‘no fellowship of kindred’ (*cum eis nullum cognationis habebant consortium*).<sup>84</sup>

For the Florentine government too, the touchstone of natural love towards the city was not personal commitment or even services performed on behalf of the city but rather ancestry. Only those who could prove that their father and grandfather were true Florentine citizens were deemed worthy of accessing the highest political offices: the *Signoria*, the *Sedici Gonfalonieri*, and the *Dodici Buonomini*. This policy is somewhat perplexing because in the same period foreigners used to fill a large number of offices in the Florentine government and

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<sup>82</sup> For a similar set of attitudes in this period, see the remarks on the resettlement of Muslim converts in France by William Chester Jordan, in *The Apple of His Eye. Converts from Islam in the Reign of Louis IX* (Princeton, 2019), 67, 81-82 on cohabitation, and 94-96, 139-140 on intermarriage and integration.

<sup>83</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, q. 105, a. 3, co.: ‘Et ideo lex statuit ut de quibusdam gentibus habentibus aliquam affinitatem ad Iudaeos, scilicet de Aegyptiis, apud quos nati fuerant et nutriti, et et de Idumaeis, filiis Esau fratris Iacob, in tertia generatione reciperentur in consortium populi.’ See Deut 23:7-8: ‘Thou shalt not abhor the Edomite, because he is thy brother: nor the Egyptian, because thou wast a stranger in his land. They that are born of them, in the third generation shall enter into the church of the Lord.’

<sup>84</sup> Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, q. 105, a. 3, co.

administration. Why would the commune restrict the access of new citizens to certain offices while explicitly hiring foreigners to fill others?

The explanation is that these were two different types of political office. Offices of a legislative character were expected to be filled by Florentine citizens whose natural inclination to love the common good of the city would have been prized. By contrast, the jobs which the Florentine commune expected to be staffed by foreign officials were mainly of an executive and judicial character; the three main ones being the *Podestà*, the *Capitano del popolo*, and the *Esecutore degli ordinamenti di giustizia*.<sup>85</sup> In all these cases, an absence of kinship ties was advantageous because it ensured a certain degree of fairness and impartiality.<sup>86</sup> Naturally, this does not mean that foreign officials were given free rein. From the late thirteenth century, these executive positions or *rettori maggiori* had been heavily subordinated to the legislative and consultative organs of government. There were mechanisms in place for the Priors, the Gonfalonier, and the College of the Arts (guilds), that is for ‘true’ Florentine citizens, to interfere on some occasions and whenever the good name of the commune was at risk.<sup>87</sup>

The desire for foreign officials to be impartial explains why the statutes of the Florentine republic of the years 1322-25 established that the *Podestà* and the *Capitano del popolo* should be selected from neither the vicinity of Florence nor from its neighbouring towns, and that each of them should also be from a different land.<sup>88</sup> Even the staff of notaries, judges, and other minor officials who accompanied the *podestà* and assisted him in office had to be from

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<sup>85</sup> For a comprehensive list, see Andrea Zorzi, “I rettori di Firenze: reclutamento, flussi, scambi (1193-1313),” in *I podestà dell’Italia comunale. Parte 1. Reclutamento e circolazione degli ufficiali forestieri (fine XII sec.- metà XIV sec.)*, ed. Jean-Claude Maire Vigueur (Rome, 2000), 457-458.

<sup>86</sup> At any rate, impartiality seems to have motivated the first election of a foreign *podestà* in Florence in 1207. See Villani, *Nuova cronica*, vol. I, book 6, ch. 32, 207-208.

<sup>87</sup> Laura Ikins Stern, *The Criminal Law System of Medieval and Renaissance Florence* (Baltimore, 1994), 171-185.

<sup>88</sup> *Statuto del capitano del popolo degli anni 1322-25*, in *Statuti della repubblica fiorentina*, vol. 1, 6: ‘et qui non sit de terra unde esset Potestas vel Executor ordinamentorum iustitiae, tempore electionis predictae, vel de aliqua civitate vel terra confinante cum civitate vel districtu Florentie.’ And, *Statuto del podestà dell’anno 1325* in *ibid*, vol. 2, 6: ‘et qui non sint de terra unde esset Potestas vel Capitaneus aut Executor Ordinamentorum iustitiae tempore electionis predictae.’

outside of Florence.<sup>89</sup> Similarly, the official over the sumptuary legislation promulgated in 1355, his cohort (*familiares*), and even the notary that was to help the judge in these cases had to be foreign (*forestiere*).<sup>90</sup> The *Statuti del Podestà* of the same year 1355 are even more clear with regards to this. They expressly prohibit that any foreign citizen should take up office if he is related to any Florentine within four degrees of consanguinity or affinity as defined by canon law.<sup>91</sup>

If common descent disposed individuals to love one another, the assumption that members of different political factions in Florence shared kinship ties could also be invoked to promote peace and concord. This rationale animates a letter of the Tuscan poet Guittone d'Arezzo (1235-1294) that he sent to the Florentines sometime in the 1260s after their defeat at the battle of Montaperti. Guittone was a staunch supporter of the Guelfs in Tuscany. His political views led him to be exiled from Arezzo in 1256. But almost a decade later, in 1265, he decided to enter the military order of the *Fratres Gaudenti*. The mission of this order, founded four years earlier in 1261, was to achieve the pacification of the Italian city-states, torn apart by factional strife. Guittone exhorts the Guelfs and Ghibellines to make peace with each other. He criticises the Florentines for acting unreasonably, like animals, against nature, and against God. And he laments how political allegiances have destroyed the traditional loyalties towards friends and family while expressing his perplexity at the fact that Guelfs and Ghibellines fight each other as enemies when, in fact, they should consider one another family. He tells them that if they hate and kill each other, they hate and destroy themselves for 'there is no honour,

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 11: 'Et quod dominus Potestas non sit et non possit vel ei liceat ducere aliquem vel notarium, militem, berroviarum vel aliquem de sua familia de aliqua civitate vel loco confinante cum civitate vel districtu Florentie.'

<sup>90</sup> *Legge sumtuaria fatta dal comune di Firenze l'anno 1355 e volgarizzata nel 1356 da Ser Andrea Lancia*, ed. Pietro Fanfani (Florence, 1851), 22, 31-33. From reading the law one gets the impression that a native from Florence would have had trouble trying to enforce it. In practice, however, it seems that even the officials' foreignness did not amount to much. See Catherine Kovesi Killerby, *Sumptuary Law in Italy, 1200-1500* (Oxford, 2002), 133-163.

<sup>91</sup> ASF, *Statuti del Podestà di Firenze del 1355*, f. 27v: 'Nullus forensis affinis uel consanguineus alicuius cuius uel comitatus florentie usque in quartum gradum inclusiue intelligendo gradum secundum iura chanonica possit uel debeat aliquo modo directe uel indirecte elegi uel asummi ad aliquod uel in aliquo regimine seu offitio in ciuitate comitatus uel districtis florentie.'

no feat, no offence, or harm of your neighbours that you do not share with them.’ And then, he raises the question: who are these your fellow neighbours? And he says:

Aren’t they born from you, and you from them? For you are all of one flesh and of one blood; and there is no one in one faction or the other that is more joined by blood and love to the others, so that he participates in whichever harm, offence, and pain.<sup>92</sup>

In this short passage, Guittone appeals to the belief that love and consanguinity go hand in hand. He asks the Florentines to consider that in spite of all the quarrels and differences they are all family, for they are all related to each other. His message is clear: Guelphs and Ghibellines are joined (*congiunti*) to each other by blood and what is expected from individuals thus related is not war but love, peace, and concord. We might nonetheless wonder whether Guittone understood this relatedness to stem from common descent, from intermarriage or, as it is more likely, from them both. Guittone’s letter, therefore, poses the following question: what was the role played by marriage in late medieval discourses on natural love?

#### 5.4 Marriage and Natural Love

In medieval times, the union of man and woman in the sacrament of marriage was more often described as the union of flesh than blood. To some extent, this was unavoidable given that such was the way in which marriage was termed in scripture.<sup>93</sup> The bond of marriage, however, was by no means deemed to be weaker than the bond produced by consanguinity. In marriage, husband and wife were not just united by flesh – that is by sexual intercourse – but rather became one flesh. The strength of this union and the love resulting thereof is portrayed in two questions dealing with the *ordo caritatis* of the aforementioned *Book of Sydrac*. King Boctus asks

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<sup>92</sup> Guittone d’Arezzo, “Exhortation to peace made to the Florentines,” in *Le lettere di frate Guittone d’Arezzo*, ed. Francesco Meriano (Bologna, 1923), 183: ‘Non sono nati di voi, e voi di loro? Per ché d’un sangue e d’una carne siete; no è alcuno in parte, non in l’altra parte aggia pluzori de sangue e d’amori seco congiunti, cui danno, cui onta e cui dolore participa, voglia o no.’

<sup>93</sup> Genesis 2:24: ‘Wherefore a man shall leave father and mother and shall cleave to his wife: and they shall be two in one flesh.’ See also Matthew 19:5; Mark 10:8; and Ephesians 5:31.

whether a man should love more his wife or his children. And Sydrac answers that after God, a man should love first his wife, dearest of all things, because he and the wife are one thing (*inperò che egli e la sua moglie sono una cosa*), for God wanted them to be one (*Idio volle che due fossino uno*). The king then asks whether a man should love his children, and Sydrac answers saying that ‘no one should love anyone more than God, then your good wife, then your children, and then everyone else.’<sup>94</sup>

The union of husband and wife in one flesh had larger implications for their families. Marriage and consummation turned in-laws into consanguineous relatives. In his *Summa de matrimonio*, Raymond de Penyafort affirmed that the relation of affinity is contracted by anyone who is joined in consanguinity through sexual intercourse (*affinitatis contrahitur ex persona addita consanguinitati per carnis copulam*). Marriage, he remarked, changes the kind of relationship (*mutat genus attinentiae*) while procreation changes only the degree (*mutat gradum*).<sup>95</sup> The rationale was the following: because consummation makes husband and wife one in the flesh, any blood relationship which either one possesses is equally shared by the other and treated in the same way.<sup>96</sup>

The belief that a woman became one flesh with her husband also explains why despite the relentless agnatic focus of the Tuscan patrilineage, Florentine writers like Giovanni Rucellai (1403-1481) included in their accounts of their family’s descent the women who had married into their families.<sup>97</sup> Of course, great marriage alliances were one of the main sources of honour and reputation for families because they linked one lineage to others (*legami di parentado*). But the fact that Florentines did not record in those accounts the women of their own lineage who

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<sup>94</sup> *Il libro di Sidrach*, cap. 239, 225-226; and cap. 234, 269.

<sup>95</sup> Raymond of Penyafort, *Summa de poenitentia, et matrimonio*, 556. A very similar idea was present in Roman law, see *Dig.* 38. tit. 10. c. 4, 624: ‘Adfines sunt viri et uxoris cognati, dicti ab eo, quod duae cognationes, quae diversae inter se sunt, per nuptias copulantur et altera ad alterius cognationis finem accedit: namque coniugendae adfinitatis causa fit ex nuptiis.’ On relationships of affinity, see Charles Edward Smith, *Papal Enforcement of some Medieval Marriage Laws* (University, LA., 1940), 35-53.

<sup>96</sup> See John Alesandro, “Una caro and the Consummation of Marriage in the Decretum Gratiani,” *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte: Kanonistische Abteilung* 98, no. 1 (2012), 133-138.

<sup>97</sup> Molho, *Marriage Alliance*, 340-42.

had married outside the family and that, apparently, their *parentadi* were not considered a source of honour for the lineage,<sup>98</sup> shows the extent to which the sentiment of kinship through the female line was intimately dependent on the woman's union with her husband in one flesh. In other words, only those women who bore future generations of the lineage were deemed worthy of being remembered.

Moreover, from the beginning of the fifteenth century in Florence, the union of wives with their husband's lineage was reinforced by changes in legal and economic practices. Until 1415, the children of a woman inherited from her whenever she had not had children in her second marriage. From 1415, by contrast, her new husband inherited her property whether or not she had had previous children. Effectively, from this moment onwards, the remarriage of widows entailed the break of legal ties with their offspring, even if relationships persisted and affective ties often continued to unite mothers and children.<sup>99</sup>

The union of man and woman in marriage could also be literally understood as the mixing of two bloods. This way of thinking derived from the way in which medieval scholars conceptualised the nature of the sexual act itself. If scholars thought that affinity was established through the mixing of two bloods, it is because during the sexual act the male semen (concocted blood) mixed with the female seed or menses (blood too). To create affinity, the sexual act had to be such that it guaranteed the mixing of bloods. Thus, Raymond of Penyafort points out that if a man:

pollutes a woman outside of that order [of nature], that is, outside of or around the proper vessels, his blood relatives are not impeded from marrying this woman [...] The reason for saying this is because such pollution neither makes

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 343-44.

<sup>99</sup> See Isabelle Chabot, "Seconde nozze e identità materna nella Firenze del tardo medioevo," in *Tempi e spazi di vita femminile tra medioevo ed età moderna*, ed. Silvana S. Menchi, Anne J. Schutte, and Thomas Kuehn (Bologna, 1999).

for mixing of blood (*non facit sanguinis commixtionem*) nor unity of the flesh (*nec carnis unitatem*) through which affinity is contracted.<sup>100</sup>

If sexual intercourse brought about the mixing of bloods of two families, then it is not surprising that medieval society regarded marriages as a convenient means of increasing the prospect of peace and concord in society. Indeed, it is this expectation that motivated the establishment of consanguinity prohibitions by the medieval Church.

Consanguinity prohibitions have been the subject of much scholarly debate. Some historians have attributed this marriage policy to the aversion of some leading Church men to sex, a view which is demonstrably wrong.<sup>101</sup> The work of the anthropologist Jack Goody also stimulated much debate. His thesis was that consanguinity prohibitions and incest laws were strategies employed by the medieval Church to reduce the number of heirs and to channel property into ecclesiastical hands.<sup>102</sup> This view has been substantially refuted by David d'Avray who has demonstrated that the Church wanted to achieve something very different, namely a wide distribution of kinship networks that could foster peace and alleviate social conflict.<sup>103</sup>

One such piece of evidence is a letter of Peter Damian (c.1007-1072) written in early 1046 to John, the bishop of Cesena, and to Almeric, the archdeacon of Ravenna, in which he himself exposes his views on consanguinity. The letter has a central message: because marriage forges new bonds of charity they should be distributed as widely as possible and hence the

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<sup>100</sup> Raymond of Penyafort, *Summa de poenitentia, et matrimonio*, 556. See also, Gratian, *Decretum*, in *CIC*, vol. 1, pars 2, C. 35, q. 2-3, c. 11, 1266. Similar remarks had been made by Bernard of Pavia (c.1150-1213), *Summa decretalium: ad librorum manuscriptorum fidem cum aliis eiusdem scriptoris anecdotis*, ed. Ernst A. T. Laspeyres (Regensburg, 1860, repr. Graz, 1956), IV. xiv. 17, 173: 'De extraordinaria pollutione dico quod omnis pollutio, quae non est facta intra vas aptum naturae, i.e. intra vulvam, sive fiat intra aliud vas sive extra, non facit seminis commixtionem nec carnis unionem, ideoque non inducit affinitatem nec impedit matrimonium.' Also, *Glossa Palatina* (1210-14), quoted by Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, 356, fn. 156: 'Talis enim pollutione que fit extra vulvam non facit sanguinis commixtionem nec carnis unitatem; sed quid si quis frangit claustrum pudoris, sed non spermatizat ibi uel si spermatizat, non cum ipsa? Dico cum h. per talen coitum unitatem carnis non fieri nec sanguinis commixtionem, nec impediri ob hoc consanguineorum ab eius copula si constare possit.' See Biller, *The Measure of Multitude*, 165-66.

<sup>101</sup> David L. d'Avray, "Peter Damian, Consanguinity and Church Property," in *Intellectual Life in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to Margaret Gibson*, ed. Lesley Smith and Benedicta Ward (London, 1992), 71-74.

<sup>102</sup> Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe*.

<sup>103</sup> d'Avray, "Peter Damian," 74-79; d'Avray, *Papacy, Monarchy and Marriage 860-1600* (Cambridge, 2015), 208-217; and d'Avray, "Kinship and Religion in the Early Middle Ages," review of *Inzestverbot und Gesetzgebung: Die Konstruktion eines Verbrechens (300-1000)*, by Karl Ubl, *Early Medieval Europe* 20, no. 2 (2012).

consanguinity prohibitions. In other words, Peter believed that exogamous marriage helps bind society together. He explicitly talks of ‘the love of and care for our neighbour (*vicarious amor proximi*) [...] supplied from the very necessity of blood relationship (*ipsa germanitatis necessitudine*).’ But he adds that ‘when blood relationship (*affinitas generis*) has become distant and lost to view (*elongata discedit*), through the vice of human perversity the flame of love (*amoris*) grows cold, as if the kindling wood has been taken away.’<sup>104</sup> Because love diminishes the more distant two individuals are to a common ancestor, at some point it is not bad to allow relatives to marry each other. This apparently naïve and simple justification for the Church policy on marriage was not radically new; it followed a tradition that stretched back to Augustine’s remarks on consanguinity prohibitions in book 15 of *The City of God*.<sup>105</sup>

Similar arguments to that of Peter Damian were put forward by late medieval thinkers. In a sermon on the Marriage Feast at Cana, the Dominican Ambrogio Sansedoni (1220-1287) – one of the most prominent clerics in the city of Siena – suggested that the reason for the reduction of the prohibited degrees at the Fourth Lateran Council was to foster peace by facilitating marriages between warring families.<sup>106</sup> Aquinas, for this part, explained that beyond the fourth degree, consanguinity is not strong enough to avoid conflicts. Four degrees are suitable because that is the maximum number of generations that usually coexist, and this enables individuals to preserve more easily the memory of their own blood-relation.<sup>107</sup>

By the time Aquinas was writing, however, the Church had dressed up Peter Damian’s ideas in medical vocabulary. Canon 50 of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) stated that reducing the prohibited degrees from seven to four was appropriate because, among other

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<sup>104</sup> *Die Briefe des Petrus Damiani*, ed. Kurt Reindel, in *Die Briefe der deutschen Kaiserzeit*, vol. 4/1 (Munich, 1983), letter 19, 179-99, with a partial translation in d’Avray, “Peter Damian,” 72-73.

<sup>105</sup> Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, vol. 2, lib. XV, cap. 16, 91-94.

<sup>106</sup> See Daniel P. Waley, *Siena and the Siennese in the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1991), 143.

<sup>107</sup> Aquinas, *In sententias*, lib. 4, d. 40, q. 1, a. 4, co.: ‘Satis etiam convenienter usque ad quartum gradum dicta prohibitio est restricta; tum quia usque ad quartam generationem homines vivere consueverunt, ut sic non possit consanguinitatis memoria aboleri.’

things, there are four humours in the body (*quia quatuor sunt humores in corpore*).<sup>108</sup> Thus, Aquinas saw necessary to present an additional and complementary explanation for the four degrees. He says that in any marriage the mixture of bloods creates a single identity. Then, as this blood is mixed with other bloods through subsequent marriages, it starts to diverge from the initial mixture (*quantum miscetur alteri, tantum receditur a primo*). Because there are four elements in the blood and there is always one of them which is more delicate than the others and, therefore, more susceptible to be mixed, after four mixtures (*commixtione*), the resulting blood is so different from the first one that carnal union between relatives can be suitable once again.<sup>109</sup> In other words, after four generations, the natural similarity between relatives is small enough to assume that they will not feel inclined to love each other more than strangers.

When Peter Damian affirmed that marriage contributes to fostering peace and concord, he did not say anything new or revolutionary. Throughout history, marriage has often formed the basis of alliances between families and has strengthened the reconciliation of rival political factions. Yet Peter highlighted the relationship between consanguinity, love, and affection. By the late thirteenth century, the conviction that sexual intercourse produced the mixing of two bloods and the belief that consanguinity predisposes individuals to love each other must have reinforced the belief that the union of man and woman in marriage was beneficial for the peaceful state of society and a suitable means for the resolution of political conflict.

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<sup>108</sup> *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils*, ed. and trans. Henry J. Schroeder (St. Louis, Mo., 1937), canon 50, 279-80, 578.

<sup>109</sup> Aquinas, *In sententias*, lib. 4, d. 40, q. 1, a. 4, co.: 'tum quia in qualibet generatione nova mixtio sanguinis, cujus identitas consanguinitatem facit, fit cum sanguine alieno; et quantum miscetur alteri, tantum receditur a primo: et quia elementa sunt quatuor, quorum quodlibet tanto est facilius miscibile, quanto est magis subtile; ideo in prima commixtione evanescit sanguinis identitas quantum ad primum elementum, quod est subtilissimum; in secunda quantum ad secundum; in tertia quantum ad tertium; in quarta quantum ad quartum; et sic convenienter post quartam generationem potest iterari carnalis conjunctio.'

Historical examples that reflect this sensibility towards marriage abound in Florentine history.<sup>110</sup> Florentine chroniclers recount how in 1266-7, right after the battle of Benevento, marriages were arranged between Guelphs and Ghibellines in Florence.<sup>111</sup> In the early fourteenth century, the Florentine Neri Strinati remembered how in 1267 his family made peace with the rival Della Tosa family by means of a series of marriage alliances.<sup>112</sup> Perhaps the most illustrative example is that of 1280. In this year, cardinal Latino Malabranca Orsini (c.1235-1294) arrived in Florence to negotiate a peace between Guelphs and Ghibellines. Upon his arrival, many exiles were allowed to return to the city. However, with regard to the most extreme among the Ghibelline exiles, Latino decreed that they should remain outside the city and that they should not return ‘until they were redirected to unity and friendship [with their fellow citizens] by kinship ties (*parentelas*) or in some other way.’<sup>113</sup> Sometime later, the cardinal arranged marriages between members of the leading families of both factions.<sup>114</sup>

The way in which marriages were perceived to facilitate friendship between families who had spent the last few decades killing each other might be striking to modern eyes. But if Latino – himself a Dominican who had studied and taught in Paris – shared the conviction of Aquinas, Remigio, Sansedoni, and Giordano, namely that natural love arises from common descent, perhaps it made sense after all. Soon afterwards, however, the peace he had established and the fragile political regime he had devised for Florence were disrupted once again by factional strife and Latino missed a unique opportunity to see if his marriage policy

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<sup>110</sup> On marriage and political reconciliation in late medieval Italy, see Katherine L. Jansen, *Peace and Penance in Late Medieval Italy* (Princeton, 2018), 184-188.

<sup>111</sup> Villani, *Nuova cronica*, vol. I, book 8, ch. 15, 355; Compagni, *Cronaca fiorentina*, book I, 35-36; and Malispini, *Storia fiorentina*, ed. Vincenzo Follini (Florence, 1816), CXC, 159.

<sup>112</sup> Neri Strinati, *Chronichetta di Neri di Alfieri di Strinato di Ramingo degli Strinati*, in *Storia della guerra di Semifonte scritta da Messer Pace da Certaldo e cronichetta di Neri degli Strinati* (Florence, 1753), 110.

<sup>113</sup> *La Pace del Cardinal Latino*, in Salvemini, *Magnati e popolani*, 330: ‘Sed morabuntur in locis predictis donec animi eorum, quos olim inimicitia separavit, per parentelas vel alio modo ad unitatem et amicitiam reducantur.’

<sup>114</sup> Mario Sanfilippo, “Guelfi e ghibellini a Firenze: la “pace” del cardinal Latino,” *Nuova rivista storica* 64 (1980): 17-18.

could have worked.<sup>115</sup> Nevertheless, a century and a half later, marriage policies were still part and parcel of how a Florentine like Matteo Palmieri (1406-1475) envisioned the ideal city: a network of families and lineages in which individuals, united by kinship ties (*per parentela coniuncti*), would love and help one another.<sup>116</sup>

## 5.5 Loving One's Neighbour

By the mid-thirteenth century, blood ties were perceived to have a vitality and strength of their own that set family members apart from other social relations and, to some extent, higher up in the hierarchy of loves. Perceptions of common descent and consanguinity across social groups and political communities, as it happened in Florence, could expand the operation of natural love beyond the confines of the household and the extended family. This belief was reinforced by the conviction that marriage produced a union of bloods that could revitalise weakening solidarities. In this final part, I will show how common descent from Adam and Eve could also be employed as a rhetorical device to appeal to the genealogical relatedness of all human beings. When a relationship was so distant that speaking of blood seemed futile, scholars reminded their audience that all human beings shared a common human nature inherited from our first parents in an attempt to expand to even wider circles the operation of natural love. In so doing, they naturalised the command to love our neighbour and harmonised it with the inclination to love one's family.

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<sup>115</sup> Among medieval royal houses, one can easily find examples of marriages that helped ended feud between families. See, for instance, the case of the houses of Aragon and Naples in David L. d'Avray, *Death and the Prince: Memorial Preaching before 1350* (Oxford, 1994), 97-98.

<sup>116</sup> Matteo Palmieri, *Vita civile*, ed. Gino Belloni (Florence, 1982), 161: 'Utile cosa è avere generato figliuoli [...] dopo i figliuoli, si stimano et debbono essere utili i nipoti et qualunque altro nato di nostro sangue; complendesi in questi prima tutta la casa; poi, moltiplicati et non attamente in una medesima casa ricevuti, si diffondono le schiatte, le consorterie et copiose famiglie, le quali, dando et ricevendo legittime noze, con parentadi et amore comprehendono buona parte della città, onde poi per parentela coniuncti, caritativamente si sobvengono et fra loro medesimi conferiscono consigli, favori et aiuti, i quali nella vita recono attitudini, commodità et abundantia fructi.'

It is important to emphasise, first of all, that the operation of natural love was not confined to the realm of consanguinity or even to the human species. In this sense, it is worth recalling the medieval definition of nature given by William of Conches (c.1090-1154) in his *Dragmaticon philosophiae*: ‘Nature is a certain force implanted in things, producing similar from similar’ (*natura est vis quaedam rebus insita, similia de similibus operans*).<sup>117</sup> It is the work of nature that men are born of men, and every animal from his own species. Natural love, therefore, is nothing but the inclination to one another of beings which are similar in nature. A short passage in the *Roman de la Rose* echoes the conjunction of these two ideas. Within Nature’s confession, we read: ‘For creatures capable of reproduction will always engendered similar creatures or will come together (*feront leur commixtions*) according to their natural temperaments (*par naturex complexions*) and the affinities (*proprietez communes*) between them.’<sup>118</sup>

In his *De bono communi*, Remigio de’ Girolami provides one of the most comprehensive examples of this way of thinking about the operation of natural love:

Just as chapter XIII of Ecclesiasticus [19] says; ‘every animal loves what is similar to itself’ and Aristotle says in Ethics VIII that ‘the similar [person] is a friend just as “birds of a feather flock together.”’ And this derives from the nature of being. By nature, every creature is an entity. And thus, because every creature naturally loves itself, it naturally also loves all that in which it discovers itself, [...] And, similarly, similarity is greater in genus than that which is in being only [...], and moreover, it is greater in species, and furthermore it is greater in substance than in accidents, and so man naturally loves more the animated beings such as trees than inanimate such as stones, and more animals and birds than trees, and more men than animals, and more those of his own blood than *coalbos* and *congemmaticos*.<sup>119</sup>

This passage illustrates that the similarity generated by common descent and blood within families was simply a more concrete form of the natural similarity that all human beings shared as members of one species. Moreover, at a time when the Bible and the Church taught that

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<sup>117</sup> William of Conches, *Dragmaticon philosophiae*, lib. I, 7, 3, 30. On ‘inheritability’ as the operation of nature, see Epstein, *The Medieval Discovery of Nature*.

<sup>118</sup> Guillaume de Loris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Félix Lecoy, vol. 3 (Paris, 1970), 25.

<sup>119</sup> Remigio de’ Girolami, *De bono communi*, 30. In a personal communication, Dr Ida Toth suggested that Remigio seems to have coined the last two words by way of referencing Romans 8:23 and their meaning, therefore, must be something along the lines of “God’s children” or “fellow Christians.”

the human race originated from a single pair of ancestors, and centuries before the work of Darwin challenged monogenism, it was taken for granted that all men and women had inherited their human nature by virtue of their descent from Adam and Eve.<sup>120</sup> Thus, with regards to the monstrous races of the East, Augustine had famously declared that ‘whoever is anywhere born a man, that is, a rational mortal animal, no matter what unusual appearance he presents [...] no Christian can doubt that he springs from that one protoplast [...] if they are human, they are descended from Adam.’<sup>121</sup> Accordingly, when scholars deployed the theory of natural love to include every member of the human species, although they were working at a different scale, their approach was conceptually the same. For instance, when Sydrac explains to king Boctus why a rich man should help the poor, he begins by precisely pointing out the rich man’s and the poor’s shared human nature. He says that ‘the rich man must consider that the poor is born of Adam and Eve the same way he is, and that he is made in the image of God, as he is too.’<sup>122</sup> Likewise, discussing the good of friendship, Palmieri remarked that it is first given by nature which unites all men in ‘a friendly affection (*amichevole affectione*) of similar companionship (*similiata compagna*) so that, being inclined to assist others in their miseries, they would all be naturally moved (*da natura mossi*) to lend help to he who is most in need, no matter how unknown (*ignoto*) and strange (*strano*) he might be to us.’<sup>123</sup>

Another sermon preached by Giordano da Rivalto in 1303 in Florence shows that this appeal to fundamental similarities was a frequent recourse. It is a Sunday sermon that takes the following gospel passage as its *thema*: ‘love your enemies’ (*diligite inimicos vestros*). Giordano recognises how challenging loving enemies can be, and he attempts to persuade his audience

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<sup>120</sup> George Boas, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in the Middle Ages* (Baltimore, 1997). It is worthwhile noting that monogenism is still, or rather again, the current favoured scientific view, the most widely accepted model being the ‘Out of Africa’ theory.

<sup>121</sup> Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, vol. 2, lib. XVI, cap. 8, 135-137. On the monstrous races as the descendants of Cain, see John B. Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Syracuse, NY., 2000), 87-107 and 178-196 on their human status.

<sup>122</sup> *Il libro di Sidrach*, cap. 95, 140.

<sup>123</sup> Palmieri, *Vita civile*, 162.

that this is both possible and worthwhile: ‘And this commandment seems difficult and challenging because your mind is corrupted, because you are not enlightened, for if you were illuminated, you would love it and it would seem to you most effortless.’<sup>124</sup> Giordano hopes that by demonstrating beyond reasonable doubt that any individual can love his enemies, this knowledge will counteract any feelings of enmity. He wants his fellow citizens to operate on the basis of *dilectio* (reason) rather than *amor* (natural instinct). Besides many arguments drawn from scripture, he strives to demonstrate that there are similarities between any individual and his enemies. We should consider, he says, our enemy’s nature in relation to his soul and in relation to his body.<sup>125</sup> Each of these, in turn, can be understood in a threefold fashion: if we consider the enemy as creature, on account of similarity, and according to its end. With regards to similarity, Giordano offers two arguments. The first refers to natural similarity, that is, arising from descent: ‘consider that he [the enemy] is similar to you and has the same nature as you, for we are all of the same nature.’ The second, instead, focuses on supernatural similarity: ‘we are brothers not only in nature but also through baptism.’ And he adds that ‘for this reason you should love more another Christian than a Saracen because you are more brother of the former.’<sup>126</sup> Interestingly, when Giordano says we [Christians] are brothers not only in nature but also in baptism, he is implicitly saying all men are brothers in nature. Because of this, he does not say that the Saracen is not their brother but that the Christian is more brother than the Saracen because he is, in addition, a brother in the Church.

Membership in the Church, and the similarity arising thereof, was another way in which the theory of natural love could be expanded to include things other than biological descent. When Bonaventure had commented on the fourth commandment, he had affirmed that love

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<sup>124</sup> Giordano da Rivalto, *Prediche inedite*, 22-29, 24-25.

<sup>125</sup> When in this passage Giordano says ‘in relation to the body’ he means the body and the soul from the point of view of nature, that is, without taking grace into account.

<sup>126</sup> Giordano da Rivalto, *Prediche inedite*, 25: ‘Ancora se consideri ch’egli è simigliante a te e ha quella natura che tu; perocchè tutti semo d’una natura. [...] E ancora semo fratelli non solamente nella natura, ma per lo batesimo; perocchè semo tutti d’una madre, cioè dell’acqua del batesimo; e per questa ragione se’ tenuto d’amare più il cristiano che ‘l saracino, perocchè è più tuo fratello.’

has an order by virtue of which we should love ‘because of closeness (*proximitatis*), because of likeness (*similitudinis*), and because of obligation (*obligationis*).’ With respect to the first – that is degree of relationship – he had affirmed that ‘we owe a greater love to family than to strangers’. With respect to the second one, he remarked that we should love all men because we all have the same specific form or species. But, in addition, he added that ‘because of agreement in faith, we should love Christians more than Moslems.’<sup>127</sup> Aquinas classified this divine fellowship as the fourth type of communication which human beings can share and out of which the love of charity (*amicitia caritatis*) arises. He believed that this is what ultimately enables Christians to love all men, and even our enemies, because from his perspective all men and women are members of the Church: some actual members, and others potential ones.<sup>128</sup>

Despite his unwillingness and hesitation to provide a definitive answer to the question of the *ordo caritatis*, Peter Lombard acknowledged that insofar as they are human beings (*inquantum homines*) all men should be equally loved.<sup>129</sup> The concepts of similarity and consanguinity, however, were notoriously absent from the Lombard’s discourse. By the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, in contrast, the belief that natural love arises out of similarity and common descent could justify not only that family members love each other more than strangers, but also why we should love all men. By placing both loves in the same conceptual framework, medieval scholars managed to harmonise the instinct to love one’s family and the command to love our neighbour. They were two manifestations of the same phenomenon operating at a different scale and with more or less intensity. For an individual to love his neighbour, and to love his family even more, was simply to act according to nature.

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<sup>127</sup> Bonaventure, *Collationes de decem praeceptis*, 524: ‘Primo, dico, debemus diligere secundum rationem proximitatis; et secundum hoc debemus maiorem amorem domesticis quam extraneis, [...] Secundo habet dilectio ista ordinem secundum rationem similitudinis, quia aliquibus debemus ratione similitudinis maiorem dilectionem quam aliis: sic ratione similitudinis in forma specifica tenemur diligere hominem; tamen secundum similitudinem ratione convenientiae in fide debemus plus diligere Christianum quam Saracenum.’

<sup>128</sup> Aquinas, *In sententias*, lib. 3, d. 29, q. 1, a. 6, co.: ‘Quarta communicatio est divina, secundum quam omnes homines communicant in uno corpore Ecclesiae vel actu vel potentia; et haec est amicitia caritatis, quae habetur ad omnes, etiam ad inimicos.’

<sup>129</sup> Peter Lombard, *Sentences*, vol. 2, lib. III, dist. 29, cap. 2, 12, 176.

Ultimately, the highest form of brotherly love was thought to originate in God as a common father. But God's fatherhood towards men was adoptive not natural. From the thirteenth century, commentaries to the Lord's prayer emphasised that Christ was the only natural son of God, the 'only begotten Son.'<sup>130</sup> Human beings, on the other hand, had been made children of God by grace, not according to nature. In nature, Adam was the common father of men. Yet, as we have seen, this did not mean that Adam's fatherhood was not seen to play a part in the salvation of man. Indeed, Adam's paternity was considered to be part and parcel of God's designs for men: it was the way in which God himself, through nature, guided men towards that perfect, spiritual brotherhood that was to be ultimately found in heaven.

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One of the most important contributions of the *Ethics* was to establish a connection between friendship and similarity and between similarity and consanguinity. That the *vinculum consanguinitatis* and the *vinculum amicitiae* were firmly connected did not mean, however, that other factors like common rearing, common faith, and even professional association were ignored.<sup>131</sup> It is important to bear in mind that consanguinity did not necessarily lead to friendship, because common descent simply determined an inclination to love.<sup>132</sup> As Aquinas had affirmed with regard to the aptitudes, natural inclinations were not always to be followed. Likewise, scholars remarked that natural love needed to be controlled by the operation of divine grace.<sup>133</sup> Christian love (*dilectio*) was a rational choice, not a natural disposition. Thus, Engelbert of Admont could claim that the love between friends is more praiseworthy than the

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<sup>130</sup> For instance, in an early fourteenth-century commentary on the Lord's prayer, the Florentine notary Zuccherio Bencivenni presents divine adoption in opposition to natural filiation. Zuccherio Bencivenni, *Volgarizzamento dell'esposizione del Paternostro fatto da Z. Bencivenni*, ed. Luigi Rigoli (Florence, 1828), 25: 'Sappiate che veruno non de' dire padre mio se non quelli ch'è suo figliuolo per natura [...], ma noi siamo suoi figliuoli per adozione e per grazia.'

<sup>131</sup> See Sère, *Penser l'amitié au Moyen Âge*, 230-237.

<sup>132</sup> As John Buridan noted, 'dicendum quod sine dubio necesse est omnes amicos, secundum quod sunt amici, communicare sibi adinvicem quedam bona sua interiora, [...] et si aliqui talia bona sibi invicem non communicent, ipsi non sunt amici quamvis essent fratres.' Quoted in *ibid.*, 229-230.

<sup>133</sup> Kempshall, *The Common Good*, 164.

love of family because it does not arise from natural instinct but only as a result of the virtue of love, that is rational love, and reason is a better guide to virtue than nature.<sup>134</sup>

The association of love and consanguinity was nonetheless very compelling: it was employed in political writing and religious didactic literature, it featured in canon law and sermons, in popular encyclopaedias, deeds of adoption, letters, poetry, and even in civic decrees. Its ubiquity helped popularise the belief that two individuals with common descent would naturally love each other more than strangers because blood unites them and makes them similar to each other. Thus, Bonaventure could say that all other things being equal, if we add blood relation, this makes it easier to love another person because ‘underneath the cloak of loving affection lies hidden carnality.’<sup>135</sup>

Late medieval scholars thus managed to firmly integrate the instinct to love one’s family within the *ordo caritatis*. Christian charity was to be practised in such a way that it respected this natural order because, as Aquinas asserted, grace does not change the order established by nature but perfects it (*caritas ordinem naturae non mutat, sed perficit*).<sup>136</sup> Loving more those who were more closely related by blood was compatible with Christ’s commands to love our neighbour and our enemy because determining the proper ‘order of love’ was not meant to limit Christian charity or to provide excuses for uncharitable behaviour, but rather to establish a hierarchy that would help to make love more efficacious.

This ‘naturalisation’ of love was one of the many ways in which late medieval scholars combined the Aristotelian virtue-ethics approach to morality with the law-based approach of Scripture. In so doing, they wanted to defend the commandments as a reliable source of ethical

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<sup>134</sup> Engelbert of Admont, *Speculum virtutum*, 11, cap. XII, ‘De dilectione ad propinquos et cognatos,’ 388.

<sup>135</sup> Bonaventura, *Commentaria in quattuor libros Sententiarum*, dist. 29, a. 1, q. 6, co.: ‘Si enim in duobus dilectis est par dignitas et necessitas, quantum est de istis proprietatibus et conditionibus, aequaliter sunt amandi effectu et affectu; sed si in altero illorum superaddatur sanguinis propinquitatis, facit ipsum magis amabilem utroque modo. [...] Verendum enim valde est, ne sub pallio caritatis affectus lateat carnalitatatis.’

<sup>136</sup> Aquinas, *In sententias*, lib. 3, d. 29, q. 1, a. 7, co.

knowledge by demonstrating them to be a ‘revealed articulation of natural law.’<sup>137</sup> As Kellie Robertson has demonstrated in her analysis of late medieval literature, Aristotelian natural philosophy largely contributed to forming the widespread belief that ethics had a grounding in physics or, in other words, that how the material world functioned largely determined how humans should behave.<sup>138</sup>

While the Aristotelian theory of natural love became rapidly accepted, it had also the potential to be very controversial. Sometimes, love was intentionally made to appear as irresistible, perhaps to ethically justify following one’s desires.<sup>139</sup> Moreover, if nature’s influence in moral life was consequential, this could threaten one of the basic tenets of Christianity, that is, the freedom of the human will.<sup>140</sup> Nonetheless, the persistence of an Aristotelian immanent realism in the West ensured the continuity of this intimate relationship between love and physics. It was only during the Enlightenment that it came under serious attack when for the first time in centuries scholars like David Hume (1711-1776) suggested that there was a fundamental distinction between facts and values, ‘is’ and ‘ought’ propositions.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Randall B. Smith, “Thomas Aquinas on the Ten Commandments and the Natural Law,” in *The Decalogue and its Cultural Influence*, ed. Markl Dominik (Sheffield, 2013).

<sup>138</sup> See the introduction to Robertson, *Nature Speaks*. See also Boquet and Nagy, *Medieval Sensibilities*, 151-57 on the naturalism of emotions in thirteenth-century thought.

<sup>139</sup> Morgan, “Natural and Rational Love,” 51-52.

<sup>140</sup> Thus, the Paris condemnations of 1277 censured the propositions that suggested that the human will could be subjected to natural forces. See *CUP*, 547, no. 74; 551, no. 133 and 134; and 552, no. 162 and 164.

<sup>141</sup> On this transformation, see Alastair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN., 1984), 51-61. Some late twentieth-century philosophers have once again challenged this distinction. See, e.g., Willard Van Orman Quine, “Main Trends in Recent Philosophy: Two Dogmas of Empiricism,” *The Philosophical Review* 60, no. 1 (1951).

## Conclusion: A Corporeal Turn

Throughout this thesis we have seen how late medieval society underwent an anthropological shift: it presented humans as ‘being’ bodies rather than merely ‘possessing’ them. The body was not thought to be just a locus of physical needs. As some scholars put it, by the thirteenth century, with the assimilation of Aristotelian natural philosophy and Galenic medicine, it ‘acquired a central place as the locus of individuality, as a source of significant influence on behavioural patterns and as a treasure-trove of information to be applied to a series of philosophical and theological questions.’<sup>1</sup> The development of material theories of individuation, the concept of aptitudes, and theories of moral and intellectual trait inheritance helped to foreground the social, moral, and political significance of the body and, thus, of biological descent. As a result, ancestry and blood emerged at the centre of individual and group identities and became one of the main ways in which families, social groups, and political communities were organised, interpreted, and related to one another.

In addition, the body explained not just individuality and identity but also diversity and differences. Ancestry and bodily complexion were thought to determine the character and status of individuals and also that of social and political groups. Blood mattered, and not just rhetorically, because as Compagni’s chronicle suggested, it was perceived to be very diverse indeed. Unlike cultural, economic, and social capital, blood could not be easily acquired. Yet the belief that husband and wife became one flesh in marriage could contribute to social mobility and to distributing kinship networks more widely linking families to one another by blood and strengthening the unity of groups in society.

Needless to say, there were other ideas and competing values in late medieval society. Not all scholastic thinkers adhered to the material theories of individuation developed by

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<sup>1</sup> *The Origins of Racism in the West*, introduction, 23.

Aquinas and his followers. Not every moral or didactic writer was interested in the behavioural effects of bodily complexion. Not every lawyer thought that law must always imitate nature. And not every political writer thought that common descent was an important component of political identities. Yet, overall, our sources attest to the development of a new set of ideas about the body, blood, and descent that by the fourteenth century had quickly disseminated and had become an important part of the social and political discourse.

### **Rationalities**

This set of ideas did not merely translate into a set of abstract values. They informed the structures, practices, and normative approaches to social life of cities like Florence. In other words, they became a rationality.

For example, the late medieval family was closely interpreted in biological grounds and structured according to principles of patrilineal descent which foregrounded male blood and male ancestry. Parental roles were regarded as natural obligations which encouraged paternal responsibility and marital fidelity. The concept of natural nobility and the belief in noble bodies reinforced the conviction that nobility was transmitted by blood and helped legitimise the power and status of the aristocracy. Political communities thought of themselves as historical groups of descent united by blood. Myths of descent became an important component of political identities, buttressed claims to political independence and sovereignty, and informed rules for membership and political participation. And theories of natural love placed genealogical relatedness at the centre of moral discourses regarding the order of love and were employed to foster peace and solidarity in times of conflict and violence.

Nonetheless, throughout this thesis we have also seen how various demographic, economic, and social circumstances could induce individuals and groups to act in ways that were seemingly at odds with those values. Parents sent their children to be wet nursed by the

blood of women other than their mothers. Couples adopted orphaned and abandoned children who were not related to them by blood and developed strong affective relationships with them. Individuals of low birth could attain noble status on account of their virtues and merits and be recognised as such by others. Urged by economic and political interests, governments granted citizenship to immigrants who were not part of the city as a *gens* and could not claim common descent with their neighbours. These were all ways in which medieval society attempted to come to terms with the fact that life is always a mix of nature and artifice.

Still, the rationale helps us make sense of these ‘countercultural’ practices because in all these cases, the deviations from the norm were, to some extent, explained, justified, and legitimised by reference to the framework imposed by the value rationality. Fathers sent their children away to be wet nursed, but they must have been reassured by the belief that their blood was much more important than their wives’ milk. Couples were allowed to adopt children, but from the perspective of medieval jurists these could never be heirs *ab intestate* because they were not biologically related to their adoptive parents. The love adoptive parents professed or promised to their children was modelled upon and compared with the love of parents to their natural offspring. Cities naturalised immigrants but granted them lower status than original or native citizens, restricting their access to public office because they were deemed to lack an innate love towards the city. One could legitimately be recognised as noble by the virtue of personal merits but this did not always confer the rights and privileges of noble birth.

### **Nurture vs Nature?**

It is important to note that although the focus of this study has been the development of a proto-materialistic approach to human personality and behaviour, the rationality we have outlined was in no way deterministic. Medieval thinkers acknowledged that individuals were not compelled to behave in certain ways on account of their blood or inborn inclinations.

Indeed, moral life had to be ultimately regulated by reason which, as moral theologians affirmed, can elevate action above and beyond the impulses of nature. And man, despite having been created by God, was fallen, so that he needed not only reason but grace.<sup>2</sup>

Likewise, parents could overcome the difficulties posed by a lack of biological relation for the sake of their children and to satisfy their desires of paternity. Medieval authors highlighted the need to use reason and develop virtue in order to acquire *true* nobility. Governments could at times restrict the political participation of their citizens in order to achieve impartiality and avoid conflicts of interests. And Christians were urged to love not only their relatives but also their neighbour and their enemy – perhaps often the same person – even if they were not closely related to them by blood. Nay, the gospels even asserted that, at times, one had to be ready to hate his family (*Luke* 14:26).

Thus, from the perspective of medieval thought, human life required individuals and groups to rise above materiality. And although there was a recognition that the body could facilitate or hinder the development of virtue, as the Lombard affirmed, the qualities or sex of one's body did not determine one's reward in heaven.

### **Modern Questions, Past Answers**

It is time now to return to some of my original questions: why is genealogy still central to many accounts of identity? And why do biological ties seem to have been so significant throughout history in Western society? It would be simplistic to say that our modern sensibilities and mentalities can be traced back to the medieval past. Yet Tuscan society in the period 1250-1400 offers instructive lessons.

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Cross, "Weakness and Grace," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*, vol. 1, ed. Robert Pasnau (Cambridge, 2009).

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries Aristotelian natural philosophy and medical and biological knowledge were pervasive. It is perhaps even warranted to term this period one of profound scientific transformations. Yet the availability of knowledge alone does not explain the eagerness of its adoption and, least of all, the ways it was employed. To move past this point, we need to adopt a more humanistic approach. If we pay close attention to late medieval attitudes to biological descent one cannot fail to notice that what genealogical knowledge provided above all was meaning and order.

The medieval view of the world was mimetic. Order and meaning were thought to be given, and it was up to human beings to discover them and conform to them. By the thirteenth century, medieval society had the tools and concepts to extract that meaning from nature and, among other things, it directed its attention to the natural body. In addition, medieval society searched for meaning in the past because the past could provide a sense of purpose and help legitimise present realities by connecting past, present, and future. As Gabrielle Spiegel has argued, ‘genealogy functioned to secularise time by grounding it in biology, transforming the connection between past and present into a real one, seminally imparted from generation to generation.’<sup>3</sup> Genealogy became a principle of narrative order not only in literary texts but, as we have seen, in the life of individuals and groups. Moreover, this search for meaning was informed and reinforced by Christianity. The salvific dynamic of redemption had endowed history with direction, and the doctrines of creation, incarnation – a God who is made flesh – and corporal resurrection the material world with dignity and intelligibility.<sup>4</sup> Thus, biological ancestry served to find meaning both in nature and in the past; a meaning that was always intended for the present.

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<sup>3</sup> Gabrielle M. Spiegel, “Genealogy: Form and Function in Medieval Historical Narrative,” *History and Theory* 22, no. 1 (1983), 50.

<sup>4</sup> See Caroline W. Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, MA., 2011), 285; Patricia Ranft, *How the Doctrine of the Incarnation Shaped Western Culture* (Lanham, 2013), 6-18; and Matteo Salonia, “The Body in Medieval Spirituality: A Rationale for Pilgrimage and the Veneration of Relics,” *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 14 (2018).

Today, individuals and societies are also searching for meaning and purpose, and genealogy provides a narrative that helps people position their life within a broader context and make sense of one's own existence.<sup>5</sup> But as Charles Taylor has argued, in contrast with medieval society, our view of the world in the West is no longer primarily mimetic, that is imbued with meaning. Instead, many modern intellectual currents offer a poietic view: a meaningless world where sense and purpose do not need to be discovered but created.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the interest in the biological dimensions of ancestry can feel, to some extent, antithetical because although the past still is a source of meaning and identity, nature and biology are not upheld as major ordering principles of society. This is the result of an anthropological shift as significant as the one of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. For seen in a longer perspective, as Caroline W. Bynum has argued, anti-essentialist positions are 'a reaction to Cartesian and Enlightenment dichotomies: mind versus body, authority versus liberty, society (or nurture) versus nature, and so on.'<sup>7</sup> Thus even if genealogy remains fascinating today, our contemporary attitudes to biological descent are very different from late medieval ones. Both, nonetheless, point to the persistent awareness of a fundamental fact which continues to exert a powerful influence on the human mind, namely that we are made 'of flesh and blood.'

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<sup>5</sup> Rhys Price-Robertson, "Ancestry, Identity and Meaning: The Importance of Biological Ties in Contemporary Society," in *Families, Policy and the Law: Selected Essays on Contemporary Issues for Australia*, ed. Alan Hayes and Daryl Higgins (Melbourne, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> See Charles Taylor, *The Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, 1989); and Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA., 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Bynum, "Why all the Fuss about the Body?" 28.

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